THE COLERIDGE BULLETIN has received an Italian translation of Coleridge’s ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ by Ugo Gervasoni. It is a beautifully presented work. Both main versions of the poem are provided (1798 and 1834), handwritten; and hand-drawn, coloured illustrations accompany the 1798 version, while the 1834 version has explanatory notes. In
the translation to the latter version, the gloss is also translated. An afterword
and select bibliography complete the book.

The English text faces the Italian translation, and as Ugo Gervasoni
mentions, the illustrations sometimes link two pages: ‘At the end of part 4, for
example, when “The albatross fell off, and sank/ Like lead into the sea”, I
suggest the sinking of the bird by colouring the two facing pages in different
shades of blue.’ The blue darkens as the albatross sinks.

Ugo Gervasoni also explains his metrical choice: he uses the eleven-syllable
line that is the traditional measure of Italian poetry, combining it with the
eight-syllable line, ‘in order to give the stanzas variety and suppleness’ and thus
a musical quality to echo the original. Archaic language also helps to provide an
Italian equivalent of Coleridge’s diction. The title – by contrast, for instance,
with ‘La ballata del vecchio marinaio’ in Beppe Finoglio’s translation published
in 1964 – borrows the word ‘navicante’ from Dante’s Purgatorio, producing an
alliteration: ‘Antico Navicante’ (emphasis added). A note at the end of the 1798
version indicates the careful reflection that has informed such translation
choices. Ugo Gervasoni quotes Julian W. Abernethy’s comment in his edition
of 1907 to the effect that the words ‘Ancient Mariner’ provide the keynote of
the poem, by suggesting something remote and uncanny. He adds: ‘I too was
struck by Coleridge’s unusual word choice, before I encountered Abernethy’s
observation. Hence the decision to recur to the epithet Antico Navicante in my
version, which effects a change from the soft music of the palatal consonants
and alveolars of the original to the harder sound of the velars and labiodentals in the translation, in order to preserve an echo of the enchanting spatial and temporal distance’ (p. 71, trans. JV).

A similar attention to sound throughout the text produces a suitably haunting effect, enhanced by the images. It is to be hoped that this work will reach many readers of Italian—not that Italian is needed to appreciate the English text and illustrations.

Publication

The Friends of Coleridge would like to support a publication by subscription of Ugo Gervasoni’s *Il Canto dell’Antico Navicante*. A minimum print run of 25 copies would cost each subscriber £20 plus p&p. The work is hand-written throughout, with illustrations on every page of the parallel text, and the work 130 pages in all. If you would like to subscribe, please contact Graham Davidson at gcdd@bluyeonder.co.uk