

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner Study Guide

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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Overview

On a superficial level, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" can be read as a tale of horror in which a mariner is hounded by disaster and supernatural forces after murdering an albatross. But it is much more than that. Coleridge clearly tries to make the supernatural elements of the poem appear as integral parts of the natural world. His underlying theme is that all things that inhabit the natural world have an inherent value and beauty, and that it is necessary for humanity to recognize and respect these qualities. The simple action of the plot, initiated by the mariner's unthinking, destructive act, leads to his tribulations and consequent maturation. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is an excellent example of Romantic poetry and is often read to understand the characteristics of this poetic genre.

About the Author

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in the small, rural Devonshire town of Ottery St. Mary in southwest England on October 21, 1772. The son of a Church of England parish vicar, John Coleridge, and Ann Bowdon Coleridge, the boy entered Dame Key's Reading School in 1775. In 1778 he began studies at the Henry VIII Free Grammar School, which was headed by his father.

When John Coleridge died in 1782, Samuel was sent to the Christ's Hospital School in London. The youngster was considered dreamy and eccentric by fellow schoolboys, in part because of his enthusiastic interest in metaphysics. He was considered extremely precocious.

In 1791 Coleridge entered Jesus College, Cambridge, but in spite of his scholastic abilities and outstanding intellect, he did not find the experience stimulating and left the university in 1794 without graduating.

On a visit to Oxford in June of that same year, he met Robert Southey, a student there. The two young men had several things in common, including poetic aspirations, radical political and religious views, and sympathy for the principles of the ongoing French Revolution. Coleridge and Southey determined to emigrate to Pennsylvania to establish a "Pantisocracy," a term devised by Coleridge to describe an ideal democratic community in which there would be equal rule by all. Because the scheme required the would-be immigrants to marry, Coleridge became engaged to Sara Flicker, the sister of Southey's fiancée. Although the Pantisocracy plan was never realized, in 1795 Coleridge went through with the marriage.

In 1796 Coleridge published his first collection of poems, *Poems on Various Subjects*. In addition, he served as the editor of *The Watchman* for a couple of weeks, championing the ideals of the French Revolution and of the English political thinker William Godwin.

Coleridge moved to Nether Stowey in Somersetshire in 1797. This was a fortunate event because William Wordsworth, the "best poet of the age," and his sister Dorothy, settled at nearby Alfoxden House the same year. Coleridge and Wordsworth, who had met casually two years earlier, now developed an intimate friendship. They collaborated on a collection of their poetry and jointly published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. This collection included Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." A second edition, published in 1802, featured Wordsworth's preface, which described the writers' poetic theory. Scholars consider the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* to mark the beginning of the English Romantic Period and, indeed, it is one of the most significant volumes in English literary history.

Over the next couple of years, Coleridge's health deteriorated. To dull the pain, doctors provided him with heavy dosages of laudanum, a narcotic. It is suggested that he may have become addicted to this drug; in any case he fell into a deep depression. In 1802 Coleridge published "Dejection: An Ode," a poem of despair in which he laments the



loss of his health, happiness, and poetic powers. In spite of its bleak outlook, many scholars consider this ode to be Coleridge's most magnificent lyrical work.

In 1803 the poet traveled in Scotland with the Wordsworths. In 1804 he visited Malta in hopes of improving his health. While there, Coleridge served as secretary to Governor Sir Alexander Ball. But after two years, he felt that his health was completely broken, and he returned to England. That same year he separated from Sara and their children.

One of the lowest points in the poet's life came in 1810, when he quarreled with Wordsworth and the two men became estranged for two years. Eventually,

these men reconciled their differences.

In 1816 Coleridge took up residence with a physician, James Gilman, at Highgate, a northern suburb of London.

Coleridge apparently prospered under Gilman's care, and he entered his most sustained period of literary activity, which lasted until 1819. While continuing to lecture and write for newspapers, Coleridge published *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a brilliant volume of philosophical and literary observations. This volume included his account of the conception of *Lyrical Ballads*, his insightful examination of Wordsworth's poetry, and his statement of the concept of "willing suspension of disbelief."

The final years of Coleridge's life were relatively tranquil. In 1825 he was named an associate of the Royal Society of Literature, and he and Wordsworth toured the Rhineland in 1828. His most pleasurable pursuit during this time may have been entertaining guests in his home. William Hazlitt, in *My First Acquaintance with Poets*, reported on Coleridge's habit of dazzling visitors with his observations on literature and philosophy. He became known as the "Sage of Highgate," and his home was the meeting place for the London literati.

Coleridge died in Highgate on July 25, 1834.



Plot Summary

There is a Latin epigraph before the poem that is a quote by Thomas Burnet from *Archaeologiae philosophicae*. It says that there are forces in nature and that people should study them. There are also notes beside the poem that summarize and explain the corresponding passages. There are two versions of this poem, one written in 1798 and the other in 1817. In the later edition, some passages are changed or left out. There are also fewer older words.

An old sailor, or Ancient Mariner, stops three young men who are going to a wedding. The sailor grabs one of the men and tries to speak, but the man wants him to let go. However, the man, or Wedding Guest, is captivated by the sailor's "glittering eye" and listens obediently like a child. The Wedding Guest sits on a stone, and the sailor begins his tale, explaining how his ship initially sailed in good weather. Although the Guest hears wedding music and wants to go to the wedding, he feels compelled to listen to the Mariner. The sailor continues to tell him the story of a storm at sea. The ship is blown into a cold, icy area and is trapped. An Albatross, or sea bird, comes and flies around the boat. The ice splits and releases the ship, allowing it to leave the cold area, and the ship enters the fog. The bird follows the ship, which the crew takes to be a good omen. When the Guest wants to know why the sailor looks sad, the Mariner admits he killed the Albatross.

The other sailors are angry at the Mariner for killing the bird that caused the wind. The fog disappears, and the sailors change their minds and decide the bird brought the fog, not the wind. They are happy with the Mariner now. The breeze leads the ship into a calm ocean, and the ship stops. Without a wind, the ship cannot travel. The sailors have no water, and the salt water in the ocean is undrinkable. The ocean seems to be corrupted and filled with dirty beasts. The crew is plagued by a spirit that followed them from the south. They are thirsty and think all this is the Mariner's fault. They hang the dead Albatross across his neck. The sailors continue to suffer with their thirst. Then, the Mariner sees something on the horizon to the west. A ship is coming towards them. The Mariner bites his arm and drinks his own blood to moisten his mouth so he can inform the crew about the ship he sees.

The crew is ecstatic until they see the ship looks haunted. Death and Nightmare Life-in-Death are on the ship. Nightmare Life-in-Death looks like a woman. The two begin to gamble with dice, and the woman wins. She makes night appear, and all the sailors except the Mariner die. Their souls leave their bodies and fly past the Mariner. The Guest is fearful that the Mariner is a ghost, but the Mariner says he is still alive. The Mariner, surrounded by dead men, is alone on the ship on a rotten ocean. His praying is futile, and for a week, the Mariner is haunted by the dead men's eyes and cannot die himself. When the Mariner appreciates the sea creatures in all their colors in the moonlight, he can pray, and the Albatross falls from his neck.

Rain comes and refreshes the Mariner. He sees things in nature, and the dead men come back to life and no longer scare him with their eyes. They go about their ship



tasks. The Guest is afraid the souls of the crew have come back, but the Mariner says that blessed spirits are inhabiting the bodies of the crew. The ship moves with no wind. The spirit from the south, or Polar Spirit, is guiding the ship. At midday the ship stops and begins heaving. When the ship breaks free, the Mariner faints. He overhears two spirits talking about how the Mariner killed the Albatross and how he has been punished, but the punishment is not over yet. The Mariner hears them talking about how angelic forces steer the ship and how the ship is going too fast for the Mariner to be conscious. He wakes up at night and sees the dead men standing with frightening eyes. However, the spell breaks, and the ship arrives at the Mariner's home country. The Mariner is happy to see the sights of home. The spirits leave the bodies of the crew, and they turn into points of light above the bodies. The light attracts a rescue boat. The Mariner sees that one of the passengers is a Hermit who can absolve him from killing the Albatross. As the boat approaches, the ship sinks, and the Mariner goes overboard.

The Mariner is brought into the rescue boat. He has been through an ordeal, and his looks scare the Pilot and Hermit who are on the boat. They get on land, and the Mariner wants the Hermit to absolve him of his sin. The Hermit, a holy man, asks who he is. Something in the Mariner's soul forces him to tell the story, which gives him relief.

The Mariner is at the end of the story with the Guest. He tells the Guest that since the Hermit's blessing, he is compelled to go everywhere, and when agony strikes him, he sees someone with whom he has to share the story. He tells the Guest that there should be love for all God's creation. The Mariner leaves, and the Guest is flabbergasted. The wedding is over, and the Guest has missed it. He becomes "sadder and wiser" from hearing the Mariner's tale.



Epigraph

Epigraph Summary

Thomas Burnet says there are unseen Natures. He wants to know who will study these Natures. He says there is much to be studied. People should study these things to broaden their minds. He also says people should be objective in these studies.

Epigraph Analysis

Both visible and unseen Natures are in the poem. The poem is a study of Natures including human nature, the natural world and the supernatural world. This quote by Burnet reinforces what Coleridge tries to do in the poem. The quotation is an addition to the 1817 poem.



Notes

Notes Summary

The notes are a shorter summation of the poem. The Ancient Mariner meets the three men going to a wedding and detains a Wedding Guest. The Mariner's eye forces the Guest to listen to the Mariner's story. The Mariner says the ship is sailing in good conditions until it gets to the "Line," which is to the south. The Guest is distracted by the wedding noises, but the Mariner continues. The ship is blown by a storm to the South Pole. This is a barren, icy place with scary noises. The Albatross comes, and the crew is happy to see it. The Albatross is a good sign, and it stays behind the ship as the ship goes North through fog and ice. The Ancient Mariner rudely kills the bird of good luck. The crew is mad at the Mariner for doing that. Yet, when the fog disappears, the crew has a change of heart and supports the Mariner, which makes them guilty too. The wind goes on. The ship reaches the Pacific Ocean and goes north until it gets to the Line. The ship becomes still, and the Albatross has his revenge. A Spirit is behind them. It is an unseen force on Earth. The Spirit is not a soul or angel. The learned Jew Josephus and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus could provide more information. There are many spirits everywhere. The suffering crew blames the Mariner by putting the dead Albatross around his neck.

The Mariner sees something in the distance. It appears to be a ship. Through drastic means, he relieves his thirst and talks. The ship seems to be a positive sign, but things go wrong. It is strange that the ship moves without the wind or water. The ship is like a skeleton. The ship's ribs are like bars against the setting sun. There are a "Spectre-Woman and her Death-mate" on the scary ship. Except for them, the ship is deserted. Death and Life-in-Death gamble with dice for the crew, and Life-in-Death wins the Mariner.

Twilight disappears, and when the moon rises, the crew falls dead. Life-in-Death starts working on the Mariner. The Wedding Guest interrupts and says the Mariner must be a ghost. The Mariner tells him he is not and continues to tell how he is punished. He hates the sea creatures. He is mad that they are alive, and the crew is dead. The dead crew's eyes haunt him. In his solitary state, he wants to identify with the moon and stars, which are at home in the sky and revered. In the moonlight, he looks at God's creatures in the calm ocean. He sees their beauty and blesses them. The spell breaks.

Through divine intervention, the Mariner is soothed with rain. He hears noises and sees odd things. The crew's bodies are reanimated, and the ship continues on the journey. This revival is not because of men's souls or demons. The cause is a group of angelic spirits, which appear on the behalf of guardian saint. The South Pole spirit takes the ship to the Line in compliance with the angelic spirits. The Spirit still needs revenge. The spirit's demon associates are the unseen residents of the element. They conspire with him. Two of them discuss how the Polar Spirit makes the Mariner repent. The Polar



Spirit goes back to the South. The Mariner has fainted. He could not endure the speed of the ship caused by the angelic spirits. The ship goes north. The ship slows.

The Mariner is conscious again and has to repent again. The curse is over. The Mariner sees his native land. The angelic spirits depart the dead crew and emerge as points of light. A Hermit in curiosity goes to the ship. The ship sinks. The Pilot's boat saves the Mariner. The Mariner asks the Hermit to absolve him of his sins. As punishment for the rest of his life, the Mariner's agony makes him go from place to place to share his story so he can teach others about loving God's creation.

Notes Analysis

The characters are not given names, but they are personified by capitalized descriptive nouns. These notes clarify what happens in the poem, and there are additional elements here that are not in the poem. The notes say the ship is going to "the Line" which is not mentioned in the poem. The "line" is the equator. The notes refer to the noise from the wedding as "bridal music." The ship is going to the South Pole. The notes identify specific geographic areas while the poem just describes the surroundings. The killing of the Albatross and the aftermath are explained clearly. The notes let the reader know the crew is guilty like the Mariner. The ship goes to the Pacific Ocean and to the Line.

The notes signal the beginning of the Albatross's revenge. There is an extensive description of the Spirit. The reader learns what the Spirit is and who the experts on the matter are. The drinking of the Mariner's blood is called a "dear ransom." The first letter of the sun and moon are capitalized, like in the poem, making them characters. Nightmare Life-in-Death is called "The Spectre-Woman." Death is her "Death-mate." Their ship is called a "skeleton ship." The reader learns Nightmare Life-in-Death has won the Mariner in the game of dice. Death takes care of the crew. Life-in-Death takes care of the Mariner. This is the Mariner's "horrible penance."

The Mariner is jealous of the creatures that live while the crew is dead. The Mariner's sky-watching has more of an explanation. He envies the moon and stars because they are happy at home while he is not. Religious references appear with "God's creatures" and "by grace of the holy Mother." There is an explanation of the spirits. The Spirit from the South Pole takes the ship to the Line. This spirit needs revenge. The two voices are demon associates of the Polar Spirit. The motion of the ship is called "supernatural," which is a theme of the poem. The notes let the readers know what the spirits' purposes are. One purpose is to punish the Mariner while another is to provide light so he can be rescued by the Pilot boat. These notes help the reader, who may be confused by the flowery language of the poem. The notes are an addendum to the 1817 poem.



Part 1, Lines 1-82

Part 1, Lines 1-82 Summary

An old sailor, or Ancient Mariner, stops one of three young men who are going to a wedding. The Mariner tries to speak, and the man, or Wedding Guest, wants to know why he stops him. The Guest explains that he has to go to a wedding. The Mariner tries to tell him about a ship, but the Guest calls the Mariner crazy and tells him to let go. Even though the Mariner drops his hand, the Guest is captivated by the Mariner's "glittering eye" and listens obediently like a child. The Wedding Guest sits on stone, and the Mariner begins his tale.

The ship has a glorious sendoff. The weather is sunny at first. During the story, the Guest hears a bassoon and wants to go to the wedding, which is described. Still, the Guest stays to hear the Ancient Mariner. The Mariner tells how a storm comes up. He describes the ship's state during the storm, and how it travels south. Then the ship comes into a cold, icy area. The ice is imposing and makes cracking sounds.

Then, an Albatross, or sea bird, comes through the fog and flies around the boat. The Mariner and other crewmembers are happy to see the bird. It eats and flies. The ice splits and releases the ship, allowing it to leave the cold area, and it enters the fog. The south wind and bird follow the ship. The Albatross is a pleasant diversion for the crew, and it is thought to be a good omen. Then, night falls on the ship. When the Wedding Guest wants to know why the Mariner looks sad, the Mariner admits he shot the Albatross with his cross-bow.

Part 1, Lines 1-82 Analysis

The first part of the poem sets the stage for the rest of the poem. The poem goes back and forth between the Mariner and Wedding Guest's interactions and what happens on the ship. The Mariner's appearance is described. He has a long, gray beard, a "skinny hand," and a "glittering eye." His eye compels the Guest to listen to the Mariner even though the Guest wants to go to the wedding. He is identified as "next of kin," which would make him an important part of the wedding. He hears music and knows he is missing the ceremony. There is a supernatural element to this hypnotism, and other supernatural elements are present throughout the poem. The Mariner describes the weather, which is important to the poem. He also describes the natural surroundings. Nature is a theme on the voyage. The poem consists of mainly four-line stanzas with an A-B-C-B rhyme scheme. Each part has some stanzas that break this pattern.

The reader should note that the voyage begins happily both in feelings and in the weather. The Mariner's reverence for the landmarks of home, the light-house top, for example, occur throughout the poem. Note the archaic language such as "eftsoons" which means at once. Coleridge uses colors to describe things, such as the ice was as



"green as emerald." Notice that there is alliteration within the simile in this passage, "red as a rose is she." There is also personification of the sun: "The Sun came up on the left, Out of the sea came he!" Nature is seen as good and bad in the poem. Here, ice is described as a monstrous force. During the happy period with the Albatross, the moon shines.

Certain words are capitalized, which heightens their importance. All the letters in "Storm-blast" are capitalized. The Mariner compares the storm to a bird, which foreshadows the Albatross. The Mariner makes a religious reference to the bird, and religion is also a theme of the poem. The bird is thought of as a good omen because it appears at the same time the ice splits. Superstition was common during that time of the eighteenth century. The Mariner must have looked very distressed when talking about the Albatross. Even the Wedding Guest notices it. The Mariner shooting the Albatross is a pivotal event that leads to other important events in the poem. Note that the cross-bow has the word "cross" in it. The weapon is also shaped like a cross. These are religious references, which are part of the overall religious theme. This foreshadows several events.



Part 2, Lines 83-142

Part 2, Lines 83-142 Summary

The sun rises and sets in the fog. The south wind continues, but there is no flying bird. The other sailors are angry at the Mariner for killing the bird that caused the wind. The fog disappears, and the sailors change their minds and decide the bird brought the fog, not the wind. They are happy with the Mariner now. The breeze leads the ship into a calm ocean, and the ship stops. The sun makes them hot and thirsty. They are out of water. The ocean is undrinkable and seems to be filled with dirty beasts. The Mariner talks about death fires at night. The water turns different colors. Some of the crew dreams a spirit follows them from the icy area. The crew becomes thirsty and unable to talk, and they think all this is the Mariner's fault. They hang the dead Albatross across his neck.

Part 2, Lines 83-142 Analysis

Coleridge uses a great deal of repetition in the poem. He repeats the refrain "food or play Came to the mariners' hollo!" to emphasize the absence of the Albatross. The weather and surroundings are also emphasized. Weather is very important to the crew because they depend on it for the ship's movement. This is why they are concerned about the wind and fog. Examples of alliteration, such as "furrow followed free," add to the musical sound of the piece.

Literature introduces popular words and phrases into the English language. This part of the poem introduces the common saying, "Water, water, every where, Nor any drop to drink." There are variations of this saying in our language, such as "water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink," which come from Coleridge's poem. This phrase also utilizes alliteration and repetition with irony and paradox. It is ironic that they are surrounded by water, and they cannot drink any of it. Another popular saying introduced by this poem is "an albatross around his neck," which means that a person is carrying a burden. The poem also propagates the idea that killing an albatross is bad luck. Someone who causes bad luck may also be called an albatross.

Supernatural references appear again with "death-fires," "witch's oils," creatures and the spirit dreams. The death-fires are thought to be St. Elmo's Fire. It was common for sailors to see them, possibly due to the masts attracting electricity during storms.

The sun, which was good at the beginning of the voyage, becomes a giver of stifling heat and thirst. The sun is beating down on the men, who are on a still ship so there is no relief. The Mariner is disgusted with the sea creatures, but this will change later in the poem. Coleridge again uses colors to describe the water as "green, blue, and white." Note that the men lose their ability to speak due to the parching thirst and stifling heat. The crewmembers, young and old, are affected by the drought.



The crewmembers also apply superstitions to the Albatross, first calling it a good omen and condemning the Mariner for killing it, then praising him when the fog lifts. Their misreading of natural signs, and consideration that the Albatross is only good in so far as it benefits them, dooms them. With the death of the bird, they have been punished with thirst and muteness in the stranded ship. A religious reference appears at the end with the hanging of Albatross across the Mariner's neck. Coleridge substitutes the bird for the cross that Jesus carried. The Mariner is martyred for his sin against the bird, which can symbolize mankind's sins against nature. The cross has the connotation of absolving sins, which is foreshadowing later events in the poem. Coleridge compares the sun to God's head, another religious reference.



Part 3, Lines 143-223

Part 3, Lines 143-223 Summary

The sailors continue to suffer with their thirst. Then, the Mariner sees something on the horizon to the west. At first, he cannot make it out. A ship is coming towards them. Because his throat, like the rest of the crew's, is parched, the Mariner bites his arm and drinks his blood to moisten his mouth so that he can inform the crew about the ship he sees. The crew is ecstatic and follows the Mariner in drinking their own blood. The Mariner continues to describe the ship. The sun is setting, and the ship blocks it. The sun can still be seen, though, through the skeletal sides of the ship. The Mariner says the sun is covered with the ribs of the ship, which are like bars. He remarks that the sails are like cobwebs and that there is no wind carrying the ship, and then he notices the passengers.

Death and Nightmare Life-in-Death are on the ship. Nightmare Life-in-Death looks like a woman. He describes the woman's appearance and seems to fear her. The two begin to gamble with dice, and Life-in-Death wins the Mariner. She speaks about winning and then whistles three times to begin the curse on the Mariner. She makes night appear. The sailors have scary looks and curse the Mariner with their eyes. All two hundred sailors except the Mariner die because Death won them and because they are complicit in the killing of the Albatross. Their souls leave their bodies and fly past the Mariner. The Mariner compares their movements to his cross-bow.

In the 1798 edition of the poem, there are differences. One is that Death is described, as a black skeleton with rotting places. The passages about the ribs and the description of Life-in-Death use different wording. There is a passage after the Life-in-Death whistles where wind goes through Death's bones and makes a scary sound. A "Spectre-ship" is mentioned. The description of the "horned Moon" appears in a different passage. The Mariner implores the "stranger" to listen to him. There is nothing about his fear, life-blood or cup. There is also nothing about the steersman's face.

Part 3, Lines 143-223 Analysis

Coleridge emphasizes the eyes of the crew in this section. Their eyes are weary because of their thirst, and they give the Mariner evil eyes before they die. At the poem's beginning, the Mariner's eye makes the Guest listen to his story, showing the power and forcefulness of the eye - the window to the soul. Another body part Coleridge uses is the heart. The Mariner talks about his heart beating. He also talks about the fear in his heart. So far, alliteration, personification and irony have been used in the poem. Another device used is synecdoche, a part representing a whole, which appears in the phrase "the western wave was all a-flame." The wave (a part) represents the ocean (the whole).



All the letters in Death and Life-in-Death are capitalized, as well as the word cross-bow. This emphasizes the importance of these two characters as well as that of the weapon. Death is a skeleton. Life-in-Death is described as a woman in a negative way, even with traits like red lips and golden hair that are often considered beautiful or positive. Her skin is the color of leprosy, demonstrating the fearfulness of the disease especially at that time and marking her as an instrument of horror. Death-in-Life is diseased and represents a fate worse than death. When the two gamble for the crew's souls, Death wins all the crew but the Mariner. Death is punishment, but for the Mariner, Life-in-Death is possibly a worse punishment.

The men are happy at first because they think the ship is a rescue ship. They have no idea it is a ship of doom. The whistling three times by Life-in-Death is significant. The number three can mean different things. In a religious context, it could be the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The Mariner stops one of three men at the beginning. Besides the reference to the drinking of the blood, the Mariner mentions his "life-blood." The Mariner usually refers to the crew in general, but in this passage, he speaks of the steerman.

Repetition appears again, for example, "a weary time, a weary time." Dark imagery permeates the poem. The "black lips baked" of the crew shows their dire situation. Nature becomes evil, such as when the sun seems to be in a dungeon. As the ship approaches, it has a sinister look because of the ribs the sun shines through. This also marks the ship as a supernatural element. The ribs are uncovered, and if it were a natural ship, it would sink. The sails of the deadly ship are compared to gossameres or cobwebs, which furthers the fright aspect of it. The first letter of "sun" is capitalized in the poem to illustrate its part in the deterioration of the voyage. Nature plays its part in the doomed voyage after Life-in-Death wins the dice game. Darkness, the stars and the moon (which is capitalized like the sun) set the mood for a dangerous future. Religious references can be seen in invoking "Heaven's mother" and when the souls of the sailors head to "bliss or woe," or heaven and hell. The crew drinking their blood is like Christ's blood, which saves. The comparison of the cross-bow to the souls' movement ties two horrible situations together.

In the 1798 version, the description of Death does add another frightening element to the poem. Coleridge uses black to describe the bones and purple and green to describe the rot. He uses colors to enhance the imagery. He also uses sounds like the wind whistling through the bones. Wind plays various roles throughout the poem, and this is one of the ominous roles. The Mariner speaks to the Guest again. Although the Guest is a stranger, they develop a connection throughout the poem.



Part 4, Lines 224-291

Part 4, Lines 224-291 Summary

The Guest is fearful that the Mariner is a ghost, but the Mariner says he is still alive. The Mariner, surrounded by dead men, is alone on the ship on a rotten ocean. His praying is futile. In fact, it is impossible for him to pray. He closes his eyes to escape his evil surroundings. The dead men do not decay, and they maintain their "evil eye" looks. For a week, the Mariner is haunted by the dead men's eyes and cannot die himself. At first, the Mariner describes the moon and ocean in negative ways. However, he notes the water snakes' colors and beauty, and he feels unexpected love for them. When the Mariner appreciates the sea creatures in all their colors in the moonlight, he can pray, and the Albatross falls from his neck.

Part 4, Lines 224-291 Analysis

The Wedding Guest is back to interrupt the story after being told the crew dies. He again describes the Mariner's looks. The voyage has taken a toll on the Mariner, who is thin with leathery skin. The Guest makes a reference to the Mariner's trade by comparing his skin to sand. The Guest also refers to the "glittering eye," which has terrifying power over him. The Guest is terrified because he thinks the Mariner is a ghost.

The beasts in the ocean bother the Mariner at the beginning. All nature seems cruel, corrupt and grotesque. There is a religious reference when the Mariner cannot pray. His view of the ocean as horrible is tied to his inability to pray. Only when he can see the beauty in nature can he communicate with God. In addition, the Mariner talks about a saint, who first does not help him but later does. The Mariner mentions that his soul is in agony, which is a foreshadowing.

Coleridge again uses numbers to describe the seven days the Mariner suffered. In a religious context, the world was made in seven days. Seven is considered to be a lucky number, but in this case, it is not, except perhaps that after seven days the Mariner is able to pray. The poet employs pacing with the phrase, "For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky." This speaks to the Mariner's state of mind and how slowly the time passes. This passage also uses repetition and alliteration, emphasizing the passage of time. Coleridge uses color this time to describe the "awful red" of the sea. He also uses color to describe the snakes. They have "tracks of shining white" and "golden fire." They are "blue, glossy green, and velvet black." Coleridge also describes the moonbeams as like "April hoar-frost spread," evoking the spring.

Coleridge talks about eyes again when the Mariner tries to use his eyes to shut out everything, and when the dead men's eyes do not stop looking at the Mariner. Superstition is part of the poem, emphasized by the powerful eye of the Mariner himself



and the eyes of the dead crew. There is another reference to the heart, with his heart being as dry as dust and love coming from his heart. The Mariner is being punished for killing the Albatross by being forced to stay alive to suffer in his environment of strange elements and dead men. Even the moon and ocean look terrible. The moon is usually seen as good, but the Mariner says the "beams bemoaned." Even the ship is deteriorating with "rotting deck." The Mariner has an epiphany about the beasts which he once feared. He now thinks they are beautiful, and his punishment ends. The recognition of beauty in nature is at the thematic center of the poem. In a religious context, he blesses them. He can pray at last, and he is rid of his burden, the Albatross.



Part 5, Lines 292-409

Part 5, Lines 292-409 Summary

The Mariner goes to sleep, which he is thankful for. Rain comes and refreshes him. The Mariner thinks it is dream, but it is real. His body feels light. The wind blows and shakes the sails. A storm with lightning occurs, and the ship moves. The dead men come back to life because of spirits and no longer scare him with their eyes. They go about their ship tasks in a mechanical way. During the story, the Guest is afraid the souls of the crew have come back, but the Mariner says that they are revived by blessed spirits. The ship moves with no wind. The voyage is pleasant for awhile. The Polar Spirit is guiding the ship. At midday, the ship stops and begins heaving. When the ship breaks free, the Mariner faints. He does not know how long he stays unconscious. He overhears two spirits talking about how the Mariner killed the Albatross and how he has been punished, but the punishment is not over yet.

In the 1798 version, there is a conversation with the Wedding Guest. The Mariner tells the Guest to listen to him. The Guest tells him he is obedient because of the eye. The Mariner tells him that a sadder story has never been told. He warns the Guest that he will wake up more somber in the morning. He says the sailors went back to work quietly and did not look at the Mariner.

Part 5, Lines 292-409 Analysis

The Mariner praises the sleep he gets. As a sailor that knows navigation, he mentions the poles. He refers to "Mary Queen," the mother of Jesus. The rain is part of the weather, an ally to nature and a theme in the poem. The rain is a contrast to the dryness he and the other sailors have suffered. He goes from "black lips baked" to wet lips. The abundance of water is seen with the pouring rain, shooting water and the reference to a river. He mentions feeling like a ghost, and there are other ghostly mentions in this section, such as when the revived crew seems to be apparitions.

Another prominent weather element is the wind, which eventually stops. Clouds, lightning, moon, sun and stars are here representing nature, which is very important. The first letters in moon and sun are capitalized, as usual. Coleridge talks about how the revived crew's eyes do not move. The eyes have been important in the poem. One of the crew is the Mariner's nephew, and this is a rare instance when the Mariner individualizes the crew. He mentions the helmsman again. The ship is deteriorating because the sails are "thin and sere." There is repetition with "to and fro." The ship moves again with no wind after it has been still. The crew, possessed by heavenly bodies, compels the ship forward with the help of the Polar Spirit who is exacting revenge on the Mariner.



The Mariner makes another comparison to a month, which is June. Woods are mentioned in contrast to the ocean. Music is part of this section with the instruments, angels singing and the singing brook. The Mariner says there is music on his heart, which combines the music and heart references. The ocean is nine fathoms deep. This is also mentioned in the second part. A fathom is a unit of depth measurement that is six feet or 1.8288 meters. The ship is also compared to a bucking horse. The Mariner mentions blood again when fainting. It is thought the blood goes to the head when someone faints.

The Wedding Guest interjects in this section. He is starting to get frightened again by the story, and the Mariner tries to reassure him. The Mariner compares the crew's sounds to different things, such as instruments and angel voices. The sounds become visible by flying to the sun and mixing. The Mariner continues his bird references by talking about the songs of sky-larks. He makes a religious reference to angels singing. Then, he makes a nature reference to brook noise. The binding of nature and religion runs throughout the poem and is central to the theme.

The Polar Spirit originates from the icy area where they met the Albatross, and in keeping with the supernatural theme, the Polar Spirit guides the ship. Two spirits discuss the Mariner, who has fainted. They mention the bow, cross and the killing of the Albatross. They talk of the Polar Spirit, and how this is revenge on the Mariner. The voices are like a Greek chorus in plays because they talk about the action and inform the reader what is happening. This foreshadows future events. The spirits are also judges of the Mariner's wrongdoing, and they are meting out a punishment. This is stated in the stanza:

"The spirit who bideth by himself

In the land of mist and snow,

He loved the bird that loved the man

Who shot him with his bow."

This shows that the spirits revere the bird and are punishing the Mariner because he killed it. The importance of the voices is noted through capitalization.

In the 1798 version, the Mariner wants to make sure the Wedding Guest understands the importance of this story. As part of Coleridge's use of eyes in the poem, the Guest brings up the "hypnotizing eye" which has transfixed him from the beginning. The Mariner warning the Guest about how he will be the next day is foreshadowing and shows that the Mariner understands that his story has the power to change the people who hear it. Coleridge uses the eyes again to say the crew cannot look at the Mariner. This reinforces the Mariner's loneliness, and how he is isolated from everything.



Part 6, Lines 410-513

Part 6, Lines 410-513 Summary

The Mariner hears the spirits talking about how the ocean is subservient to the moon and how angelic forces steer the ship. The ship is going too fast for the Mariner to be conscious. When the Mariner regains consciousness, the ship will slow. He wakes up at night and sees the dead men standing with frightening eyes. The Mariner feels the curse by not being able to stop looking at their eyes and being unable to pray. However, the spell breaks. At first, the Mariner is apprehensive and does not know what to expect. A wind comforts him, and the ship goes to the Mariner's home country. The Mariner is happy to see the sights of home. He cries and prays to God to let him stay awake or to put him to sleep permanently. The Mariner describes seeing red shadows and then seeing the crew's dead bodies. The spirits leave the bodies of the crew, and they form points of light. Their light attracts a rescue boat. The Mariner hears oars and sees a Pilot. He hears the Pilot and the Pilot's Boy approaching. One of the passengers is a Hermit who can absolve him from the sin of killing the Albatross.

In the 1798 version, after the harbor-bay passage, there is a further description of the moonlight bay. The Mariner talks about red shadows, which turn out to be the crewmembers that stand before the mast. Their arms light up, and their eyes sparkle. The Mariner prays and does not look at them. He notices there is no wind or wave. After the Mariner spots the boat, there is another passage. He says the lights go away, and the bodies rise up. They go back to their places. The wind blows on the Mariner.

Part 6, Lines 410-513 Analysis

The Mariner is finally rescued in this section. The spirit voices teach the reader how the ship moves. The first voice asks questions while the second voice answers. A voice makes a reference to slavery, which was common then. There is a timetable to the voyage, when the voice says they cannot be late. Nature references explain the relationship between the moon and ocean. The moon has control of the ocean. Again, capitalization is used for emphasis and to personify the elements of nature as characters. The calm weather and moon are prominent as the Mariner sees the crew. Their eyes are emphasized again, and so is the Mariner's eye. He cannot stop looking and cannot pray with his eyes. Even the ocean's eye is mentioned. The curse and the breaking of the spell are elements of the supernatural. The Mariner's fears are soothed by the wind, which plays good and bad roles in the poem. The wind invigorates his body. It is compared to spring.

The color green is applied to the ocean. The bay is white. The shadows are crimson. The Mariner compares his fear to walking on a road and thinking someone is behind, bringing a description of land to the poem. When the Mariner says the reanimated dead



men are for a charnel-dungeon fitter, he means that they seem to be ready for a place for the dead. Note that "corse" means "corpse."

The Mariner sees the lighthouse top, the hill and the kirk he mentions at the beginning of the poem. The kirk is a church. He happily mentions his country, or countree. After this harrowing voyage, his country is very important to him. In a religious reference, he cries and prays, which he could not do before. He reverently describes nature until he sees the dead men. Their spirits are gone, but they reform as light on the bodies. The Mariner is happy to see the light, which seems to be from Heaven after a dark voyage, and even happier to see the rescue boat. The light is called a "seraph band" or band of angels. The Mariner says "by the holy rood." "Rood" means "cross," which again relates back to the cross-bow and the Albatross around the neck. While the silence scared him before, he now cherishes it. There is a contrast as the silence is compared to music.

Up until now, the Mariner has been surrounded by scary noises, but the noise of the oars, the Hermit's hymns and the Pilot's voice are reassuring. He makes a religious reference by calling on the Lord when he sees the rescue crew. He is excited to see the Hermit, a religious man. The Hermit is from the wood, which is part of nature, a theme of the poem. The Mariner feels the voyage has been a punishment for killing the Albatross, and he hopes the Hermit can help him find peace. The Mariner feels the Albatross' blood is on his soul, and he wants to be clean again. Coleridge uses blood throughout the poem, such as when the Mariner and the crew drink their blood. This is a religious reference in that Jesus' blood cleanses sins. The Mariner has been seeking religious redemption since he killed the bird. The Albatross does fall from his neck after he appreciates God's creatures, but he has not gotten total redemption yet.

In the 1798 version, there is an additional description of nature. The wind and water are important in the poem, and there is a lack of them in this part. The shadows are described in more detail. Coleridge likens the shadows to torches, or fire. Fire has been part of the voyage with the heat, the Sun and the death-fires. Coleridge again uses colors to describe the moonlight bay and the shadows. Even the Mariner's skin is red. He is undergoing a transformation, even though his is a different transformation than the crew's transformation. The crew making fire is a foreshadowing to the seraph-band light. The crew's eyes glitter like the Mariner's did at the beginning of the poem. Here Coleridge also uses the right arms of the crew. The Mariner's eyes do not look at the crew. The Mariner prays again as he does throughout the poem.

In the other passage, the reader learns what happens to the bodies of the crew and that it goes dark. The wind comes back just for the Mariner. The Mariner is about to get rescued, so in this instance the wind is a positive force.



Part 7, Lines 514-625

Part 7, Lines 514-625 Summary

The Mariner describes the Hermit in a positive manner, as a holy man who is in tune with nature. The Mariner overhears the passengers talk about the lights. The Hermit remarks that no one is responding, and that the ship looks bad. The Pilot is scared, but the Hermit urges him to keep on. As the boat comes closer, the Mariner is still, but he hears a noise. The ship is destroyed by something in the water, and the Mariner goes overboard. He is brought into the rescue boat. The Mariner has been through an ordeal, and his looks scare the Pilot and Hermit. The Mariner grabs the oars, and the Pilot's Boy acts crazy and calls the Mariner the Devil. Finally, they bring the Mariner to land, and the Mariner wants the Hermit to absolve him of his sin. The Hermit, a holy man, asks who the Mariner is. An agony in the Mariner's soul forces him to tell the story, which gives him relief.

The Mariner is at the end of the story with the Guest. He tells the Guest that after the Hermit's blessing, he is compelled to go everywhere, and anytime the agony strikes him, he sees someone with whom he has to share the story of the voyage. After he tells the story, the agony is gone until it returns again. There are sounds from the wedding, and the Mariner tells of the greatness of prayer, especially after being alone on the ship with no sign of God. He tells the Guest that in addition to prayer, there should be love for all God's creation which includes "man, bird, and beast." God loves all He created. The Mariner leaves after hearing the bell that signals prayer, and the Guest is flabbergasted. The Guest does not attend the wedding and becomes "sadder and wiser."

Part 7, Lines 514-625 Analysis

The Hermit is like a savior to the Mariner. He will save the Mariner who is from a "far coundree." The Hermit is a representative of religion and nature, two themes of the poem. His religious role offers the Mariner redemption. The Hermit lives in the woods next to the sea, and he is a man of nature, which elevates him to the Mariner. The Hermit's habits of prayer and his surroundings are described, with references to the Hermit kneeling on moss and an oak stump. These aspects of nature are holy, being places of prayer. The Hermit describes to the reader how the ship looks after the scary voyage, with warped planks and thin sails. He compares it to the nature scenes at home. His connection to nature is seen again with the leaves floating on the water where the owls and wolves are. The wolf eating the young may be dark, but it is the cycle of nature. The Pilot is afraid, but the Hermit is not. He wants to approach the fearsome looking ship. The Pilot's fear serves to show the Hermit's goodness and kindness in wanting to approach the ship. In response to their introduction to the Mariner, the Pilot yells, and the Hermit prays. Again, the opposite nature of the Pilot accentuates the Hermit's goodness.



Sound, which is important in the poem, leads to the undoing of the ship. The boat sinks like lead. The Albatross falls "like lead into the sea" in Part the Fourth. The Mariner again refers to seven days, the length of his ordeal. It is interesting that the poem is in seven parts. During his rescue, the Mariner also mentions dreams, which have been mentioned throughout the poem.

The Mariner mentions the Hermit's eyes in prayer. The eyes of several of the characters have significance. The Mariner has an eye that compels the Wedding Guest to listen to the story. The ghostly crew has cursed eyes for the Mariner. The Mariner's eyes are fixated on the crew and cannot look up to pray. Another heart reference appears here when the Mariner's heart burns.

The Pilot's boy has a crazy reaction to the Mariner. He calls the Mariner the Devil, another religious reference. Although the Mariner looks terrible after his ordeal, the Hermit treats him well, and they bring him back to land. The Mariner's love for his country is emphasized when they are back on land. The Hermit crossing his brow is a religious ritual Catholics use today. The agony strikes the Mariner for the first time once on land. During his conversation with the Hermit, he gets the absolution he wants, and he begins his ritual of talking about the voyage in order to free himself. In Catholic terms, the Mariner confesses his sins to the Hermit, who gives the Mariner a penance, to tell his story over and over. The Mariner uses the word "shrieve" which means to hear a sinner's confession. By spreading his story as penance, the Mariner becomes a teacher and a preacher.

The Mariner's compulsion to tell his story is a catharsis and a punishment at the same time. Telling the story is like putting out the fire in his heart. This is like the water or rain putting out the fire or quenching the thirst of the Mariner. The Mariner's comparison to night is affirming the cycle of nature. His speech is mentioned throughout the poem. At first, he speaks during the stillness of the ship. Then, his speech is hampered by thirst. He regains speech by drinking his blood. Now his speech is affected by this compulsion to tell his story. The sounds of the wedding intrude into his story. There is music from the wedding throughout the poem. Sounds on the ship are compared to music. The Mariner says he felt he was without God on the ship, but now it is different.

The Mariner tells the Wedding Guest that after the horror of the voyage, the ability to pray is such a relief. It is better than a wedding. The Mariner talks about the kirk, or church, again. This is a favorite of his as he makes positive references to it throughout the poem. The Mariner is lonely on the ship, but he prays with other people of different genders and ages. He now feels the fellowship of others. As he says goodbye to the Wedding Guest, he continues about the beauty of prayer and how the Guest should love what God has created and loved. The "man, bird, and beast" of God's creation is on the voyage in the forms of the crew, the Albatross, and the sea creatures. The Mariner is warning the Wedding Guest what happens as a result of sin, and defiling or disrespecting nature is a sin.

Like in the Part the Fourth, the Mariner appreciates all God's creatures "great and small," and through this epiphany, he is able to enjoy the power of prayer. The Albatross



is a representative of the creatures of God and the folly of man. The killing of the Albatross and the horrible events that follow make the Mariner a better man. Along with the Mariner, the crew is punished too. The Mariner's aging appearance is mentioned again; his eye is emphasized for the final time. The Wedding Guest is so affected by the Mariner and his story that he does not go to the wedding because it seems frivolous. The wedding represents new life. This means everyone can wipe the slate clean and choose to obey God or not. The Guest has transformed into a more somber person the next day. The Mariner's constant telling of his story not only changes himself. It changes the hearer as well.



Characters

Ancient Mariner

The Ancient Mariner is the main character in the poem. All the events revolve around him. His name is even in the title. He approaches the Wedding Guest out of three men to tell his story. The Mariner has a frazzled appearance as if he has been through an ordeal. At first, the Guest resists and says he is important to the wedding, but he is captivated by the Mariner's eye and listens. The Mariner tells of how he is part of a ship crew whose voyage had a good start. Then he shares how the voyage quickly deteriorates after he shoots an Albatross. The other crewmembers are angry with him at first because they think the bird is a good omen, and then they like him because they think the bird caused bad luck. However, conditions become hot and dry, and the sailors blame him and hang the Albatross around his neck. Then a death ship comes with Death and Nightmare Life-in-Death aboard. Because of a dice game, Life-in-Death wins the Ancient Mariner, while Death takes the crew. The Mariner suffers for a while by himself on the ship and is unable to pray. When he learns to appreciate the water snakes, which had seemed so vile, he can pray, and the Albatross falls from his neck. The Mariner witnesses strange things such as the dead men coming to life and the ship moving on its own. He learns that these strange things are caused by spirits. He finally reaches home in the ship, and after the ship collapses, he is saved by a rescue boat with a pilot, a pilot's boy, and a Hermit, who is a holy man. The Mariner wants to the Hermit to save him from his sins. The Mariner is blessed by the Hermit, and as penance, he has to tell his story wherever he goes.

The Mariner is in different states throughout the poem. At the beginning, when he is trying to tell the Wedding Guest his story, he is humble but insistent. He uses his eye to make the Guest listen. As a sailor at the beginning of the voyage, he is ignorant and careless and randomly shoots the Albatross. The subsequent events of the voyage are his punishment. The Hermit absolves him of his sins, and in order to repent, the Mariner has to tell his story so others can learn from it. He also has a religious enlightenment. He learns that killing the Albatross was wrong and that he should appreciate all of God's creatures. He finds out how precious prayer is. At the end, he is more appreciative and is compelled to tell what he has learned with others.

Wedding Guest

The Wedding Guest is stopped by the Ancient Mariner on the way to a wedding. He is in a group of men. The Guest wants to know why the old man stops him. He explains that he has to go to the wedding and that he is a close relative. The Mariner tries to touch him and speak, but the Guest tells him to take his hand away. However, the Mariner's eye has a hypnotic effect on the Guest, and he sits down to listen. Not long after the Mariner begins the story, the Guest hears the music and other sounds from the wedding and is agitated. Still, he continues to listen to the Mariner. The Guest becomes an



attentive listener and is compassionate in asking why the Mariner looks so afraid at one point in the story. At another point, he tells the Mariner he is afraid of him because he thinks the Mariner is a ghost. He also expresses his fear when the dead men come back to life. At the end of the Mariner's story, the Guest is somber and no longer in the mood for a wedding.

The Guest is the audience to the story, like the reader is. Coleridge has the Guest describe the Mariner so the reader can see his appearance. The Guest breaks up the poem to emphasize certain situations or to clarify the story. The Mariner's powerful story makes the Guest decide not to go to the Wedding. At the beginning, he is ready to celebrate, but by the end, he sees how frivolous the wedding is and ponders what the Mariner has told him. The story captivates him, and he has reactions of sympathy and fear. The Mariner feels an agony come over him when he feels he has to tell someone the story, and he chooses the Guest.

Albatross

The Albatross is a bird that approaches the ship. The crew is happy to see it, and the Albatross happily eats and flies around the ship. The Mariner shoots and kills it. The crew is angry with the Mariner because they think the Albatross is a good omen, and then later they decide the bird is not a good omen. During a time of suffering, the crew hangs the Albatross around the Mariner's neck. When the Mariner praises the sea creatures, he is able to pray, and the Albatross falls from his neck.

The Albatross is a victim of the Mariner's cruel actions, and the Albatross's killing is the catalyst for the horrible events that follow. The crew punishes the Mariner by putting the bird on him, and when the Mariner repents, he is relieved of the Albatross. In a religious context, the Albatross is like a cross the Mariner must bear. One of the spirit voices mentions how callously he kills the Albatross. Later, the Mariner wants the Hermit to absolve him of his sin of killing the bird. Although the Mariner's killing of the Albatross is reckless and brief, he suffers for it on the ship, and after he returns home, he has to continue his punishment by telling everybody his story and the lessons he has learned.

Ship's Crew

There are two hundred men working on the ship. When telling his story, the Mariner does not refer to the individuals on the crew much. He does mention a helmsman and his nephew. The crew usually works as a group during his story. They are happy to see the Albatross and are angry when the Mariner kills it. They think the bird brought the wind that propels the ship. Then they side with the Mariner by thinking the bird brought the fog. When the crew is suffering from heat and thirst, they hang the Albatross around the Mariner's neck. The crew's fate worsens after the ghost ship arrives. Death wins them through gambling. They look at the Mariner with evil eyes, and then their bodies fall. Their souls leave their bodies. Later, the men come back to life, inhabited by blessed spirits, and go about their tasks on the ship. They do not act normally; they



make strange noises. When the ship is close to home, the men become red shadows. Then the spirits leave their bodies and form light, which attracts a rescue boat.

The crew exacts their punishment on the Mariner by giving him the burden of the Albatross. However, the crew sides with the Mariner when they agree the bird is bad luck. They receive their own punishments for this. They are part of the Mariner's punishment for the rest of the voyage by haunting him with their eyes and becoming part of the scary atmosphere. They help with the Mariner's rescue by contributing to the light. The voyage is horrible for them because of the Mariner, and they lose their lives.

Wedding Party

The Wedding Guest is on his way to a wedding when the Mariner stops him. He is "next of kin" so he is important to the wedding. Other people in the wedding are the bridegroom, the guests, the bride, musicians and the bridesmaids. The Wedding Guest is torn between the actions of the wedding party and the Mariner's tale. The sounds of the wedding, such as the bassoon, intermingle with the Mariner's story. Because of the Mariner, the wedding happens without the Guest. After the story, the wedding seems unimportant.

Death

Death is one of the passengers on the death ship that approaches the Mariner's ship. In the older version of the poem, he is described as a black skeleton with patches of rot. Death plays dice with Nightmare Life-in-Death and loses the Mariner to her. He is responsible for the death of the crew. He is part of the Mariner and crew's punishment after the killing of the Albatross. He is part of the frightening environment of the voyage.

Nightmare Life-in-Death

Nightmare Life-in-Death is one of the passengers on the death ship that approaches the Mariner's ship. She is described as having red lips, yellow hair and white skin. She plays dice with Death. She announces the end of the game and proclaims herself the winner. She whistles three times, and the ensuing events are part of the punishment for the Mariner and his crew. She wins the Mariner and makes him suffer a "nightmare life-in-death." Like her partner Death, she punishes on behalf of the Albatross.

Pilot

The Pilot's boat serves as the rescue boat for the Mariner. Although the Pilot is supposed to be the person in charge of the boat, he reacts badly to the Mariner, and the Hermit has to persuade him to approach the ship, which looks frightening to the Pilot. When the Mariner is in the rescue boat and tries to speak, the Pilot screams and falls "down in a fit." Even though the Pilot is part of the rescue crew, the Hermit is the hero.



The Pilot shows the reader how awful the ship and the Mariner look, and he represents the fears of the reader.

Hermit

The Hermit is on the rescue boat that saves the Mariner. He is a religious man who lives in the woods. He persuades the scared Pilot to approach the ship. He remarks on the poor condition of the ship. When he sees the Mariner in the boat, he prays. The Mariner thinks highly of the Hermit and wants redemption from him. The Hermit persuades the Mariner to tell his story. The Hermit gives the Mariner penance for his bad deeds, which is to constantly share the story. The Hermit not only rescues the Mariner physically but also spiritually. He is the savior figure the Mariner needs after he suffers for his misdeeds on the ship.

Pilot's Boy

The Pilot's Boy is the Pilot's helper on the rescue boat. After the Mariner gets in the boat and takes the oars, the Pilot's boy laughs wildly and has crazy eyes. He calls the Mariner the devil. He is scared like the Pilot, but he views the ship as a hellish vision and thinks the Mariner must be an evil figure.

Two Spirits

There are a variety of spirits on the voyage, and the two spirits have a conversation after the Mariner faints. One voice is the questioner. The other voice answers and tells the reader what is happening. They talk about how the Mariner killed the Albatross and about his punishment. The answering voice explains about the ocean and how the ship runs. These voices serve as impartial observers that explain to the reader what is happening while the Mariner is unconscious.



Objects/Places

The Countree

This is the place where the ship leaves from and returns to. It has a church, a hill and a lighthouse. It is not named, but the Mariner is fond of it.

The Wedding Location

This is where the wedding is that the Wedding Guest is attending. There is a hall and a place for the bridegroom. The bride, musicians, guests and bridesmaids are there.

The Ship

This is the ship where the Mariner and the rest of crew work. It is where the Mariner kills the Albatross and where the horrifying events happen.

The Death Ship

This frightening-looking ship approaches the Mariner's ship. The passengers are Death and Nightmare Life-in-Death.

The Rescue Boat

The Pilot, Pilot's boy, and Hermit are on the boat. They rescue the Mariner after his ship collapses.

The Stone

This is where the Wedding Guest sits to listen to the Mariner.

The Antarctic Area

Shortly after the voyage begins, the ship sails into a land of mist and snow. The ship is trapped in the ice but is released with the arrival of the Albatross.

The Cross-Bow

This is the weapon the Mariner uses to kill the Albatross.



Water Snakes

These are in the ocean during a tough part of the voyage. After the Mariner recognizes their beauty, he is on his way to redemption.

Kirk (Church)

This is where the Mariner can go to pray with others.



Setting

There are two settings in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." In the first scene an ancient mariner stops a guest at a wedding party and begins to tell his tale.

The mariner's words then transport the reader on a long ocean voyage, returning to the wedding at the end of the poem.

The story is probably set in the late medieval period; the town in which the action occurs is never named, although it is likely that Coleridge's audience would have pictured a British seaport, possibly London.

The mariner describes a voyage he takes as a youth from an unnamed European country to the South Pole and back. The initial descriptions of the ship and its crew are fairly realistic, but as the ancient mariner undergoes his quest for understanding and redemption, the supernatural world increasingly engulfs him. His world becomes nightmarish when contrasted with the realistic world that he has left behind. At the same time, in the background, elements from the natural world are always present.

For much of the poem, the mariner is adrift in the middle of the ocean, symbolically cut off from all human companionship.



Social Sensitivity

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge focuses on humanity's relationship to the natural world.

Coleridge makes it clear that the killing of the albatross brings dire consequences upon the mariner. In a larger sense, it is not his killing of the bird that is wrong, but the mariner's—and by extension humankind's—callous and destructive relationship with nature that is in error. Coleridge intends to confront this relationship and place it in a larger philosophical context. If the reader grasps the lesson that the ancient mariner learns from his experience, then there are social implications.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner Although the mariner's killing of the albatross, the terrifying deaths of his shipmates, and the grotesque descriptions of the supernatural spirits are disturbing, these elements are intended to develop the story, to illustrate how the mariner's destructive act sets him apart, and to portray vividly the results of his act and the horrifying, repulsive world that he comes to inhabit because of it.

The consequences are all the more terrible for having been set in motion by such a thoughtless act in the first place.

Coleridge is working toward a goal—to portray the mariner's development into a sensitive, understanding, and compassionate human being. In so doing, he aims to persuade the reader to reconsider his or her attitudes toward the natural world.

Part of Coleridge's technique is to personify aspects of nature as supernatural spirits, yet he does not develop an argument for pantheism on any level. A great deal of Christian symbolism and some allegory are present—particularly at the end of part 4, where connections are made between suffering, repentance, redemption, and penance. These elements combine to form a rich texture of both natural and religious symbolism that can be profoundly moving.

Literary Qualities

In developing his themes in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge masterfully expresses concepts through the use of symbols and imagery. Much of the imagery is breathtaking, and the poet's intense descriptions leave a lasting imprint on the reader. This skillful combination of intellectual content and vivid descriptions is not only aesthetically appealing, but also emotionally moving.

When Coleridge and Wordsworth developed the poetic theory that underlies Lyrical Ballads, they decided to use ordinary speech in their verses—what Wordsworth called "the language of real life." Embracing colloquial language was part of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's general break with neoclassical philosophies and traditions, which emphasized logic, structure, and formality.

Wordsworth and Coleridge incorporated ballad forms, themes, and characters, and proposed to write poems about simple, natural characters.

In place of an overwhelming emphasis on society—as characterized the poetry of Alexander Pope—Wordsworth and Coleridge wanted to highlight the importance of the individual. They emphasized human emotions, and stressed the concept that imagination and creativity are forces within the individual that respond to the natural world.

A lyric typically is a short poem that expresses the speaker's thoughts and emotions; a ballad is a dramatic narrative, a poem that tells a story. Lyrical Ballads, therefore, was an attempt by Coleridge and Wordsworth to bring together two poetic genres that previously had been seen as mutually exclusive. The two poets were innovative in their attempt to develop a new poetry to encompass the new realities that they perceived in the world about them.



Themes

Nature

Nature plays a major part in the voyage. The Mariner has committed a crime against nature by killing the Albatross. After that, nature is part of the revenge against the Mariner. In the epigraph by Burnet, he talks about how people should study nature, both the visible and invisible. The Mariner emphasizes his surroundings, which include the sun, moon and ocean. Sun and moon are even capitalized. Nature reflects the mood of the voyage. When the voyage starts off happily, the sun shines. The stormy weather leads the ship into an icy area, which sets the stage for the arrival of the Albatross. The Albatross and fog come at the same time. The ice splits and lets the ship pass through. Then the wind comes. After the Mariner kills the Albatross, the crew first blames him because they think the Albatross brought the wind. Then, they side with him and think the Albatross brought the fog. Wind is good for a ship, but fog is not. The crew tries to justify their feelings by using the weather and superstition. They do not see nature as good in itself, but only when it helps them and their ship. Then the wind stops, and the sun is harsh. The crew, including the Mariner, suffers from thirst and an inhospitable environment. Their mouths are so dry that they cannot speak. In response to the cruelty of nature and their own suffering, the crew retaliates against the Mariner by putting the bird on his neck. The Mariner has to be reminded of what he did, and he is punished by nature and the crew.

The sun appears evil when the death ship appears. Coleridge personifies the sun. This device allows the sun to have more impact. After Nightmare Life-in-Death wins the game, the sun leaves, and it becomes night with stars and a moon. With the moon as a sinister background, the crew drops dead. Then the Mariner suffers alone with horrible sea creatures in the ocean. The sea and sky are burdens to him. The moon continues to be sinister with mocking beams. The water is an awful red. Then, something changes. The Mariner notices the lovely colors of the sea creatures and blesses them. This makes the Albatross fall off his neck. When the Mariner learns to appreciate nature, he is relieved of his burden. While nature seems evil to the Mariner while he suffers, it is ultimately his own lack of appreciation for nature that is evil.

Then rain comes and refreshes him. Then a storm comes that involves rain, wind, moon, stars and lightning. This serves to animate the dead men, bringing blessed spirits. The ship moves without wind. The sun plays a role as the crew makes strange noises. The Mariner makes another bird reference when he talks about their singing. The Mariner compares the sounds of the sails to a brook. The sun is present when the ship bucks, and the Mariner faints. Then, there is a mixture of nature and the supernatural as the spirit voices discuss how the spirit loved the Albatross and the resulting punishment of the Mariner. The voice discusses how the ocean is subservient to the moon. When the Mariner wakes up, it is a still night with the moon up high. The dead men are standing, and their eyes glitter like the moon. When the spell breaks, the



Mariner notices the ocean, and how the welcoming wind blows just on him. The Mariner happily describes the sights of home including the harbor bay.

The Hermit is a man of nature as he lives piously in the woods. The Hermit compares the ship to scenes from his woods. The water plays a role in the sinking of the ship. The firm land of his country is pleasant to the Mariner. The Mariner tells the Wedding Guest the ocean was part of his desolation. He tells the Guest that he learned nature should be respected. Through the punishment of nature, the Mariner learns how important it is. Nature and religion are intertwined in the poem, and only through appreciation for nature can man commune with God.

Religion

The Mariner develops a respect for religion because of his ordeal. The religious references start with the appearance of the Albatross. He compares it to a Christian soul and says they hail it in God's name. The Albatross becomes a Christian symbol and is like Jesus, who was killed. The word "cross" is in cross-bow, which is the weapon the Mariner uses to kill the bird. The Albatross is also compared to a cross as it is hung around the Mariner's neck. This reinforces the Albatross being like Jesus. It can also mean that the Albatross is the cross the Mariner has to bear.

The Mariner compares the sun to "God's own head," unifying nature with God. The Mariner is starting to feel the presence of God in nature. The water snakes are like the serpent in the Garden of Eden. They make the journey more painful. Yet, they are the way to the Mariner's salvation.

Throughout the poem, the Mariner calls on God and evokes religion. When the Mariner sees the death ship, he calls for the holy Mother. When the souls leave the crew's bodies, the Mariner says they go to "bliss or woe," or Heaven or Hell. The Mariner laments that a saint does not help him. He tries to pray to Heaven, but he cannot. The Mariner blesses the snakes he once hated. He thinks the saint favors him. He is able to pray, and the Albatross falls off his neck. The blessing of the snakes makes the Mariner humble, and he no longer has to carry his burden. However, his sin of killing the Albatross has not yet been forgiven.

The Mariner praises the Holy Mother for sleep. The sleep comes from Heaven. The crew's sounds are compared to an angel song that stills Heaven. The first spirit voice continues the Jesus theme of the Albatross by talking about "he who died on cross." The other voice says the Mariner has done penance, and he will do more penance. The Mariner prays to God as he sees the sights of home. There is another "cross" reference when he exclaims, "By the holy rood!" When he talks about the light, he talks about seraph or angels.

The Hermit is a religious man who is singing hymns in the rescue boat. The Mariner thinks the Hermit will save him and cleanse him of the Albatross's blood. The Mariner talks about the Hermit's praying. When the Hermit sees the Mariner in the boat, he



prays. The Pilot's boy is so shaken up he calls the Mariner the devil. The Mariner pleads with the Hermit to hear his confession. The Hermit hears his story about killing the Albatross, and as penance, the Mariner must tell his story to teach others. The bell calls the Mariner to prayer. This reminds him of how he seemed to be without God on that terrible voyage.

The Mariner says going to the kirk, or church, is better than going to the wedding. He talks about how wonderful it is to pray with others. He tells the Guest that a person who loves what God has created will pray well. God made everything and loves everything. By the end of the poem, the Mariner has been punished and forgiven for killing the Albatross. He has a special respect for nature. He has changed into a man who loves to pray, who feels fellowship with others and who shuns frivolous things like wedding feasts. Because of the events of the voyage, he has a religious transformation.

Supernatural

As religion and nature are tied together in the poem, the supernatural is tied to both. There are supernatural events in the poem, events that cannot be attributed to nature or God. The "glittering eye" of the Mariner makes the Wedding Guest listen to his story. The eye is very powerful because the Guest cannot bring himself to go to the wedding. The crew thinks the Albatross has some kind of power to control the weather. While the Mariner is suffering from thirst, he calls St. Elmo's fire "death-fires" and calls the water "witch's oils." The Polar Spirit follows them from the Antarctic after the Albatross is killed, punishes the sailors, and finally brings the Mariner back to his home.

The Mariner notices that the death ship moves without the aid of nature. It seems to be moving through unseen forces. He sees two characters, Death and Nightmare Life-in-Death. They are supernatural characters, described as a skeleton and a frightening woman. Nightmare Life-in-Death's whistling changes day to night. Under the night scene, the crewmembers fall dead for no apparent reason. The Mariner thinks they look "ghastly" and that they curse him with their eyes. Coleridge gives the eyes of the characters powers. The Mariner sees the souls leave the dead bodies. All this action scares the Wedding Guest, and he thinks the Mariner is a ghost. While dead, the bodies do not decompose, and they still have that cursing look in their eyes.

After it rains, the Mariner feels light and feels like a ghost. There is wind, but it does not touch the ship. The dead men come back to life, and they mechanically perform their ship tasks. The Mariner, who includes himself, says they are a "ghastly crew." Again, the Guest is scared. The Mariner explains that spirits were animating the crew. Then the crew makes strange noises. A spirit is guiding the ship. The ship bucks with no apparent cause. The Mariner hears two spirit voices. They discuss that the Mariner killed the Albatross and that he is being punished. A spirit from the "land of mist and snow" (the Polar Spirit) is behind this.

The Mariner has to be asleep for the ship to go faster. After the Mariner wakes up, he sees the dead men standing. They have glittering, stony eyes. Again, the eyes are



emphasized. The Mariner says the curse still exists, and that his eyes are fixed on theirs. Then the spell breaks. A wind just blows on the Mariner alone. After seeing home, he spots red shadows that are the dead men. Then, he sees the dead men, and they are topped by light. The spirits are emanating as light from the bodies. The passengers in the rescue boat talk about the light and the strange condition of the ship. The Pilot in the boat is afraid and thinks the ship looks "fiendish." An unknown force sinks the ship. The Pilot and Pilot's boy have superstitious reactions to the Mariner. A "woeful agony" makes the Mariner tell his story. He calls it a "ghastly tale." He says he has "strange power of speech." He automatically knows whom he has to tell the story to. At the end of the poem, the Mariner's eye is emphasized.

The elements of the supernatural in this tale can be linked to the two other major thematic elements, nature and religion. Some of the supernatural beings and events are personifications of nature. The Polar Spirit is a force of the natural world, avenging its inhabitant, the Albatross. Death is a force of nature, personified, as is Life-in-Death, a personification of disease and distress. In addition to representing a living force of nature, some of the supernatural elements represent forces of God. The spirits that inhabit the corpses are blessed, angelic spirits that come to rescue the Mariner when he prays. The fact that the Polar Spirit must obey these blessed spirits shows a natural order. As the ocean obeys the moon, so the spirits of nature must obey the spirits of God.



Themes/Characters

There are several subthemes in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," relating to Christianity and the supernatural, and two primary themes. The first primary theme concerns the potential consequences of a single unthinking act.

When the mariner shoots an albatross, he does it casually and without animosity. Yet this impulsive, destructive act is his undoing. Similar to other Romantics, Coleridge believed that the seeds of destruction and creation are contained each within the other. One cannot create something without destroying something else. Likewise, destruction leads to the creation of something new. The loss of the mariner's ship, shipmates, and his own former self ultimately leads to the regeneration of the mariner.

This process of destruction and regeneration introduces the poem's second main theme. The mariner gradually comes to realize the enormous consequences of his casual act, even as he struggles to accept responsibility for it.

To do this he must comprehend that all things in nature are of equal value.

Everything, as a part of nature, has its own beauty and is to be cherished for its own sake.

This realization is suddenly apparent when the mariner spontaneously appreciates the beauty of the sea snakes; his heart fills with love for them, and he can bless them "unaware." The moral of the tale is manifest in the ancient mariner's final words to the wedding guest: "He prayeth best, who loveth best/ All things both great and small;/ For the dear God who loveth us,/ He made and loveth all."

The major character in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is the mariner who relates his chilling experiences. It is he who kills the albatross, suffers the consequences, learns from his sufferings, and earns his redemption. As part of his penance, he spends his life telling his tale to others as a warning and as instruction. At first terrifying in looks and manner, the mariner is so intense that the wedding guest is compelled to listen.

As the tale unfolds, the wedding guest's reactions to the mariner change from scorn to sympathy, and finally even to pity. The wedding guest serves as a plot device to frame and advance the story, but he also undergoes a transformation of his own. Startled by the mariner who accosts him, the wedding guest first appears as a devil-may-care gallant. But after he hears the mariner's dreadful tale, he is thoughtful and subdued.

The mariner's shipmates are innocent victims of his rash act. Like the members of the wedding party, the sailors are purposefully kept vague and undeveloped, for Coleridge's intent is that the audience focus their full attention on the plight of the mariner.



Supernatural beings appear in the poem as symbolic or allegorical figures, representing the forces of nature, life, death, and retribution. The mariner confronts these figures and must ultimately appease them in order to obtain his salvation.

Style

Point of View

The poem begins in the third person. After the Mariner starts telling his story, it is in first person. In the Wedding Guest sections and wedding sections, it reverts back to third person. At the end, the narrative is in third person. Since it is a story within a story, the Mariner's first person perspective does not take over until he begins his tale. When the Mariner recalls the voyage, he says "we" meaning the crew and himself. Since the Mariner is on his own throughout most of the voyage, he mostly uses "I." The reader sees the thoughts of the Mariner but not the thoughts of the other characters. The other characters' feelings are displayed in their dialogue and reactions.

When the poem starts off in the third person, the reader gets to see the needs of the Mariner and the Guest. It is obvious the Guest is in conflict between hearing the Mariner's story and attending a wedding where he is a special guest. Both the Guest and the reader are lulled into the Mariner's story. The Mariner is very descriptive and allows the reader to see the ship, the weather, the environment and the crew. One can feel the weather and other conditions and hear the sounds. The reader does not see all the Mariner's thoughts. One does not know why he kills the Albatross. As the Mariner describes the deterioration of the voyage and the scary events, the reader is caught up in them along with him. One feels the different moods of the Mariner. When the Mariner has his epiphanies in Parts Four and Seven, the reader is also enlightened. The Guest and the reader are left with their reactions at the end of the poem.

Setting

The primary setting in the poem is the ship and the ocean. This is where the Mariner goes through his transformation. The major events of the poem happen there, such as the killing of the Albatross, the hanging of the Albatross about the Mariner's neck and the changes of the crew. The ship is where the Mariner despairs about nature. It is also where the Mariner learns to appreciate nature. A supernatural force guides the ship. The movement of the ship makes the Mariner faint. The Hermit notes how bad the ship looks. A mysterious force in the ocean sinks the ship. Ultimately, the ship is vital to the Mariner's enlightenment.

The ocean is divided into separate areas, and one important place the ship travels is the Antarctic zone. It is a place of "mist and snow." The ship becomes stuck in the ice, and after the Albatross appears, the ship breaks through. This puts the crew in happy spirits and makes the Albatross a good omen.

Although the death ship has a smaller role, it is part of the Mariner's punishment. The ferocious-looking ship carries the dark characters of Death and Nightmare Life-in-Death



who lead to the Mariner and crew's undoing. The death ship is skeletal and frightening, adding to the atmosphere of terror.

After the voyage, the Mariner goes back to his beloved "countree." The country is not named, but the landmarks of the kirk (church), lighthouse and hill please the Mariner. At the end of the poem, the kirk is very important to the Mariner because he can pray there with others.

The third important watercraft of the poem is the rescue "skiff-boat." This boat not only physically saves the Mariner from the sinking ship, but also one of the passengers, the Hermit, saves the Mariner spiritually. The people who man the boat are afraid of the Mariner. The Hermit lives in the woods, which is described in the poem and depicted as a holy place.

Another location is the location of the Mariner and Wedding Guest outside a wedding hall. The Guest sits on a stone to listen to the Mariner's story. The sounds of the wedding travel to the two, including music and sounds of celebration. This creates a conflict in the Guest between listening to the story and joining a celebration. It also serves to contrast the story of the Mariner to the joys of life.

Language and Meaning

The language in the poem is antiquated, using words such as "stoppeth" and "may'st." Some words, such as "corse" are spelled differently than we would spell them today. There are also words that would not be commonly known today, such as "kirk" and "wist." Important words in the poem, such as Albatross, are capitalized. The poem follows a rhyme scheme, including the dialogue, which is also archaic. The dialogue is the only way the reader can know the characters other than the Mariner. Through the Wedding Guest's dialogue, the reader can sense his impatience with the Mariner. Then, as the Mariner tells his story, the Guest's dialogue indicates he is involved with the story. He has reactions of sympathy and fear. The Guest's dialogue tells the reader what the Mariner looks like. His aged appearance is indicated by his name, Ancient Mariner. The brief dialogue of Nightmare Life-in-Death makes the reader think bad things are about to happen. The spirit voices' dialogue lets the reader know what is happening with the Mariner and the ship. The Hermit's dialogue reports on the conditions of the ship and tells how brave he is. The words of the Pilot and Pilot's boy imply how frightening the Mariner looks and how they are affected by the situation.

Most of the words in the poem are the Mariner's as he is telling the story. He uses words to show the drama of the voyage. He vividly describes the weather, ship and crewmembers. Colors help to enhance the descriptions. Elements of nature are emphasized, like the moon and sun. Some of the Mariner's words have gained prominence in the English language. "Water, water, every where, nor any drop to drink" and "albatross," which means bad luck, are still used today. Words also play a part in the Mariner's redemption. He pleads with the Hermit to save him. He tells his story to the Hermit. As penance, the Mariner has to speak about the voyage constantly. He says



he has "strange power of speech." The words of the poem employ literary devices such as alliteration and repetition. Coleridge uses the word "cross" to support the religious theme. He also uses the word "eye" to convey something about the characters. Coleridge employs a variety of words that mean ghostly.

Structure

The poem is in seven parts and has ballad stanzas. In the second version of the poem, there is an epigraph, which is a paragraph long. There are also notes, which appear between stanzas. The Ancient Mariner and Wedding Guest meet at the scene of a wedding, and then the Mariner tells the Wedding Guest about an event that has already happened. The Mariner's story is a flashback, and the story as he tells it is linear. The Guest interjects every so often with a comment, and then the Mariner continues the story. At the end, the Mariner concludes the story with a lesson, talks about his present life and comments on the wedding that is happening in the present. The story ends in the present with the reaction of the Guest.

There are patterns to the poem. The end of each section is about the Mariner killing the Albatross. The end of the first section deals with the actual killing. The second section ends with the Albatross around his neck. The end of the third section has the Mariner comparing the movements of the crew's souls to his cross-bow which is his weapon to kill the bird. At the end of the fourth section, the Albatross falls off. The spirit voices talk about the Mariner's punishment for killing the bird at the end of the fifth section. At the end of the sixth section, the Mariner hopes the Hermit can clean him of the Albatross's blood. At the end of the last section, the Guest reacts to the Mariner's story of killing the Albatross.



Quotes

As if it had been a Christian soul, We hailed it in God's name. (lines 65-66)

With my cross-bow I shot the ALBATROSS. (lines 81-82)

Water, water, every where, And all the boards did shrink; Water, water, every where, Nor any drop to drink. (lines 121-122)

Instead of the cross, the Albatross About my neck was hung. (lines 141-142)

Is that a DEATH? and are there two? Is DEATH that woman's mate? (lines 188-189)

And every soul, it passed me by, Like the whizz of my CROSS-BOW! (lines 222-223)

I fear thee, ancient Mariner! (line 224)

The Albatross fell off, and sank Like lead into the sea. (lines 290-291)

Quoth he, "The man hath penance done, And penance more will do." (lines 408-409)

Is this mine own countree! (line 467)

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!" (line 574)

Since then, at an uncertain hour, That agony returns; And till my ghastly tale is told, This heart within me burns. (lines 582-585)

He prayeth best, who loveth best All things both great and small; For the dear God who loveth us He made and loveth all. (lines 614-617)

Adaptations

While Coleridge did not write poetry specifically for young adults, "Kubla Kahn" is frequently read in schools as a companion piece to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The two poems are different in that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a finished narrative, whereas the incomplete "Kubla Kahn" is best described as a lyrical mood poem.

Still, because these poems are Romantic in conception, both present foreign locales and deal with the past. Each is expressed in "natural" language and is concerned with mystical and supernatural events.

Literally dozens of recordings (both cassette tapes and phonograph records) have been made of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Many film versions of the poem have been produced as well. In 1982 an award-winning, sixty-minutelong film adaptation was directed by Raul de Silva. The first part of this color film covers the poet's life, while the second part features Sir Michael Redgrave's recitation of the poem.



Topics for Discussion

1. A wedding guest who does not know the mariner is forced to listen to his tale.

Is this device effective? Is the guest meant to guide the reader's response to the mariner's tale?

2. A wedding is a social celebration of natural order and of new beginnings.

Why is it significant that the mariner tells his story to a wedding guest? Would the moral of the story have been changed if the mariner told his tale to the groom or bride?

3. In later versions of the poem, Coleridge removed many archaic words and spellings that appeared in the original version. Among his revisions was the addition of the epigraph and the marginal glosses. How important are the glosses to your understanding of the poem? Does this suggest that Coleridge was successful or unsuccessful in conveying his meaning poetically?

4. Many Romantics believed that a writer could only write when inspired to do so. What do Coleridge's revisions of this poem indicate about the importance of editing in the writing process?

5. Why does the mariner kill the albatross? Is his action a typically human response or trait? Why does Coleridge spend comparatively little time describing the incident?

6. What is the significance of the albatross being hung around the mariner's neck?

7. The ancient mariner's shipmates all die fairly unpleasant deaths. Is it fair that they should suffer because of his actions?

8. At the beginning of part 4, the wedding guest interrupts the mariner's story to express his fears. Why does Coleridge not have the mariner tell his tale straight through?

9. What is the importance of the line, "I looked to heaven, and tried to pray" (l. 244)?

10. Discuss the meaning and importance of the last eight lines of the poem.

Is there a moral to this poem? Where is it explicitly stated?



Essay Topics

Why did the Mariner kill the Albatross? Do you think it was premeditated or a hasty action?

Compare the characters of the Pilot and the Hermit. How do their reactions to the Mariner's situation differ?

Why do you think the Ancient Mariner stops this particular Wedding Guest?

Compare the two versions of the poems. Why do you think Coleridge made the revisions?

Discuss how the crew besides the Ancient Mariner is punished. Is the punishment fair? Did they deserve it?

Why do you think Coleridge added the epigraph and notes to the later version of the poem? Do they help in understanding the poem?

Why do you think Coleridge made Nightmare Life-in-Death a woman? Do you think it had anything to do with women's roles during his time?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. It has been said that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is about twice as long as it needs to be. What would be the effect of reducing the poem's length?

Specifically what passages might you delete, and why?

2. Symbols are important in this poem.

Traditionally, snakes have represented both good (as on the symbol for the medical profession, where they represent healing powers) and evil (as with the serpent in the Garden of Eden). After checking at the library for other examples of the symbolic use of snakes, explain why you think Coleridge involved a water snake in the poem's climax.

3. In literature and folklore the human eye is typically considered a mirror of the soul. Discuss Coleridge's use of this tradition, examining each of the incidents in which eyes are mentioned in the poem (including lines 3, 12, 139, 144, 215, 228, 251, 255, 260, 332, 416, 436, 440, 485, 560, 567, and 618).

4. In terms of the poem's theme, compare "The very deep did rot: O Christ!/ That ever this should be!/ Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs/ Upon the slimy sea" (ll. 123-126) with "O happy living things! no tongue/ Their beauty might declare" (ll. 282-283). Consider the concept of the appreciation of life and the fact that "a spring of love gushed" from the mariner's heart as he blessed the snakes "unaware." He had killed the albatross in a thoughtless moment; why is it important that he bless the snakes unthinkingly?

5. Discuss Coleridge's use of imagery in this poem, citing examples to verify your points.

6. Discuss the use of Christian elements in this poem.

7. How does Coleridge incorporate supernatural elements in the poem? What is the function of these elements? How do the supernatural elements relate to the natural elements?

8. Do you think that Coleridge successfully used simple, colloquial language in this poem? In your commentary be sure to consider the impact of the ballad form and rhyme scheme on the narrative style.

9. Read the statements of purpose in Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and in chapter 14 of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. Determine how well "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" meets the poets' intended goals and utilizes their stated methods of expression.



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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996