Part II

Paper IV- The Romantic Period

Unit – 3 (C)

S T Coleridge – The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Argument

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

PART I

It is an ancient Mariner,

And he stoppeth one of three.

'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,

Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,

And I am next of kin;

The guests are met, the feast is set:

May'st hear the merry din.'

He holds him with his skinny hand,

'There was a ship,' quoth he.

'Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!'

Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

He holds him with his glittering eye—

The Wedding-Guest stood still,

And listens like a three years' child:

The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:

He cannot choose but hear;

And thus spake on that ancient man,

The bright-eyed Mariner.

'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,

Merrily did we drop

Below the kirk, below the hill,

Below the lighthouse top.

The Sun came up upon the left,

Out of the sea came he!

And he shone bright, and on the right

Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,

Till over the mast at noon—'

The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,

For he heard the loud bassoon.

The bride hath paced into the hall,

Red as a rose is she;

Nodding their heads before her goes

The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,

Yet he cannot choose but hear;

And thus spake on that ancient man,

The bright-eyed Mariner.

And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he

Was tyrannous and strong:

He struck with his o'ertaking wings,

And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,

As who pursued with yell and blow

Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,

We hailed it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariner's hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?'—With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS.

PART II

The Sun now rose upon the right:

Out of the sea came he,

Still hid in mist, and on the left

Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,

But no sweet bird did follow,

Nor any day for food or play

Came to the mariner's hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,

And it would work 'em woe:

For all averred, I had killed the bird

That made the breeze to blow.

Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,

That made the breeze to blow!

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,

The glorious Sun uprist:

Then all averred, I had killed the bird

That brought the fog and mist.

'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,

That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,

And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

And some in dreams assurèd were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

PART III

There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.
A weary time! a weary time!
How glazed each weary eye,

When looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.

At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,

It plunged and tacked and veered.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in.
As they were drinking all.

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither to work us weal;
Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!

The western wave was all a-flame.
The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun;

When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres?

Are those her *ribs* through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a DEATH? and are there two?
Is DEATH that woman's mate?

Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,

Who thicks man's blood with cold.

The naked hulk alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice;
'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

We listened and looked sideways up!
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
My life-blood seemed to sip!
The stars were dim, and thick the night,
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The hornèd Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,

Too quick for groan or sigh,

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,

And cursed me with his eye.

Four times fifty living men,

(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)

With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,

They dropped down one by one.

The souls did from their bodies fly,—

They fled to bliss or woe!

And every soul, it passed me by,

Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

PART IV

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!

I fear thy skinny hand!

And thou art long, and lank, and brown,

As is the ribbed sea-sand.

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,

And thy skinny hand, so brown.'—

Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!

This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,

Alone on a wide wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony.

The many men, so beautiful!

And they all dead did lie:

And a thousand thousand slimy things

Lived on; and so did I.

I looked upon the rotting sea,

And drew my eyes away;

I looked upon the rotting deck,

And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;

But or ever a prayer had gusht,

A wicked whisper came, and made

My heart as dry as dust.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay dead like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
The look with which they looked on me
Had never passed away.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmèd water burnt alway
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,

And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

PART V

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rained.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessed ghost.

And soon I heard a roaring wind:
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air burst into life!
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,
To and fro they were hurried about!
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge,
And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still

The Moon was at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.

The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
The dead men gave a groan.

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up-blew;
The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
Where they were wont to do;
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—
We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son

Stood by me, knee to knee:

The body and I pulled at one rope,

But he said nought to me.

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!'

Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!

'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,

Which to their corses came again,

But a troop of spirits blest:

For when it dawned—they dropped their arms,

And clustered round the mast;

Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,

And from their bodies passed.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,

Then darted to the Sun;

Slowly the sounds came back again,

Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky

I heard the sky-lark sing;

Sometimes all little birds that are,

How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe:
Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
Moved onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep,
From the land of mist and snow,
The spirit slid: and it was he

That made the ship to go.
The sails at noon left off their tune,
And the ship stood still also.

The Sun, right up above the mast,
Had fixed her to the ocean:
But in a minute she 'gan stir,
With a short uneasy motion—
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,
She made a sudden bound:
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell down in a swound.

How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
But ere my living life returned,
I heard and in my soul discerned
Two voices in the air.

'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?

By him who died on cross,

With his cruel bow he laid full low

The harmless Albatross.

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.'

The other was a softer voice,

As soft as honey-dew:

Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,

And penance more will do.'

PART VI

First Voice

'But tell me, tell me! speak again,

Thy soft response renewing—

What makes that ship drive on so fast?

What is the ocean doing?'

Second Voice

Still as a slave before his lord,

The ocean hath no blast;

His great bright eye most silently

Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;

For she guides him smooth or grim.

See, brother, see! how graciously

She looketh down on him.'

First Voice

'But why drives on that ship so fast,

Without or wave or wind?'

Second Voice

'The air is cut away before,

And closes from behind.

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!

Or we shall be belated:

For slow and slow that ship will go,

When the Mariner's trance is abated.'

I woke, and we were sailing on
As in a gentle weather:
'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,
For a charnel-dungeon fitter:
All fixed on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away:
I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
Nor turn them up to pray.

And now this spell was snapt: once more
I viewed the ocean green,
And looked far forth, yet little saw
Of what had else been seen—

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,

And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sailed softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?

Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway.

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light,
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
In crimson colours came.

A little distance from the prow

Those crimson shadows were:
I turned my eyes upon the deck—
Oh, Christ! what saw I there!

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the holy rood!
A man all light, a seraph-man,
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light;

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
No voice did they impart—
No voice; but oh! the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars,
I heard the Pilot's cheer;
My head was turned perforce away
And I saw a boat appear.

The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,

I heard them coming fast:

Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy

The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third—I heard his voice:

It is the Hermit good!

He singeth loud his godly hymns

That he makes in the wood.

He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away

The Albatross's blood.

PART VII

This Hermit good lives in that wood

Which slopes down to the sea.

How loudly his sweet voice he rears!

He loves to talk with marineres

That come from a far countree.

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—

He hath a cushion plump:

It is the moss that wholly hides

The rotted old oak-stump.

The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,

'Why, this is strange, I trow!

Where are those lights so many and fair,

That signal made but now?'

'Strange, by my faith!' the Hermit said—

'And they answered not our cheer!

The planks looked warped! and see those sails,

How thin they are and sere!

I never saw aught like to them,

Unless perchance it were

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag

My forest-brook along;

When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,

And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,

That eats the she-wolf's young.'

'Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—

(The Pilot made reply)

I am a-feared'—'Push on, push on!'

Said the Hermit cheerily.

The boat came closer to the ship,
But I nor spake nor stirred;
The boat came close beneath the ship,
And straight a sound was heard.

Under the water it rumbled on,
Still louder and more dread:
It reached the ship, it split the bay;
The ship went down like lead.

Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote,
Like one that hath been seven days drowned
My body lay afloat;
But swift as dreams, myself I found
Within the Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked
And fell down in a fit;
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,
The Devil knows how to row.'

And now, all in my own countree,
I stood on the firm land!
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

'O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!'
The Hermit crossed his brow.
'Say quick,' quoth he, 'I bid thee say—
What manner of man art thou?'

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!
The wedding-guests are there:
But in the garden-bower the bride
And bride-maids singing are:
And hark the little vesper bell,
Which biddeth me to prayer!

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemèd there to be.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!—

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends
And youths and maidens gay!

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

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 Mariner, whose eye is bright,

Whose beard with age is hoar,

Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest

Turned from the bridegroom's door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,

And is of sense forlorn:

A sadder and a wiser man,

He rose the morrow morn.

An introduction to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

In the Autumn of 1797, Coleridge was nearby William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, in north Somerset; and, despite his wife and young child, he spent as much time as he could with the Wordsworths. Both men, still in their 20s, were published poets, though neither had achieved anything approaching commercial success and money was tight; so, when the three of them decided to go off on a walking tour across the Quantock Hills towards the sea they had to think about funds. They set out, imprudently, at half past four on a November evening, and the poets' conversation promptly fell, as Dorothy recorded, in a letter on 20 November 1797, to 'laying the plan of a ballad'. For ballads were fashionable and they hoped to sell their work to a magazine.

Much later in life, Wordsworth would recall his own contribution to their collaborative work:

> certain parts I myself suggested; for example, some crime was to be committed which would bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterwards delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke's Voyages, a day or two before, that, while doubling Cape Horn, they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. 'Suppose,' said I, 'you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime.' The incident was thought fit for the purpose, and adopted accordingly. I also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men, but do not recollect that I had anything more to do with the scheme of the poem.

(Shelvocke's book was entitled *A Voyage Round the World, by Way of the Great South Sea*.) Wordsworth's remarks are self-deprecating; but at first sight it is difficult to see what else of much consequence there is to the 'scheme of the poem' besides his contribution – a crime that revolves around the killing of an albatross, and the consequent persecution of a wandering life in a ship of ghoulish horrors.

Nevertheless, although they attempted to pursue the poem together, it was Wordsworth who soon felt himself out of the place in the enterprise: as he remembered, years later, 'I had very little share in the composition of it, for I soon found that the style of Coleridge and myself would not assimilate'. Wordsworth withdrew, while something about the story of the poem evidently captured Coleridge, and the poem grew and grew over the next few months. When it was published in the summer of 1798 in *Lyrical Ballads*, which gathered poems by both writers, it was by far the longest in the book.

George Shelvocke's *Voyage Round the World by way of the Great South Sea* (1726) provided the source material for the shooting of the albatross in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

Coleridge and the Mariner

What was it about the tale of the poem that caught Coleridge? The answer is partly theological: at this stage of his life, Coleridge was drawn by a roughly pantheistic vision of the world completely suffused with God's abundant goodness, and many of his most beautiful poems of this period incorporate the thought of that lovely

possibility. Nature, in ‘Frost at Midnight’, for example, is described as ‘that eternal language, which thy God / Utters who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in himself’. But there is a problem with this otherwise intoxicating view: much of the world seems very short of lovely. On the contrary, it is full of cruelty and arbitrary violence and acts of evil; and in his private notebooks Coleridge, who often made lists of his future projects, duly reminded himself to write one day ‘The Origin of Evil, an Epic Poem’.

That poem never happened; but (among other things) ‘The Ancient Mariner’ happened in its place. It is the story of someone who does something terrible for reasons unknown and pays for it: we never learn why the Mariner shot the bird, but his protracted suffering is described in agonising detail. Some kind of spiritual alleviation seems to come only when the Mariner has changed his attitude towards the creatures of the sea: the sea-snakes which seemed, in the aftermath of his crime, ‘slimy things’ (l. 121) become transformed at the poem’s turning-point into ‘happy living things’ (l. 274). Recognising a joy implicit within natural appearances appears to mark a saving transition from ‘spectral persecution’ to a progressive penance.

Summary of the Poem

Part 1

An ancient mariner stops a man who is on his way to a wedding. The wedding guest is eager to get to the feast, but the ancient mariner “holds him with his skinny hand” and insists on telling him a story. Something in the mariner’s eyes holds the wedding guest transfixed, and the guest sits down and listens as the mariner tells his tale.

The mariner begins by saying that his ship left harbor in fine weather. However, a storm soon blew up, with strong winds, mist, and snow. Huge emerald-green icebergs came floating past the ship, which was soon surrounded by ice. At length, an albatross came flying through the fog. The crew greeted the bird in God’s name, and it seemed to have brought them good luck, for the ship broke safely through the ice, and a favorable wind sprang up.

The wedding guest, thinking this is the end of the story, congratulates the ancient mariner on his lucky escape. However, the ancient mariner sadly tells the wedding guest that he shot the albatross with his crossbow.

Part 2

The mariner's shipmates were angry with him for killing the albatross, since they believed it had brought the favorable wind with it. However, when the sun rose, they changed their minds, saying that the albatross had brought the fog and mist, and the mariner was right to slay it.

At first, the ship sailed on at a good pace, but then the ocean became calm. For day after day, there was no wind, and the ship remained still under the fiercely hot sun. There was water all around them, yet none the crew could drink. The surrounding ocean seemed to rot, and the crew thought themselves plagued by an evil spirit. They could not even speak. The rest of the crew looked angrily at the ancient mariner and hung the albatross around his neck to mark his shame.

Part 3

It was a "weary time" for all the sailors. Looking westward, the ancient mariner finally saw something on the horizon, no bigger than a speck. The shape "plunged and tacked and veered" across the water, until the ancient mariner could finally see what it was, yet his mouth was too dry for him to speak. He bit his arm and sucked out the blood, to enable him to cry that he had seen a sail. The ship stopped tacking and headed towards them.

The ship was sailing in front of the setting sun. The mariner realized that he could see the sun through the ship, as though it were a skeleton. The sails were like spiders' webs, and there were only two sailors: Death and Life-in-Death. Death was a skeleton, while Life-in-Death was a terrifying figure of a woman with red lips, golden hair, and skin "as white as leprosy." The two were playing dice as the ghostly ship came alongside them, and Life-in-Death won the life of the ancient mariner, while Death claimed the other sailors.

As night fell, the mysterious ship sailed away. Suddenly, everyone on the mariner's ship began to die. There were two hundred of them, and all of their souls

flew from their bodies—just as the arrow had flown from the mariner’s crossbow to kill the albatross.

Part 4

The Wedding Guest proclaims that he fears the Ancient Mariner because he is unnaturally skinny, so tanned and wrinkled that he resembles the sand, and possesses a "glittering eye." The Ancient Mariner assures him that he has not returned from the dead; he is the only sailor who did not die on his ship, but rather drifted in lonely, scorching agony. His only living company was the plethora of "slimy" creatures in the ocean. He tried to pray, but could produce only a muffled curse. For seven days and nights the Ancient Mariner remained alone on the ship. The dead sailors, who miraculously did not rot, continued to curse him with their open eyes. Only the sight of beautiful water snakes frolicking beside the boat lifted the Ancient Mariner's spirits. They cheered him so much that he blessed them "unawares"; finally, he was able to pray. At that very moment, the Albatross fell off his neck and sank heavily into the ocean.

Part 5

After praying, the Ancient Mariner thanked the Virgin Mary for finally allowing him to sleep. He dreamed that the buckets on the ship were filled with dew, and awoke to the sound of the falling rain. He drank and drank after so many days of thirst, and became so lightheaded that he thought he was a ghost. Suddenly he heard a loud wind far off, and the sky lit up with darting "fire-flags" that could be interpreted as lightning, aurora borealis, or "St. Elmo's Fire" (electricity visible in the atmosphere that sailors consider a sign of bad luck). The rain poured from a single cloud, as did an unbroken stream of lightning. The ship began to sail, although there was still no wind. Just then, all the dead men stood up and went about their jobs as a mute, ghostly crew.

The Wedding Guest proclaims again: "I fear thee, Ancient Mariner!" but the Ancient Mariner quickly assures him that the dead sailors were not evil. At dawn, they even gathered around the mast and sang so beautifully that they sounded like an orchestra. When they stopped singing, the ship's sails sang instead. The ship sailed on miraculously in the absence of wind, moved instead by the spirit that had followed it from the icy world. Once the ship reached the equator and the sun was

directly overhead, it stopped moving and the sails stopped singing. Then it began to rock back and forth uneasily until it suddenly jolted, causing the Ancient Mariner to faint. He lay for an indeterminate period of time on the ship's deck, during which he heard two voices. The first voice swore on Christ that he was the man who betrayed the Albatross that loved him, and that the spirit from the icy world also loved the Albatross: "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." The second voice, softer than the first, declared that the Ancient Mariner would continue to pay for his crime: "The man hath penance done, / And penance more will do."

Part 6

Part 6 opens with a dialogue between the two voices: the first voice, the Ancient Mariner says, asked the second voice to remind it what moved the Ancient Mariner's ship along so fast, and the second voice postulated that the moon must be controlling the ocean. The first voice asked again what could be driving the ship, and the second voice replied that the air was pushing the ship from behind in lieu of wind. After this declaration, the voices disappeared. The Ancient Mariner awoke at night to find the dead sailors clustered on the deck, again cursing him with their eyes. They mesmerized him, until suddenly the spell broke and they too disappeared. The Ancient Mariner, however, was not relieved; he knew that the dead men would come back to haunt him over and over again. Just then, a wind began to blow and the ship sailed quickly and smoothly until the Ancient Mariner could see the shore of his own country. As moonlight illuminated the glassy harbor, lighthouse, and church he sobbed and prayed, happy to be either alive or be in heaven. Suddenly, crimson shapes began to rise from the water in front of the ship. When the Ancient Mariner looked down at the deck, he saw an angel standing over each dead man's corpse. The angels waved their hands silently, serving as beacons to guide the ship into port. The Ancient Mariner heard voices: a Pilot, the Pilot's boy, and a Hermit were approaching the ship in a boat. The Ancient Mariner was overjoyed to see other living human beings and wanted the Hermit to wipe him clean of his sin, to "wash away the Albatross's blood."

Part 7

The Ancient Mariner was cheered by the Hermit's singing. He admired the way the Hermit lived and prayed alone in the woods, but also "love[d] to talk with mariners." As they neared the ship, the Pilot and the Hermit wondered where the angels - which they had thought were merely beacon lights - had gone. The Hermit remarked on how strange the ship looked with its misshapen boards and flimsy sails. The Pilot was afraid, but the Hermit encouraged him to steer the boat closer. Just as the boat reached the ship, a terrible noise came from under the water, and the ship sank straightaway. The men saved the Ancient Mariner even though they thought he was dead; after all, he appeared "like one that hath been seven days drowned." The boat spun in the whirlpool created by the ship's sinking, and all was quiet save the loud sound echoing off of a hill. The Ancient Mariner moved his lips and began to row the boat, terrifying the other men; the Pilot had a conniption, the Hermit began to pray, and the Pilot's Boy laughed crazily, thinking the Ancient Mariner was the devil. When they reached the shore, the Ancient Mariner begged the Hermit to absolve him of his sins. The Hermit crossed himself and asked the Ancient Mariner what sort of man he was. The Ancient Mariner was instantly compelled to share his story with the Hermit. His need to share it was so strong that it wracked his body with pain. Once he shared it, however, he felt restored.

The Ancient Mariner tells the Wedding Guest that ever since then, the urge to tell his tale has returned at unpredictable times, and he is in agony until he tells it to someone. He wanders from place to place, and has the strange power to single out the person in each location who must hear his tale. As he puts it: "I have strange power of speech; / That moment that his face I see, / I know the man that must hear me: / To him my tale I teach." The Ancient Mariner explains that while the wedding celebration sounds uproariously entertaining, he prefers to spend his time with others in prayer. After all, he was so lonely on the ocean that he doubted even God's companionship. He bids the Wedding Guest farewell with one final piece of advice: "He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast." In other words, one becomes closer to God by respecting all living things, because God loves all of his creations "both great and small." Then the Ancient Mariner vanishes. Instead of entering the wedding reception, the Wedding Guest walks away mesmerized. We are told that he learned something from the Ancient

Mariner's tale, and was also saddened by it: "A sadder and a wiser man, / He rose the morrow morn."

Themes

The Natural World: The Physical

While it can be beautiful and frightening (often simultaneously), the natural world's power in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is unquestionable. In a move typical of Romantic poets both preceding and following Coleridge, and especially typical of his colleague, William Wordsworth, Coleridge emphasizes the way in which the natural world dwarfs and asserts its awesome power over man. Especially in the 1817 text, in which Coleridge includes marginal glosses, it is clear that the spiritual world controls and utilizes the natural world. At times the natural world seems to be a character itself, based on the way it interacts with the Ancient Mariner. From the moment the Ancient Mariner offends the spirit of the "rime," retribution comes in the form of natural phenomena. The wind dies, the sun intensifies, and it will not rain. The ocean becomes revolting, "rotting" and thrashing with "slimy" creatures and sizzling with strange fires. Only when the Ancient Mariner expresses love for the natural world-the water-snakes-does his punishment abate even slightly. It rains, but the storm is unusually awesome, with a thick stream of fire pouring from one huge cloud. A spirit whether God or a pagan one, dominates the physical world in order to punish, and inspire reverence in the Ancient Mariner. At the poem's end, the Ancient Mariner preaches respect for the natural world as a way to remain in good standing with the spiritual world, because in order to respect God, one must respect all of his creations. This is why he valorizes the Hermit, who sets the example of both prayer and living in harmony with nature. In his final advice to the Wedding Guest, the Ancient Mariner affirms that one can access the sublime, "the image of a greater and better world," only by seeing the value of the mundane, "the petty things of daily life."

The Spiritual World: The Metaphysical

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" occurs in the natural, physical world-the land and ocean. However, the work has popularly been interpreted as an allegory of

man's connection to the spiritual, metaphysical world. In the epigraph, Burnet speaks of man's urge to "classify" things since Adam named the animals. The Ancient Mariner shoots the Albatross as if to prove that it is not an airy spirit, but rather a mortal creature; in a symbolic way, he tries to "classify" the Albatross. Like all natural things, the Albatross is intimately tied to the spiritual world, and thus begins the Ancient Mariner's punishment by the spiritual world by means of the natural world. Rather than address him directly; the supernatural communicates through the natural. The ocean, sun, and lack of wind and rain punish the Ancient Mariner and his shipmates. When the dead men come alive to curse the Ancient Mariner with their eyes, things that are natural - their corpses are inhabited by a powerful spirit. Men (like Adam) feel the urge to define things, and the Ancient Mariner seems to feel this urge when he suddenly and inexplicably kills the Albatross, shooting it from the sky as though he needs to bring it into the physical, definable realm. It is mortal, but closely tied to the metaphysical, spiritual world-it even flies like a spirit because it is a bird.

The Ancient Mariner detects spirits in their pure form several times in the poem. Even then, they talk only *about* him, and not *to* him. When the ghost ship carrying Death and Life-in-Death sails by, the Ancient Mariner overhears them gambling. Then when he lies unconscious on the deck, he hears the First Voice and Second Voice discussing his fate. When angels appear over the sailors' corpses near the shore, they do not talk to the Ancient Mariner, but only guide his ship. In all these instances, it is unclear whether the spirits are real or figments of his imagination. The Ancient Mariner-and we the reader-being mortal beings, require physical affirmation of the spiritual. Coleridge's spiritual world in the poem balances between the religious and the purely fantastical. The Ancient Mariner's prayers do have an effect, as when he blesses the water-snakes and is relieved of his thirst. At the poem's end, he valorizes the holy Hermit and the act of praying with others. However, the spirit that follows the sailors from the "rime", Death, Life-in-Death, the voices, and the angels, are not necessarily Christian archetypes. In a move typical of both Romantic writers and painters, Coleridge locates the spiritual and/or holy in the natural world in order to emphasize man's connection to it. Society can distance man from the sublime by championing worldly pleasures and abandoning reverence for the otherworld. In this way, the wedding reception represents man's alienation from the holy - even in a religious tradition like

marriage. However, society can also bring man closer to the sublime, such as when people gather together in prayer.

Liminality

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" typifies the Romantic fascination with liminal spaces. A liminal space is defined as a place on the edge of a realm or between two realms, whether a forest and a field, or reason and imagination. A liminal space often signifies a liminal state of mind, such as the threshold of the imagination's wonders. Romantics such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats valorize the liminal space and state as places where one can experience the sublime. For this reason they are often - and especially in the case of Coleridge's poems - associated with drug-induced euphoria. Following from this, liminal spaces and states are those in which pain and pleasure are inextricable. Romantic poets frequently had their protagonists enter liminal spaces and become irreversibly changed. Starting in the epigraph to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Coleridge expresses a fascination with the liminal state between the spiritual and natural, or the mundane and the divine. Recall that this is what Burnet calls the "certain [and] uncertain" and "day [and] night."

In the Ancient Mariner's story, liminal spaces are bewildering and cause pain. The first liminal space the sailors encounter is the equator, which is in a sense about as liminal a location as exists; after all, it is the threshold between the Earth's hemispheres. No sooner has the ship crossed the equator than a terrible storm ensues and drives it into the poem's ultimate symbolic liminal space, the icy world of the "rime." It is liminal by its very physical makeup; there, water exists not in one a single, definitive state, but in all three forms: liquid (water), solid (ice), and gas (mist). They are still most definitely in the ocean, but surrounding them are mountainous icebergs reminiscent of the land. The "rime" fits the archetype of the Romantic liminal space in that it is simultaneously terrifying and beautiful, and in that the sailors do not navigate there purposely, but are rather transported there by some other force. Whereas the open ocean is a wild territory representing the mysteries of the mind and the sublime, the "rime" exists just on its edge. As a liminal space it holds great power, and indeed a powerful spirit inhabits the "rime."

As punishment for his crime of killing the Albatross, the Ancient Mariner is sentenced to Life-in-Death, condemned to be trapped in a limbo-like state where his "glittering eye" tells of both powerful genius and pain. He can compel others to listen to his story from beginning to end, but is forced to do so to relieve his pain. The Ancient Mariner is caught in a liminal state that, as in much of Romantic poetry, is comparable to addiction. He can relieve his suffering temporarily by sharing his story, but must do so continually. The Ancient Mariner suffers because of his experience in the "rime" and afterwards, but has also been extremely close to the divine and sublime because of it. Therefore his curse is somewhat of a blessing; great and unusual knowledge accompanies his pain. The Wedding Guest, the Hermit, and all others to whom he relates his tale enter into a momentary liminal state themselves where they have a distinct sensation of being stunned or mesmerized.

Religion

Although Christian and pagan themes are confounded at times in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", many readers and critics have insisted on a Christian interpretation. Coleridge claimed that he did not intend for the poem to have a moral, but it is difficult not to find one in Part 7. The Ancient Mariner essentially preaches closeness to God through prayer and the willingness to show respect to all of God's creatures. He also says that he finds no greater joy than in joining others in prayer: "To walk together to the kirk, / And all together pray, / While each to his great Father bends, / Old men, and babes, and loving friends, / And youths and maidens gay!" He also champions the Hermit, who does nothing but pray, practice humility before God, and openly revere God's creatures. The Ancient Mariner's shooting of the Albatross can be compared to several Judeo-Christian stories of betrayal, including the original sin of Adam and Eve, and Cain's betrayal of Abel. Like Adam and Eve, the Ancient Mariner fails to respect God's rules and is tempted to try to understand things that should remain out of his reach. Like them, he is forbidden from being truly close to the sublime, existing in a limbo-like rather than an Eden-like state. However, as a son of Adam and Eve, the Ancient Mariner is already a sinner and cast out of the divine realm. Like Cain, the Ancient Mariner angers God by killing another creature. Most obviously, the Ancient Mariner can be seen as the archetypal Judas or the universal sinner who betrays Christ by sinning. Like Judas, he murders the "Christian soul" who could lead to his

salvation and greater understanding of the divine. Many readers have interpreted the Albatross as Christ, since it is the "rime" spirit's favorite creature, and the Ancient Mariner pays dearly for killing it. The Albatross is even hung around the Ancient Mariner's neck to mark him for his sin. Though the rain baptizes him after he is finally able to pray, like a real baptism, it does not ensure his salvation. In the end, the Ancient Mariner is like a strange prophet, kept alive to pass word of God's greatness onto others.

Imprisonment

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is in many ways a portrait of imprisonment and its inherent loneliness and torment. The first instance of imprisonment occurs when the sailors are swept by a storm into the "rime." The ice is "mast-high", and the captain cannot steer the ship through it. The sailors' confinement in the disorienting "rime" foreshadows the Ancient Mariner's later imprisonment within a bewildered limbo-like existence. In the beginning of the poem, the ship is a vehicle of adventure, and the sailors set out in one another's happy company. However, once the Ancient Mariner shoots the Albatross, it quickly becomes a prison. Without wind to sail the ship, the sailors lose all control over their fate. They are cut off from civilization, even though they have each other's company. They are imprisoned further by thirst, which silences them and effectively puts them in isolation; they are denied the basic human ability to communicate. When the other sailors drop dead, the ship becomes a private prison for the Ancient Mariner.

Even more dramatically, the ghost ship seems to imprison the sun: "And straight the sun was flecked with bars, / (Heaven's Mother send us grace!) / As if through a dungeon-grate he peered / With broad and burning face." The ghost ship has such power that it can imprison even the epitome of the natural world's power, the sun. These lines symbolize the spiritual world's power over the natural and physical; spirits can control not only mortals, but the very planets themselves. After he is rescued from the prison that is the ship, the Ancient Mariner is subject to the indefinite imprisonment of his soul within his physical body. His "glittering" eye represents his frenzied soul, eager to escape from his ravaged body. He is imprisoned by the addiction to his own story, as though trapped in the "rime" forever. In a sense, the Ancient Mariner imprisons others by compelling them to

listen to his story; they are physically compelled to join him in his torment until he releases them.

Retribution

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a tale of retribution, since the Ancient Mariner spends most of the poem paying for his one, impulsive error of killing the Albatross. The spiritual world avenges the Albatross's death by wreaking physical and psychological havoc on the Ancient Mariner and his shipmates. Even before the sailors die, their punishment is extensive; they become delirious from a debilitating state of thirst, their lips bake black in the sun, and they must endure the torment of seeing water all around them while being unable to drink it for its saltiness. Eventually the sailors all die, their souls flying either to heaven or hell. There are at least two ways to interpret the fact that the sailors suffer with the Ancient Mariner although they themselves have not erred. The first is that retribution is blind; inspired by anger and the desire to punish others, even a spirit may hurt the wrong people. The second is that the sailors are implicated in the Ancient Mariner's crime. If the Ancient Mariner represents the universal sinner, then each sailor, as a human, is guilty of having at some point disrespected one of God's creatures-or if not, he would have in the future. But the eternal punishment called Life-in-Death is reserved for the Ancient Mariner. Presumably the spirit, being immortal, must endure eternal grief over the murder of its beloved Albatross. In retribution, it forces the Ancient Mariner to endure eternal torment as well, in the form of his curse. Though he never dies - and may never, in a sense - the Ancient Mariner speaks from beyond the grave to warn others about the harsh, permanent consequences of momentary foolishness, selfishness, and disrespect of the natural world.

The Act of Storytelling

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge draws our attention not only to the Ancient Mariner's story, but to the act of storytelling itself. The Ancient Mariner's tale comprises so much of the poem that moments that occur outside of it often seem like interruptions. We are not only Coleridge's audience, but the Ancient Mariner's. Therefore, the messages that the protagonist delivers to his audience apply to us, as well. Storytelling is a preventative measure in the poem,

used to dissuade those who favor the pleasures of society (like the Wedding Guest and, presumably, ourselves) from disregarding the natural and spiritual worlds. The poem can also be seen as an allegory for the writer's task. Coleridge uses the word "teach" to describe the Ancient Mariner's storytelling, and says that he has "strange power of speech." In this way, he compares the protagonist to himself: both are gifted storytellers who impart their wisdom unto others. By associating himself with the Ancient Mariner, Coleridge implies that he, and by extension all writers, are not only inspired but *compelled* to write. Their gift is equally a curse; the pleasure of writing is marred with torment. According to this interpretation, the writer writes not to please himself or others, but to sate a painful urge. Inherent in the writer's task is communication with others, whom he must warn lest they suffer a similar fate. Just as the Ancient Mariner is forced to balance in a painful limbo between life and death, the writer is compelled and even condemned to balance in the liminal space of the imagination "until [his] tale is told." Like a writer, he is equally enthralled and pained by his imagination. Both are addicts, and storytelling is their drug; it provides only momentary relief until the urge to tell returns. In modern psychological terms, the Ancient Mariner as well as the writer relies on "the talking cure" to relieve himself of his psychological burden. But for the Ancient Mariner, the cure - reliving the experience that started with the "rime" by repeating his "rhyme" - is part of the torture. Coleridge paints an equally powerful and pathetic image of the writer. The Ancient Mariner is able to inspire the Wedding Guest so that he awakes the next day a new man, yet he is also the constant victim of his own talent - a curse that torments, but never destroys.

Critical Observation:

Coleridge’s conception of imagination is stated in his critical treatise Biopgraphia Literaria. It is his contribution to the aesthetic theory. In chapter thirteen of Biographia Literaria he distinguishes between “Primary Imagination” and “Secondary Imagination”. “Primary Imagination” means the living prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am. The “Secondary Imagination” is an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its offering. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is not, like *Kubla Khan*, a poem about poetry. The shaping spirit, or Secondary Imagination, is not its theme, though recently

critics have tried for such a reading. The Mariner's failure, and his subsequent salvation, is one of the Primary Imagination, "the repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM". God looked upon his Creation and saw that it was good. The Mariner has now first learned to repeat in his very finite mind this eternal act of perception and creation. This awakening spirit does not bring the whole soul of this man into activity; the Mariner does not learn to order his experience so as first to balance and then be free of it. He falls victim to it, and its eternal verbal repetition becomes its obsession. The Mariner returns to life as a mere fundamentalist of the Primary Imagination, endlessly repeating the story of his own salvation and the one moral in it that he can understand:

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 other moral is less simple, but quite as elemental. Coleridge has written the poem as an alternative reaction to the Mariner's experience, for that experience of purgation through love of the One Life is his own. The higher Imagination shapes truth; the lower merely takes it, through mature, from the Shaping Spirit of God. The poem celebrates the continued power of creative joy in its creator. But the poem also foreshadows the eventual fate of its creator, when the activity of the whole soul will yield to torpor. Coleridge as theologian and found more willing auditors than the mariner did, but his quest came to duplicate that of his creation.

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