

ELA 9 Study Guide

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1772-1834

Before you Read

Make the Connection – Crime and Confession: Have you ever done something on impulse, knowing that even while you were doing it that you would regret it forever? The Ancient Mariner's strange tale turns on just such an action. And the dreadful consequences of his impulsive deed are as hypnotizing to us as they are to the Mariner's spellbound listener. As you read, pay attention to your own responses to the Mariner's story. When do you feel sympathy for the Mariner – or sorrow or horror or fear? When do you feel his story is true, and when is it hopelessly distorted by his own guilt?

Elements of Literature – The Literary Ballad: A **literary ballad**, a songlike poem that tells a story, is written in imitation of the folk ballad, which springs from a genuine oral tradition. Coleridge's literary ballad imitates the traditional **folk ballad** in both subject matter and form. Like the old folk ballads, his sensational narrative blends real with supernatural events. Coleridge was a skilled poet, and to avoid monotony, he often varies his **meter** and **rhyme scheme**. He also uses sophisticated sound devices like **internal rhyme** ("The guests are met, the feast is set") and **assonance** ("Tis sweeter far to me"). To give his ballad an archaic sound, he uses language that was even old-fashioned in his own time.

Background: Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as part of the collaboration with Wordsworth in 1797-1798 that culminated in *Lyrical Ballads*. Twenty years later, in the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge recalled that he and Wordsworth made a poetic division of labor based on their interest in the two powers of poetry: (1) to represent ordinary events and objects in an unfamiliar way so as to make them fresh and interesting and (2) to make believable the unfamiliar and strange.

Coleridge's task was to write about "persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so far as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." "With this view," he said, "I wrote the *Ancient Mariner*." The poem was the first item in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. But partly because of Wordsworth's discomfort with the incongruity between it and the rest of the poems in the volume, Coleridge modernized many of the deliberately old-fashioned words he had used. The marginal notes were added in 1817 and need to be viewed as "modern" and rational comments on the Mariner's tale.

Coleridge's poem no doubt reflects his avid reading of travelers' accounts of strange lands. It was apparently Wordsworth who suggested the use of the albatross. It is helpful in reading this hypnotic narrative to keep in mind three things. First, there is no explanation for the killing of the albatross. Second, the moral of the story, pronounced by the Mariner at the end, is, as Coleridge later observed, too much and too little; that is, it is too obtrusive and yet not adequate. Finally, the poem must be seen in the light of Coleridge's own more settled religious convictions, which contrast with the spiritual despair of the Mariner: "Alone on a wide wide sea; / So lonely 'twas, that God himself / Scarce seemed there to be."



Argument

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country toward 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 Ancient Mariner came back to his own Country.

ELA 9 The Rime of the Ancient Mariner - Themes

Sin, Punishment, and Penance

The Mariner's penance is what drives the story—if he wasn't compelled to share his experience and what he's learned, he would never have stopped the Wedding Guest in the first place. When he shoots the Albatross, the Mariner sins against both nature and God. He did not appreciate the innocent beauty found in the Albatross so he kills it without even knowing why he did so. This act leads to his punishment—thirst and starvation, the death of his crew members, deprivation and isolation—until he realizes and appreciates the grandeur of the natural and supernatural world that the Albatross embodied.

He is not fully absolved of his crime though, as he is still called upon to do penance by relating his story to a person who seems to be magically chosen as needing to hear his tale. His deprivations and torment may be ended temporarily while on the ship, but his drive to confess is compelled by some otherworldly urge (spiritual or supernatural is up to interpretation). With Life-in-Death having won his soul, we can assume that the Mariner is doomed to live forever telling his story without respite or face unbearable agony.

In addition, the idea of never-ending penance is not a new one. There are many stories that deal with punishment and absolution, including that of the Wandering Jew, who reportedly taunts Jesus on the way to his crucifixion and then must wander Earth until the second coming, and the Flying Dutchman, a ghost ship that sails forever and is never able to dock in a port. Coleridge draws upon the common theme to lend his Ancient Mariner the pain and gravitas present in literary and folklore history. The Mariner's sin was the work of a moment, but his penance is eternal.

The Sublime

The idea of the sublime is one of the tenets of the Romantic Period. When we think of a thing as sublime, we believe it to be of great excellence or beauty, but the Romantics had a different definition. To Coleridge and his contemporaries, the sublime represents something both magnificent and terrible, something awe-inspiring and majestic usually associated with nature. Coleridge possessed an even narrower view of what constituted sublime spaces, believing that the limitlessness of the sea and sky and desert to be the only natural landscapes to truly fit this ideal.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is full of these instances. The storm that drives the ship to the South Pole, and the glaciers, ice, and mist that surround the ship once they get there, are described as being beautiful, powerful, dangerous, and terrifying. They inspire awe as much as they inspire fear. The sea serpents they view when the ship is calmed are all described negatively. The Mariner and his crew only seem to see the storms, ice, and creatures of the deep in negative ways, forgetting that they too are created by God and are part of the natural world. These things may be awful, but they are also awe-full. By only focusing on the one and not the other, the Mariner detaches himself from the natural world and God's creation, leaving him open to the sin of unnecessarily killing the Albatross.

When the Mariner finally does see and accept the beauty of the sea snakes that surround the ship, he is accepting the sublime. It is in that moment of clarity that he both accepts the beauty of nature and God's hand in creating them. He understands his place in the natural and spiritual order, beginning to understand the connections between. The Mariner is suddenly able to pray and, for a time, the curse is broken. When he next feels unable to pray after seeing the dead men once again staring at him, he remembers the sublime beauty of God's hand in nature, and the feeling passes. As long as he remembers to accept the presence of the sublime, the Mariner reaffirms his connection to both nature and God.

Nature and Spirit

The Romantic period is defined by an appreciation and glorification of nature, something we see in Coleridge's poem. But *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* walks a balanced line between the natural world and the spiritual one. The Wedding Guest is supposed to attend the marriage of his kinsman, a spiritual bonding beneath the eyes of God, but he's interrupted by the Mariner, a seafarer with a closer bond with the natural world.

The story the Mariner tells blends aspects of the natural world and the spiritual. The power of the storms, the eerie beauty of the ice, and the physical presence of the serpents are all dangers of the natural world. The elements that buffet the ship, the lack of wind that strands it, and the lack of water that threatens their lives are all natural in their origin. But the spirit that follows them from the South Pole, the dead men rising to pilot the ship, and the ghostly ship are elements of the spiritual and supernatural worlds. The Albatross flies between them, linking the Mariner's natural world with the supernatural.

The Mariner shooting and killing the Albatross is the inciting incident of the poem. For whatever reason (the Mariner never gives one for why he killed the bird), the Mariner's actions bring about the spiritual consequences of his actions. He could have been demonstrating man's power over nature, and as such, God's own creations. Regardless of why, the Mariner illustrates that this is not the proper way to engage the natural world.

He loses the ability to pray and to interact with the spiritual world on his own behalf. Instead he and the crew are at the mercy of the spirit of the South Pole and Death and Life-in-Death. He cannot communicate with these beings or with God because he's lost the power of speech and prayer. It is only when he begins to value the natural world that he regains his ability to communicate and to confess, and this manifests in the help of the Moon and the angelic possession of the crew to sail him home. Even the spirit of the South Pole, so angry at the death of the Albatross, is helping guide the ship. The natural world and the spiritual work in harmony because the Mariner realizes his ties to both and that they are never truly separate.

The Mariner's first audience is the Hermit, a holy man who sits, prays, and thinks on God. The Mariner is confessing his sin, not just to God but to appease the natural order that he upset when he killed the Albatross. The spiritual and the natural world combine in the character of the Hermit: "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." He prays to God, but he is removed from mankind, choosing to do so in a natural setting. He is the man that the Mariner believes can give him absolution, being in touch with both worlds.

The Mariner leaves the Wedding Guest with a moral and a warning for how to behave in order to avoid the Mariner's fate. He counsels to both love God and His creatures, to be one with the sublime and the Divine, and to accept the power of both for greater happiness. Coleridge's belief that these two ideas are bound together, that one can reach a deeper spiritual feeling through the interaction and appreciation of the natural world, is expressed to us as much as to the Wedding Guest via the Mariner's story.

How does this story explore penance and redemption?

A dream by Coleridge's friend, John Cruikshank, was the inspiration for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Coleridge and poet William Wordsworth discussed Cruikshank's dream, with Wordsworth suggesting that Coleridge incorporate elements of the dream into a poem based on a crime committed on a ship at sea. The crime, Wordsworth suggested, should be the heart of the narrative, driving the development of plot, character, and theme. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" reflects Wordsworth's suggestions, but the poem is more complex than a tale of crime and punishment. The Mariner's crime is committed against God, not man, and the narrative develops as an examination of sin, penance, and redemption. Moreover, the nature of the Mariner's crime underscores the darkest aspect of human nature—the desire to destroy simply for the love of destruction.

The Mariner's killing the albatross serves no apparent purpose. The bird poses no threat to him or to his shipmates; the albatross, in fact, seems to have brought the men luck after a violent storm had driven their ship off course, sending it into the icy realm of the South Pole. Coming out of the snow and fog, the bird escorts the ship away from the South Pole and flies nearby as it follows the ship north into fair weather. The albatross comes when the men call it "for food or play," and it rests on the ship at night, perching on the mast and rigging. The

“sweet bird” remains with the ship day after day, a faithful companion, until the Mariner shoots it with his crossbow, committing a deliberate act of destruction with no purpose at all, except to exercise his will.

Much suffering ensues before the Mariner realizes that in destroying the albatross, he has committed a grievous sin against God; recalling the act many years later, he tells the wedding guest, “I had done a hellish thing.” It is only when he finds himself alone on the ship, surrounded by the dead, becalmed on a “rotting sea,” and unable to pray that his selfish pride is broken and he recognizes his place in creation. Looking beyond the shadow of the ship, he sees in the moonlight the beauty of God’s handiwork in the water snakes that “coiled and swam” in the sea, “every track ... a flash of golden fire.” Overwhelmed with love for the “happy living things” too beautiful to describe, he blesses them and takes a first step on a long road toward redemption.

When the wedding guest encounters the Mariner, now so old he is “ancient,” the Mariner will not be denied the opportunity to tell his story yet again, reliving the experience while sharing the truth it imparted to him. Many years after killing the albatross, the gravity of his sin still haunts him; when the “agony returns,” he must confess his sin once more by telling his “ghastly tale.” He continues to do penance for his sin by traveling “from land to land” to find men who most need to learn what he has to teach them, the spiritual truth summarized at the poem’s conclusion:

He prayeth best, who loveth be All things both great and small;

For the dear God who loveth us, made and loveth all.

Through great suffering, the ancient Mariner had learned the true nature of mankind’s relationship to God and to God’s creation. He understands that senseless destruction is born of pride, humility is born of suffering, love is born of humility, and only in love can salvation be found.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner – Samuel Coleridge

PART I				
An ancient Mariner meeteth three gallants bidden to a wedding feast, and detaineth one.	IT is an ancient Mariner, And he stoppeth one of three. 'By thy long beard and glittering eye, Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?	it reached the Line.	Higher and higher every day, Till over the mast at noon—'	30
	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.'	5	The Wedding-Guest heareth the bridal music; but the Mariner continueth his tale.	35
	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.	10	The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast, Yet he cannot choose but hear; And thus spake on that ancient man, The bright-eyed Mariner.	40
The Wedding-Guest is spell-bound by the eye of the old seafaring man, and constrained to hear his tale.	He holds him with his glittering eye— The Wedding-Guest stood still, And listens like a three years' child: The Mariner hath his will.	15	The ship drawn by a storm toward the South Pole.	'And now the Storm-blast came, and he Was tyrannous and strong; He struck with his o'ertaking wings, And chased us south along.
	The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone: He cannot choose but hear; And thus spake on that ancient man, The bright-eyed Mariner.	20	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 roar'd the blast, The southward aye we fled.	45 50
	'The ship was cheer'd, the harbour clear'd, Merrily did we drop Below the kirk, below the hill, Below the lighthouse top.		And now there came both mist and snow, And it grew wondrous cold: And ice, mast-high, came floating by, As green as emerald.	
The Mariner tells how the ship sailed southward with a good wind and fair weather, till	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.	25	The land of ice, and of fearful sounds, where no living thing was to be seen.	55
			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 crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd,
Like noises in a swound!

60

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

115

Till a great sea-
bird, called the
Albatross, came
through the
snow-fog, and
was received
with great joy
and hospitality.

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hail'd it in God's name.

65

And the
Albatross
begins to be
avenged.

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

120

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 steer'd us through!

70

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

125

And lo! the
Albatross
proveth a bird
of good omen,
and followeth
the ship as it
returned
northward
through fog and
floating ice.

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

75

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.

130

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perch'd for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmer'd the white moonshine.'

75

A Spirit had
followed them;
one of the
invisible
inhabitants of
this planet,
neither
departed souls
nor angels;
concerning
whom the
learned Jew,
Josephus, and
the Platonic
Constantinopoli
tan, Michael
Psellus, may be
consulted. They
are very
numerous, and
there is no
climate or
element without
one or more.

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

80

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

135

The ancient
Mariner
inhospitably
killeth the pious
bird of good
omen.

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

80

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.

85

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo!

90

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

140

His shipmates
cry out against
the ancient
Mariner for
killing the bird
of good luck.

And I had done an hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averr'd, I had kill'd the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

95

PART III

'There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parch'd, 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.

145

But when the
fog cleared off,
they justify the
same, and thus
make
themselves
accomplices in
the crime.

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averr'd, I had kill'd the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

100

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

150

The fair breeze
continues; the
ship enters the
Pacific Ocean,
and sails
northward, even
till it reaches
the Line.
The ship hath
been suddenly
becalmed.

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

105

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it near'd and near'd:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,
It plunged, and tack'd, and veer'd.

155

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!

110

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 suck'd the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

160

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

110

At its nearer
approach, it
seemeth him to
be a ship; and at
a dear ransom
he freeth his
speech from the
bonds of thirst.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,

A flash of joy;	Agape they heard me call: Gramercy! they for joy did grin, And all at once their breath drew in, As they were drinking all.	165 But Life-in-Death begins her work on the ancient Mariner.	The souls did from their bodies fly— They fled to bliss or woe! And every soul, it pass'd me by Like the whizz of my crossbow!
And horror follows. For can it be a ship that comes onward without wind or tide?	See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more! Hither to work us weal— Without a breeze, without a tide, She steadies with upright keel!	170 The Wedding-Guest feareth that a spirit is talking to him;	<p style="text-align: center;">PART IV</p> 'I fear thee, ancient Mariner! I fear thy skinny hand! And thou art long, and lank, and brown, As is the ribb'd sea-sand.
It seemeth him but the skeleton of a ship.	The western wave was all aflame, The day was wellnigh done! Almost upon the western wave Rested the broad, bright Sun; When that strange shape drove suddenly Betwixt us and the Sun.	175 But the ancient Mariner assureth him of his bodily life, and proceedeth to relate his horrible penance.	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.
And its ribs are seen as bars on the face of the setting Sun. The Spectre-Woman and her Death-mate, and no other on board the skeleton ship. Like vessel, like crew!	And straight the Sun was fleck'd with bars (Heaven's Mother send us grace!), As if through a dungeon-grate he peer'd With broad and burning face.	180 He despiseth the creatures of the calm.	Alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on a wide, wide sea! And never a saint took pity on My soul in agony.
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?	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?	185 And envieth that they should live, and so many lie dead.	The many men, so beautiful! And they all dead did lie: And a thousand thousand slimy things Lived on; and so did I.
Death and Life-in-Death have diced for the ship's crew, and she (the latter) winneth the ancient Mariner. No twilight within the courts of the Sun.	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?	190 Her lips were red, her looks were free, Her locks were yellow as gold: Her skin was as white as leprosy, The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she, Who thicks man's blood with cold.	I look'd upon the rotting sea, And drew my eyes away; I look'd upon the rotting deck, And there the dead men lay.
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 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.	200 But the curse liveth for him in the eye of the dead men.	I look'd 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.
At the rising of the Moon,	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.	210 In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and everywhere the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced,	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 like a load on my weary eye, And the dead were at my feet.
One after another,	We listen'd and look'd sideways up! Fear at my heart, as at a cup, My life-blood seem'd to sip! The stars were dim, and thick the night, The steersman's face by his lamp gleam'd white; From the sails the dew did drip— Till clomb above the eastern bar The hornéd Moon, with one bright star Within the nether tip.	215	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.
His shipmates drop down dead.	One after one, by the star-dogg'd Moon, Too quick for groan or sigh, Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang, And cursed me with his eye.	220	The moving Moon went up the sky, And nowhere did abide; Softly she was going up, And a star or two beside—
Four times fifty living men (And I heard nor sigh nor groan), With heavy thump, a lifeless lump, They dropp'd down one by one.	Four times fifty living men (And I heard nor sigh nor groan), With heavy thump, a lifeless lump, They dropp'd down one by one.	220	Her beams bemock'd the sultry main, Like April hoar-frost spread; But where the ship's huge shadow lay, The charméd water burnt alway A still and awful red.

as lords that are certainly expected, and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival. By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm.

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

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

Their beauty and their happiness.

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

The spell begins to break.

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

PART V

'O 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.

By grace of the holy Mother, the ancient Mariner is refreshed with rain.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remain'd,
I dreamt that they were fill'd with dew;
And when I awoke, it rain'd.

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 blesséd ghost.

He heareth sounds and seeth strange sights and commotions in the sky and the element.

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 pour'd 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,

The bodies of the ship's crew are inspired, and the ship moves on;

A river steep and wide.

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

They groan'd, they stirr'd, 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 steer'd, 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 pull'd at one rope,
But he said naught to me.'

But not by the souls of the men, nor by demons of earth or middle air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits, sent down by the invocation of the guardian saint.

'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 dawn'd—they dropp'd their arms,
And cluster'd round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And from their bodies pass'd.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mix'd, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the skylark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seem'd 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 sail'd 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,

275

280

285

290

295

300

305

310

315

320

325

330

335

340

345

350

355

360

365

370

375

380

requireth vengeance.	Had fix'd 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.	385	I could not draw my eyes from theirs, Nor turn them up to pray.
	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.	390	And now this spell was snap't: once more I viewed the ocean green, And look'd far forth, yet little saw Of what had else been seen—
The Polar Spirit's fellow- demons, the invisible inhabitants of the element, take part in his wrong; and two of them relate, one to the other, that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner hath been accorded to the Polar Spirit, who returneth southward.	How long in that same fit I lay, I have not to declare; But ere my living life return'd, I heard, and in my soul discern'd Two voices in the air.	395	Like one that on a lonesome road Doth walk in fear and dread, And having once turn'd round, walks on, And turns no more his head; Because he knows a frightful fiend Doth close behind him tread.
	"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.	400	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.
	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."	405	It raised my hair, it fann'd my cheek Like a meadow-gale of spring— It mingled strangely with my fears, Yet it felt like a welcoming.
	The other was a softer voice, As soft as honey-dew: Quoth he, "The man hath penance done, And penance more will do."	410	Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship, Yet she sail'd softly too: Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze— On me alone it blew.
	PART VI		
	<i>First Voice:</i> "But tell me, tell me! speak again, Thy soft response renewing— What makes that ship drive on so fast? What is the Ocean doing?"	415	O dream of joy! is this indeed The lighthouse top I see? Is this the hill? is this the kirk? Is this mine own countree?
	<i>Second Voice:</i> "Still as a slave before his lord, The Ocean hath no blast; His great bright eye most silently Up to the Moon is cast—	420	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.
	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."	425	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 Mariner hath been cast into a trance; for the angelic power causeth the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure.	<i>First Voice:</i> "But why drives on that ship so fast, Without or wave or wind?"	430	The rock shone bright, the kirk no less That stands above the rock: The moonlight steep'd in silentness The steady weathercock.
	<i>Second Voice:</i> "The air is cut away before, And closes from behind.	435	And the bay was white with silent light Till rising from the same, Full many shapes, that shadows were, In crimson colours came.
	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.'	440	A little distance from the prow Those crimson shadows were: I turn'd my eyes upon the deck— O Christ! what saw I there!
The supernatural motion is retarded; the Mariner awakes, and his penance begins anew.	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.	445	Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat, And, by the holy rood! A man all light, a seraph-man, On every corse there stood.
	All stood together on the deck, For a charnel-dungeon fitter: All fix'd on me their stony eyes, That in the Moon did glitter.	450	This seraph-band, each waved his hand: It was a heavenly sight! They stood as signals to the land, Each one a lovely light;
	The pang, the curse, with which they died, Had never pass'd away:	455	This seraph-band, each waved his hand,

	No voice did they impart— No voice; but O, the silence sank Like music on my heart.	500		Within the Pilot's boat.	
	But soon I heard the dash of oars, I heard the Pilot's cheer; My head was turn'd perforce away, And I saw a boat appear.			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.	560
	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.	505		I moved my lips—the Pilot shriek'd And fell down in a fit; The holy Hermit raised his eyes, And pray'd where he did sit.	
	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 shrive my soul, he'll wash away The Albatross's blood.	510		I took the oars: the Pilot's boy, Who now doth crazy go, Laugh'd 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."	570
	PART VII			And now, all in my own countree, I stood on the firm land! The Hermit stepp'd forth from the boat, And scarcely he could stand.	
The Hermit of the Wood.	"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 mariners That come from a far countree.	515		"O shrive me, shrive me, holy man!" The Hermit cross'd his brow. "Say quick," quoth he, "I bid thee say— What manner of man art thou?"	575
	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.	520	The ancient Mariner earnestly entreateth the Hermit to shrive him; and the penance of life falls on him.	Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench'd With a woful agony, Which forced me to begin my tale; And then it left me free.	580
	The skiff-boat near'd: I heard them talk, "Why, this is strange, I trow! Where are those lights so many and fair, That signal made but now?"	525	And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land;	Since then, at an uncertain hour, That agony returns: And till my ghastly tale is told, This heart within me burns.	585
Approacheth the ship with wonder.	"Strange, by my faith!" the Hermit said— "And they answer'd not our cheer! The planks looked warp'd! and see those sails, How thin they are and sere! I never saw aught like to them, Unless perchance it were	530		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.	590
	Brown skeletons of leaves that lag My forest-brook along; When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow, And the owl whoops to the wolf below, That eats the she-wolf's young."	535		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!	595
	"Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look— (The Pilot made reply) I am a-fear'd"—"Push on, push on!" Said the Hermit cheerily.	540		O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been Alone on a wide, wide sea: So lonely 'twas, that God Himself Scarce seem'd there to be.	600
	The boat came closer to the ship, But I nor spake nor stirr'd; The boat came close beneath the ship, And straight a sound was heard.	545		O sweeter than the marriage-feast, 'Tis sweeter far to me, To walk together to the kirk With a goodly company!—	605
The ship suddenly sinketh.	Under the water it rumbled on, Still louder and more dread: It reach'd the ship, it split the bay; The ship went down like lead.	550		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!	610
The ancient Mariner is saved in the Pilot's boat.	Stunn'd by that loud and dreadful sound, Which sky and ocean smote, Like one that hath been seven days drown'd My body lay afloat; But swift as dreams, myself I found	555	And to teach, by his own example, love	Farewell, farewell! but this I tell To thee, thou Wedding-Guest! He prayeth well, who loveth well	

and reverence
to all things that
God made and
loveth.

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,

615

Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
Turn'd from the bridegroom's door.

620

He went like one that hath been stunn'd,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man
He rose the morrow morn.

625

Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Iron Maiden

Hear the rime of the ancient mariner
See his eye as he stops one of three
Mesmerises one of the wedding guests
Stay here and listen to the nightmares of the sea.

And the music plays on, as the bride passes by
Caught by his spell and the mariner tells his tale.

Driven south to the land of the snow and ice
To a place where nobody's been
Through the snow fog flies on the albatross
Hailed in God's name, hoping good luck it brings.

And the ship sails on, back to the North
Through the fog and ice and the albatross follows on.

The mariner kills the bird of good omen
His shipmates cry against what he's done
But when the fog clears, they justify him
And make themselves a part of the crime.

Sailing on and on and north across the sea
Sailing on and on and north 'til all is calm.

The albatross begins with its vengeance
A terrible curse a thirst has begun
His shipmates blame bad luck on the mariner
About his neck, the dead bird is hung.

And the curse goes on and on AND ON at sea
And the thirst goes on and on for them and me.

"Day after day, day after day,
we stuck nor breath nor motion
as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean
Water, water everywhere and
all the boards did shrink
Water, water everywhere nor any drop to drink."

There calls the mariner
There comes a ship over the line
But how can she sail with no wind in her sails and no tide.

See...onward she comes
Onward she nears out of the sun
See, she has no crew
She has no life, wait but there's two.

Death and she Life in Death,
They throw their dice for the crew
She wins the mariner and he belongs to her now.
Then...crew one by one
they drop down dead, two hundred men
She...she, Life in Death.
She lets him live, her chosen one.

"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 curse it lives on in their eyes
The mariner he wished he'd die
Along with the sea creatures
But they lived on, so did he.

And by the light of the moon
He prays for their beauty not doom
With heart he blesses them
God's creatures all of them too.

Then the spell starts to break
The albatross falls from his neck
Sinks down like lead into the sea
Then down in falls comes the rain.

Hear the groans of the long dead seamen
See them stir and they start to rise
Bodies lifted by good spirits
None of them speak and they're lifeless in their eyes

And revenge is still sought, penance starts again
Cast into a trance and the nightmare carries on.

Now the curse is finally lifted
And the mariner sights his home
spirits go from the long dead bodies
Form their own light and the mariner's left alone.

And then a boat came sailing towards him
It was a joy he could not believe
The pilot's boat, his son and the hermit,
Penance of life will fall onto him.

And the ship it sinks like lead into the sea
And the hermit shrives the mariner of his sins.

The mariner's bound to tell of his story
To tell this tale wherever he goes
To teach God's word by his own example
That we must love all things that God made.

And the wedding guest's a sad and wiser man
And the tale goes on and on and on.