

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

L4827DVD

Teachers/Resource Guide

About the Poem

The “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” was written by the English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), and was first published in “Lyrical Ballads with a Few Other Poems” in 1798. The first edition of the poem, published jointly with his friend William Wordsworth (1770-1850) used many archaic spellings, and the poem was modernized when the second edition was published in 1800.

The most commonly used text in general use today was published in a collection of poems by Coleridge entitled “Sibylline Leaves” in 1817. In addition to updated spelling, Coleridge modified verb tenses, as well as adding and removed stanzas. The poem’s narrative was apparently motivated by a number of sources including other poems together with a book suggested by Wordsworth entitled “A Voyage Round the World by the Way of the Great South Sea,” by Shelvocke published in 1726. During the voyage described in this work, one of the crew shot an albatross that had been following the ship in bad weather. Also, one of Coleridge’s friends, John Cruikshank, reportedly had a dream which featured a ghost ship piloted by skeletal figure. Another factor that may have influenced the author was the popularity of accounts of the daring sea adventures of the British Maritime explorer Captain James Cook (1768 – 1779) who had sailed as far north as the Bering Strait (separating Alaska and Russia) and as far south as the continent of Antarctica. One possible connection between Coleridge and Cook was that one of Cook’s crewmen, astronomer William Wales, taught mathematics to Coleridge at Christ’s Hospital School in London. Some accounts suggest that a journal kept by Wales may have served as source material for the poem as well.

Originally, Coleridge and Wordsworth intended to write this poem collaboratively, but Wordsworth withdrew, apparently because his writing was not suitable, although he is credited with a half a dozen lines (Part II, Lines 13 – 16, and Lines 226 – 227). He also suggested the shooting of the albatross as the major theme, and the reanimation of the dead bodies to sail the ship. After Wordsworth withdrew from the project, Coleridge completed the poem alone.

The poem is divided into seven parts, with most stanzas having four lines, though some have five or six lines. The four line stanzas are structured so that the second and fourth lines rhyme. In the five and six line stanzas, either the second or the third line rhymes with the final line. The meter of the poem alternates between iambic tetrameter, with four feet per line, and iambic trimeter, with three feet per line.

Synopsis

The *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* tells the story of a sailor who has been on a long ocean voyage to the south Polar Regions. The mariner stops a young man (one of three) on his way to a wedding, and transfixes him with his supernatural tale of the voyage. The wedding guest is put off by the old man, and reacts to him first with amusement, then with agitation, fear, and finally fascination

as the story proceeds, but he is seemingly powerless to escape. The language of the poem demonstrates this by using various literary techniques such as repetition, personification, together with Christian and pagan symbolism to convey the mood of the story.

The mariner begins the tale by describing the ship's departure from its home port, though there is no indication of where this might be located. It then proceeds to describe the journey to the south Polar Regions, where the ship becomes trapped in ice and fog. An albatross appears, and stays with the ship, providing entertainment and diversion for the crew. Eventually, the ice breaks, and the albatross leads the ship to safety. It is at this point that the story takes a sinister turn, as the mariner shoots the albatross with his crossbow, killing it. The motivation for this action remains unstated. The ship is then enshrouded in mist and fog, and the crew is initially angry with the mariner. The fog is lifted, however, and as the ship proceeds northward, the fickle crew then states that killing the bird was a good thing, and it must have brought on the mist and fog. Once the crew changes their opinion and support the evil deed of the mariner, their fortunes turn. The spirits who pursue the ship now cause the winds to drop, and the ship is becalmed in the doldrums. Water becomes scarce, and the crew suffers for an extended period from heat and thirst.

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.

Once again, the crew changes their mind about the mariner's actions, and condemns him to wear the dead albatross around his neck as punishment for killing the bird.

A ship is spotted on the horizon by the mariner, but his throat is too dry to speak. He bites his arm and wets his throat with his own blood so that he can call out and alert the crew. They are initially overjoyed at the prospect of imminent salvation. The ship draws near as the sun sets, and they realize that the ship is a ghost ship (spectre-bark). It is commanded by a woman who personifies Life-in-Death, and the steersman of the ship is Death itself. As the ship comes alongside, they see that the two are casting lots for the souls of the crew. The Death wins the souls of the crew in the game, and they all fall dead on the deck of the ship as their souls leave their bodies. The woman, Life-in-Death, wins the soul of the mariner, and he alone is left alive on the ship. Her name is symbolic of the fact that, although his life alone is spared, the existence that he must suffer in the coming days is worse than death. It is a life in death! For seven days and nights, the mariner is trapped on the vessel with the un-rotting corpses of his crew-mates, whose eyes still carry the curse with which they looked on him as they died. This ghastly state of affairs continues, and the mariner is unable to pray – unable to seek forgiveness for what he now knows was a terrible sin. One night, however, he watches the sea-snakes dancing in the water, illuminated by the moonlight, and is struck by the wonder of creation in their form. Unknowingly, he blesses them, and is suddenly able to pray once more, and the albatross drops from around his neck and sinks into the sea.

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.

After the albatross is removed from his neck, the mariner falls into a senseless state, and the ship is propelled by the spirits toward his home port. When he awakens, it is raining, and the dead bodies are re-animated by "seraph-men" to sail the ship. The ship reaches the harbor, and is approached by the harbor-pilot, his son, and a holy hermit in a small boat. The mariner's ship sinks in a whirlpool, leaving the mariner in the water, and he is rescued by the trio in the boat, who are awed and frightened by the ship's appearance. Once on dry land, the mariner asks the hermit to grant him forgiveness, and is compelled to tell his tale in full. Subsequent to his rescue, the mariner is compelled to travel the land and tell his tale to others as a cautionary tale. The poem ends with the departure of the mariner, leaving the wedding guest in a stunned and forlorn condition: both sadder and wiser for his experience.

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.

Questions for Thought & Further Discussion

1. Write a brief summary of the events in the poem. Be sure to write about the major events that occur, and to explain why they happened.
2. Why did the entire crew die in the poem? What significance does the fact the protagonist alone survived have?
3. How does Coleridge utilize imagery from nature in the poem? Give three specific examples and explain how the author uses these images to convey a message.
4. What does the albatross represent in the poem? How does this symbol relate to the poem's religious context?
5. What direction did the ship sail when it left the Mariner's homeland? Cite specific evidence from the text to support your answer.
6. Give three examples from the text of the poem that show that the Mariner is an unusual or strange individual. Interpret the specific language used in terms of the usage of Coleridge's time and/or the metaphors used.
7. There are two specific passages that indicate that the ship is at the equator. What are these passages, and how do they communicate this idea?
8. Explain how the Albatross is used in the poem to represent the idea of goodness or innocence. Cite four passages to support your findings.
9. The Mariner seems to have hypnotic powers when he speaks to others. Cite two passages that support this idea and explain how each passage leads to this conclusion.
10. What possible motivation could the Mariner have for shooting the albatross?
11. The other sailors had two very different reactions to the shooting of the Albatross. Explain what aspects of the surrounding environment might have led to the two different reactions.
12. In Stanza 15, why does the crew hail the albatross "in God's Name?"
13. In the last part of Stanza I, what caused the Wedding Guest to ask what plagues the Mariner?
14. What does the poem suggest about the cultural beliefs, commonly held at the time, regarding fate, cause and effect, and divine judgment?
15. When the woman, Death, and her companion are seen next to the Mariner's ship, what is the significance of the game of dice they are playing? How does this relate to the story in the New Testament of the soldiers casting lots for Christ's garments at the crucifixion?
16. What is a "Spectre-Bark?" How does this imagery connect to the context of what is happening in that part of the poem?
16. At one point in the Mariner's journey, the ship is becalmed in the doldrums. What effect does this have on the mood of the crew? How does this relate to the perceived ill effects of the killing of the albatross?
17. Give three examples of Christian symbolism used in the poem. How does the poem's mythological setting relate to the Christian faith?
18. When does the tone of the story change from horror to hope on the part of the Mariner? What specific event described by the text symbolizes this transition?
19. What aspect of the conversation between the two voices indicates that the Mariner's redemption is an ongoing process, not yet complete?
20. The poem is a mixture of both Christian and Pagan symbolisms. Does this mixture create tension or harmony (or both)? How does Coleridge strike a balance between the two?
21. What is the reaction of the Mariner to the fact that his nephew's body is pulling at the ropes beside him? What is the reaction of the Wedding guest to the animation of the dead bodies?
22. What power enables the Mariner to stop the wedding guest in his tracks? What is the value of "superstition" in this poem?
23. Why should it matter that the man stopped was on his way to a wedding?
24. Why does the Mariner shoot the Albatross? Is any reason given in the poem?

25. How is the albatross more than a plain old albatross -- what is its spiritual significance, if any? What do you make of the "breeze" that blows through the poem -- i.e. that at certain points the Mariner's ship is becalmed or takes sail?
26. What event or process leads the Mariner to *bless* the sea-snakes unawares? Why does the Albatross then fall from his neck?
27. Why must the Mariner continue with his penance -- why must he repeat his tale to everyone he can fix with his gaze?

Vocabulary for The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Abated – Reduced in amount, degree, or intensity
Abide- to remain, continue, or stay
a-feared - afraid
Afloat- floating or borne on the water
Agape – with the mouth wide open, as in wonder, surprise, or eagerness
Agony – extreme and generally prolonged pain; intense physical or mental suffering
Alas – an exclamation used to express sorrow, grief, pity, concern, or apprehension of evil.
Albatross – any of several large, web-footed sea-birds that have the ability to stay aloft for long periods.
Alongside - beside
Ancient – of extreme age
Anear - near
Attire – clothes or apparel, especially rich or splendid garments
Aught – in any degree, at all
Averred – stated as truth
Aye - yes
Balls - eyeballs
Bassoon – a large woodwind instrument of low range
Bemocked – to mock or jeer at
Beside - alongside
Betwixt - between
Biddeth - asked
Bideth - remains
Bliss – supreme happiness or joy; heaven
Bridegroom – a newly married man or a man about to get married
Brook – a small natural stream of water
Burnt - burned
Ceased - ended
Charmed – marked by good fortune or privilege
charnel-dungeon – a death-like underground prison or cell
Chased - pursued
Cheered – a shout of encouragement, approval or congratulation
Chuse - choose
Cleft - split
Clifts - cliffs
Clombe - climbed
Clustered – gathered together in groups
Copper – copper colored
Corses - corpses
Countree - country
Crag – a steep, rugged rock
Crimson – deep purplish-red

cross-bow – a medieval weapon consisting of a bow fixed on a stock with a trigger to release the arrow.
Crossed – made the sign of the cross
Cursed – under a curse; damned
Dank – unpleasantly moist or humid; damp and, often chilly
Darted – moved swiftly, with sudden movements
death-fires - St. Elmo's fire, which is electricity discharged from pointed objects, such as masts, during storms.
Din – a loud, confused noise
Discerned – to perceive by sight or other sense (or by the intellect)
Dismal – causing gloom or dejection; gloomy, dreary, cheerless
Doth - does
Dread – to fear greatly; to be in extreme apprehension
Dreamt - dreamed
Dropt - dropped
Drought – a period of extreme dryness
Drunken – having drunk a liquid
dungeon-grate – a set of bars in a dungeon or jail
eastern bar – eastern horizon
Eftsoons – soon after
Elfish – elf-like
Emerald – having a clear, deep green color
Fair – pleasing in appearance or nature
Farewell – goodbye; may you fare well
Fathom – a unit of length equal to six feet used mainly in nautical measures
Fiend – a diabolically cruel or wicked person
Fiendish – having a diabolically cruel or wicked nature
fire-flags – northern lights (aurora borealis) or southern lights (aurora australis)
Fixed – held in place; immobile
Flecked - speckled
Foam – the sea; the frothy bubbles on the ocean's surface
Forlorn – lonely and sad; abandoned
Forthwith - immediately
Frame - body
Frightful - frightening
Fro - forth
Furrow – a trench made by plowing; in nautical terms – a wake formed by a ship
garden-bower – a leafy shelter or recess
Ghastly – shockingly frightful or dreadful; horrible
Glazed – having a fixed or lifeless expression
Glimmered – shined faintly or unsteadily; twinkled
Glittering - shining
Glorious – brilliantly beautiful or magnificent; splendid
Goodly – attractive, pleasing or fine
Gossamers – extremely delicate; gauze-like; thin

Graciously – merciful or compassionate
Gramercy – give thanks
Grate – a set of bars
Gushed – welled up
Gusht - gushed
Harbor - harbor
harbour-bar – Entrance to the harbor; sandbar
Heaven's Mother – Mary, the mother of Jesus
Helmsman – the pilot of a ship
Hermit – a religious person who lives in seclusion
Hither – to or toward a specific place
Hoar – gray with age
hoar-frost – white frost
Hoary – white with age
holy rood – the cross upon which Jesus was crucified
honey-dew – a sweet melon
horned moon – crescent moon
Hulk – the body of an old or dismantled ship
ivy-tod – ivy bush
Jag - bolt
Jargoning – unintelligible or meaningless talk
Keel – the bottom-most part of a boat that extends the entire length.
Ken – to understand or recognize
Kin - relation
Kirk - church
Lag - follow
Lank – lean; gaunt; thin
Leprosy; a bacterial infection that attacks the nerves that deadens pain sensations; untreated, leprosy can lead to loss of affected body parts
Limbs – arms or legs
Locks – curls or hair
Loon – an insane person
Main – the open sea
Mariner - sailor
Mary Queen of Heaven – Mary the mother of Jesus
Mast – a vertical structure rising above the deck of a ship that supports sails, spars and rigging
meadow-gale – a strong wind in a meadow
Mingled – to become mixed, blended, or united
Minstrelry – a group of medieval poets and musicians who sang and recited poems
Morn - morning
Morrow - tomorrow
Mute – silent or quieted
nether tip – lower tip
Nought - nothing
o'ertaking - overtaking

Owlet – a young owl
Pang - pain
Parched – very dry
Penance – a punishment imposed in penitence for sin
Pilot – a person who guides or steers a boat
Plagued – annoyed; vexed; troubled
Plunged – broke through waves
Prayeth - prays
Quoth - quoted
Reared – rose up
Reel – carren;lurch; stagger
Renewing – asking again
ribbed sea-sand – sand on the shore characterized by ripples or ribs
formed by wave action
Ribs – arched structural parts of a boat that connect to the keel and
hold the planks in place
Rout – something that is thrown out
Saint – a holy person, possibly in heaven
Scarce – barely; hardly
Sedge – grasses or rushes growing in wet places
seraph-man – angel-like man; Seraphim
Sere - dry
Sheen – luster; brightness; radiance
Shrieve – to free from guilt; to perform the sacrament of
reconciliation
skiff-boat – a small boat that can be rowed by one person
sky-lark – a brown, speckled bird, famed for its melodious song
Slay - kill
Smote – struck; killed
Snapt – snapped; broken
Soot – black residue from burning
Spake - spoke
spectre-bark – ghost-ship
star-dogged – followed by stars
Steeped – immersed in
Steersman – pilot of a ship
Stoppeth - stops
storm-blast – wind and waves of a storm
Strewn - thrown
Stride - step
Sultry – oppressively hot and close or moist
Swound- swoon; fainting spell
Tacked- one of a series of straight runs made by a ship moving
against the wind
Telling - echoing
Thicks - thickens
Thrice – three times
Tread - step

Trow- believe or trust
Twain- two
Unslaked – not satisfied; thirsty
Upright - vertical
Uprist – rose up
Uproar – a loud outburst of noise
Utter – say or speak
Veered – changed direction
Velvet – pleasant; luxurious; desirable
vesper-bell – a bell used to call worshipers to evening service
Wan - pale
Warped – bent or twisted
water-snakes – sea creatures
water-sprite – a spirit that inhabits the water
Weal - well
Weathercock – weather vane, often in the form of a rooster
Wist - know
Withered – shriveled; faded
Woe - misfortune
Wondrous - wonderful
Wrenched – pulled forcefully; affected distressfully
Wretch – a deplorably unfortunate or unhappy person

PART THE FIRST.

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 chuse 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 light-house 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 chuse 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 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 mariners' 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 THE SECOND.

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 mariners' hollo!

And I had done an 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 assured 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 THE THIRD.

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 not 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 clombe above the eastern bar
The horned 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 THE FOURTH.

"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 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 a 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 charmed water burnt away
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 THE FIFTH.

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 swoond.

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 THE SIXTH.

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 away.

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 shrive my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

PART THE SEVENTH.

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 owl 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 woeful 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 seemed 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.

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