

Rime of the ancient mariner

[Religion](#), [Jesus](#)



Assignment One - Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" 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. 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 selfsame moment I could pray; And from my neck so free The Albatross fell off, and sank Like lead into the sea Consider the above extract from part IV carefully. Offer an analysis of Coleridge's poetic methods and the concerns in the extract, remembering to comment on its importance for the poem as a whole. Coleridge's ballad, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", is in essence a story of man's religious and personal redemption. In Part IV, the poem's protagonist achieves forgiveness for his sin of killing the Albatross, considered a protective omen by seafarers. In a wider sense, the story of his liberation from guilt presents powerful metaphors for the death of Jesus Christ and the fate of the Mariner is linked, symbolically, with the fate of all mankind. In this sense, the central theme of the poem (and especially of Part IV) can be interpreted as redemption of man by unconditional love of life, living things and all of Creation. This essay will focus on Part IV of this poem outlining key factors into my interpretation of the specific section lines 272-291, however will reference other significant points of the text in line with the ideas put forth in lines 272-291. I will provide comment in relation to the poet's techniques of symbolism and juxtaposition which are used to convey

this message. Part IV of the " Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is, in a literal sense, chiefly concerned with the liberation of the Mariner from the curse of " Life-in-Death" and the (partial) forgiveness of the crime of killing the Albatross. It gives insight into the process by which the Mariner's redemption is attained, that is, through regaining his respect for life and living things that had been demonstrably absent earlier in the poem. This disregard was most markedly shown by his slaughter of the Albatross, a friendly omen that had saved the Mariner's vessel from probable disaster. Upon regaining this respect, the Mariner is freed of the weight of the crew's collective guilt and thus from a state of living death. There is, however, sufficient spiritual and specifically Christian symbolism present through the poem to argue that the poem is intended to be interpreted as a Christian allegory and that the lifting of the curse of the Mariner can be equated to the forgiveness of sin by God. In this context, Part IV can be viewed a metaphorical tale of the redemption of Man through the death of Christ or, alternatively, an explanation for how Christ's killers could seek redemption themselves. Part IV is the climactic point in which the Mariner reaches his lowest ebb but goes on to achieve salvation by blessing the water snakes. Surrounded by the dead bodies of his crew, the Mariner is unable to pray because of his bitterness toward God who would allow the men to die and the " slimy" water snakes to live. Coleridge uses this as a symbol of the original sin of Adam and Eve, as by killing the Albatross he has committed a crime without a purpose. The Mariner is alone with his guilt, as were Adam and Eve and has been kicked out of his own private Paradise after losing his entire crew and being won over by ' Life in Death'. The Mariner's spiritual dryness is emphasized in lines 243-247 (" 1

looked to heaven, and tried to pray But or ever a prayer had gushed, A wicked whisper came, and made My heart as dry as dust". According to traditional Christian doctrine, the Mariner must repent by means of prayer in order to be saved from his sin. However, so far no grace has been granted him allowing him the appropriate frame of mind for prayer--" no saint took pity on [his] soul in agony." Grace finally comes with the transfiguration of the water snakes by moonlight. Beyond the shadow of the ship, the moonlight transforms the slimy things into objects of beauty " Beyond the shadow of the ship..... With tracks of golden fire. " (lines 272-281). The Mariner sees the snakes in a new light--with admiration, esteem and even joyousness. They are no longer seen, as previously, as objects of revulsion or threats to be eliminated but instead as living creatures, possessed of their own beauty by virtue simply of being " living things". Next he internalises his new vision and finds the snakes still beautiful even when the moonlight is not directly on them, thus emphasizing the internal transformation that has taken place in the Mariner in terms of his respect for other creatures. No longer afflicted with his earlier bitterness, the Mariner is able to love and bless the snakes and now is able to pray. This section (Part IV, lines 272-291) is rich in symbolism and juxtaposition: the Mariner fell from grace because he separated himself from Nature by the act of killing the Albatross; now because of the transforming power of imagination, he reunites himself with Nature by blessing the snakes. Coleridge use of the blessing of snakes as the symbol for this reunification, as there is a great dramatic irony in having snakes act as a vehicle or salvation since in the Bible the serpent was a vehicle for the fall of Mankind. I believe this choice underlines Coleridge's

desire to have the Rime compared and contrasted with the story of the Fall in the Bible. Part IV also serves a purpose of complete juxtaposition to all that came before. The lines 238 - 241 " The many men so beautiful! And the all dead did lie: And a thousand thousand slimy things Lived on; and so did I", show the Mariners feeling that his men, and human beings in general, were more highly regarded than creatures of the sea, and those which may be regarded as lesser beings. The mariner includes himself in the category of lesser beings. It is only in the section referenced in the question that the mariner ' opens his eyes' to the world and all the beauty in it, that he sees the ' slimy things' as ' happy living things, moving with tracks of shining white'. In this moment, the Mariner re-connects with God " that selfsame moment I could pray" (290), and the curse of the living death begins to break, signified by the weight of guilt caused from killing the Albatross falling from his shoulders " and from my neck so free the Albatross fell off, and sank like lead into the sea" (291 - 293). This is in contrast to lines 245 - 249 where all his men were dead, and although he had wanted to, he had been previously unable to pray as any attempt had made " a wicked whisper" come and turn his heart dry. When viewing this poem as a Christian allegory, the reader can perceive the Albatross as a clear symbol of Jesus Christ and the Mariner the Romans/Jews as he is responsible for killing the messiah. One interpretation sees the Albatross as a symbol of Jesus Christ as he is the saviour of the crew. The Albatross led the ship out of danger only to be put to death by those He would save. Jesus had to bear his cross to the place of execution, this is the literal " weight" of the sins of mankind. In this poem, that burden is replaced by the metaphorical lead weight of the bird,

representing the sins of the crew (thereby Human Beings in general). The Mariner's release from this metaphorical weight symbolises repentance leading to forgiveness and the end of the Mariner's (Humankind's) damnation. The rest of the poem demonstrates the unravelling of the curse brought on by the killing of the albatross. Parts V-VII demonstrates the Mariner's return to wholeness--a reunification with the natural world resulting from the transforming power of the imagination. In Part V the poem enters elements of unification and spiritual rebirth. It rains ending the Mariner's spiritual and physical drought; a refreshing and revitalizing vision accompanies him home along his journey of reconstruction. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is clearly a Christian allegory, and Coleridge's use of symbolism and juxtaposition is key to providing a metaphorical account of the Fall and Salvation of Mankind. The poet also provides a parable in that all of God's creations are beautiful and equal irrespective of their outer appearance or how Human's may, on first glance, find repugnant when in actuality these "slimy creatures" are worthy of love and respect purely by existing as one of God's creations "He prayeth well, who loveth well Both man and bird and beast." (lines 613-614).