

# Ballad form in the rime of the ancient mariner essay sample

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Some Readers think the ballad form limits their interest in The Ancient Mariner. What is your view of Coleridge's use of this form? In the Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Coleridge employs the ballad form to contrast the traditional with the exotic through this he forms a poem full of supernatural elements that is easily accessible. The ballad form was a typical form of medieval poetry that was revived by the Romantics as it symbolised a form representative of an idealised past. It is also associated with specific traits such as simple language conveying a profound message which the Ancient Mariner utilises effectively. The structure of the lyrical ballad contributes to the expression themes in the poem but it is actually manipulated by Coleridge to add emphasis, intensity and horror. The poem is enhanced by it being a ballad, not limited as conventional aspects are subverted to present a deep insight into the mariner's psyche that is riddled with guilt and terror.

One may feel the poem is limited by the ballad form due to its rigidity and structure, four line stanzas, regular rhythm and rhyme scheme give it a certain order. However rather than this limiting the poem it allows Coleridge to manipulate it by the inclusion of five and six line stanzas that remove the poem from the traditional form. The regularity of the ballad also allows these regular stanzas to carry great importance which is why they are used to convey the supernatural and exotic parts of the story that require more of the reader's attention . Such as stanzas 10 and 11 in Part III that introduces the idea of Death and Life in Death , and the collection of four extended stanzas in Part IV which show a contrast to the mariner's previous state of mind and contain the core message of redemption through love ' A sprig of love gushed from my heart/ And I blessed them unaware'. The instability

Coleridge inflicts upon the form contributes to its meaning as it reflects the instability of the poem with regards to the defining it as a Christian poem or a criticism of Christianity.

The rhyme scheme associated with the ballad is A B C B and although the stanzas do take this form , internal rhyme is used as well such as in Part I ' the ice did split with a thunder fit'. This is done throughout the poem to create suspense, tension and rhythm which helps the reader become involved in the mariner's thoughts and emotions.

In the Ancient Mariner the scene is set in the past shown by the use of archaic language and the use of the medieval ballad form. The setting in the past allows the reader a certain detachment and perspective from the poem that makes what occurs more plausible. Being set in the past it gives it a whole new dimension for the reader as what is being discussed is profound and complicated and requires distance to comprehend it. The use of the past shows progression and gaining of knowledge through mistakes by being able to reflect in retrospect, which is a central theme in the poem. The ballad form gives the poem age which means wisdom and depth. The type of narration also allows for the boundaries of time to be broken down such as ' The Sun came up on the left,/Out of the sea came he!/And he shone bright, and on the right/Went down into the sea' . This gives the story fluidity especially in the supernatural more unusual aspects.

In Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth set out his own boundaries on the form such as the stories being told to have characters in it of everyday occurrence and

despite the inclusion of the exotic, for the story to be somewhat possible. The story in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner is controversial, somewhat random and certainly not an everyday occurrence.

The use of the simple language is vital in the poem in making concise descriptions of emotions, atmospheres and landscapes, these specific settings arouse the readers senses providing dramatic effect such as in Part I 'The ice was here, the ice was there/the ice was all around'. Ballads being traditionally passed on through word of mouth, simple language as well as other devices make the form very memorable. In the Rime of the Ancient Mariner the language makes it easily accessible as the lessons in it are universal, and makes every description precise and specific to how Coleridge wanted the reader to picture it. Memorable descriptions also being fixed in the readers head which allows the poem's effect to be long lasting and in the case of the Ancient Mariner the memory of specific settings causes the reader to remember specific lessons associated with it such as in Part II 'Water water everywhere/Nor any drop to drink'. This encapsulates the idea of a vengeful God and people suffering for the sins of others and becomes stamped on the reader's subconscious.

Ballads are conventionally associated with stories having religious connotations, the use of spirits in this is also very common. The Ancient Mariner conforms to this but rather than admiring God and the value of prayer and repentance; it questions it. The form provides a veneer of religious celebration and contentment but the story itself completely undermines this notion. The use of spirits is also quite different, rather than

the traditional method of them being used as part of the supernatural, in *The Ancient Mariner* they are used symbolically almost as extensions of God that help the ship and the mariner.

The typical oral transmission of ballads captures the essence of the poem and contributes to it. The poem is about a mariner forced to wander the earth retelling his story and as this is what the form was designed for. This allows the form of the poem to actually become absorbed into the meaning as through the reader the moral of the poem is being passed on and continued in the conventional way but this time challenging what is expected and intensifies it. The oral transmission of ballads is also why they were written in dialogue form and with the metre of traditional speech and *The Ancient Mariner* is no exception .

In conclusion, the ballad form does not limit interest in the poem in fact it intrigues the reader due to the way it has been manipulated by the poet. It allows for Coleridge's own individual style and interpretation of lyrical ballads to emerge as he set out in *Biographia Literaria* ' to excite the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature' and ' incidents and agents to be , in part at least , supernatural' which he achieves through his own take on the form. He only used the ballad as a framework and actually pulls away from it in terms of the use of internal rhyme, extended stanzas and subject matter. The simplicity of the ballad fixes the themes and ideas in the reader's head and allows the reader to become drawn into the poem as it is easily approached. The form actually compliments the issues addressed in

the poem as it reflects the meaning such as the instability of religion and the variation in stanza length and internal rhyme.