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| CONTEXT  | Published in 1798 in *Lyrical Ballads*. The piece went against traditional Romantic ideals through the loose rhyme and contemporary language; Coleridge argued that these choices were to appeal to a sense of literary eternity. However, the work does follow typical Romantic themes. Debated whether Coleridge was on Opium at the time of writing. Inspired by historical voyages, to include Captain James Cook’s Voyages.  |
| ABOUT | *Part One:* Introduces the main narrative voice of the ancient mariner, who begins to tell his tale to a wedding guest. The ancient mariner speaks of a voyage to the equator, but when they reached the equator a terrible storm hits the ship. The sailors continue in this state until an Albatross appears, which they believe to be a sign of luck – sent by God to save them. The ice they’re trapped in then breaks and the wind picks up allowing the crew to sail, all with the Albatross ahead. The mariner then admits that he then shot the Albatross. *Part Two:* The ship sails northward in the Pacific Ocean. Sailors initially condemn the mariner for killing the Albatross, then change their opinion and praise the mariner for having killed it and got rid of the mist. The ship continues its journey until the wind disappears. Then sun becomes unbearably hot while the sailors then run out of water. The ocean becomes hideous, with some of the sailors dreaming of evil spirits that have follower them. To brand the mariner for his crime, the sailors hang the Albatross carcass on his neck. *Part Three:* The sailors become delirious. Then, the ancient mariner notices a ship approaching from the west but no one could shout to the ship as their throats were so dry. The mariner then uses his own blood to wet his mouth and cry out to the ship. Mysteriously, the ship turns to them, despite there being no wind. This initial joy turns to dread as the ship comes closer. Manning the ship is “*Death*”, a male figure, and “*Life-in-Death*”, a female figure. “*Life-in-Death*” the wins a gamble for the ancient mariner’s soul. She whistles three times and night falls and the ship moves away. The moon rises, and as it does the sailors are illuminated, all turning to curse the mariner with their eyes before falling dead. The mariner watches each soul zoom out of his body like the arrow he shot in the Albatross. *Part Four:* The wedding guest proclaims his fears for the mariner, and the mariner responds by assuring that he has not returned from the dead. Instead, he drifted in agony, alone. His attempt to pray failed, and for 7 days and nights he was alone on the ship. Miraculously, the dead sailors did not rot, instead continuing to curse him with their eyes. When spotting a beautiful water snake, his spirits were lifted and finally he was able to pray. In doing so, the Albatross fell from his neck and sank into the ocean. *Part Five*: The mariner thanks the Virgin Mary for allowing him to sleep, dreaming that the buckets on the ship were filled with dew and he awakes to rain. He then hears a loud wind far off, with the sky lighting up signifying lightening. Then the ship begins to sail, although there is still no direct wind. Then, the dead crew stand and go to their roles on the shop. The wedding guest is alarmed, then assured that the ghost sailors were not evil – at dawn they sang beautifully. Once the ship reached the equator, it stopped moving and the sailors stopped singing. The ancient mariner faints as it rocked uneasily. He lay there hearing two voices, The first claims that he was the man who betrayed the Ablatross, and the spirit from the icy world also loves the Albatross. *Part Six*: The first voice asks why the ship was moved along so fast, with the second reply that it must have been the moon controlling the ocean. The first asks who was driving the ship, with the second responding that the air was controlling it. After this, the voices disappear. When the mariner awakes, the sailors are back cursing him with their eyes which mesmerises him, until they disappear. He then realises that the men will haunt him again and again. The mariner then sees the shore of his country, with moonlight illuminating the harbour. Then crimson shapes rise from the water, and an angel stands over each corpse that guide the ship to port. The mariner hears voices approaching the boat and is overjoyed to see living humans (Pilot, Pilot’s Boy & Hermit). The Hermit wants to wipe clean his sin. *Part Seven*: As they near the ship, the Pilot & Hermit wonder where the angels (thinking they’re beacon lights) have gone. The hermit encourages him to steer closer to the ship, but as it reaches the ship a noise comes from underneath the water and it sinks. The men save the ancient mariner, although he appeared as if drowned. The boat spins in the whirlpool of the sinking ship. As they reach shore, the mariner begs the Hermit to relieve his sins, and he is compelled to share his story with the Hermit, which restores him. The mariner tells the wedding guest that he has an urge to tell his tale at unpredictable times. He own prefers to pray instead of entertain, after all, on the ocean he was so isolated he doubted even God’s companionship. He bids farewell, advising that one becomes closer to God by respecting all living things. The guest walks away, mesmerised and reflective.  |
| SPEAKER | Introduced in the first line as “*an ancient mariner*” who is directing his story at a Wedding Guest. At the end of the piece, we realise that the only relief the mariner can get is when he briefly speaks of his experiences to other people, hence the choice to tell his story. Employs the frame narrative technique, with a non-linear narrative structure. |
| FORM | Ballad form, telling a narrative. The meter is characterised by lots of iambs (short beat, long beat), with the line length varying. The choice of stresses has a lyrical quality.  |
| OVERALL STRUCTURE | Rhyming Quatrains are employed for the majority of the poem, in an ABCB pattern. However, Coleridge does not sacrifice meaning for his structural decisions, therefore there are some anomalies.  |
| LANGUAGE | The limbo of the ancient mariner as he is stranded at sea is reflected within the repetition of “*For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky*”. The image created demonstrates the scale of his solitude against the powerful natural elements. These are all anapests, each one identical in rhythm (di di **dum),** with the mirrored structure, each side of the comma/caesura – he’s trapped, alone…At the end of the poem, biblical language is used – “*He prayeth best, who loveth best... For the dear God who loveth us*” – suggesting a religious lesson to be learnt after the action, as a reminder that human life does not have the ultimate power. |
| SOUND EFFECTS | As the sailors drop “*With a heavy thump, a lifeless lump*” a clear image is conveyed of the hundreds of sailors falling together, leaving the mariner in isolation as the only living being in the middle of the ocean.  |
| IMAGerY  | Imagery is significant throughout the poem to advance the solitude of the mariner, by creating a vast backdrop for the action with overwhelming natural elements at play. As “*The moving moon went up the sky*” the mariner’s loneliness is exacerbated because he is unable to travel as nature is, because he no longer has a crew. The Death-In-Life figure is eerily and unnaturally portrayed; “*Her lips were red, her locks were free, // Her locks were yellow as gold: // Her skin as white as leprosy*”. The use of a seemingly human figure, with various abnormal attributes has an unnerving effect, as the reader becomes unsure as to if they should be thankful for the new ship advancing towards the stranded mariner. |
| PATTERNS OF LANGUAGE | A motif of biblical language runs throughout the poem, most significantly when describing the Albatross which becomes the catalyst for the mariner’s fall – this event parallels the fall of man and the Garden of Eden. The line “Instead *of the cross, the Albatross // About my neck was hung”* epitomises the religious connotations running throughout the poem. Perhaps, the Albatross at this point is to represent sin, with the cross representing a possibility for future redemption. Alternatively, this image may reflect the Romantic idea of challenging conventional religious ideas. |
| PUNCTUATION & GRAMMAR  | At the beginning of each stanza, a new sentence begins which advances the narrative plotline as each stanza is another part of the story. This choice further advances a lyrical quality to the narration. |
| LINKS TO OTHER POEMS | Thematically:Mortality – *Ode: Immitations of Immortality* (William Wordsworth), *On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year* (Lord Byron)Religion / Belief – *Holy Thursday* (William Blake)Suffering – *Fare Thee Well* (Lord Byron)Supernatural – *Ode to a Nightingale* (John Keats) |