**English Romantic Verse** One-Page Guides

**Poet: Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

Poem: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

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| Context (biographical, Romantic attitudes, social/historical etc)  | -Coleridge was sent away to school in London as a child, so as a result of this, he wanted his child to be brought up surrounded by nature-for Romantics, childhood was inseparable from nature -he was suffering from dissentry and took opium which lifted him to a different level of consciousness and gave him visions-romantic view of sublime, all-powerful nature-gothic tradition well established: horror and terror |
| A poem about… (Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality) | -you should worship nature and look after God’s kingdom – know your place-Key themes: Nature, Religion, Supernatural, the imagination-false urgency of the wedding is a rather mundane celebration which is insignificant in comparison to the mariner’s tale, and to a proper Romantic appreciation of the sublime |
| Speaker (who? talking to whom? attitude to subject- ironic, reverent etc) | -there are 2 levels of narrative: wedding guest and mariner-wedding guest uses long sentences and exclamatory language-this contrasts to blunt, emotionless words of the mariner: ‘I shot the Albatross’-shock of the mariner’s tale is shown through the wedding guest – would not be apparent if he was not used |
| Form (sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme and rhythm) | -ballad form: musical, storytelling, strong rhythm-he borrowed the form of this poem from old, popular English ballads- repetition, originally used to aid memory for oral tradition, in literary ballads used for emphasis (e.g. ‘the ice was all…’ in I,15 & 16, perhaps emphasises power of nature, sublime, gothic entrapment etc)-most stanzas are quatrains with ABCB but many stanzas vary in length and rhyme (e.g. the mirrored structure of Part II, 6 line verses 3 & 4 where the crew first condemn the mariner, then the crew incriminate themselves by supporting his decision to shoot the bird)-so Coleridge takes older forms in this poem and updates them with the more wild elements of romanticism |
| Overall structure (shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc) | -pivotal moment at end of Part 1 (death of the albatross) – predicts disaster-only positive bit of poem in relation to albatross comes before this: ‘a good south wind sprung up behind’ -death of the bird starts to take its toll on the Mariner and the crew, as they begin the slow process of dying of thirst, despite being surrounded by water: ‘water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink’ - such a torture is penance for the sins they have committed.-in the end, the wedding guest has learnt from the mariner’s warning, and becomes a ‘sadder and a wiser man’ |
| Language (vocabulary - heightened or demotic; rhetorical features etc) | intentionally archaic language (“Eftsoons his hand drops he”)-reflects his use of form of older poems- The forces of Death and Life-in-Death are personified as the crew of the Ghost Ship - Life-In-Death is a strange mix of the beautiful and the creepy, as shown by two similes: her hair is like gold, but her skin is diseased like a leper's - The dice game they play represents the random fate of the sailors |
| Imagery (metaphor, simile, images etc) | Ocean - represents the mysteries of the human soul and the unconscious.-just like the sea, an individual's personality is often like a flat, uniform surface that conceals a deepness filled with emotions and desires-so, when the Mariner pollutes his soul by killing the albatross, it's not a surprise to see that the ocean also becomes polluted with slime and horrible creatures |
| Patterns of language (semantic fields, repetitions, oppositions) | Religious language: ‘christian soul’ ‘God’s name’ ‘God save thee’-albatross can be seen as representing spiritual belief – comes ‘thorough the fog’-‘Instead of the cross..’ – Christian symbol, penance – emblematic of his crime-his action is a crime against the natural world, and thus against God, for which the mariner will never be fully absolved- supernatural images: moon connotes lunacy (occult), sun worship (pagan), resurrection of ‘dead men rise’- later the moon is seen as a guide – a kinder face of nature? or a kinder face of God (if you see God in nature as Romantics did)-There is no easy distinction between theological and supernatural – the supernatural is the vessel of theology (Christian spirits inhabiting bodies of dead men- ‘He prayeth well, who loveth well’ is repeated – becomes refrain – his motto- use of archaic language, e.g. ‘prayeth’ gives the text a heightened, timeless feel |