

Coleridge and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

Samuel T Coleridge

1772-1834

He was the youngest of 14 children. His father died just before he turned nine. While still in his youth, he became involved with alcohol, opium, and sex. He left school early to join the Dragoons, a cavalry branch of the British military. Later, his brothers rescued him from the military and encouraged him to go back to Cambridge.

However, shortly afterward, he left school again, and Coleridge and a friend tried to form a Utopian society. Not surprisingly, this plan failed. He then began preaching and focusing seriously on his writings.

Coleridge continued to struggle with addictions, causing his second marriage to fail and his friendships to evaporate. Eventually, in 1814, he put himself under the care of a doctor and his family who tried to help Coleridge with his addiction to opium. They helped him manage his “demon” for the next 18 years.

Despite his lifelong struggles, Coleridge established himself as the most intellectual of the English Romantic poets.

Part I

1. Who does the Mariner stop at the beginning of Part I?
2. Why has the Mariner stopped this person?
3. What are some physical attributes of the Mariner that are learned in the first three stanzas?
4. Describe the personification in stanza 11. Who was “tyrannous and strong”?
5. What is it that stops the progress of the ship as it travels southward?
6. Who is the Christian soul that approaches the Mariner and the men on the ship?
7. What tragedy befalls the “Christian soul” and how does it occur?

Part II

8. What determines whether the Ancient Mariner’s shipmates praise or curse him for slaying the Albatross?
9. What happens to the ship to make it “as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean”
10. Explain the irony in stanza 10: “Water, water every where / Nor any drop to drink.”
11. Why do the sailors hang the Albatross from the Mariner’s neck?
12. The Mariner says: “Instead of a cross, The Albatross / About my neck was hung.” Explain the allusion to “a cross.” What is this referencing?

Part III

13. In the first five stanzas, what is it that the Ancient Mariner sees?

14. The sailors' mouths and tongues are so dry, they are unable to speak. How does the Mariner wet his tongue, enabling him to be able to talk?
15. How do the Mariner and the rest of the crew know this is an apparition of some sort?
16. The two passengers on the skeleton ship are DEATH and LIFE-IN-DEATH. What does LIFE-IN-DEATH declare that she has won?
17. What happens to the Ancient Mariner's fellow sailors?
18. There are 201 men on the Mariner's ship. How many die?

Part IV

19. At the beginning of the fourth section, why does the Wedding Guest fear the Ancient Mariner?
20. Why does the Mariner's "kind saint [take] pity on" him?
21. In this section, the Ancient Mariner is unable to pray. What happens that causes him to be able to pray?
22. What happens when he does begin to pray?

Part V

23. Describe how a troop of angels help the Mariner pilot the ship.
24. "Around, around flew each sweet sound, / The darted to the Sun" What is happening in this stanza? What is causing the sweet singing that fills the air?
25. How does the Mariner react to the birds? Contrast it with his earlier reactions to the natural world.

Part VI

26. After the curse is lifted, what welcome sight does the Ancient Mariner see?
27. What three persons come to the ship in their own boat?
28. Who will wash away the blood of the Albatross?

Part VII

29. What happens to the ship and to the Mariner as the boat nears them?
30. What continuing penance must the Mariner pay for his crime?