

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (text of 1834)

Argument

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

PART I

1It is an ancient Mariner,
2And he stoppeth one of three.
3'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
4Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

5The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,
6And I am next of kin;
7The guests are met, the feast is set:
8May'st hear the merry din.'

9He holds him with his skinny hand,
10'There was a ship,' quoth he.
11'Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!'
12Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

13He holds him with his glittering eye--
14The Wedding-Guest stood still,
15And listens like a three years' child:
16The Mariner hath his will.

17The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
18He cannot choose but hear;
19And thus spake on that ancient man,
20The bright-eyed Mariner.

21'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
22Merrily did we drop
23Below the kirk, below the hill,
24Below the lighthouse top.

25The Sun came up upon the left,
26Out of the sea came he!
27And he shone bright, and on the right

28Went down into the sea.

29Higher and higher every day,
30Till over the mast at noon--'
31The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
32For he heard the loud bassoon.

33The bride hath paced into the hall,
34Red as a rose is she;
35Nodding their heads before her goes
36The merry minstrelsy.

37The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
38Yet he cannot choose but hear;
39And thus spake on that ancient man,
40The bright-eyed Mariner.

41And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he
42Was tyrannous and strong:
43He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
44And chased us south along.

45With sloping masts and dipping prow,
46As who pursued with yell and blow
47Still treads the shadow of his foe,
48And forward bends his head,
49The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
50And southward aye we fled.

51And now there came both mist and snow,
52And it grew wondrous cold:
53And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
54As green as emerald.

55And through the drifts the snowy clifts
56Did send a dismal sheen:
57Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken--
58The ice was all between.

59The ice was here, the ice was there,
60The ice was all around:
61It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
62Like noises in a swound!

63At length did cross an Albatross,
64Thorough the fog it came;

65As if it had been a Christian soul,
66We hailed it in God's name.

67It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
68And round and round it flew.
69The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
70The helmsman steered us through!

71And a good south wind sprung up behind;
72The Albatross did follow,
73And every day, for food or play,
74Came to the mariner's hollo!

75In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
76It perched for vespers nine;
77Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
78Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'

79'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
80From the fiends, that plague thee thus!--
81Why look'st thou so?'--With my cross-bow
82I shot the ALBATROSS.

PART II

83The Sun now rose upon the right:
84Out of the sea came he,
85Still hid in mist, and on the left
86Went down into the sea.

87And the good south wind still blew behind,
88But no sweet bird did follow,
89Nor any day for food or play
90Came to the mariner's hollo!

91And I had done a hellish thing,
92And it would work 'em woe:
93For all averred, I had killed the bird
94That made the breeze to blow.
95Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
96That made the breeze to blow!

97Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
98The glorious Sun uprist:
99Then all averred, I had killed the bird
100That brought the fog and mist.
101'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,

102That bring the fog and mist.

103The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
104The furrow followed free;
105We were the first that ever burst
106Into that silent sea.

107Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
108'Twas sad as sad could be;
109And we did speak only to break
110The silence of the sea!

111All in a hot and copper sky,
112The bloody Sun, at noon,
113Right up above the mast did stand,
114No bigger than the Moon.

115Day after day, day after day,
116We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
117As idle as a painted ship
118Upon a painted ocean.

119Water, water, every where,
120And all the boards did shrink;
121Water, water, every where,
122Nor any drop to drink.

123The very deep did rot: O Christ!
124That ever this should be!
125Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
126Upon the slimy sea.

127About, about, in reel and rout
128The death-fires danced at night;
129The water, like a witch's oils,
130Burnt green, and blue and white.

131And some in dreams assurèd were
132Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
133Nine fathom deep he had followed us
134From the land of mist and snow.

135And every tongue, through utter drought,
136Was withered at the root;
137We could not speak, no more than if
138We had been choked with soot.

139Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
140Had I from old and young!
141Instead of the cross, the Albatross
142About my neck was hung.

PART III

143There passed a weary time. Each throat
144Was parched, and glazed each eye.
145A weary time! a weary time!
146How glazed each weary eye,

147When looking westward, I beheld
148A something in the sky.

149At first it seemed a little speck,
150And then it seemed a mist;
151It moved and moved, and took at last
152A certain shape, I wist.

153A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
154And still it neared and neared:
155As if it dodged a water-sprite,
156It plunged and tacked and veered.

157With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
158We could nor laugh nor wail;
159Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
160I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
161And cried, A sail! a sail!

162With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
163Agape they heard me call:
164Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
165And all at once their breath drew in.
166As they were drinking all.

167See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
168Hither to work us weal;
169Without a breeze, without a tide,
170She steadies with upright keel!

171The western wave was all a-flame.
172The day was well nigh done!
173Almost upon the western wave
174Rested the broad bright Sun;

175When that strange shape drove suddenly
176Betwixt us and the Sun.

177And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,
178(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
179As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
180With broad and burning face.

181Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
182How fast she nears and nears!

183Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
184Like restless gossameres?

185Are those her *ribs* through which the Sun
186Did peer, as through a grate?
187And is that Woman all her crew?
188Is that a DEATH? and are there two?
189Is DEATH that woman's mate?

190 *Her* lips were red, *her* looks were free,
191Her locks were yellow as gold:
192Her skin was as white as leprosy,
193The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
194Who thicks man's blood with cold.

195The naked hulk alongside came,
196And the twain were casting dice;
197'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'
198Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

199The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;
200At one stride comes the dark;
201With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
202Off shot the spectre-bark.

203We listened and looked sideways up!
204Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
205My life-blood seemed to sip!
206The stars were dim, and thick the night,
207The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
208From the sails the dew did drip--
209Till clomb above the eastern bar
210The hornèd Moon, with one bright star
211Within the nether tip.

212One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,

213 Too quick for groan or sigh,
214 Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
215 And cursed me with his eye.

216 Four times fifty living men,
217 (And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
218 With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
219 They dropped down one by one.

220 The souls did from their bodies fly,--
221 They fled to bliss or woe!
222 And every soul, it passed me by,
223 Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

PART IV

224 I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
225 I fear thy skinny hand!
226 And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
227 As is the ribbed sea-sand.

228 I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
229 And thy skinny hand, so brown.'--

230 Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
231 This body dropt not down.

232 Alone, alone, all, all alone,
233 Alone on a wide wide sea!
234 And never a saint took pity on
235 My soul in agony.

236 The many men, so beautiful!
237 And they all dead did lie:
238 And a thousand thousand slimy things
239 Lived on; and so did I.

240 I looked upon the rotting sea,
241 And drew my eyes away;
242 I looked upon the rotting deck,
243 And there the dead men lay.

244 I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
245 But or ever a prayer had gusht,
246 A wicked whisper came, and made
247 My heart as dry as dust.

248 I closed my lids, and kept them close,

249And the balls like pulses beat;
250For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
251Lay dead like a load on my weary eye,
252And the dead were at my feet.

253The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
254Nor rot nor reek did they:
255The look with which they looked on me
256Had never passed away.

257An orphan's curse would drag to hell
258A spirit from on high;
259But oh! more horrible than that
260Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
261Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
262And yet I could not die.

263The moving Moon went up the sky,
264And no where did abide:
265Softly she was going up,
266And a star or two beside--

267Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,
268Like April hoar-frost spread;
269But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
270The charmed water burnt away
271A still and awful red.

272Beyond the shadow of the ship,
273I watched the water-snakes:
274They moved in tracks of shining white,
275And when they reared, the elfish light
276Fell off in hoary flakes.

277Within the shadow of the ship
278I watched their rich attire:
279Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
280They coiled and swam; and every track
281Was a flash of golden fire.

282O happy living things! no tongue
283Their beauty might declare:
284A spring of love gushed from my heart,
285And I blessed them unaware:
286Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
287And I blessed them unaware.

288The self-same moment I could pray;
289And from my neck so free
290The Albatross fell off, and sank
291Like lead into the sea.

PART V

292Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
293Beloved from pole to pole!
294To Mary Queen the praise be given!
295She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
296That slid into my soul.

297The silly buckets on the deck,
298That had so long remained,
299I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
300And when I awoke, it rained.

301My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
302My garments all were dank;
303Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
304And still my body drank.

305I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
306I was so light--almost
307I thought that I had died in sleep,
308And was a blessed ghost.

309And soon I heard a roaring wind:
310It did not come anear;
311But with its sound it shook the sails,
312That were so thin and sere.

313The upper air burst into life!

314And a hundred fire-flags sheen,
315To and fro they were hurried about!
316And to and fro, and in and out,
317The wan stars danced between.

318And the coming wind did roar more loud,
319And the sails did sigh like sedge,
320And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
321The Moon was at its edge.

322The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
323The Moon was at its side:

324Like waters shot from some high crag,
325The lightning fell with never a jag,
326A river steep and wide.

327The loud wind never reached the ship,
328Yet now the ship moved on!
329Beneath the lightning and the Moon
330The dead men gave a groan.

331They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
332Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
333It had been strange, even in a dream,
334To have seen those dead men rise.

335The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;
336Yet never a breeze up-blew;
337The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
338Where they were wont to do;
339They raised their limbs like lifeless tools--
340We were a ghastly crew.

341The body of my brother's son
342Stood by me, knee to knee:
343The body and I pulled at one rope,
344But he said nought to me.

345'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!'
346Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!
347'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
348Which to their corpses came again,
349But a troop of spirits blest:

350For when it dawned--they dropped their arms,
351And clustered round the mast;
352Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
353And from their bodies passed.

354Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
355Then darted to the Sun;
356Slowly the sounds came back again,
357Now mixed, now one by one.

358Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
359I heard the sky-lark sing;
360Sometimes all little birds that are,
361How they seemed to fill the sea and air

362With their sweet jargoning!

363And now 'twas like all instruments,
364Now like a lonely flute;
365And now it is an angel's song,
366That makes the heavens be mute.

367It ceased; yet still the sails made on
368A pleasant noise till noon,
369A noise like of a hidden brook
370In the leafy month of June,
371That to the sleeping woods all night
372Singeth a quiet tune.

373Till noon we quietly sailed on,
374Yet never a breeze did breathe:
375Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
376Moved onward from beneath.

377Under the keel nine fathom deep,
378From the land of mist and snow,
379The spirit slid: and it was he
380That made the ship to go.
381The sails at noon left off their tune,
382And the ship stood still also.

383The Sun, right up above the mast,
384Had fixed her to the ocean:
385But in a minute she 'gan stir,
386With a short uneasy motion--
387Backwards and forwards half her length
388With a short uneasy motion.

389Then like a pawing horse let go,
390She made a sudden bound:
391It flung the blood into my head,
392And I fell down in a swoond.

393How long in that same fit I lay,
394I have not to declare;
395But ere my living life returned,
396I heard and in my soul discerned
397Two voices in the air.

398'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?
399By him who died on cross,

400With his cruel bow he laid full low
401The harmless Albatross.

402The spirit who bideth by himself
403In the land of mist and snow,
404He loved the bird that loved the man
405Who shot him with his bow.'

406The other was a softer voice,
407As soft as honey-dew:
408Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,
409And penance more will do.'

PART VI

FIRST VOICE

410'But tell me, tell me! speak again,
411Thy soft response renewing--
412What makes that ship drive on so fast?
413What is the ocean doing?'

SECOND VOICE

414'Still as a slave before his lord,
415The ocean hath no blast;
416His great bright eye most silently
417Up to the Moon is cast--

418If he may know which way to go;
419For she guides him smooth or grim.
420See, brother, see! how graciously
421She looketh down on him.'

FIRST VOICE

422'But why drives on that ship so fast,
423Without or wave or wind?'

SECOND VOICE

424'The air is cut away before,
425And closes from behind.

426Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!
427Or we shall be belated:
428For slow and slow that ship will go,

429When the Mariner's trance is abated.'

430I woke, and we were sailing on
431As in a gentle weather:
432'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;
433The dead men stood together.

434All stood together on the deck,
435For a charnel-dungeon fitter:
436All fixed on me their stony eyes,
437That in the Moon did glitter.

438The pang, the curse, with which they died,
439Had never passed away:
440I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
441Nor turn them up to pray.

442And now this spell was snapt: once more
443I viewed the ocean green,
444And looked far forth, yet little saw
445Of what had else been seen--

446Like one, that on a lonesome road
447Doth walk in fear and dread,
448And having once turned round walks on,
449And turns no more his head;
450Because he knows, a frightful fiend
451Doth close behind him tread.

452But soon there breathed a wind on me,
453Nor sound nor motion made:
454Its path was not upon the sea,
455In ripple or in shade.

456It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
457Like a meadow-gale of spring--
458It mingled strangely with my fears,
459Yet it felt like a welcoming.

460Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
461Yet she sailed softly too:
462Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze--
463On me alone it blew.

464Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
465The light-house top I see?

466Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
467Is this mine own countree?

468We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
469And I with sobs did pray--
470O let me be awake, my God!
471Or let me sleep alway.

472The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
473So smoothly it was strewn!
474And on the bay the moonlight lay,
475And the shadow of the Moon.

476The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
477That stands above the rock:
478The moonlight steeped in silentness
479The steady weathercock.

480And the bay was white with silent light,
481Till rising from the same,
482Full many shapes, that shadows were,
483In crimson colours came.

484A little distance from the prow
485Those crimson shadows were:
486I turned my eyes upon the deck--
487Oh, Christ! what saw I there!

488Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
489And, by the holy rood!
490A man all light, a seraph-man,
491On every corse there stood.

492This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
493It was a heavenly sight!
494They stood as signals to the land,
495Each one a lovely light;

496This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
497No voice did they impart--
498No voice; but oh! the silence sank
499Like music on my heart.

500But soon I heard the dash of oars,
501I heard the Pilot's cheer;
502My head was turned perforce away

503And I saw a boat appear.

504The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,
505I heard them coming fast:
506Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
507The dead men could not blast.

508I saw a third--I heard his voice:
509It is the Hermit good!
510He singeth loud his godly hymns
511That he makes in the wood.
512He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
513The Albatross's blood.

PART VII

514This Hermit good lives in that wood
515Which slopes down to the sea.
516How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
517He loves to talk with mariners
518That come from a far countree.

519He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve--
520He hath a cushion plump:
521It is the moss that wholly hides
522The rotted old oak-stump.

523The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,
524'Why, this is strange, I trow!
525Where are those lights so many and fair,
526That signal made but now?'

527'Strange, by my faith!' the Hermit said--
528'And they answered not our cheer!
529The planks looked warped! and see those sails,
530How thin they are and sere!
531I never saw aught like to them,
532Unless perchance it were

533Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
534My forest-brook along;
535When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
536And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
537That eats the she-wolf's young.'

538'Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look--
539(The Pilot made reply)

540I am a-feared!--'Push on, push on!'
541Said the Hermit cheerily.

542The boat came closer to the ship,
543But I nor spake nor stirred;
544The boat came close beneath the ship,
545And straight a sound was heard.

546Under the water it rumbled on,
547Still louder and more dread:
548It reached the ship, it split the bay;
549The ship went down like lead.

550Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,
551Which sky and ocean smote,
552Like one that hath been seven days drowned
553My body lay afloat;
554But swift as dreams, myself I found
555Within the Pilot's boat.

556Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
557The boat spun round and round;
558And all was still, save that the hill
559Was telling of the sound.

560I moved my lips--the Pilot shrieked
561And fell down in a fit;
562The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
563And prayed where he did sit.

564I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
565Who now doth crazy go,
566Laughed loud and long, and all the while
567His eyes went to and fro.
568'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,
569The Devil knows how to row.'

570And now, all in my own countree,
571I stood on the firm land!
572The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,
573And scarcely he could stand.

574'O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!'
575The Hermit crossed his brow.
576'Say quick,' quoth he, 'I bid thee say--
577What manner of man art thou?'

578Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
579With a woful agony,
580Which forced me to begin my tale;
581And then it left me free.

582Since then, at an uncertain hour,
583That agony returns:
584And till my ghastly tale is told,
585This heart within me burns.

586I pass, like night, from land to land;
587I have strange power of speech;
588That moment that his face I see,
589I know the man that must hear me:
590To him my tale I teach.

591What loud uproar bursts from that door!
592The wedding-guests are there:
593But in the garden-bower the bride
594And bride-maids singing are:
595And hark the little vesper bell,
596Which biddeth me to prayer!

597O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
598Alone on a wide wide sea:
599So lonely 'twas, that God himself
600Scarce seemed there to be.

601O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
602'Tis sweeter far to me,
603To walk together to the kirk
604With a goodly company!--

605To walk together to the kirk,
606And all together pray,
607While each to his great Father bends,
608Old men, and babes, and loving friends
609And youths and maidens gay!

610Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
611To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
612He prayeth well, who loveth well
613Both man and bird and beast.

614He prayeth best, who loveth best

615All things both great and small;
616For the dear God who loveth us,
617He made and loveth all.

618The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
619Whose beard with age is hoar,
620Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
621Turned from the bridegroom's door.

622He went like one that hath been stunned,
623And is of sense forlorn:
624A sadder and a wiser man,
625He rose the morrow morn.