

1. Symbolism in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is an allegory. An allegory is a narrative in which the characters, settings and the actions are symbolic as well as literal. In “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” there are many symbols, including the Ancient Mariner, the ship of the Ancient Mariner ,and the Albatross.

The ancient Mariner is a symbol for humanity. He shows that everyone makes mistakes, but one can work towards becoming a better person. He shoots the albatross for no reason. The reader can only assume he did this out jealousy because all of the crewmen were paying attention to the albatross and not him. He killed the bird out of spite, which even though no one wants to admit it, is a very human thing. However, because life-in-death won him, he was given the chance to repent. The Mariner was allowed to live because he found beauty in water snakes he saw off the side of the ship. “O happy, living things! No tongue Their beauty might declare: A spring of love gushed from my heart, And I blessed them unaware.”

The Ship of the Ancient Mariner symbolizes **self discovery** and **religious awareness**. It is the vessel that brought the Mariner on his journey throughout his entire story. The ship was what moved him on because there was literally nothing else he could do but move on with his self discovery while on the ship. While the Mariner was on the ship, he was spared, found the beauty of the snakes, the albatross fell from his neck, he saw the angels that came for the crewmen and was given his penance. “Upon the whirl, where sank the ship, the boat spun round and round; and all was still, save that the hill Was telling of the sound.” The end of story ship sinking signified the end of his journey. After the ship sank, The Mariner was to go and begin telling his story to the rest of the world. His journey of self-discovery was over, he had found himself.

The albatross is the symbol most closely linked to the Christian moral allegory that critics often associate with the Mariner’s narrative. When this sea bird first appears, the sailors all hail it “as if it had been a Christian soul” . Hence, when the Mariner kills it, his companions interpret the act as a grave sin. It is for this reason that they force the Mariner to wear the albatross around his neck. Replacing the crucifix that a faithful Christian would normally wear, the dead albatross symbolizes the burden of the Mariner’s sin. For the rest of the poem, the Mariner must seek absolution for this sin. But to achieve absolution, he must first learn to recognize the sanctity of all creatures. He comes to this recognition at the end of

Part 4, where he feels “a spring of love” gush forth when he looks upon a host of roiling “water-snakes” This experience leads him to prayer, at which point the albatross falls from his neck, disburdening him of the dead bird’s physical weight. Yet the sin of the Mariner’s action remains, which explains why he seeks absolution through confession—first to the Hermit, and now to the Wedding-Guest.

2. Literary Devices in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

2.1. Figures of Speech

2.1.1. Personification

Personification is giving human characteristics to non-human things . It is used to help the reader create a clearer mental picture of the scene or object being described.

Coleridge uses personification to address what he sees as the imbalance created by the power struggle between man and nature. For example, in the quote below, he grants the weather human characteristics that connect nature to mankind, putting both on an equal footing.

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

The sun is also personified, described as "he" rather than "it" in the following:

“The Sun came up upon the left,(25)
Out of the sea came he! (26)

And he shone bright, and on the right” (27)

Went down into the sea (28)

2.1.2. Simile: : a figure of speech that makes an explicit comparison between two unlike things, using a word such as, "like" and "as."

Here is a list of some similes:

"red as a rose is she" (34)
"as who pursued with yell and blow/ Still treads the shadow of his foe" (46-47)
"as green as emerald" (54)
"like noises in a swound" (62)
"as if it had been a Christian soul" (65)

2.1.3. Repetition

One of the most-used device in this poem, repetition occurs at the letter, word, phrase, sentence, and stanza level. Although often used to convey meaning, Coleridge uses it chiefly to create poetic rhythm.

Word level

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

Phrase level

The ice was all between
The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around."

Sentence Level

Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere
Nor any drop to drink."

Stanza level

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

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

2.2.Sound Devices

2.2.1. Alliteration

Another device used extensively by Coleridge in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is alliteration. Alliteration is a series of words or phrases that all (or almost all) start with the same sound. These sounds are typically consonants to give more stress to that syllable.

Coleridge uses this chiefly to create rhythm and draws emphasis to important words in a line, as in:

“**H**e holds **h**im with **h**is skinny **h**and,”

“The **d**eath-fires **d**

“Was a **f**lash of golden **f**ire.”

“They raised their **l**imbs like lifeless tools.”

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