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“A Sadder and a Wiser Man”: The Wedding Guest’s Transformation

In “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, Samuel Taylor Coleridge explores how experience and suffering can lead to wisdom. The final lines A sadder and a wiser man, / He rose the morrow morn describe how the wedding guest changes after hearing the mariner’s story. He wakes up the next morning no longer the same carefree person he was before. He has gained wisdom, but that wisdom has come at a cost.

At the start of the poem, the wedding guest is impatient and frustrated. He does not want to listen to the mariner; he only wants to attend the wedding. However, as the mariner tells his tragic tale how he killed the albatross, brought a curse upon his ship, and endured great suffering the wedding guest becomes deeply affected. He learns an important lesson about the consequences of human actions and the need to respect all living things. By the end of the story, he no longer seems eager for the wedding, showing that he has been permanently changed.

His transformation mirrors that of the mariner. Just as the mariner learned his lesson through suffering and is now doomed to wander the world telling his story, the wedding guest now carries the weight of that knowledge. He does not return to the wedding, which suggests that he can no longer enjoy life in the same way. The mariner’s tale has opened his eyes to the darker side of the world, making him wiser but also sadder.

These final lines highlight one of the poem’s key messages: true wisdom often comes from experience, and learning hard truths can change a person forever. The wedding guest’s sorrow shows that understanding the world more deeply is not always pleasant, but it is necessary. Through this ending, Coleridge suggests that knowledge comes with responsibility and that once someone has learned an important lesson, they cannot go back to who they were before.