



Death and Life-in-Death

The Mariner and his fellow sailors lose all hope, till a ship is seen approaching from the West.

There passed a weary time. Each throat¹
Was parched², and glazed³ each eye.
A weary time! a weary time!

The ancient Mariner beholdeth a sign in the element afar off.

How glazed each weary eye,
5 When looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.

At first it seemed a little speck⁴,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
10 A certain shape, I wist⁵.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a water-sprite⁶,
It plunged⁷ and tacked⁸ and veered⁹.

*At its nearer approach, it seemeth him to be a ship; and at a dear ransom¹⁰ he
freeth his speech from the bonds of thirst.*

15 With throats unslaked, with black lips baked¹¹,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought¹² all dumb we stood!
I bit¹³ my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

20 With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard¹⁴ me call:
A flash of joy;
Gramercy! they for joy did grin¹⁵,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

And horror follows. For can it be a ship that comes onward without wind or tide?

25 See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither¹⁶ to work us weal¹⁷,
Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel¹⁸!

The western wave was all a-flame.
30 The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

It seemeth him but the skeleton¹⁹ of a ship.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
*The Rime of the Ancient
Mariner*
(1798)

Part III, Lines 143-223

- 1 Each throat. La gola di ognuno.
- 2 Was parched. Era riarisa.
- 3 glazed. Vitreo.
- 4 a little speck. Un piccolo punto
- 5 wist. (Arc.) Pensai.
- 6 As if ... a water-sprite. Come se evitasse un folletto marino.
- 7 It plunged. Beccheggiava.
- 8 tacked. Bordeggiava.
- 9 veered. Virava.
- 10 ransom. Prezzo.
- 11 With ... baked. Con la gola inappagata, con labbra nere cotte.
- 12 drought. Siccità.
- 13 bit. Morsi.
- 14 Agape they heard. Mi udirono a bocca spalancata.
- 15 they ... did grin. Digrignarono i denti per la gioia.
- 16 Hither. Qui.
- 17 weal. Benessere; *qui*: soccorso.
- 18 She ... keel. Viene diritta con la chiglia sollevata.
- 19 skeleton. Scheletro.



35 And straight the Sun was flecked²⁰ with bars,
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
As if through a dungeon-grate²¹ he peered
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
40 How fast she nears and nears!
Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres²²?

*And its ribs²³ are seen as bars on the face of the setting Sun. The Spectre-Woman
and her Deathmate, and no other on board the skeleton-ship. Like vessel, like
crew!*

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

*Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:*
50 *Her skin was as white as leprosy,*
The nightmare²⁴ LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
Who thickens²⁵ man's blood with cold.

*Death and Life-in-Death have diced for²⁶ the ship's crew, and she (the latter)
winneeth the ancient Mariner.*

The naked hulk²⁷ alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice;
55 'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

No twilight within the courts of the Sun.

The Sun's rim dips²⁸; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
60 With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

At the rising of the Moon,
We listened and looked sideways up!
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
My life-blood seemed to sip²⁹!
The stars were dim, and thick the night,
65 The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
From the sails the dew did drip –
Till clomb above the eastern bar³⁰
*The horned Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip³¹.*

One after another,
70 *One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,*

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- 20 was flecked. Si striò.
21 dungeon-grate. Grata di galera.
22 Like ... gossameres. Come spiritate ragnatele.
23 ribs. Costole.
24 nightmare. Incubo.
25 thickens. Congela.
26 have diced for. Si sono giocati ai dadi.
27 hulk. Carcassa, scafo.
28 dips. Si immerge.
29 My life-blood ... sip. Sembrava sorseggiare il mio sangue vitale.
30 Till ... bar. Finché ascese da levante.
31 The horned ... tip. La Luna cornuta, con una stella brillante all'interno della sua punta bassa.



Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang³²,
And cursed me with his eye.

His shipmates drop down dead.
Four times fifty living men,
75 (And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

But Life-in-Death begins her work on the ancient Mariner.
The souls did from their bodies fly, –
They fled to bliss or woe!
80 And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

32 ghastly pang. Spasimo atroce.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

1 READ the text and divide it into three parts. Then write a heading for each section.

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents. Then answer the following questions.

- What is the effect of this linguistic device?
- What do all these words have in common? Does this make the story go faster or slower?
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-
- What do these stages remind you of?
- Her.....
- Can you explain them?

3 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- 1 Does the presence of archaisms contrast with the overall simplicity of the language?
- 2 Do the Mariner and the crew realise the supernatural quality of the vision?
- 3 Why is the description of Life-in-Death so horrible? What kind of woman is she?
- 4 Why can she be considered a mockery of the bride at the wedding feast?
- 5 Does the ancient Mariner become more conscious of himself?
- 6 How does this part end?
- 7 In the first extract, the crossbow killed the albatross. In this extract, the reference to the crossbow comes when the ancient Mariner is cursed to live a life-in-death. What do you think is the relationship between the two?
- 8 Compare the Part I (→ T28) and the Part III of *The Rime* by filling in the table below.

	Part I	Part III
Motion of the ship		
Natural elements		
The crew		
The ancient Mariner		
Other characters		

**4 COMPLETE** the summary with the words from the box.

cursed	windless	throats	dice	thirst	leprosy
crew	tide	skeleton	moon	mysteriously	shot



The sailors spent a long time on a **(1)** ocean, and eventually they became sick with **(2)** because of the absence of water. One day, the ancient Mariner saw something coming from the West. As it moved closer, the sailors realised it was a ship, but no one could cry out because of their dry **(3)** The ship was **(4)** approaching since she managed to turn her course to them, even though there was neither **(5)** nor wind. The ancient Mariner's initial joy turned to fear as he noticed that the ship looked like a **(6)** When the ship came near, he could see her **(7)** : Death and Life-in-Death. The latter was a strange woman, with red lips, golden hair, and skin 'as white as **(8)** '. Death and Life-in-Death were playing **(9)** for the sailors' lives. It was Life-in-Death who won the ancient Mariner's soul. Night fell all of a sudden and the ghost ship sailed away. The partial **(10)** rose above the ship with 'one bright star' just inside its bottom rim. Suddenly all the sailors turned towards the ancient Mariner and **(11)** him with their eyes before dying. Their souls escaped their corpses and **(12)** past the ancient Mariner like arrows from the crossbow with which he killed the Albatross.

5 COMPARE Coleridge with Wordsworth as regards the importance given to nature and to imagination, the main themes developed and the style employed. Write not more than 10 lines.