



## The water-snakes

*In the following excerpt the redemption of the Mariner is announced.*

*The Wedding-Guest feareth that a Spirit is talking to him;*

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!

I fear thy skinny hand!

And thou art long, and lank<sup>1</sup>, and brown,

As is the **ribbed** sea-sand.

*but the ancient Mariner assureth him of his bodily life, and proceedeth to relate his horrible penance.*

- 5 I fear thee and thy glittering eye,  
And thy skinny hand, so brown.' –  
'Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!  
This body dropt not<sup>2</sup> down.

- Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
10 Alone on a wide, wide sea!  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.

*He despiseth<sup>3</sup> the creatures of the calm,*

- The many men, so beautiful!  
And they all dead did lie:  
15 And a thousand thousand **slimy** things  
Lived on; and so did I.

*And envieth<sup>4</sup> that they should live, and so many lie dead.*

- I looked upon the rotting<sup>5</sup> sea,  
And drew my eyes away;  
I looked upon the rotting **deck**,  
20 And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;  
But or ever a prayer had gusht<sup>6</sup>,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

- 25 I closed my **lids**, and kept them close,  
And the balls like pulses beat;  
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky  
Lay like a load<sup>7</sup> on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet.

*But the curse<sup>8</sup> liveth for him in the eye of the dead men.*

- 30 The cold sweat **melted** from their limbs,  
Not rot nor reek did they<sup>9</sup>:  
The look with which they looked on me  
Had never passed away.

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

Part IV, Lines 224-291

- 1 thou ... lank. Tu sei lungo e allampanato.  
2 dropt not. Non è caduto. Qui: non è morto.  
3 despiseth. Disprezza.  
4 envieth. Si rassegna.  
5 rotting. Putrido.  
6 But ... gusht. Ma invece che sgorgare una preghiera.  
7 load. Peso.  
8 curse. Maledizione.  
9 Not ... they. Non si erano decomposti né puzzavano.



35 An orphan's curse would drag<sup>10</sup> to hell  
 A spirit from on high;  
 But oh! more horrible than that  
 Is the curse in a dead man's eye!  
 Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
 And yet I could not die.

*In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth<sup>11</sup> towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.*

40 The moving Moon went up the sky,  
 And no where did abide<sup>12</sup>:  
 Softly she was going up,  
 And a star or two beside –  
 Her **beams** bemoaned the sultry main<sup>13</sup>,  
 45 Like April hoar-frost spread<sup>14</sup>,  
 But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
 The charmed water burnt alway  
 A still and awful red.

*By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm.*

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
 50 I watched the water-snakes:  
 They moved in **tracks** of shining white,  
 And when they **reared** the elfish light  
 Fell off in hoary flakes<sup>15</sup>.

Within the shadow of the ship  
 55 I watched their rich attire<sup>16</sup>.  
 Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
 They **coiled** and swam; and every track<sup>17</sup>  
 Was a flash of golden fire.

*Their beauty and their happiness.  
 He blesseth them in his heart.*

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

*The spell begins to break.*

65 The self-same moment I could pray;  
 And from my neck so free  
 The Albatross fell off, and sank  
 Like lead<sup>18</sup> into the sea.

- 10 would drag. Trascinerebbe.  
 11 yearneth. Si strugge.  
 12 no ... abide. In nessun luogo (Lett.: attendeva, qui:) dimorava.  
 13 bemoaned ... main. Schernivano il mare arroventato.  
 14 Like ... spread. Sparsa come brina d'aprile.  
 15 hoary flakes. Fiocchi candidi.  
 16 their rich attire. Il loro ricco abbigliamento.  
 17 track. Scia.  
 18 sank ... lead. Sprofondò come piombo in fondo al mare.



## LITERARY COMPETENCE

## &gt; VOCABULARY

**1 READ** the text and match the highlighted words in the text with their Italian translation.

- |                                  |                       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 sgorgò .....                   | 6 palpebre .....      |
| 2 viscide .....                  | 7 si scioglieva ..... |
| 3 a coste, con scanalature ..... | 8 tracce .....        |
| 4 si avvolgevano a spirale ..... | 9 raggi .....         |
| 5 ponte .....                    | 10 aumentavano .....  |

## &gt; COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

**2 READ** the text again and do the following activities.

- Who is speaking at the beginning of this part? What is he afraid of?
- Describe what happens around the Mariner, as regards the Mariner's shipmates, the sea, the deck of the ship, the sky.
- What is the Mariner unable to do?
- What does the Mariner contemplate? What does he discover?
- What is the sign of the Mariner's redemption?

## &gt; COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

**3 READ** out loud lines 9-10, concentrating on the sounds. It seems as if the Mariner is howling in despair. What are the literary devices used?

**4 SAY** out loud lines 13 to 16. Did you notice that you did not need to move your top lip? Try again. Get a friend to watch you doing this so they can see the expression on your face. What is the effect of these sounds?

**5 READ** out loud lines 54 to 58. This requires you to move your mouth and lips a lot. What is the effect of all these consonants? Is it visual and tactile as well as sonorous?

**6 CONCENTRATE** on stanzas 3-9. They are built up in a way comparable to the 'zooming' technique used in film-making, which starts from a panoramic view and focuses upon a detail gradually.

1 Now answer the following questions.

- Where do you get a panoramic view?
- Does the Mariner explore the whole scene or does he focus on details in stanzas 4-6?
- Is there a closer view of the scene in stanza 7?
- What/who does the last stanza focus on?

2 Focus on the second section of 'Part IV', which is built like another zoom shot, and complete the sentences.

- Lines 40-45 describe .....
- The following lines, 46-48, show us .....
- The Mariner focuses on ..... in the final quatrains.

**7 COMPARE** the reference to the water-snakes in line 15 and the detailed description of the same animals in lines 54-64. How are they perceived?

Line 15: water-snakes are .....

Lines 54-64: water-snakes are signs of .....

**8 DISCUSS.** Has the Mariner's sensibility undergone a change? Support your answer quoting from the text.