Thor’s Day, 4/2: The Nightmare Life-In-Death

EQ: How did Coleridge’s “contraries” differ from Blake’s and Wordsworth’s?

- Welcome! Gather S. T. Coleridge, Rime of the Ancient Mariner, pen/cil, paper, wits!

- Reading and Writing: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Rime of the Ancient Mariner

- Reading and Writing: Suspension of Disbelief (The Nightmare Life-In-Death)

in seminal British texts

ELACC12RL-RI2: Analyze two or more themes or central ideas of text
ELACC12RL3: Analyze impact of author’s choices regarding elements of a story
ELACC12R13: Analyze and explain how individuals, ideas, events interact, develop
ELACC12R16: Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text
ELACC12R18: Delineate and evaluate the reasoning
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834)
Excerpt from *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

...It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that *willing suspension of disbelief for the moment*, which constitutes poetic faith.
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798)

- First poem in *Lyrical Ballads* – QUITE a different tone from “We Are Seven”!
- Coleridge puts an ordinary guy (sailor) into extraordinary situation (zombies)
- One of the first “Undead” stories
- Like *Gulliver’s Travels*, a reaction to (cashing in on?) “real-life” sea stories dominating news and print at the time
- Instantly and hugely successful
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798): Part I

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

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

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

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

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

"The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,  
Merrily did we drop  
Below the kirk, below the hill,  
Below the light-house top.

The Sun came up upon the left,  
Out of the sea came he!  
And he shone bright, and on the right  
Went down into the sea….

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

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

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

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

The ice was here, the ice was there,  
The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises in a **swound**! *dream, faint*

At length did cross an **Albatross**: *BIG seagull*  
Thorough the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.

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

And a good south wind sprung up behind;  
The Albatross did follow,  
And every day, for food or play,  
Came to the mariners' hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,  
It perched for **vespers** nine; *evenings*  
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,  
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!--  
Why look'st thou so?"—  
With my cross-bow  
I shot the **ALBATROSS**.
### Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798): Part II

| The Sun now rose upon the right:  | Day after day, day after day,  |
| Out of the sea came he,           |   We stuck, nor breath nor motion; |
| Still hid in mist, and on the left |   As idle as a painted ship     |
| Went down into the sea.           |   Upon a painted ocean.       |
| And the good south wind still blew behind |   Water, water, every where,   |
| But no sweet bird did follow,     |   And all the boards did shrink; |
| Nor any day for food or play      |   Water, water, every where,   |
| Came to the mariners’ hollo!      |   Nor any drop to drink.      |
| And I had done an hellish thing,  |   The very deep did rot: O Christ! |
| And it would work 'em woe:        |   That ever this should be!    |
| For all averred, I had killed the bird |   Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs |
| That made the breeze to blow.     |   Upon the slimy sea.        |
| Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay |   About, about, in reel and rout |
| That made the breeze to blow!     |   The death-fires danced at night; |
| Nor dim nor red, like God's own head, |   The water, like a witch's oils, |
| The glorious Sun uprist:           |   Burnt green, and blue and white.  |
| Then all averred, I had killed the bird |   And some in dreams assured were  |
| That brought the fog and mist.    |   Of the spirit that plagued us so: |
| 'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay, |   Nine fathom deep he had followed us |
| That bring the fog and mist.      |   From the land of mist and snow. |
| The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, |   And every tongue, through utter drought, |
| The furrow followed free:         |   Was withered at the root; |
| We were the first that ever burst |   We could not speak, no more than if |
| Into that silent sea.             |   We had been choked with soot.|
| Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down, |   Ah! well a-day! what evil looks |
| 'Twas sad as sad could be;         |   Had I from old and young!   |
| And we did speak only to break    |   Instead of the cross, the Albatross |
| The silence of the sea!           |   About my neck was hung.     |
| All in a hot and copper sky,      |                                 |
| The bloody Sun, at noon,          |                                 |
| Right up above the mast did stand,|                                 |
| No bigger than the Moon.          |                                 |
|                                 |                                 |
|                                 |                                 |
There passed a weary time. Each throat Was parched, and glazed each eye.  
A weary time! a weary time!  
How glazed each weary eye,  
When looking westward, I beheld  
A something in the sky.  

At first it seemed a little speck,  
And then it seemed a mist:  
It moved and moved, and took at last  
A certain shape, I \textit{wist}.  

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
And still it neared and neared:  
As if it dodged a water-\textit{sprite}.  
It plunged and tacked and veered.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
We could not laugh nor wail;  
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!  
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,  
And cried, A sail! a sail!

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

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!  
Hither to work us \textit{weal};  
Without a breeze, without a tide,  
She steadies with upright keel!

The western wave was all a-flame  
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.

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

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

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

Her lips were red, her looks were free,  
Her locks were yellow as gold:  
Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
The Night-Mare \textit{LIFE-IN-DEATH} was she,  
Who thickens man's blood with cold.

The \textit{naked hulk} alongside came, \textit{busted ship}  
And the twain were casting dice;  
"The game is done! I've won! I've won!"  
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

The Sun's rim dips, the stars rush out,  
At one stride comes the dark;  
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea.  
Off shot the spectre-\textit{bark}. \textit{ship}

We listened and looked sideways up!  
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,  
My life-blood seemed to sip!  
The stars were dim, and thick the night,  
From the sails the dew did drip--  
Till clombe above the eastern bar  
The horned Moon, with one bright star  
Within the nether tip.

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon  
Too quick for groan or sigh,  
Each turned his face with a ghastly \textit{pang}. \textit{pain}  
And cursed me with his eye.

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

The souls did from their bodies fly,--  
They fled to bliss or woe!  
And every soul, it passed me by,  
Like the whizz of my \textit{CROSS-BOW}!
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798): Part IV

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

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

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

I looked to Heaven, and tried to pray:
But or ever a prayer had gush't,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

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 on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

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

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

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside.

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway
A still and awful red.

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

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

O happy living things! no tongue
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 self same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

[Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all.

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

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.]
Reading Journal Entry:

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her looks were free,
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yellow as gold:
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LIFE-IN-DEATH
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(Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
*Rime of the Ancient Mariner*)