

Water as a symbol of nature in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Coleridge's ballad can be read as an experience of sin against nature, but also as the story of a nightmare hiding a mysterious guilt.

As a result, the Mariner's perception of natural elements depends on his spiritual and psychological conditions during the voyage by sea, where water may be either a hostile element or a benevolent force depending on the Mariner's attitude to nature.

In the first part of the poem, the sea is personified in the image of the 'Storm Blast', which is 'tyrannous and strong', and in the animal sounds of the icebergs that surround the ship:

*The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:* (Part 1)
*It cracked and growled and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!*

By killing the albatross, the sailor commits a sin against God's creatures and nature. Therefore, God's punishment is manifested in nature under the influence of the Sun, which may represent divine law and justice. The ship is becalmed in the tropics and the crew have to stand terrible heat and thirst:

*Water, water everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.* (Part 2)

The algae of the Sargasso Sea appear to the sinful sailor as 'slimy things' that 'crawl with legs upon the slimy sea' and

*The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green and blue and white* (Part 2)

Later on, after punishment and catharsis, the influence of the God of love - the Moon - allows the Mariner to appreciate the beauty of nature, so the 'slimy things' appear to him as beautiful 'water snakes':

*They moved in lines of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes* (Part 4)

After that, the old sinner is able to pray and thank God:

*Oh happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,* (Part 4)
And I blessed them unaware;

The albatross, which has been hanging around his neck as a sign of sin and guilt, sinks into the sea and, to mark the end of punishment and the beginning of redemption, it starts to rain.

*And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge. [...]
Like waters shot from some high crag,* (Part 5)
*The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide*

As we can see, near the end of the voyage the salty water of the sea is replaced by rain from the sky, like fresh water from a river which can cool the Mariner, quench his thirst and wash away the taint of sin.