

P.G SEM II
CC-6
UNIT-II
The Rime of Ancient Mariner: Coleridge

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The use of Ice as a Metaphor in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is long and rich in symbolism, and most important aspect is: the metaphor of ice.

"I see the ship as a metaphor for the journey into unknown regions. The land of ice represents the realm of imagination. I therefore interpret this passage as the mariner's voyage into the mystic, a wondrous place where the images of the world are reflected and fractured."

Ice is a key metaphor in this poem, especially since it figures prominently in the title. Rime is defined as "an accumulation of granular ice tufts on the windward sides of exposed objects that is formed from supercooled fog or cloud and built out directly against the wind." What makes Rime so unique is that it is the metamorphosis of gas to solid, bypassing the liquid state. Essentially, this would be symbolic of the transformation of spirit to flesh or matter.

*Ice makes its first appearance in the poem at line 51:
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*

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*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 crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd,
Like noises in a swound!*

The ice here seems both beautiful and frightening. The crystal structures create a stunning landscape, but also represent a dangerous place. Below the surface, hidden ice waits to tear into the hulls of ships. The ship can be seen as a metaphor for the journey into unknown regions. The land of ice represents the realm of imagination. This passage can be interpreted as the Mariner's voyage into the mystic, a wondrous place where the images of the world are reflected and fractured. But a mariner must remain safe within his vessel, otherwise he becomes lost in the labyrinth of ice and cannot return to the realm of reality.

It is while in the land of ice and snow that the albatross appears, guiding the ship through the mists and clouds. The albatross is a spirit guide whose purpose is to lead souls safely through the mystical realms of imagination, ensuring they do not get lost. But the mariner, for no apparent reason, kills the albatross. He shows no emotion and has no remorse. Essentially, his soul has been iced over and his heart is frozen. It is a cold and senseless act that displays a

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complete disregard for all things divine and holy. This begins the ship's descent into horror and the darker realms of the imagination. It is only after the mariner begins to feel a sense of remorse that the ship begins to move again and the divine beings return to guide the ship safely to port. The rime that coated the mariner's heart is melted away when he realizes that his actions have consequence and that all living things, instilled with the divine spirit, are deserving of love and reverence. He reiterates this belief toward the end of the poem.

*He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.'*

It is a matter of speculation why the mariner chooses to recount his tale to the wedding guest? It's because the wedding guest is displaying the same coldness of heart that was in the mariner. The mariner sees this and chooses the guest. Likewise, the guest recognizes the mariner's past iciness resides within himself, which adds to the fear that he feels as the mariner unfolds his tale.

Lastly, the Mariner knows that unless he relives his experience through the retelling of his tale, he is at risk of returning to his cold, unfeeling state. The rime over one's heart and soul forms quickly and silently. It is only by exposing the darker regions of one's memory to the light that one can prevent the icing over of emotion.