

① What poetic genre does this poem belong to ? Justify (cf wks "a few poetic genre")

Help: pay attention to the rhymes, the rhythm (stressed/unstressed syllables) and the form (number of stanzas and lines)

*It is a ballad in so far as*

- it is a narrative poem which tells a story
- it consists of 4-line stanzas (quatrains)
- if we consider the rhythm, the quatrains alternate lines of 4 and 3 stresses (iambic rhythm: unstressed/stressed syllable) and lines 2 and 4 rhyme.

② Sum up in your own words what is happening in each stanza

*1<sup>st</sup> stanza: the poet introduces the setting and emphasizes the mariner's loneliness, hopelessness and moral distress as he is the only one to have survived the mysterious spell.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> stanza: the light is shed on the crew's corpses and on the disgusting image of the 'slimy things' that seems to crawl at the mariner's feet.*

*3<sup>rd</sup> stanza: we go a step further into the macabre with the gruesome description of the sea and the deck which are rotting as well as the dead men's bodies. It becomes unbearable for the narrator who has to look away as he can't face death/decay/decomposition anymore.*

*4<sup>th</sup> stanza: the marine turns to God and tries to pray looking for redemption but it is in vain. He won't escape the spell and he is doomed to suffer agony alone on his ship.*

*5<sup>th</sup> stanza: the tension culminates in a sort of climax as the narrator can't bear the situation anymore and seems to be overwhelmed by horror/ hopelessness/guilt. He wishes death could come and take him as well.*

③ List all the gothic elements you can find

Help: pay attention to the semantic fields!

a. concerning the setting and the atmosphere:

→ Semantic fields of **VASTNESS** ("wide wide sea"/ "the sky and the sea, the sea and the sky")/ **DECAY/DEGENERATION** : a crumbling ship ("the rotting sea" "the rotting deck") / **DEATH**: a rotting crew ("they all dead did lie" / "the dead men lay" "the dead were at my feet")

→ A macabre / gruesome atmosphere: images of the **GROTESQUE** (= abnormal and hideous visions)

→ **The blurring of borders /disruption of boundaries and limits**: 2<sup>d</sup> ST: life and death meet / 3<sup>rd</sup> ST: No limit to decay and degeneration with the image of the rotting of the bodies, the ship and the sea. / 4<sup>th</sup> ST: "gusht" vs "dust" evoking water vs "dryness" / 5<sup>th</sup> ST: the sea and the sky merge

b. concerning the mariner himself:

→ semantic field of the **PHYSICAL PAIN** of the narrator ("agony" "beating balls of his eyes...")  
+ of his **MENTAL SUFFERING** (loneliness + he cannot pray = guilt) + Of **RELIGION** ("a saint"  
"my soul" "heaven" "tried to pray" "a prayer")  
→ He goes through **EMOTIONAL EXTREMES** (cf 4<sup>TH</sup> ST)

#### ④ Focus on the narrative choice (cf wks "point of views")

a. From what point of view is the story told? Justify quoting from the text.

*The story is told through the eyes of the mariner. It is a first-person narrative.  
Cf use of the pronoun "I" + possessive determiner "my" - they often start or end a line!*

b. Does it add something to the reader's sensations? Explain.

*It is all the more frightening as the reader sees what the character can feel or see. He is actually in the same situation as the narrator so that he/she can identify with him.*

#### ④ Focus on the different stylistic devices/ literary techniques

a. List all the repetitions. What is their effect?

→ Repetitions: 1<sup>st</sup> ST: "alone", "wide" / 2<sup>nd</sup> ST: "thousand" / 3<sup>rd</sup> ST: "I looked upon", "rotting" /  
4<sup>th</sup> ST: "close(d)" / "the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky" (= a chiasmus = a criss-  
cross figure of speech)

→ Effect: they convey the anguish of the narrator, the feeling that his fate is inescapable,  
that he is trapped on the ship and that there is no way out. They may refer to the never-  
ending nightmarish visions of the mariner + his constant retelling of the tale.

→ Repetitions are typical of the traditional folk ballad.

b. Which other poetic devices can you find? (cf wks "Literary terms-poetry" + "poetic devices" quiz") - Give their names and quote examples in the poem.

→ **consonances**: "l" sound (l1) / "d" sound (l6), "b" sounds (l 18), "z" sound (l17)

→ **alliterations**: "w" sound (l2, l15), "m" sound (l5) "d" sound (l6, l16) "th" sound (l7) "k" sound  
(l17), "b" sound (l18), "s" sound (l19), "l" sound (l20)

→ **assonances**: "o" sound (l1) "e" sound (l12), "i" sound (l15), "ei" sound (l15)

"a" "o" and open vocalic sounds in the 1<sup>st</sup> ST.

c. What is the effect produced? Develop as much as you can.

#### **ALLITERATIONS AND CONSONANCES**

= They create a sing-sing effect in the poem and mark the language as musical so that the ear  
will tend to pay special attention to the alliterated syllables;

= it gives a sense of continuity and fluidity to the verse = may refer to the never-ending  
nightmarish visions of the narrator + the constant retelling of the tale

**ASSONANCES (open vocalic sounds):** they produce a moaning effect and thus reveal the  
narrator's attitude and state of mind. They complement/ emphasise the message and create a mood.

### ⑤ Focus on the second stanza.

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

↓  
= A CAESURA

↘  
= A RUN-ON LINE  
AN ENJAMBMENT

- Which two groups are opposed (Dichotomy) and how is it conveyed ?
- What does the metaphor "slimy things" stand for? Which feeling is conveyed by the stylistic device used by the end of line 3?
- Which feelings does it emphasize as far as the narrator is concerned?

-In the second stanza two groups are opposed: There is a **dichotomy (that is to say a division into two opposing parts)** with on the one side "the crew" referred to in the text as "the many men, so beautiful" who are dead and lying on the deck of the ship and on the other side the mariner and narrator "I" (14) who is the only survivor together with "a thousand slimy things" (13).

The dichotomy is clearly marked in the text by the use of the colon (: ) and the semi-colon (; ) which visually separate the mariner from his crew.

- "Slimy things" is a **metaphor**. These "slimy things" may stand for/ represent worms and thus refer to death and the decay of the sailors' corpses. They may also refer to the multi-legged marine creatures or sea animals later described by the narrator in the poem - another **vivid gothic visual fantasy!**

The **run-on-line (or enjambment)** suggests that once again there is a disruption of limits; it looks as if the marine creatures were overflowing onto the ship or as if the corpses were overflowing with worms... (cf: **images of the Grotesque (gruesome, macabre, abnormal and hideous vision)**)

-It emphasizes the narrator's feeling of horror and loneliness: he can't cope with the situation any longer. He is overwhelmed by horror and despair as death is slowly reaching him. (cf 5<sup>th</sup> stanza)

### ⑥ To what extent can the poem be read as a Christian parable?

-What may the albatross, the old mariner and the dead albatross around the mariner's neck stand for?

This extract can be read as a Christian parable/allegory. Christianity preaches that life is a trial by which we either pass and go to heaven, or fail.

In this poem the mariner goes through a trial of storms and fails by killing the Albatross (God's creature) which helped him.

As a consequence, he is punished for his sin and feels cut off from God (he can't pray), from redemption and from the natural universe which seems alien and ugly to him. This is the consequence of his guilt/remorse symbolized by the dead albatross hanging around his neck.

- the Albatross may stand for God/ God's creation
- the old mariner can be seen as the archetype of the sinner
- the dead albatross symbolizes guilt.

⑦ Look for more information about S.T Coleridge. What may his poem mirror?