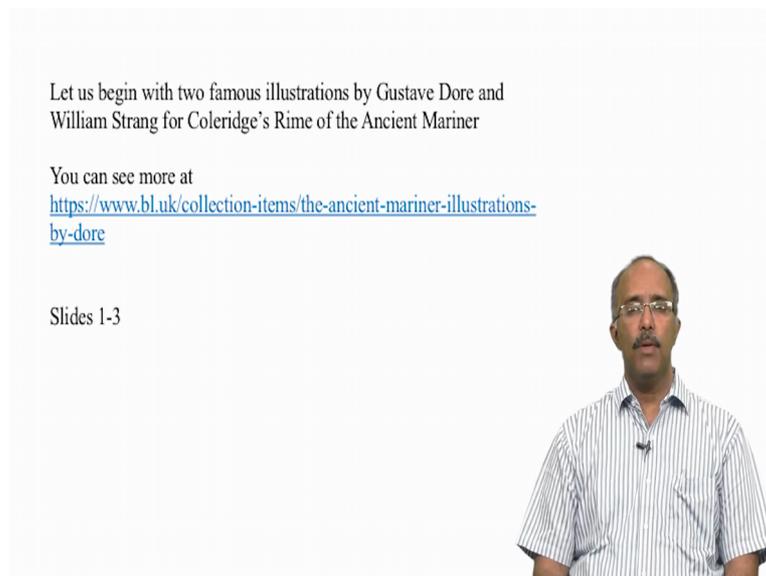


**English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832**  
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**Department of English**  
**English Romantic poetry 2: Nature, the Environment and Ecology Coleridge**

Hello everybody, welcome to the lesson for the English Romantic writers 1798 to 1832. After having looked at the background to the study of nature and environment and ecology Wordsworth we shall today move onto the other major writer of the 1<sup>st</sup> half of Romantic writers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

(Refer Slide Time: 0:37)



We will begin with 2 famous illustrations by Gustave Dore and William Strang for what is arguably Coleridge's most famous poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". For those of you who are interested you can explore more of the images from this 1st edition of the text from the British library collection on the Rime of the ancient mariners illustrations, but here are a couple of slides.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:00)



The mariner up on the mast in a storm

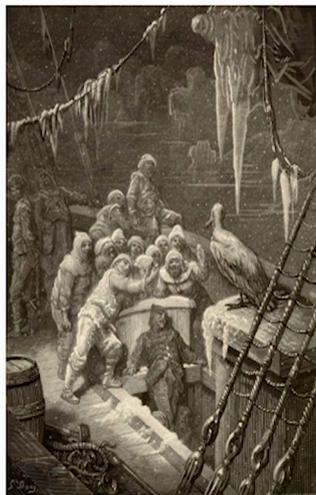


Let us begin with two famous illustrations by Gustave Dore and William Strang for Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner

You can see more at

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-ancient-mariner-illustrations-by-dore>

Slides 1-3

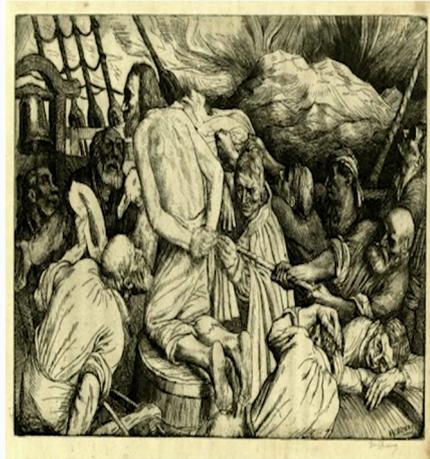


[The Albatross](#)



The Mariner up on the mast in a storm, then the image of the famous bird the Albatross who in many ways responsible for what goes wrong with the ship and the Mariner.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:15)



The Albatross about my Neck was Hung," etching by [William Strang](#) (1896)



And finally the albatross that has been hung around the neck of the ancient mariner by the other sailors because the mariner had just shot the albatross and ever since the shooting and the death of the albatross, the things begin to go very badly wrong for the mariners and the ship itself, so William Strang's illustration dating back to the 1896 uh edition of the book shows this event. So, as we know the Coleridge poem the Rime of the ancient Mariner deals with a kind of punishment meted out to the ancient Mariner and people on the ship for them violated fundamental principle of nature taking life.

(Refer Slide Time: 2:01)

'Nature', in Coleridge, is always seen in terms of its connections and interpenetration with the mind. It is a part of his inner landscape as much as it is an external 'thing'. In this he is exactly at the heart of the Romantic movement which saw the poet's consciousness as shaped by and in Nature. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his lines from 'The Eolian Harp', one of the famous 'Conversation Poems':

Slide 4



Nature in Coleridge is always seen in terms of its collection and interpenetration with the mind. It is a part of inner landscape as much as it is an external thing. So in this stance, he is almost exactly the same as Wordsworth and both of them are at the heart of the Romantic movement which saw the poets consciousness as shaped by and within nature. An excellent illustration of this position and attitude towards natural is seen in Coleridge's lines from "The Eolian Harp" one of the more famous conversation poems, it is coming up now on your slide.

(Refer Slide Time: 2:38)

And what if all of animated nature  
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,  
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

A man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a light blue and white striped short-sleeved shirt, stands to the right of a white rectangular slide. The slide contains five lines of poetry in a black serif font.

And what if all of animated nature be but organic harps diversely framed, that Tremble into the thought as o'er er them sweeps, plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze, at once the soul of each, and of God of all?

(Refer Slide Time: 2:54)

Coleridge would use a similar image of  
Nature stimulating the harp of the  
mind/imagination again in 'The Nightingale'  
and 'Frost at Midnight'

Slide 5

A man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a light blue and white striped short-sleeved shirt, stands to the right of a white rectangular slide. The slide contains three lines of text in a black serif font and the text "Slide 5" in a smaller black sans-serif font.

College would use a similar image of nature simulating the harp of the mind or the harp of the imagination in the “Nightingale” and “Frost at midnight”, two other famous poems, now coming up on your slide excerpts from both of these poems.

(Refer Slide Time: 3:09)

earth and sky  
With one sensation, and those wakeful birds  
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,  
As if some sudden gale had swept at once  
A hundred airy harps! ('The Nightingale')

The Frost performs its secret ministry...  
Sea, hill, and wood, This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,  
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature  
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,  
Making it a companionable form,  
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit  
By its own moods interprets, every where  
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,  
And makes a toy of Thought.  
(‘Frost at Midnight’)



In the Nightingale Coleridge would write, or and sky with one sensation, and those wakeful birds have all but pursed 4<sup>th</sup> in choral minstrelsy as if some sudden gain had swept at once, a hundred airy harps that is from the Nightingale. Moving onto the other instance on your slide Frost at midnight Coleridge writes, the Frost performs its secret ministry... sea, Hill and wood. This populous village sea and hill and wood. Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature gives it dims sympathies with me who live, making it the companionable form, whose puny flaps and freaks the idling spirit by its own moods interprets, everywhere echo or mirror seeking of itself, and makes a toy of thought.

(Refer Slide Time: 4:06)

Nature embodies a companionship for the active mind, suggests STC.

For Coleridge, the perceiving and imagining mind searches for images of itself and God in Nature. In Coleridge, the entire universe could be creative, as God works through a shaping nature. Hence many Coleridge poems begin with the poet in a state of quiet meditation, ready to receive or receiving sensations from nature.

The image of Nature as a temple is perhaps best seen in 'This Lime-tree Bower, My prison' where Coleridge would speak of

The many-steeped tract magnificent / Of hilly fields and meadows.'



Nature embodies for Coleridge of companionship for the active mind. For Coleridge, the perceiving and imagining mind searches for images of itself and of God in nature. So the entire universe could then be deemed to be creative at God works through a shaping nature. Hence many Coleridge poems began with the poet in a state of quiet meditation in a reflective posture ready to receive or receiving sensations from nature that is there is an image of the poet quite relaxed but ready to receive inspiration from nature. The image of nature as something that provides inspiration of course as we know is something that we have seen in the work of Wordsworth's most famous in the (())(4:56).

So Coleridge actually at one point with Wordsworth in this where nature is something that generalises all sorts of inspirational material into the receptive mind. Now what you need to understand here is, it is not any or every mind that receives these, it is a certain kind of mind that is receptive to uh the images and instructions from nature, so that is one. The other is the image of nature as a temple, this is perhaps best seen in uh famous Coleridge poem "This Lime tree Bower, My prison". Having looked that the image of nature as something that inspires, we now move onto the 2<sup>nd</sup> instance of the image of nature as a temple. Coleridge would speak here of the many steeped tract magnificent of hilly fields and meadows it may be that sort again. The many steeped tract magnificent of hilly fields and meadows.

(Refer Slide Time: 5:55)

What was at the beginning of the poem, a prison,  
Coleridge's poet discovers at the end, is actually the  
source of imagination and sensation:

Slide 6



In this particular poem “This lime tree Bower, my prison” what was at the beginning of the poem represents Coleridge poet discovers at the end is actually the source of imagination and sensation. That is the poem begins with an image of something trust of a big imprisoning uh limiting but towards the end of the poem this precise situation is what enables him to imagine. Coming up on your slide next another excerpt from “This lime tree Bower, my prison” please read that carefully.

(Refer Slide Time: 6:25)

A delight  
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad  
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,  
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark'd  
Much that has sooth'd me. Pale beneath the blaze  
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd  
Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see  
The shadow of the leaf and stem above  
Dappling its sunshine! And that walnut-tree  
Was richly ting'd, and a deep radiance lay  
Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps  
Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass  
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue  
Through the late twilight.



A delight comes sudden on my heart and I am glad as I myself were there. Nor in this bower, this little lime tree bower have I not marked much that has soothed me. Pale beneath the blaze hung the transparent foliage, and I watched some broad and sunny leaves, and loved to see

the shadow of the leaf and stem above that playing its sunshine. And that walnut tree was richly tinged, and a deep radiance lay full on the ancient ivy, which usurps those fronting elms, and now with blackest mass makes there that branches gleam a lighter hue through the late twilight.

So what we have seen in these 2 examples is Coleridge's view of nature as channeling something into the consciousness of the writer, the receptive quiet mind which receives instructions, inspirations, images, whatever you want to call it from nature. In fact has Wordsworth already argued and Coleridge is (( ))(7:26) the poetic consciousness is at one with nature, so the soul that run through me as Wordsworth would (( ))(7:33) the soul that is mind has a poet comes actually from nature.

(Refer Slide Time: 7:41)

But Coleridge was not entirely happy with this image of Nature mainly because it suggested that the poet's mind is a passive object that Nature animates. He would later reformulate the view of Nature so that the mind would have a More active role.

We see this shift in 'Frost at Midnight'. He prays that his son will be able to :

see and hear  
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters



But Coleridge was not entirely happy with this image with this approach to nature primarily because of the problem he discovered. The idea that natural funnels channelizes things into the poetic mind seems to suggest that the poet's mind is a passive object, the poetic mind is just that exist, and for it to actually live for it to actually become imaginative or creative, it has to have nature animating it. In other words, Coleridge is arguing that if you think of the poet's mind is merely passive there is actually a death kind of mind, nature animates the mind. He would later therefore because of this particular inconvenient sound that crossed his mind, he would later reformulate this view of nature so that the mind has to have a more active role.

In fact we notice this shift in “Frost at midnight” itself, because he will pray that his son will be able to see and hear, the lovely shape and sounds intelligible of that eternal language which thy God Utters. That the son will be quote see and hear the lovely shapes and sounds intelligible of that eternal language with thy God utters.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:10)

Nature here is God’s language, but the mind needs to find meaning, make it intelligible, says Coleridge. More than anything else, it is the potential loss of this ability to understand Nature that Coleridge documents. That is, Coleridge wonders whether the poet’s mind can always understand Nature’s language.

A poem that most forcefully ponders this question, this crisis of the loss of the mind’s ability to read Nature is perhaps ‘Dejection: An ode’, where Coleridge opens with the hope that he will read Nature and then shifts the theme. He prays:

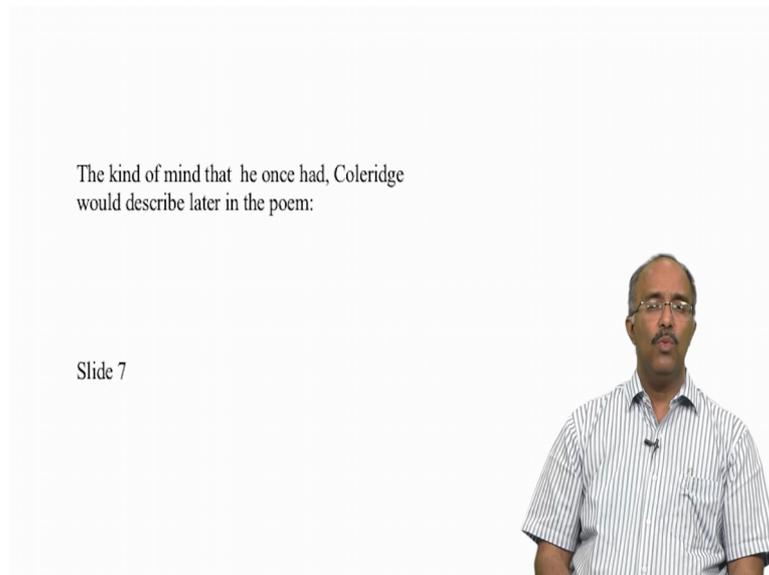
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,  
And sent my soul abroad,  
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,  
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!



Nature here is God’s language, but as Coleridge underscores, the mind needs to find meaning make it intelligible. So you see what Coleridge is doing is to say that there is nature then there is a mind but the mind is not a passive recipient, the mind has to recipient and find meaning. More than anything else it is this that features prominently in the later uh thoughts of Coleridge. Now Coleridge worries that the loss of this ability to understand to make meaning of nature is something that Coleridge is really anxious about. So Coleridge wonders whether the poet’s mind can always understand nature’s language, what if at some point you cannot?

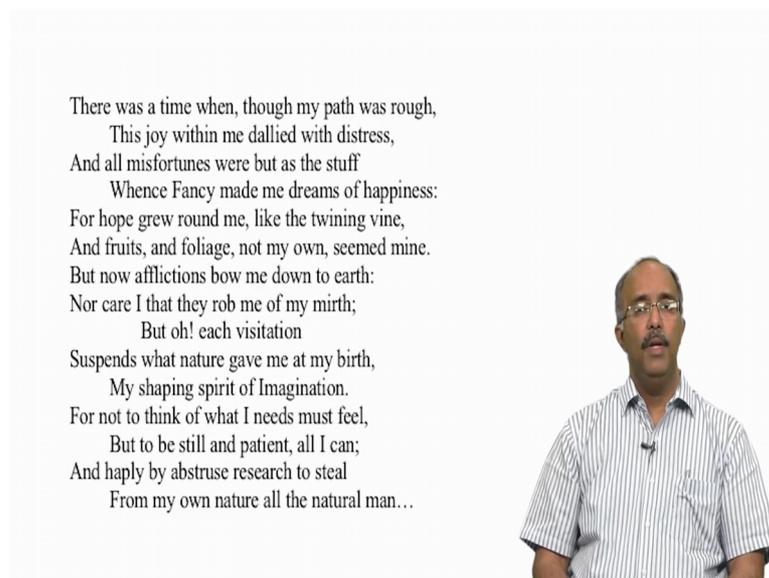
A poem that most forcefully ponders discussion, this crisis of the loss of the mind’s ability to read nature is perhaps “Dejection An ode” one of Coleridge most famous poems. Coleridge opens with the hope that he will read natural and then shift the theme. He prays, those sounds which have raised me, whilst they all awed and sent my soul abroad, might now perhaps their wonted impulse give, might startle this dull pain and make it move and live.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:29)



So the kind of mind that he once had Coleridge says which is now lost, he would describe later in the poet coming up in the Slide now.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:38)



There was a time when though my path was rough this joy within me dallied with distress, and all misfortunes were but as the stuff whence fancy made me dreams of happiness: for hope grew around me, like the twining vine, and fruits and foliage, not my own, seemed mine. But now afflictions bow me down-to-earth: not care I that they rob me of mirth; but oh each visitation suspends what nature gave me at my birth, my Shaping spirit of imagination. For not to think what I needs must feel, but to be still and patient all I can; and haply by abstruse research to steal from my own nature all the natural man.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:27)

But the ability, the 'shaping spirit of Imagination', as he puts it, has disappeared, and Coleridge's poet finds himself unable to make sense of the Nature around him. This results in:  
A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,  
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,  
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,  
In word, or sigh, or tear—



So the inability what he calls the “Shaping spirit of imagination” has disappeared. So please understand what he is talking about, initially he said the mind the poetic mind is a passive object which receives material from nature but he moves this argument away from this position to make a suggestion that the mind is actually active, it shapes whatever it is coming to it, it shapes meaning out of the universe, but what if this shaping spirit of imagination disappears? And Coleridge poet finds himself unable to make sense of the natural around him. This results in what he will describe in “Dijection an ode”. A quote “a grief without a pang, void, dark and drear, a stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief, which finds no natural outlet, no relief, in word or sigh or tear.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:26)

The eye cannot see just as the mind cannot comprehend what he sees:

Have I been gazing on the western sky,  
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:  
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!

.....

I see them all so excellently fair,  
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

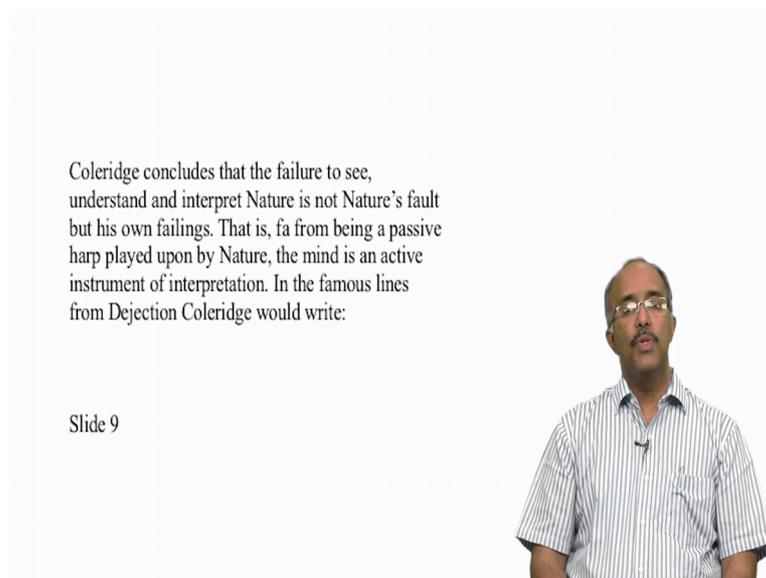
Then Coleridge comes to his famous conclusion about the roles of mind and Nature:

Slide 8



So the eye cannot see just as the mind cannot comprehend what he sees as he put it, have I been gazing on the western sky and its peculiar tint of yellow green: and still high gaze and this is the problem and still I gaze and with how blank an eye. So Coleridge has lost the ability to imagine, has lost the ability to see poetically so that is why he is saying I gaze, I fixed my eye upon the nature here and there but my eye is actually blank, this is the loss of meaning making that I am unable to make sense of the nature I perceive around me. Coleridge then comes to the famous conclusion about the roles of mind and nature coming up on your Slide now. I may not hope from outward forms to win I may not hope from outward forms to win the passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:26)



Coleridge concludes that the failure to see, understand and interpret Nature is not Nature's fault but his own failings. That is, far from being a passive harp played upon by Nature, the mind is an active instrument of interpretation. In the famous lines from Dejection Coleridge would write:

Slide 9

Coleridge concludes that the failure to see, understand and interpret nature is not nature's fault but it is his own failings, his own lack that results in this problem. So far from being a passive harp played upon by nature, the mind is an activist and of interpretation. In the famous line from dejection, Coleridge would write which you will in the slide now.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:50)

O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does nature live:  
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!  
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,  
Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,  
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
Enveloping the Earth –  
And from the soul itself must there be sent  
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,  
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!



I lady we receive but what we give, and in our life alone does nature live. Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud and would be aught behold of higher worth then that animates cold world allowed to the poor loveless or ever anxious crowd or a light , or glory, fair, luminous cloud enveloping the earth. And he concludes by saying; of all sweet sounds the life and the element.

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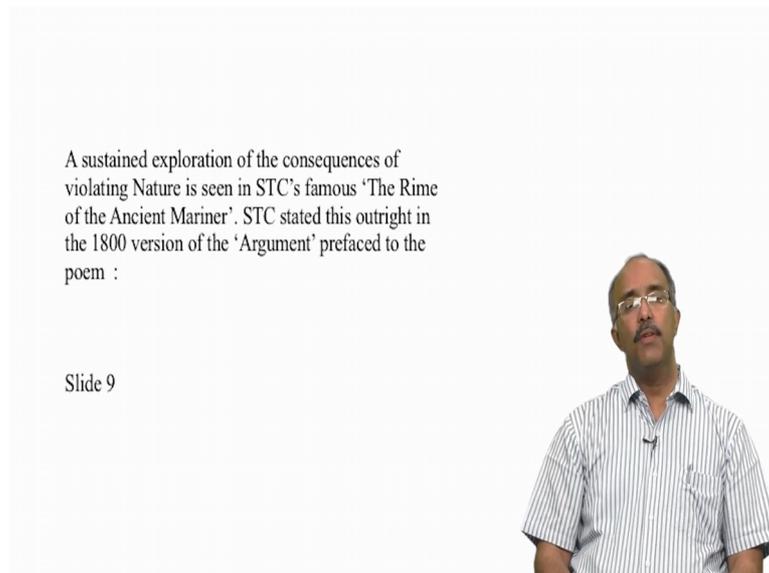
It is the active mind that constructs the world,  
imagines it. And if the mind cannot do so, Nature  
cannot help in the matter. The soul or mind must  
possess its proper joy or nature will be mere matter.  
However, in poems like 'Fears in Solitude', the  
strife of politics and the strife in Nature seem to  
merge, or at least reflect each other :  
What uproar and what strife may now be stirring  
This way or that way o'er these silent hills –  
And undetermined conflict. . .



It is active minded constructs the world, imagines it creates it. And if the mind cannot do so, nature cannot help So Coleridge is not giving nature that kind of privacy that you expect him to. What instead he is doing is, nature is fine, nature is wonderful, nature is inspirational, nature is a teacher, but for nature to be effective it requires a particular kind of mind which is

active. In poems like “Fears in solitude” the strife of politics and the strife in nature seem to merge or at least reflect each other. What he would say is; what uproar and what strife may now be stirring this way or that way over these silent hills and undermine conflict...

(Refer Slide Time: 15:10)



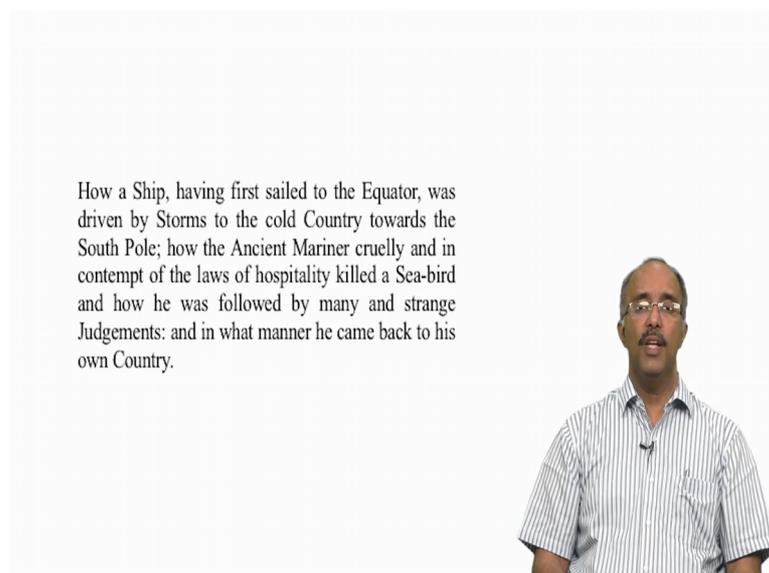
A sustained exploration of the consequences of violating Nature is seen in STC's famous 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. STC stated this outright in the 1800 version of the 'Argument' prefaced to the poem :

Slide 9



A sustained exploration of the consequences of violating nature is of course there in “the Rime of the ancient Mariner”. Coming up on your Slide is the preface that kind of argument to the ancient manner to which the Coleridge wrote.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:28)



How a Ship, having first sailed to the Equator, was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how the Ancient Mariner cruelly and in contempt of the laws of hospitality killed a Sea-bird and how he was followed by many and strange Judgements: and in what manner he came back to his own Country.



How a ship having 1<sup>st</sup> sailed to the equator was driven by storms to the cold country towards the South Pole, how the ancient mariners cruelly and in contempt of the laws the hospitality

killed a seabird and how he was followed by many and strange judgements; and what minor he came back to his own country.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:43)

The poem's key theme is about a crime against nature, punished by the laws of Nature, with restoration and reformation following repentance in the form of an appreciation of Nature (but with supernatural aid). He violates Nature, and is punished for it. But he also violates Nature in other ways: 'in touching his nephew's living corpse, the mariner violates another taboo – that which separates the living from the dead. Later, Coleridge suggested that it is the mariner's violation of this taboo that makes him an object of terrified and superstitious awe' (Fulford).

Nature punishes, in the sailors' superstition by stopping all wind that aid the ship. The sailors are dying of thirst in the middle of so much water. Redemption comes when the Mariner comes to admire and appreciate Nature. What he perceived as 'slimy things' (l. 121) become 'happy living things' (l. 274). The Mariner recognises a joy implicit within natural appearances appears to mark a saving transition from the ghostly haunting so that he can now perform his penances.



The poem's key theme is about a crime against nature, punished by the laws of nature with restoration and reformation following repentance in the form of an appreciation of nature but with super natural aid of course. The ancient mariner violets nature and is punished for it, but he also violates nature in other ways as you perhaps know because it is one of the most androgynous poems in history. In touching his nephew's living corpses, the mariner violates another taboo that which separates the living from the dead. Later, Coleridge suggested that Mariner's violation of the taboo that makes him an object of terrified and superstitious awe, this is Tim Fulford (16:24) Nature punishes in the sailor superstition by stopping all wind that aid the ship so sailors are dying of thirst (16:36)

(Refer Slide Time: 16:38)

However, the political subtext to the poem's depiction of this Man versus nature theme is a very interesting one.

First, the albatross also became synonymous with bad luck, although many forget why this is the case or exactly how such ill fortune comes about. The albatross is the iconic bird of the southern hemisphere oceans – and this locates the poem's political geography firmly in the global south.

For noted Coleridge scholar, Lucy Newlyn, the poem 'although not explicitly a political poem, arose from Coleridge's radical opposition to slavery, and it makes his readers aware of their fatal attraction to the powerful, makes them 'share the terror, desperation, and desire of a man enslaved, in mind and body'. In fact, much of this poem's imagery draws upon STC's lectures against slavery. Tim Fulford has noted:



However, the political subtext to the poems depiction of this man versus nature theme is very interesting. 1<sup>st</sup>, the albatross also became synonymous with bad luck, although many forget why this is the case or exactly how such ill fortune comes about it. The albatross is the iconic bird of the southern hemispheric oceans and this locates the poem's political geography firmly in the global South. For noted Coleridge Collar, Lucy Newlyn, the poem quote although not explicitly a political poem, arose from Coleridge's radical opposition to slavery that is important. So the subtext to the poem is Coleridge's opposition to slavery, it makes the reader aware of the fatal attraction to the powerful, makes them quote share the terror desperation and desire of a man enslaved and body. In fact, much of this poem's imagery draws upon Coleridge's lectures and lectures against slavery as Tim FulFord has noted.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:47)

In 'The Rime', he returns to the images of infection he had used in that lecture: the mariner, like a sailor on a slave-ship bound for the West Indies, enters a zone where all becomes tainted with the diseases of empire. Leprosy rots the flesh of the spectre-woman who dices for the crew's lives. And the corruption spreads to the sea itself: 'the very deeps did rot' (l. 119). In the mariner's tale, the whole world becomes infected by the events and images that show him his moral guilt.



In "The rime" the mariner returns to the images of infection he has used in uh that is Coleridge returns to the images of infection he had used in the lecture against slavery. The mariner like a sailor on a slave bound ship for the West Indies enters a zone where all everything becomes tainted with diseases of empire. Leprosy rots is the flesh of the Spectre-woman who of course dies. And it is not very certain what the man actually I mean the ancient mariner suffers from.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:18)

Newlyn writes:

a sea voyage into unknown areas forms an outward dramatisation of the inward conditions that, in Coleridge's diagnosis, produced superstition. The mariner journeys beyond the limits of geographic knowledge, where he finds himself helpless before powers and events over which he has no control. The further he penetrates into a physical *terra incognita*, a place of green ice and red ocean, the more he discovers his own powerlessness. On an ocean that is like 'a Slave before his Lord' (419),<sup>4</sup> he too is controlled by forces he cannot understand or resist.



Newlyn writes, a sea voyage there is a sea voyage into unknown areas which forms an outward dramatisation of inward conditions that in Coleridge diagnosis produced superstition. As moving away from Newlyn, it is partially driven by the moral dimension of

what he has done that causes guilt in the ancient mariner. I continue with the Newlyn quote; the mariner's journey is beyond the limit of geographical exploration and geographical knowledge, he finds himself helpless before powers over which he has no control. Then of course he permeates penetrates into a physical terra incognita, a place of green and red. So what is it that we take away from this particular lesson on Coleridge? Coleridge began by thinking in terms of nature acting upon a passive mind playing it like a harp and harp becomes Coleridge's best metaphor.

But he was little unhappy about that image because it rendered the poet or the poetry mind a little passive and it is just a quiet recipient. So he modifies it by saying that within ourselves the nature lives so we need to do something as well. Finally when you look at the Rime of the ancient mariner, a crime against nature is not to be seen as trivial and nature herself will punish the person for it, thank you.