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Sent: Wednesday, February 22, 2006 6:25 PM
To: English 232 List
Subject: Discussion questions for 2/23

Discussion questions for "Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

1. Wordsworth says in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads that he includes the poems of his friend [Coleridge] for "variety" and because of the similarity of their ideas about poetry (574). How can we see a similar poetic sensibility at work in Wordsworth and Coleridge? How do they differ?
2. Reading Wordsworth's Preface, one gets the impression that he and Coleridge were interested in introducing a new kind of poetry. Despite its reliance on archaism as a technique, what about Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" might have struck contemporary readers as new or experimental?
3. Sonmez's article is useful for what it tells us about the techniques of the poem, but it stops short of offering an interpretation of the poem's meaning. Besides using archaisms to shroud his poem in the mists of time and give it an arcane cachet, what else is Coleridge "up to" in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner?"
Is it a merely a supernatural allegory about guilt and redemption? What other interpretations seem plausible? (Besides Iron Maiden's.)

Annotated Bibliography

M. J.-M. Sonmez. 'Archaisms in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"', Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text 9 (Dec. 2002). Online: Internet (2/14/06):

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc09_n02.html>.

In "Archaisms in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', " Margaret Sonmez traces Coleridge's deliberate use of various stylistic devices to evoke the past. She outlines all of these techniques (collectively called archaisms), which include: the use of "old fashioned vocabulary" or outdated verb endings; historical references; the genre an author or poet writes in; as well as "surrounding paraphernalia," most notably Coleridge's addition of a gloss in the 1817 version. Sonmez carefully traces and analyzes Coleridge's use all of these techniques as they evolve over the first five printed versions of the poem. Responding to initial criticism of the poem, she argues, Coleridge revised the work to eliminate some of the more awkward archaisms, but in the process, he added additional sources of archaism and made them even more evocative of a distant, mythical past. This effective use of archaism, she further asserts, has a number of additional effects, including its ability to obscure the author's role in its creation, which lends the written poem an air of authority normally connected with received legends arising from an oral tradition.