

THE ANCIENT MARINER VISITS WASHINGTON DC
or
POET'S NIGHTMARE COMES TRUE.

There's something about this poem of Coleridge's (and Gustave Dore's haunting illustrations) that reminds me of our time and place; so I imagined the Mariner becalmed in the Swamp. The atmosphere and weird imagery seem to fit well, and I'll leave it to your imagination to identify the albatross and the dead men on deck, there are several possibilities that might serve.

"Water, water every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

...
Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

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

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust."

To those who don't know the story, the Ancient Mariner is a Jacob Marley type compelled to repeat his history of 'living-death' to an unwilling (but in desperate need of warning) young wedding guest. Happily, the Mariner's tale has an upbeat ending. There is a bit of the Ancient Mariner's tale in both Scrooge's story and Groundhog Day. It is interesting to note that the Mariner has to force the wedding guest to listen. Ancient mariners of today still face the same problem. Warnings are often unwanted and resented, and the messenger sometimes killed. But who is the one with greater love, or I should say true love, those who accept abuse to warn others about the danger of their course, or those who feign love and bid them *bon voyage* on a foredoomed cruise. That's just a random thought that came to me in reading this; thanks for being my 'wedding guest'.

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

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

