The Kraken

POEM TEXT

Below the thunders of the upper deep,
Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea,
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
About his shadowy sides; above him swell
Huge sponges of millennial growth and height;
And far away into the sickly light,
From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
Unnumbered and enormous polypi
Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.
There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep,
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by man and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

SUMMARY

The poem opens with a description of a place that is even lower than the powerful waters of the ocean's initial depths, a place deep in the terrible abyss of the sea. It is in these depths that, without dreams or interruption, the Kraken slumbers in his long sleep. Dim rays of sun barely reach this far down in the ocean, where they fail to illuminate the Kraken's dark shape. In the waters above the monster there are large sea sponges that have been growing for thousands of years. And far from the Kraken's body in the ocean's weak light, emerging from multiple little caves, many giant jellyfish-like creatures churn the water with their large tentacles. The Kraken has remained in the depths of the ocean for a very long time and will continue to inhabit the deep, sustaining himself by eating large eels while sleeping—until, that is, the world is consumed by fire and even the lowest points of the ocean begin to heat, at which point humans and angels will finally catch a single glimpse of the Kraken as he raucously rises to the surface of the ocean to die.

THEMES

THE EERINESS OF THE UNKNOWN

"The Kraken" explores the unsettling nature of the unknown. Describing the depths of the ocean, the poem presents an otherworldly setting that not only seems foreign and strange, but also untouched by humankind. As if this remote setting weren't enough to make readers feel estranged from their own world, the poem primarily focuses on the Kraken, a mythological sea monster shrouded in mystery and fear. The idea of the Kraken lurking in the deepest reaches of the ocean adds to the eeriness of the poem, underscoring just how disquieting it can be to contemplate the unknown.

Before the poem even introduces the Kraken, it demonstrates that some parts of the world are largely unfamiliar to human beings. The first line suggests that the poem is set beyond the "upper deep" of the ocean, thereby implying that there are depths even *lower* than what people normally think of when they hear the word "deep." Playing on this notion, these seemingly bottomless parts of the ocean are referred to as "abysmal," a word that denotes extreme depth but also describes something terrible or appalling. In turn, the world of the deep sea takes on a frightening, foreboding aspect, and this helps establish the remote setting of the Kraken's home as a mysterious, chilling place.

It is in this otherworldly context that the Kraken dwells in an "uninvaded sleep," completely uninfluenced by the outside world. Given that the Kraken is a sea monster that often appears in ancient folklore, the sense of mystery surrounding the mythical beast is quite strong, and the poem emphasizes the monster's ominous qualities by describing it in vivid terms. Indeed, the Kraken is presented in the poem as a giant creature who has "shadowy sides" and eats "enormous" squid-like animals as they sweep through the dark waters of the abyss. As such, it becomes clear that the Kraken not only exists in a context unknown to humans, but is itself a ghastly, uncanny being.

At the same time, though, it's worth noting that the only thing the Kraken actually does in this poem is sleep and eat "sea worms." In truth, there is nothing inherently terrifying about either of these actions. And yet, the Kraken still seems like a terrifying creature because it exists out of sight, dwelling in the farthest depths of the ocean. In keeping with this, there is something ominous about the idea of an enigmatic creature lurking in a dark, unfamiliar location that remains untouched my humankind. It is this very lack of familiarity, then, that makes the Kraken so frightening, ultimately suggesting that humans are easily unsettled by the unknown.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-15

HISTORY AND END TIMES

As a poem, "The Kraken" isn't just interested in mining the depths of the ocean, but of history, too. This is made evident by the fact that the Kraken itself is an ancient creature, one that has figured prominently into legends and myths for hundreds of years. In keeping with this, the poem depicts the Kraken as something that has seemingly always been in existence—something as old and elemental as the earth itself.

In this way, the Kraken is a constant (albeit unseen and ominous) presence in the world, and the only thing that will end its time on earth is—apparently—some kind of Biblical reckoning that will finally drive the monster to the surface of the ocean. Under this interpretation, the Kraken's death will coincide with the end of the world as humanity knows it. Accordingly, it becomes clear that even the most ancient and enduring creatures will not survive in this world forever.

The language used in reference to the Kraken alerts readers to the rich history of the monster's existence. The speaker describes the creature as sleeping an "ancient, dreamless" sleep, one that has gone uninterrupted for a very long time. In fact, the Kraken is so old that the sea sponges around it have grown to "millennial" heights, meaning that they've been growing for thousands of years. What's more, the poem suggests that the Kraken has "lain for ages" in the dark reaches of the ocean, sleeping all the while. That the monster is asleep is particularly noteworthy, as it depicts the Kraken's resting state as consistent and unchanging. In turn, the sea monster comes to represent a certain constancy in the world, even if its presence is also frightening and dangerous.

However, the last three lines of the poem uphold that there will come a day when the Kraken's steady slumber will end. Indeed, the speaker says the Kraken will continue to sleep "until the latter fire shall heat the deep." The image of fire consuming the seas suggests that there will be some kind of reckoning—perhaps religious, perhaps political—that will fundamentally change the world.

Having said that, though, the poem doesn't provide quite enough information to fully contextualize or interpret this line as a reference to any specific religious or political belief. The only thing readers know for sure is that an event with religious overtones will take place and that it will be significant enough to not only drive the Kraken from the depths of the sea, but also kill the creature once it reaches the surface. In this way, the poem implies that, just as the ancient Kraken will eventually die, so too will the world as we know it someday come to an end.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Lines 3-4
- Lines 5-6
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 13-15

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

Below the thunders of the upper deep,
Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea,

These first two lines establish the setting of the poem, describing an extraordinarily deep part of the ocean. The reference to the "upper deep" in line 1 is especially important because it suggests that there are varying degrees of depth in the ocean itself. In other words, it's not enough to say that the ocean is simply "deep." As such, the speaker makes a distinction between the "upper deep" and areas that are even farther down. To that end, the "upper deep" is most likely what comes to mind for most people when they think about the immediate depths of the ocean, which is the oceanic layer in which the most familiar marine animals live.

"The Kraken," however, takes place below these somewhat familiar depths, plunging deep into the "abysmal sea." The word "abysmal" is particularly noteworthy, since it can either mean terrible and appalling *or* extraordinarily deep. Indeed, the word derives from the "abyss," which refers to endless, void-like chasms. Because "abysmal" can be interpreted both ways, then, the word not only helps the speaker describe just how deep these waters are, but also allows the speaker to associate these depths with an ominous, foreboding quality. In this way, readers feel as though they are being drawn down into an unsettling and remote place, sinking past the familiar and into the unknown.

There is also a muscular sound to these opening lines, which are subtly consonant. For instance, the /b/, /p/, and /r/ sounds work their way throughout both lines:

Below the thunders of the upper deep,
Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea

None of these instances of consonance jump out at readers right away, but their presence in these lines is prominently felt, giving the entire opening a strong sound that aligns with the imagery of the thunderous ocean waters. In this sense, the consonance emboldens the beginning of the poem, giving it a power reminiscent of the low rushing sound that would accompany the act of plunging into the "abysmal sea."

LINES 3-5

His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee

About his shadowy sides;

Having established that the poem takes place far down in the lowest depths of the ocean, the speaker now focuses on the subject of the poem: the Kraken. Interestingly enough, though, the Kraken itself isn't actually mentioned until the fourth line. This is because the third line focuses on the nature of the Kraken's *sleep*, clarifying that the monster enjoys not only an uninterrupted and "dreamless" slumber, but also one that has lasted for quite a long time.

Indeed, the Kraken sleeps an "ancient" sleep, suggesting that it has maintained a consistent life in the depths of the ocean for generations. In a way, then, the monster comes to seem as old and enduring as the earth itself, and it is perhaps in an effort to reflect this sense of patient longevity that the speaker waits until the fourth line to directly mention the Kraken. Because the official introduction of the poem's subject is so delayed, readers will most likely feel a sense of anticipation that aligns with the poem's later assertion that the Kraken will eventually be driven from the bottom of the sea by an apocalyptic event.

Having finally mentioned the Kraken, the poem once more focuses on the monster's surrounding environment. The caesura in the middle of line 4 creates a pause, after which the speaker reverts to observations about the shadowy depths of the ocean, asserting that only the "faintest" rays of light shine this far down. These dim rays aren't enough to illuminate the Kraken's dark body, and in fact "flee" from the monster. This personification of the sunlight adds to the poem's ominousness, presenting the Kraken as so frightening that even sunlight itself hides from it.

All the while, sibilance works through these lines. The lines include many clear /s/ sounds, as well as /z/, /sh/, /f/, and /th/ sounds (which also fall under the umbrella of sibilance in broader definitions of the term):

> His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
> The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
> About his shadowy sides

Sibilance is often associated with whispering or even a threatening hissing sound. This, in turn, evokes the creepy silence and stillness surrounding the monster far below the surface.

By this point in the poem, the poem's meter and initial rhyme scheme are clear. The meter is iambic pentameter, meaning there are five iambs—poetic feet with an unstressed-stressed beat pattern— per line. Take lines 3 and 4:

> His an- | cient, dream- | less, un- | invad- | ed sleep
> The Kra- | ken sleep- | eth: faint- | est sun- | lights flee

The rhyme scheme here follows and ABAB pattern, as is typical for the octave (first eight lines) of a sonnet. The rhymes so far have been perfect—"deep"/"sleep" and "sea"/"flea."

LINES 5-6

above him swell
Huge sponges of millennial growth and height;

The poem continues to vividly describe the Kraken's surroundings. Instead of focusing on the extreme depths of the ocean, though, these lines describe the area just above the Kraken, where large sea sponges reach toward the upper regions of the deep.

The image that emerges in this section is one of extreme growth, as "huge sponges" that have been growing for thousands of years extend far above the Kraken. This image further emphasizes just how *old* the Kraken is and, moreover, how long it has been lying in the deepest part of the ocean. After all, it has apparently been there so long that the surrounding elemental features have managed to grow above and around him. With this in mind, readers come to associate the Kraken with the old, steady growth of the world's most untouched chambers.

As is the case in the lines directly preceding this passage, sibilance runs throughout these lines:

> [...] above him swell
> Huge sponges of millennial growth and height.

With this recurring hissing sound (which utilizes both /s/ and /z/ sounds), the speaker links the Kraken's "shadowy sides" mentioned in the beginning of line 5 with the large sponges surrounding the monster, thereby implying that the creature is firmly implanted in the immediate environment. To that end, the sibilance in this passage (and throughout the sonnet's opening octave) creates a feeling of unification in the otherwise unimaginable world of the deep sea.

Moreover, the imagery of sea sponges "of millennial growth"—indicating that they're thousands of years old—emphasizes just how old the Kraken is, framing him and his surroundings as deeply rooted in the world's oldest and most remote places. After all, if the sponges around the Kraken are so tall, then it's clear that they've remained mostly untouched for a very, very long time.

LINES 7-10

And far away into the sickly light,
From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
Unnumbered and enormous polypi
Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.

Lines 7 through 10 serve the dual purpose of describing the Kraken's deep sea surroundings while also spotlighting some of the other animal life in these far reaches of the ocean. However, it's worth keeping in mind that the creatures

mentioned in this section of the poem exist "far away into the sickly light," meaning that they aren't actually all that close to the Kraken. After all, the fact that these lines take place in the "sickly light" of the ocean reveals that the location in question isn't quite as deep as the dark, "shadowy" home of the Kraken. Instead, these lines focus on a layer of the ocean that has a small amount of murky light filtering through from the surface. In turn, readers can infer that the sea creatures described in this section do their best to avoid the Kraken, drifting above the monster instead of swimming through his darkened waters.

In keeping with this, lines 8 and 9 also imply that the creatures in question live in "secret cell[s]" like grottos, which are small, cave-like structures. Of course, these sea creatures do venture out of their caves to "winnow" the ocean water with their tentacles, but it's noteworthy that they only do so in the "sickly light" of shallower waters, meaning that they never actually get close to the Kraken. Indeed, when they are in the darkened depths of the ocean, they hide in their "secret" caves, and when they emerge, they make sure to float around in regions of the ocean just above the Kraken. All in all, then, it's clear that these creatures take care not to encounter the frightening Kraken.

It's worth mentioning here that the speaker refers to these creatures as "enormous polypi." This is seemingly yet another misnomer, since a polyp is a kind of marine animal that is permanently attached to some sort of surface (for instance, coral and sea anemones are both polypi). In this context, though, the speaker seems to view polypi as squid-like creatures capable of emerging from caves and waving their tentacles around in the water.

Despite this inaccurate use of biological terminology, what's most important to grasp is that the speaker calls the polypi "enormous," later adding in line 10 that they "winnow" (or wave) the dark green ocean water with their "giant arms." This, in turn, creates an image of massive tentacles sweeping through the depths. Alternatively, these lines could be read as referring to the Kraken itself as the "slumbering green," using its own "giant arms" to sweep away the "enormous polypi."

By this point in the poem, readers might begin to notice a lack of concrete description about the Kraken itself, even though the entire poem is about the monster. In fact, the only thing the speaker has said about the monster's form is that the Kraken has "shadowy sides"—a descriptor that does very little to help readers actually envision the Kraken.

Instead of depicting the monster, the poem describes everything *around* the Kraken, including the "huge sponges" and "enormous polypi." In this way, the poem heightens the mystery surrounding the Kraken, emphasizing the fact that it is a mythical sea monster that has rarely—if ever—been seen. As a result, the poem plays with just how disconcerting it is to confront the unknown, allowing readers to build their own image of the Kraken. And though each reader will perhaps envision a different kind of beast, the fact that the "enormous polypi" seem to actively avoid the Kraken makes one thing quite clear: this monster is even bigger than the deep sea's largest creatures.

Finally, the poem's rhyme scheme changes here. Whereas the first four lines followed an ABAB pattern, then next four rhyme ABBA ("swell"/"cell" and "height"/"light"), which keeps things from getting overly predictable as the poem gets closer to the Kraken.

LINES 11-12

There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep,

Focusing once more on the Kraken itself, lines 11 and 12 confirm that the monster has remained in the same place in the ocean's depths for "ages." The use of polyptoton in line 11 emphasizes the longevity and endurance of the Kraken's time on earth, since the variation of the verb "to lie" conveys both that the Kraken has been in the same place for a long time *and* that he will still be in this place in the future:

> There hath he lain for ages, and will lie

The verb "to lie" first appears as the past participle "lain," underscoring how long the Kraken has been in existence. Then, at the end of the line, the verb reappears in the future tense as "will lie," thereby reaching into the future to assert that the Kraken will continue to exist in the exact same state has he always has.

It is in this capacity that the Kraken sustains himself on "huge sea worms"—yet another indication that he is much larger than even the biggest animals around him, considering that he eats such big creatures. What's more, he eats them *in his sleep*, apparently not even needing to put any effort toward sustaining himself. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons he has been able to stay alive so easily and for so long; it takes very little for him to survive.

As is the case for many of the lines in this poem, a faint strain of sibilance slinks through lines 11 and 12, especially if readers expand their definition of sibilance to include not just /s/ sounds, but also /th/, /f/, and /z/ sounds:

> There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
> Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep

The subtle, easy hissing sound of this sibilance builds a somewhat sleepy sound, one reminiscent of the fact that the Kraken has spent "ages" in uninterrupted—or, to use the speaker's word, "uninvaded"—sleep. To that end, the sibilance conveys a slow, slumbering attitude that perfectly aligns with the Kraken's patient, ancient ways. In this regard, readers come to see the monster as a constant, unchanging presence in the depths of the ocean.

LINES 13-15

Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by man and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

Although "The Kraken" has 15 lines instead of 14, it still functions like a sonnet. Of course, its nod to the sonnet doesn't mean that it perfectly follows the form's structural conventions, but the poem does employ several elements that are typical of sonnets.

For instance, line 13 functions as a turn (or "volta"), since it signals a sudden shift from what the rest of the poem has already established. Indeed, the speaker now reveals that, even though the Kraken has been sleeping in the depths of the ocean for ages and will continue to do this, there will eventually come a time when the mighty monster is driven from his secluded resting place.

In the standard Elizabethan sonnet, the turn often comes in the poem's final couplet—with this in mind, the turn in line 13 of "The Kraken" loosely adheres to the form of an Elizabethan sonnet, except that lines 13 and 14 don't rhyme like they would normally. And, of course, there is a fifteenth line, a fact that also strays from the conventions of the Elizabethan sonnet.

Formal considerations aside, though, it's worth thinking about the "latter fire" that will apparently "heat the deep" and force the Kraken to the surface of the ocean to die. Because the rest of the poem focuses so narrowly on describing the ocean and, to a certain extent, the Kraken itself, it's difficult to interpret the religious implications that come along with the phrase "latter fire."

And yet, the vision of fires banishing a wicked monster from the depths of the ocean is charged with religious imagery, putting readers in mind of the kind of apocalyptic, end-of-the-world scenes that appear in the New Testament's *Book of Revelation*. The word "latter" is especially significant in this context, since it refers to something that occurs near the end of something. In turn, it becomes clear that the fires that will someday "heat the deep" will most likely signal the end of the world as humans know it.

Despite these gestures toward some kind of religious reckoning, though, it's hard to say with any specificity what kind of apocalyptic event the speaker has in mind. The only thing that remains certain is that there will be *some* form of reckoning. And it is this reckoning that will change what has for "ages" remained the same, destroying the Kraken's constant and hidden presence in the world.

Indeed, the Kraken will be forced to leave its remote dwelling place and finally come to the surface, where he will be seen just once by humans and angels alike. It is in this moment, then, that the mystery surrounding the Kraken will finally subside. However, the fact that it will then die suggests that the monster will mostly remain shrouded in mystery, implying that certain things will forever remain unknown. What's more, it's also quite significant that the Kraken (who has been alive for so long) will indeed die, effectively demonstrating that nothing lasts forever, not even the most ancient, enduring creatures.

SYMBOLS

THE KRAKEN

Because it is a monster with seemingly no contact with the outside world, the Kraken is a perfect embodiment of the unknown. This poem doesn't actually describe the creature itself all that much, and instead focuses on the creature's remote life in the darkest, deepest reaches of the ocean. In fact, the speaker's *refusal* to describe the Kraken in a concrete way actually makes the monster seem even more unsettling, casting it as an ominous figure that readers can't even fully grasp.

To that end, the only mention of the Kraken's physical form is a fleeting reference to its "shadowy sides." This, in turn, means that readers must struggle to build their own image of the Kraken, and this element of mystery only emphasizes the monster's existence as an ominous, unknown figure. Accordingly, the Kraken itself comes to represent what it feels like to confront the unfamiliar.

At the same time, the Kraken has been written about time and again over the centuries, and has a reputation as a dangerous and violent beast. That violence isn't really present in this poem, but different readers have also taken the creature as representative of human darkness buried so deeply that it feels foreign and alien.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-15

POETIC DEVICES

ASSONANCE

Assonance appears in "The Kraken" most strongly in the opening quatrain, which repeats the /ee/ sound quite prominently. This long /ee/ sound is particularly noticeable because it appears in the final word of every line in the quatrain, as well as in other words throughout the lines:

Below the thunders of the upper d**ee**p,
Far, far b**e**n**ea**th in the abysmal s**ea**,
His ancient, dr**ea**mless, uninvaded sl**ee**p
The Kraken sl**ee**peth: faintest sunlights fl**ee**

The /ee/ sound threaded throughout these lines creates several internal slant rhymes, as is the case in line two with the words "beneath" and "sea." This, in turn, gives the entire opening a feeling of unification and musicality that oddly contrasts with the otherwise gloomy and ominous subject. In this regard, the poem's heightened language and euphonic sound juxtapose its dark, sinister qualities.

Indeed, it is perhaps because of these sinister qualities that the pleasing assonance found in the first quatrain completely drops off in the second quatrain, as the speaker begins to focus more intensely on the Kraken's chilling environment. Indeed, as the speaker describes the Kraken's surroundings, the overall musical quality shifts considerably, veering away from assonance (apart from that seen in a few more end rhymes) and toward consonance.

This, of course, is not to say that the speaker's use of consonance isn't also musical, but this kind of musicality is much more muscular and contoured, whereas the assonance in the beginning of the poem is more relaxed. However, assonance eventually returns in line 10, bringing back the repeated long /ee/ sound that characterizes the first four lines of the poem. In this way, the sound of the poem comes full circle, ultimately developing a consistent sound that one might argue reflects the Kraken's ancient, unchanging state of rest.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Below," "the," "thunders," "of," "upper," "deep"
- **Line 2:** "beneath," "sea"
- **Line 3:** "ancient," "dreamless," "uninvaded," "sleep"
- **Line 4:** "sleepeth," "faintest," "flee"
- **Line 6:** "height"
- **Line 7:** "light"
- **Line 10:** "green"
- **Line 11:** "lain," "ages"
- **Line 12:** "sea," "sleep"
- **Line 13:** "heat," "deep"
- **Line 14:** "be," "seen"
- **Line 15:** "rise," "die"

CAESURA

There are some prominent caesuras in "The Kraken." For instance, lines 4 and 5 both feature long pauses:

> The Kraken sleepeth: || faintest sunlights flee
> About his shadowy sides; || above him swell

These caesuras are important because they help the speaker transition from one thought to the next. In this manner, the caesura in line 4 signals a shift in focus from the Kraken itself to a slightly more general observation about the quality of light surrounding the monster. In turn, the caesuras in this section enable the speaker to layer important details about the Kraken and its surroundings, separating these details from one another while also controlling the poem's overall rhythm and pacing. The caesura in line 11 serves a similar purpose, separating the past—"hath lain"—from the future–"and will lie."

Identifying caesuras is often fairly subjective because of the simple fact that people can read the same poem in multiple different ways. With this in mind, whether lines 2 and 3 actually contain any caesuras is up for interpretation. This is especially the case in line 2, when the comma near the beginning of the line could serve either as a caesura or simply as a grammatical necessity. Having said this, it's worth recognizing that the comma in the phrase "Far, far" serves as an intensifier, allowing the speaker to emphasize just how far below the ocean's surface the Kraken dwells. Because of this significant emphasis, there is a strong argument that the comma between the two words creates a caesura.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** ", "
- **Line 3:** ", ", ", "
- **Line 4:** ": "
- **Line 5:** "; "
- **Line 11:** ", "

CONSONANCE

"The Kraken" is filled with consonance. In fact, every single line includes at least some kind of consonant repetition. In many cases, this means that single words sometimes contain multiple forms of consonance, repeating up to two different consonant sounds at once. For instance, the first two lines feature the /b/, /er/, /l/ and /d/ sounds. This means that words like "below" include two relevant sounds, since "below" contains both the /b/ sound and the /l/ sound. Similarly, "thunder" features both the /d/ sound and the /er/ sound. This pile-up of consonance is a defining feature of the poem, giving each line an incredibly contoured, muscular sound that feels appropriate for a poem that takes place in the "thunder[ous]" waters of the ocean.

Furthermore, the consonant repetition that twists through each line often creates moments of notable euphony, setting forth a pleasing but still very strong quality. For instance, lines 8 through 10 are quite euphonic because of their repetition of the /r/, /n/, /w/, /m/, /s/, and /n/ sounds:

> From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
> Unnumbered and enormous polypi
> Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.

One might argue that the use of so many repeated consonant sounds gives "The Kraken" (and particularly this section) a tactile quality that ultimately helps readers more vividly imagine the long tentacles of "enormous polypi" moving

through dark caves and waving through the depths of the ocean. In this regard, then, consonance helps the speaker invite readers into the otherwise foreign, slippery world of the poem, slowing them down with these consonant clusters so that they have something to hold on to as they encounter the unknown environment of the ocean's depths.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Below," "thunders," "upper," "deep"
- **Line 2:** "Far," "far," "beneath," "abysmal"
- **Line 3:** "dreamless," "sleep"
- **Line 4:** "sleepeth," "faintest," "sunlights," "flee"
- **Line 5:** "shadowy," "swell"
- **Line 6:** "Huge," "sponges," "millennial," "growth"
- **Line 7:** "far," "away," "sickly," "light"
- **Line 8:** "From," "many," "wondrous," "grot," "secret," "cell"
- **Line 9:** "Unnumbered," "enormous"
- **Line 10:** "Winnow," "with," "arms," "slumbering," "green"
- **Line 11:** "There," "lain," "for," "will," "lie"
- **Line 12:** "Battening," "upon," "worms," "sleep"
- **Line 13:** "Until," "latter," "fire," "shall"
- **Line 14:** "once," "man," "and," "angels," "seen"
- **Line 15:** "roaring," "rise," "surface"

END-STOPPED LINE

Although many of the lines in "The Kraken" end with punctuation, it's not quite as easy to identify the end-stopped lines as one might think. Consequently, it's hard to confidently determine how some sections of the poem fit together, ultimately creating a free-flowing feeling that reflects the churning waters of the ocean's depths.

For example, the first two lines seem end-stopped, but it's possible to argue that they're enjambed. According to the end-stopped argument, the lines stand on their own, the commas between them creating a pause at the end of each line. According to the enjambed argument, though, the phrases in lines 1 and 2 don't actually stand on their own because they're not syntactically complete—after all, they lack both a subject and a verb, since both phrases focus on orienting the reader, front-loading the sentence with information about setting and location before clarifying in lines 3 and 4 that the Kraken sleeps in these "thunders of the upper deep."

Therefore, whether the first two lines are end-stopped or enjambed depends on what readers prioritize when determining such things. If readers place emphasis on sound, pacing, and the flow of a line, they will see these two lines as end-stopped, but if they base their reading solely on grammar and syntax, they will see them as enjambed.

There are many obvious end-stopped lines in the poem though. Take line 6, which features the end of a full phrase that begins in line 5:

> [...] above him swell
> Huge sponges of millennial growth and height;

In order to make sense, the words "above him swell" depend on the rest of the phrase, which carries over into the next line. This means that "above him swell" is enjambed. Conversely, "Huge sponges of millennial growth and height" is end-stopped because it comes to an obvious conclusion at the end of the line. This is especially apparent because the line that comes next begins a new sentence that focuses not on the "huge sponges," but on "unnumbered and enormous polypi." As a result, it's evident that the speaker has transitioned from one topic to the next, using the semi-colon at the end of line 6 to signal this shift in focus.

Once again, though, ambiguity arises in the phrase that follows, which stretches out over four lines and includes not one but two possibly contentious instances of either enjambment or end-stopped lines.

> And far away into the sickly **light,**
> From many a wondrous grot and secret **cell**
> Unnumbered and enormous polypi
> Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.

The first ambiguous moment in this passage comes at the end of line 7. The comma after "light" functions very similarly to the commas that appear at the ends of lines 1 and 2. The phrase "And far away into the sickly light" isn't a complete clause because it lacks a verb and a subject, but it *is* isolated from the rest of the sentence. To that end, the line that follows it adds to its meaning but doesn't necessarily change the image of something existing "far away into the sickly light." For this reason, it's difficult to say whether the line is end-stopped or enjambed.

The second ambiguous moment in this passage comes at the end of line 8, which functions very similarly to line 7 even though there is no comma at the end. Indeed, these two lines are almost exactly like the first two lines of the poem. In both cases, each line functions as an isolated descriptor while also bringing itself to bear on the rest of the phrase. With this in mind, the line "From many a wondrous grot and secret cell" connects to "Unnumbered and enormous polypi," but it also seems to stand on its own—especially since "Unnumbered and enormous polypi" also connects to "Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green."

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** ","
- **Line 2:** ","
- **Line 6:** ";"
- **Line 7:** ","

- **Line 10:** “.”
- **Line 12:** “,”
- **Line 13:** “;”
- **Line 14:** “,”
- **Line 15:** “.”

REPETITION

The repetitions that appear in "The Kraken" are granular and mostly focused on recycling specific words. This is evident very early in the poem, when the speaker uses epizeuxis to repeat the word "far" twice in a row in the second line, thereby highlighting just how deep in the ocean the Kraken lives. In keeping with this, the word "deep" also repeats in the poem, along with the word "sleep." Indeed, both of these words appear near the beginning of the poem and then reappear near the end:

> Below the thunders of the upper deep,
> Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea,
> His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
> The Kraken sleepeth:
> [...]
> Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep,
> Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;

This straightforward repetition of the words "deep" and "sleep" emphasizes two of the poem's most important details: that the monster lives in the extreme depths of the ocean, and that it exists in an unbothered resting state, plunged into a seemingly eternal slumber that reflects its constancy throughout the ages.

In addition to the reappearance of the words "deep" and "sleep" at the end of the poem, the poem includes other kinds of repetition. For example, there are two instances of polyptoton, as the speaker not only reuses words, but changes the *way* they are used, too. This is evident in the variation of the word "sleep" in lines 3 and 4, as the speaker uses "sleep" as a noun before reusing it as a verb: "His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep / The Kraken sleepeth." This variation enables the speaker to draw attention to the fact that the Kraken is asleep, thereby accentuating its state of constant restfulness.

Similarly, line 11 features another moment of polyptoton, as the speaker changes the tense of the verb "to lie": "There hath he lain for ages, and will lie / [...]." Once again, this highlights the Kraken's inactive existence, which conveys an unchanging sense of consistency and longevity. That both the past participle and the future tense of the verb "to lie" appears in this line underscores the idea that the monster has been in the same state for a very long time and that he will continue to be in this state for years to come.

This, in turn, makes it all the more noteworthy when the speaker eventually says in line 13 that "the latter fire" will interrupt the Kraken's sleep someday and drive him to the surface of the ocean—a vision of profound change that stands in stark contrast to the consistency that the various repetitions have built throughout the poem.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “deep”
- **Line 2:** “Far, far”
- **Line 3:** “sleep”
- **Line 4:** “sleepeth”
- **Line 11:** “lain,” “lie”
- **Line 12:** “sleep”
- **Line 13:** “deep”

SIBILANCE

The poem is full of sibilance, since so many of the words feature the /s/ sound. This consistent hissing sound that appears in nearly every line ultimately recreates oceanic noises that align with the aquatic nature of the subject. Words like "sea," "sleep," "sunlights," "sides," "swell," and "sponges" feature prominently in the first half of the poem, delivering a multitude of /s/ sounds that grant the poem a tense, hushed quality.

In addition, the poem is even more sibilant than it might first appear—if, that is, readers choose to count /sh/, /z/, /th/, and /f/ sounds as sibilant (which many people do). Under this interpretation, there isn't a single line in the entire poem that doesn't include some kind of sibilance. Lines 11 through 13, for example, suddenly become much more sibilant if readers expand their definition of sibilance to include a wider array of hissing sounds:

> There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
> Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep,
> Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;

By weaving these soft, sibilant sounds through these lines, the speaker creates a lulling effect. This is especially appropriate for a poem about a creature that has been sleeping for "ages" and will continue to slumber until the world's end. In this regard, sibilance in "The Kraken" not only imitates the sound of waves and rushing water, but also eases readers with hypnotic language that mimics the unbothered resting state of the Kraken itself.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “sea”
- **Line 3:** “dreamless,” “sleep”
- **Line 4:** “sleepeth,” “faintest,” “sunlights”
- **Line 5:** “sides,” “swell”
- **Line 6:** “sponges”

- **Line 7:** "sickly"
- **Line 8:** "wondrous," "secret," "cell"
- **Line 9:** "enormous"
- **Line 10:** "slumbering"
- **Line 12:** "sea," "sleep"
- **Line 14:** "once," "seen"
- **Line 15:** "surface"

IMAGERY

Part of the poem's appeal is that it vividly describes an unknown environment, allowing readers to feel as if they have been plunged into the depths of the ocean to float around with the Kraken and its fellow sea creatures. This means that the poem is highly visual, conjuring images of weak shafts of light filtering down into the dark, murky waters of the ocean. This, in turn, gives rise to the image of the Kraken and its "shadowy sides," a description that depicts the monster as so big that it's capable of blotting out what little light makes it down to these depths.

The image of large sponges of "millennial growth and height" reaching past the Kraken is also quite vivid, inviting readers to envision an old, overgrown environment. Similarly, the speaker mentions "sickly light," once more drawing upon light-related imagery to more thoroughly convey the dim and otherworldly setting. In combination with the towering sponges, this dark environment slowly comes to seem mysterious and rather ominous, and this is only exacerbated by the fact that "enormous polypi" emerge from hidden caves and wave their tentacles through the lonely waters.

By using this kind of highly visual imagery, then, the poem helps readers enter the unsettling world of the unknown, effectively making them see the Kraken's underwater environment as a profoundly unfamiliar place—exactly the kind of place where one would expect to find a mythical monster.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-10:** "faintest sunlights flee / About his shadowy sides; above him swell / Huge sponges of millennial growth and height; / And far away into the sickly light, / From many a wondrous grot and secret cell / Unnumbered and enormous polypi / Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green."

VOCABULARY

Upper Deep (Line 1) - In this context, the phrase "upper deep" refers to a layer of the ocean that, although still quite deep, is near the water's surface. By using the word "upper," the speaker implies that there are varying levels of what might be considered "deep." This, in turn, alerts readers to the fact that the poem takes place in an especially deep part of the ocean.

Abysmal (Line 2) - Generally speaking, the word "abysmal" is used to describe something that is extremely bad, terrible, or wretched. However, the word is also related to the word "abyss" and can refer to the lowest reaches of the ocean.

Uninvaded (Line 3) - Uninterrupted. The speaker uses this word as a way of emphasizing the Kraken's remote, solitary existence.

Sponges (Line 6) - Sea sponges are pore-filled organisms that live in the ocean and are permanently attached to some kind of surface. Although the poem suggests that the sponges surrounding the Kraken are extraordinarily tall, in reality sea sponges don't grow very high, though it *is* true that they can be very, very old.

Millennial (Line 6) - A word used to refer to a time period of a thousand years.

Sickly (Line 7) - In this case, the word "sickly" means weak or pale and is used to describe water that is still quite deep but not deep enough to be completely dark.

Grot (Line 8) - A form of the word "grotto," which is a small cave.

Secret Cell (Line 8) - Along with the word "grot," the phrase "secret cell" refers to the dark underwater caves from which large sea creatures emerge to float around the Kraken.

Polypi (Line 9) - The plural form of "polyp," which is a kind of sea creature like the sea anemone. Polypi are normally attached to some kind of surface, though there are some polypi that float freely near the surface of the ocean.

Winnow (Line 10) - The word "winnow" normally means to remove or separate something from something else. In this case, though, it seems to function more like the word "wave" or "churn."

Battening (Line 12) - To "batten" is to sustain oneself on something. In this case, the Kraken is eating large sea worms while sleeping.

Latter Fire (Line 13) - As discussed elsewhere in this guide, it's difficult to draw any definitive conclusions from this somewhat ambiguous phrase. However, what remains clear is that "latter fire" refers to some kind of apocalyptic, religious reckoning that will change the world as we know it. This interpretation makes sense when readers consider that the word "latter" is a descriptor used to note something that occurs near the end of something else. With this in mind, the fire in question will apparently take place just before the end of the world.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem functions as a sonnet even though it has an extra line.

Like most sonnets, it follows a set rhyme scheme, is composed in iambic pentameter (meaning that most lines contain five iambs, or da-DUMs), and even features a turn near the end of the poem when the speaker notes that the Kraken will someday be roused from his ancient slumber.

However, there is no denying that there are 15 lines instead of the sonnet's standard 14, a fact that underscores the poem's unwieldiness when it comes to formal structure. After all, the poem doesn't perfectly adhere to any strict sonnet conventions, as made evident not only by its extra line, but also by the fact that the stanza structure isn't neatly organized like it is in most sonnets.

To that end, it's worth noting that the lines of "The Kraken" flow into each other in unconventional ways, streaming from one quatrain to the next. Of course, the first quatrain is *almost* self-contained, in that the poem's first sentence seems to come to a conclusion halfway through the fourth line, culminating in the caesura after the word "sleepeth." And yet, a new phrase begins in the second half of the fourth line, and this phrase continues into the second quatrain. This is significant because the end of a quatrain is often end-stopped, whereas the end of this poem's first quatrain is enjambed.

This kind of unexpected continuation from one quatrain to the next is even more apparent in line 8, since almost all sonnets feature end-stopped lines at the end of the first octave (eight lines). In "The Kraken," however, the last line of the octave leads into the first line of the next section—a section that is difficult to label because of the poem's extra line. Indeed, lines 9 through 15 of the poem could either be seen as aligning with the conventions of the Italian sonnet or with those of the Elizabethan sonnet.

If the remaining lines are based on the Italian sonnet, then they constitute a sestet (six-line stanza) plus an extra line. If, however, they are based on the Elizabethan sonnet, then they form a third quatrain followed by a concluding couplet. Although both interpretations are valid, it seems logical to think of the end of the poem in terms of the Elizabethan sonnet, if only because line 13 (the final line of what could be considered the third quatrain) is end-stopped, meaning that the final couplet is self-contained.

Regardless of how readers decide to conceptualize the poem's form, though, what's most important to grasp is that the lines actively resist neat categorization. Even though "The Kraken" is recognizable as a sonnet, then, it is also large and uncontainable, thereby reflecting the massive and uncanny power of the Kraken itself.

METER

"The Kraken" is written mostly in iambic pentameter, which means that there are five iambs, poetic feet with a "da-DUM" rhythm, per line. For example, the first line scans like this:

> Be**low** | the **thun-** | ders **of** | the **up-** | per **deep**,

It's clear that this line is in iambic pentameter, since each foot is an iamb and the entire line contains five metrical feet. Other lines in the poem, however, are considerably more complicated, making use of a number of metrical substitutions instead of using only iambs. This is especially the case in lines 5 and 6, which are still examples of pentameter (in that there are five feet per line) but feature several deviations from the previously established iambic rhythm:

> A**bout** | his **shad-** | owy **sides**; || a**bove** | him **swell**
> **Huge spong-** | es of | mil**len-** | nial **growth** | and **height**;

For the most part, line 5 isn't all that different from the other lines, since it is still mostly composed of iambs. However, its third foot is an anapest ("-owy **sides**"), meaning that it is made up of two unstressed syllables followed by a **stressed** syllable (da-da-DUM). Building on this sense of variation, line 6 completely deviates from the poem's overall rhythm by beginning with a spondee ("**Huge spong-**"), which is a somewhat less common metrical foot consisting of two **stressed** syllables in a row (**stressed-stressed**).

To add to this, the line's second foot is a pyrrhic ("-es of"), another somewhat uncommon metrical unit made up of two unstressed syllables in a row (unstressed-unstressed). And, lastly—in terms of metrical substitutions—the line's fourth foot is yet another anapest ("-nial **growth**"). Consequently, it's evident that this line stands out as extraordinary in a poem that is otherwise characterized by a more or less steady adherence to iambic pentameter. And yet, it's also worth noting that lines 5 and 6 are still written in pentameter, since there are only five stresses per line, even if some of those stresses appear in unexpected places.

On the whole, this use of meter ultimately disrupts the otherwise smooth flow of the poem, drawing attention to the irregularities that arise in the verse. And though the majority of the poem is composed in straightforward iambic pentameter, the kinds of variations that appear in lines 5 and 6 also crop up in other places, like in line 12, which also uses an anapest ("-ing up**on**"), a spondee ("**huge sea**"), and a pyrrhic ("worms in") to create a somewhat disjointed rhythm. In turn, the speaker's use of metrical substitutions takes the familiarity of iambic pentameter and makes it feel foreign and strange, effectively aligning with the fact that the Kraken itself represents the disconcerting unknown.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem follows a set rhyme scheme, but this scheme doesn't align with the way sonnets traditionally rhyme. This is partially due to the fact that "The Kraken" has an extra line, which

disorders the rhymes in the latter half of the poem. For instance, whereas the six-line sestet in the traditional Elizabethan sonnet usually concludes with a rhyming couplet, the last two lines of "The Kraken" don't rhyme with each other. Instead, the last line rhymes with the 11th line, functioning more as a distant echo than as a prominent rhyme.

This, however, is not to say that the poem is completely unorganized when it comes to rhyming. To the contrary, "The Kraken" has a clear—albeit unique—rhyme scheme, which looks like this (note that the stanza divisions here are somewhat arbitrary, since the poem's structure is slightly amorphous):

ABAB CDDC EFEA AFE

As this illustrates, there is a dependable rhyme scheme in the first two quatrains of the poem, both of which follow a fairly standard format. After this eight-line octave, though, the rhyme scheme becomes considerably more irregular, since the rhyme introduced in line 10 ("green") doesn't come to full fruition until the poem's second-to-last line ("seen").

In this way, the speaker delays the rhymes as the poem progresses, especially when it comes to the last line ("die"), which doesn't rhyme with anything except the ninth and eleventh lines—both of which are a bit too far away to create a strong sense of pattern within the rhyme scheme. In the same way that the form of "The Kraken" deviates from the standard structure of a sonnet, then, the rhyme scheme becomes increasingly disorganized in the final lines of the poem. In turn, the poem develops a feeling of unwieldiness, one that perhaps embodies the large and unmanageable form of the Kraken itself.

SPEAKER

There is no identifying information about the speaker, who doesn't factor very heavily into the poem. Instead of emerging as a character of some kind, the speaker functions as an omniscient narrator who simply delivers details about the Kraken and its home in the depths of the ocean. In this way, the speaker has a neutral, unnoticeable presence, one that doesn't bring itself to bear on the observations or assertions that run throughout the lines.

Accordingly, some readers may choose to think of the speaker as Tennyson himself, though there's nothing in the poem to either support or debunk this interpretation. Either way, what remains clear is that the speaker is not only capable of vividly describing the oceanic world of the Kraken, but also capable of looking into the future and predicting that the Kraken will one day be driven by fire to the surface of the ocean, where it will finally die. With this in mind, the speaker's omniscient capacities become even more remarkable, ultimately framing the speaker as an all-knowing figure.

SETTING

The poem is set in the deepest parts of the ocean, where the Kraken has been sleeping for years and years. However, the poem never clarifies which ocean the Kraken lives in, instead simply focusing on portraying the environment as extremely remote and untouched by human activity. To that end, the poem meticulously describes the Kraken's surroundings, depicting this part of the ocean as dark and teeming with extraordinarily large creatures like sea sponges that have been growing for thousands of years. And although ancient lore about the Kraken typically suggests that the monster lives in the waters off the coast of Norway, this poem is uninterested in the monster's specific geographical setting, choosing instead to concentrate on detailing the mysterious world of the deep unknown.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

A poem that takes place in the ocean, "The Kraken" is part of a long literary tradition that centers around the power and mystery of the sea. This is a common interest that runs throughout some of Tennyson's most famous poems, which often make use of water-related imagery and use the ocean as either a backdrop or a metaphor. Indeed, poems like "Crossing the Bar," "Ulysses," and "Break, Break, Break" all use the ocean as an important setting or motif.

In general, literature—especially poetry—has celebrated and considered the sea for a very long time. Indeed, Homer's *The Odyssey* features a long ocean passage and is perhaps the most iconic sea-related story of all time. As for seafaring tales written closer to Tennyson's lifetime, though, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was published in 1798 and tells the story of an old sailor who kills an albatross while on a long ocean voyage, bringing bad luck to the entire ship. This story is particularly relevant to "The Kraken" because it spotlights the sailing community's fixation with folklore and superstition, both of which factor heavily into "The Kraken" and its focus on a mythical sea monster.

To that end, Herman Melville's famous novel *Moby-Dick* also exhibits an interest in what lurks beneath the surface of the ocean—an interest that is clearly on full display in "The Kraken," too. In fact, *Moby-Dick* even includes mention of a giant Kraken-like creature capable of dragging entire whaling ships to the bottom of the ocean. In this capacity, the novel—which was published roughly 20 years after "The Kraken"—helped keep the myth of the Kraken alive in the world of maritime literature, ultimately serving as a precursor to the mention of an enormous squid in Jules Verne's popular novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, which was published in 1870.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Kraken has existed as a figure in maritime folklore since at least the 13th century, appearing in old Norse tales about fishermen encountering an enormous sea beast with many tentacles. Later, in the 18th century, the Kraken saw its first mention by name in a well-known natural history book, *Systema Nature*. Since then, it has been a popular staple in many stories about ocean passages and deep-sea encounters with the unknown.

Interestingly enough, though, "The Kraken" is as much about the monster's surrounding environment as it is about the creature itself. In fact, the speaker spends a large amount of the poem describing the underwater world of the deep sea. This aligns with Tennyson's position as a poet working in the early Victorian era, when the literary landscape began to shift away from the Romanticism that dominated the first half of the 19th century.

Indeed, it's worth noting that Tennyson proceeded William Wordsworth as the United Kingdom's Poet Laureate, but he didn't completely leave behind all the defining characteristics of Romanticism. Like Wordsworth and the other Romantic poets, Tennyson was especially attuned to nature, but his interest in the beauty of the natural world was perhaps a bit more complex and imaginative than that of his predecessors.

"The Kraken," therefore, is a perfect example of how Tennyson expanded the Romantic fascination with nature, since it manages to celebrate the natural world while also making that very world seem foreign, strange, and unsettling. In this way, "The Kraken" showcases the gradual but notable ways in which Tennyson helped the literary world transition away from Romanticism without completely leaving behind some of the movement's most important preoccupations.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Practice the Poem's Scansion — Practice your scansion (scanning a line of poetry for its meter) and get a feel for the meter of "The Kraken" by using this interactive tool. (https://prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody_poem/the-kraken/)
- The Watcher in the Water — Check out this clip from "The Fellowship of the Ring," in which Frodo and the other hobbits encounter a ghastly Kraken-like creature known as the "Watcher in the Water." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWNZdOY94ko)
- Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea — For another look at a giant squid-like creature, take a look at this illustration that was published in the original 1870 version of Jules Verne's novel "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kraken#/media/File:20000_squid_holding_sailor.jpg)
- Moby-Squid — Read a short chapter from Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick," which mentions a large squid that was based on the legends of the Kraken. (https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/42/moby-dick/740/chapter-59-squid/)
- Release the Kraken! — Enjoy watching a very shiny Liam Neeson yell "Release the Kraken!" while playing Zeus in the 2010 film "Clash of the Titans." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38AYeNGjqg0)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER ALFRED LORD TENNYSON POEMS

- Break, Break, Break
- Crossing the Bar
- Tears, Idle Tears
- The Brook
- The Charge of the Light Brigade
- Ulysses

HOW TO CITE

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