

## The Role of the Otherworldly and Real elements in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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**ABSTRACT:** Coleridge has offered his readers with a "nature and otherworldly" combination in his poetry that is both unique and impressive. Coleridge believes that man is surrounded by environment and that it is a special honour to be able to comprehend what he sees. Though written in the romantic style, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is often considered as a masterwork of mystical poetry because to the poet's sense of wonder and the wide range of topics it addresses. On the other hand, it teaches its readership that no wrongdoing, no matter how little, will be tolerated. The article investigates how Coleridge balances earthly and otherworldly elements in the poem.

**KEYWORDS:** poetry of redemption, the ancient mariner, Coleridge, supernaturalism.

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### INTRODUCTION

It was Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* that first got British adventurers excited about the Arctic and Antarctic. Even modern readers find themselves captivated by its "complicated apologue of atonement," which weaves together otherworldly and naturalistic images (Wikipedia Editorial Team, 2017). Some of the phrases "a sorrowful but better man" and "albatross around one's neck" were borrowed from it into the English language (Wilkinson, 2002). It's a made-up account of a sailor's journey from his home port to the Arctic and Antarctic. At first, things are

going swimmingly. Gusty winds after passing the equator, however, drive the cruiser south, where it becomes trapped in a glacier off the coast of Antarctica. Meanwhile, the ice begins to melt, and the ship makes its way out, accompanied by a friendly Albatross that the crew has been feeding and caring for. In spite of this, the Ancient Mariner eventually kills the Albatross on the spur of the moment. As a result, the wind dies down, the sun turns crimson, and the group starts to get thirsty, but there is nowhere to get clean water. They put the albatross over Mariner's neck because they believe he is responsible for everyone's misery (Coleridge, 1834).

Suddenly, the Mariner spots an incoming cruiser coming from the west. It looks like a haunted ship piloted by two ghosts named "Death" and "Life-in-Death," with "Death" alluding to its literal meaning and "Life-in-Death" standing in for the trials and tribulations that everyone must face in this world. The destiny of Mariner's crew is up for grabs as the two ghosts play dice with it. All the sailors perish, but the Ancient Mariner is given the gift of eternal life after death. However, he must endure the torment of staring into the eyes of the recently deceased and seeing the curse written in their emotions. And so it goes for seven days and nights, during which time the Mariner is left feeling utterly alone (ibid).

His troubles don't end until he happens across some water snakes, which he unwittingly blesses. In giving thanks to God for His creations, he finds relief from his pain. When the albatross slips from his neck and splashes into the water, he feels some relief from his guilt. As the winds pick up and the ship begins to move, his luck begins to turn around. The reanimated seamen try to manoeuvre the ship back to safety, but it is sucked into the vortex and sunk. When the ship sinks, all the crew perish with it, but the Mariner is rescued by a recluse, a flyer, and a flyer's child. Because of and as punishment for killing the Albatross, the Mariner is cursed to roam aimlessly for the rest of his life. The only time he feels better is when he shares his ordeal and helps others through it (ibid.).

### **The Natural World in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge:**

There may be no final, conclusive solution to the question of what poetry's central point is. The phrase "poetic imagination" to describe the use of language that reflects the writer's emotional, creative, intellectual, and expressive state of mind is a recurrent theme that appears in works from a variety of historical periods and cultures. The ability to use one's imagination is a mental skill that allows one to form mental pictures of things outside oneself that one cannot directly observe. Everything's about coming to grips with everything, integrating it fully, and setting things in order. Coleridge goes above and beyond the typical concerns with imagination by praising it as the only mediator and fundamental to artistic production. In this poem, he makes some rational attempts to

understand Nature and its connection to memory. Coleridge (1817) classifies imagination as either primary or secondary. The primary imagination, as described by Coleridge ("Notes on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Biographia Literaria," n.d.), is the "living power and prime agent of all human Perception," while the secondary imagination is "an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation" (ibid.). The secondary Imagination breaks down, disperses, and evaporates so that it may be recreated. Because all of the things are fixed and dead, this imagination struggles "to idealise and to unite" when this process of dissolve, disperse dissipate, and restoration is made impossible (ibid).

Coleridge's ideas on nature suggest that, for this romantic poet, there are two distinct realities: the one in which most people live and the one in which his own imagination has yet to fully take shape. If a poet can raise his mind to the level of Nature's spirit, he will perceive a different side of Nature. The fictional universes authors create for their readers depend in part on their own vivid imaginations. In the poem, "water-snakes," for instance, are transformed from realistic depictions of a reptilian monster into idealised representations of creativity and grace. Through the "water-snakes," the poet's imagination reveals the spirit of Nature, which personifies beauty, and the poet's imagination and the objective reality become one. One who lacks creativity, however, will only observe the lifeless, unappealing surface of nature (ibid.).

Because of his indestructible creativity, Coleridge was able to maintain a healthy connection with the natural world (Aledelis, 2016). His definition of "nature" encompasses everything perceptible to the human senses, including the natural world and the universe beyond it, the relationship between which has traditionally been articulated via poetry. While all poets have an appreciation for the natural world, their perspectives on it vary.

Coleridge's thoughts on the poet's creation and its link to Environment are deep since he seems to be both a poet and a scholar in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (Ernest, 1907). Coleridge clearly sees nature as a true and reliable friend who will always have his back because "love of essence is ever returned double."

Since the Mariner is punished for his senseless, unprompted, and impulsive killing of the Albatross, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a story of wrongdoing, retaliation, and redemption. Avenged by Nature for the death of the Albatross, the Mariner and his crew must deal with emotional, mental, and physiological turmoil. Before they die, sailors are put through excruciating pain because they are thirsty and they are tortured by the knowledge that they can see water but cannot drink it. No regardless of how innocent they are, the crew still has to deal with

the Mariner's wrath. There are two possible meanings to their anguish. First, vengeance is a blind emotion, driven by anger and the need to exact revenge. Second, the Mariner's crew is blamed for the crime because they helped cover it up. Their negative reinforcement, though, is only temporary; they'll all perish, but the Mariner will spend eternity experiencing the torment of Life-in-Death. The Mariner is punished by being damned to hell for all of time. To warn others about the dire and long-lasting repercussions of disregarding the natural world and the outcomes of trying to deal with Essence unwisely and thoughtlessly, the Mariner gives advice from beyond the grave (Mutasem & Al-Khader, 2016).

### **In Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the Author Discusses the Role of the Supernatural:**

The significant abundance of paranormal aspects in his poetry, Coleridge is regarded as the finest poet of the mysterious in English literature. Through this poem, he has cemented his place as the Romantic poet with the most rich and vibrant imagination in history. According to Longinus<sup>4</sup>, a great writer is one who is able to take his reader into the imaginary world he has constructed by the use of baffling mystery. In this poem, Coleridge not only invents a fantastical setting, but also renders it fanciful and fantastical. His fantastical writing often includes a moral message because of the strong connections his creative mind makes between the otherworldly and the real world. He shows that there are consequences for wrongdoing of any kind and that the only way to change a destructive pattern of behaviour is via the pain that always follows. This agonising medicine seems to be at work in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," convincing the Mariner that all of nature's creatures are worthy of love and respect. The poem also demonstrates that the emergence of the otherworldly follows the annihilation of natural resources. Because drought and water shortages and other natural attractions like wind bring about so much misery, it follows that fate is controlled by otherworldly factors. It is possible to cleanse and renew a hurting spirit via acts of penance and genuine affection. In his writing, Coleridge is able to conjure up an aura of mystery that makes the world appear real. Simultaneously, there is a rise in the popularity and fixation with these inanimate things. He excels where Wordsworth fell short because of his deft handling of otherworldly creatures endowed with a soul or spirit. The hallucinations upon which the otherworldly components of "The Ancient Mariner" are founded are, in fact, the result of regret. Coleridge deftly handles the supernatural in this poem in two ways: first, he makes the supernatural appear to be natural in all respects; and second, he employs those methodologies which are evocative, mental, and also advanced, so that the feelings of mystery can be produced and at the same time horror can be experienced by the reader. He avoids the crassness and sensationalism of, say, Stephen King in favour of subtlety and nuance. Monk Lewis, Mrs. Radcliffe, Horace, and

Walpole. The real greatness of "The Ancient Mariner" lies in Coleridge's ability to make the supernatural seem credible and convincing, despite the fact that there are a few impossible and incredible, fantasy-like situations present in the poem, such as the mesmerising and magnetic power which lies in the ancient mariner's gaze or the rapid and out-of-nowhere visual appeal of the enigmatic skull ship. The polar spirit's commentary on or influence over events is as unbelievable as the spectre lady and her spouse, the resurrected dead, the seraph-band signalling to the land, the ship's unexpected sinking, and so on. However, these otherworldly occurrences are credible because Coleridge expertly interweaves them with perfectly plausible normal occurrences, making the entire novel seem genuine.

Thanks to the impressive attention to detail, the supernatural components in the poem come across as credible and exciting, while simultaneously functioning as a critique of modern living. The vast majority of The Ancient Mariner's scenes and events leave readers with a sense of mystery, dread, or both. When the skeleton ship first appears, panic ensues. In contrast to the Mariner's ship, which sits still "like a painted ship upon a painted ocean," this one is described as having "ribs" and "cobweb-like sails," both of which are torture. The ship is obviously driven by some kind of supernatural power, and its crew is made up of ghostly figures. The description of Death and Life-in-Death as part of the spectre ship's crew serves to heighten the reader's sense of impending doom. Coleridge uses allusion and manipulation tactics to evoke a feeling of dread in this poem. When describing the ghost lady and her death mate, for example, he does not depict their physical characteristics but rather focuses on how they make the mariner feel emotionally. The next three paragraphs detail the emergence of Life after Death:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,/Her locks were yellow as gold/Her skin was as white as leprosy (190-92).

Next two lines follow as:

The night-mare Life-in-Death was she,/ Who thick man's blood with cold (lines 193-94).

Simply stating that a man's circulation would freeze at the presence of a ghost-woman is enough to communicate the terror and depict the supernatural to the reader, Coleridge does this well and succinctly. The horrific features of Life-in-Death, which epitomises the unfathomable agony of a man who cannot die, are left to the reader's imagination. Paradoxically, the ghost ship has no living crew and may sail even when there is no wind. The sailors' worst fears are realised as the metaphorical figures of Death and Life-in-Death become disturbingly real to them, particularly for the Mariner, whose soul Life-in-Death "wins," dooming him to a destiny worse than death. In a sense, the Mariner's fate is worse than that of the sailors who have already died; although their

spirits are no longer bound to their bodies, the Mariner's existence is doomed to be an eternal prison.

Just as the Mariner's pain lessens as a consequence of his praise of the seabird, so too does the albatross that had been around his neck earlier in the poem. Angels materialise over the bodies of the fallen sailors. They don't bother the Mariner with any conversation, just steal his oars and paddle his boat. Seeing his crew's corpses moan, move, and come back to life must have been a horrifying sight for the Mariner:

The people attending a real-life funeral would rush away in terror if the deceased suddenly opened his eyes. Here two hundred dead people jumped up from the floor and began to row. One's imagination might go wild with the horror of the scenario. In each case, it is not made apparent whether the apparitions are actual or the product of the poet's creative mind, leading one to the conclusion that the reader, and not the poet, is responsible for providing the otherworldly interpretation.

## CONCLUSION

Coleridge's poetry presents a perspective of the human-natural world that suggests three distinct epochs in the connection between humans and the natural world. In the first phase, a person only observes his environment without actively engaging with it. Through the second level, one moves beyond the physical, sensory experience of nature to a deeper, more profound connection with her soul. At this point, the forces of nature inside each human are in balance and exert an uniting force on one another via their ongoing actions and reactions. The third and highest level, when the person uses his creativity to re-create reality. The third stage often yields poetic work. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, we follow a person as he or she develops a connection with the natural world, from a place of ignorance about the unity of all life in the natural world to a place of enlightenment.

At first, the Mariner can only take in environment via his sensory systems. In his distorted perspective on nature, an Albatross was a threat to the ship and had to be killed to prevent its destruction. Because of this, he is completely cut off from creation, and the poem depicts the chaos and despair that ensues for him in a world where he is out of sync with nature. In the midst of all this mayhem, the Mariner develops a sense of empathy for nature and ends up blessing her for her soul and beauty. Because of this, he advances to the next phase of the connection. The Mariner enters the third stage of the individual-nature interaction when, after recovering from his trip, he journeys and proclaims his narrative to other people.

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