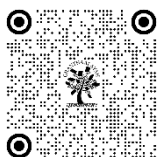


COLERIDGE'S MORAL ODYSSEY: THEMES OF GUILT AND PENITENCE IN 'THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER'

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ABSTRACT

This study examines "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge from the perspective of guilt and penitence. The moral odyssey of the mariner, whose rash act of shooting an albatross sets off a sequence of paranormal happenings and spiritual reflection, is explored in depth in Coleridge's poetic song.

In order to demonstrate how themes of nature, guilt, and redemption are relevant to the larger literary movement, the analysis starts with a study of Coleridge's biography and the setting of the Romantic age. Coleridge's own experiences with addiction and remorse give the poem a deeper personal meaning that enhances its examination of moral duty and human weakness.

The poem's episodic storytelling and symbolic imagery, together with its narrative structure, highlight the moral and psychological ramifications of guilt. Coleridge illustrates the transformational power of moral contemplation and spiritual regeneration via the mariner's slow decline into guilt-ridden despair and eventual struggle for redemption.

The symbolism of the albatross, which at first represented the grace of nature and the mariner's relationship to it, subsequently changed to represent a load of guilt and served as a catalyst for the mariner's spiritual path towards penitence, is central to the interpretation. The poem's religious and spiritual undertones deepen its thematic depth by evoking Christian allegory and concepts of divine forgiveness.

At the end, the research sheds light on Coleridge's timeless observations on the moral complexity of life and the human conscience. As a monument to Coleridge's literary prowess and moral philosophy, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" provides readers with timeless insights about guilt, penitence, and the pursuit of spiritual salvation.

Keywords: Coleridge, Nature, Supernatural, Symbolism, spiritual renewal, allegory, Ancient Mariner, penitence, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the leading poets of Romantic movement, Samuel Taylor Coleridge did not just use a pen to tell stories to the audience, but explore the meaning of life and virtue. Samuel Taylor Coleridge is remembered as born in 1772 and regarded as one of the significant leaders of what Wordsworth and others carried out in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His works which may be often described as having ghostly and the heroic aspects depict deep analysis of human feeling and spiritual struggles.

The poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is one of Coleridge's most fruitful works considering its themes and plot depth. This poem is one of the many that formed the lyrical ballads which Coleridge and Wordsworth wrote together and is more than just a simple story telling. It also tells a moral journey of being guilty and trying to find redemption all set against a backdrop of a sailor and his ship.

2. INTRODUCTION TO "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

Placed in the large area of South Pole that covers seas, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a poetry accompanied by narration of the tragic sea journey. The poem begins with the narration of a scene in which a wedding guest encounters an old mariner whose gaze as well as roar makes the guest obliged to listen to story of dreadful end that meets the mariner. Thus, trying to visualize these feelings of guilt and repentance for the sins committed by humans against nature and divine powers Coleridge uses the imagery and the plot of this poem.

3. EXPLORATION OF THEMES OF GUILT AND PENITENCE IN THE POEM

Fundamentally, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" explores the topics related to guilt and penitence. The sin is committed by the mariner shooting at an albatross, which is viewed as a sign of goodwill and nature's favour, and it triggers a series of events leading to the mariner's spiritual nature. In the context of the plot of the poem, Coleridge looks at the effects of sin in the mariner's mind, and his gradual journey towards redemption once he realizes his sin.

Thus, this article operates to reveal the layers of innocent and symbolism as well as other narrative techniques employed by Coleridge to describe the relationship between guilt and penitence. Focusing on the psychological change of the mariner from the sinner sinning against the Divine Power to the enlightened spiritual figure, it is aimed to shed light on Coleridge's moral vision and its significance for today's world.

Addressing these topics, this research will incorporate biographical data about Coleridge, Romantic culture, and criticism of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Engaging Coleridge's themes of guilt and penance, this study will analyze the text and its meanings with the goal of extending an enriched interpretation of the poetics and of presenting his work as a timeless reflection of mankind's moral inquiries and a search for spirituality to the modern.

4. OVERVIEW OF COLERIDGE'S LIFE AND INFLUENCES

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the son of a country parson was born in the year 1772. He was among the prolific poets, critics, and philosophers of Romantic Movement in the British literature. Moreover, his life and literary work were always connected with the trends of the country and the world in the given period. Born and bred in a strictly Anglican family, Coleridge acquired earliest and the most profound religious learning and ritualistic moralities as sources for further investigation of religious tendencies in his poetry. After the death of his father, he became a student at Christ's Hospital in London.

His first direct experience of German philosophy, through Kant and Schelling or through contacts with other German romantic philosophers, was to influence his outlook, at any rate on poetry, in a major way; but, aside from this, the friendship with Wordsworth and his participation, even if only peripheral, in the romantic movement, was to do a similar service for him.

5. ROMANTICISM AND ITS THEMES

Romanticism which emerged in the end of the XVII century and mostly at the beginning of the XIX was a reaction to the Enlightenment principles. The major concerns of Romanticism were subjects to do with individualism, emotionalism, and the passion for nature. Being one of the famous poets of the Romantic Movement together with Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats, Coleridge aimed at the creation of the images of the supernatural of the soul and its relationships with the nature.

Nature occupied a significant position in Romantic poetry as not only the setting but the psychological source and physical revival. The nature- landscape in the poems such as "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is alive for Coleridge because he believed that nature is a place of divine revelation and spirituality.

The use of supernaturalism is also typical for Coleridge's poetry collection, which proves his intensive interest to the things which cannot be explained by the science. Life-in-Death and Death themselves are the spirits that defy mortality and destinies inherent in human lives in the context of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

6. LITERARY INFLUENCES ON COLERIDGE, ESPECIALLY GOTHIC LITERATURE

As for the sources of Coleridge's influences the British literature mingled here with European traditions. His passion for the Gothic literature, which focuses on themes that are equally grim, eerie, spectral, and psychological horror, moulded his poetic outlook in a very significant way. Novels like "The Mysteries of Udolpho" by Ann Radcliffe and "The Castle of Otranto" by Horace Walpole introduced Coleridge to the manner of building up the mood and increasing the pitch of the action.

Coleridge found a deep connection between the Gothic tradition's focus on guilt, sin, and redemption and his own investigations through "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The structural composition of the poem — combining elements of balladry with the Gothic theme — portrays Coleridge's ability to merge different influences into a unified artistic work.

So, it might be said that at the very core of Samuel Taylor Coleridge production and persona one may trace not only a response to the individual life events but also ideas of the epoch and influence of great literature. His interaction with Romantics' themes and interests in nature, the supernatural, and self-scrutiny, together with his interest in the dark side of the Gothic literature defined his style. Thus, the exploration of Coleridge as the figure in his historical and literary environment offers new understanding of themes and strategies that contribute to his commonwealth for the English literature.

7. ANALYSIS OF GUILT IN 'THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER'

The poem, "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge is a story of sin and forgiveness coupled with a voyage of the mariner. The essence of the poem revolves on the sin that is committed by the mariner when he kills the albatross which is a symbol of good omen and Harper's blessing. Such a thoughtless sin against nature initiates a chain of supernatural occurrences and spiritual repercussions that define the mariner's development.

At first the audience may perhaps believe the shooting of the albatross was done for perhaps the characters' amusement or lack of better things to do as navigators or even as a mere superstitious act, only for it to turn out to be a sin that propels the mariner into his guilt and spiritual recklessness. Such abrupt brutality performed by a man with no apparent cause kills an obedient and innocent creature of nature disturbing the harmony of the earth which proves the people's capacity of careless destruction.

Treachery as a means of cursing the mariner and his companions and torturing them to death, as well as the death of the mariner himself, who suffers for days before dying, is an allegory of how humans can harm nature. This is true given that he is forced to recount the incidents that occurred to him to others in an effort to seek absolution of his sins, which only reopens the wound every time he does so.

The story starts at a wedding ceremony upon a man dining with another man where the later forces the young man to listen to a story he has to tell. He recounts how, in the throes of a treacherous journey to the South Pole, he heedlessly shot an albatross—an act that symbolized his breach of harmony with nature and incurred a curse upon himself and his crewmates: He recounts how, in the throes of a treacherous journey to the South Pole, he heedlessly shot an albatross—an act that symbolized his breach of harmony with nature and incurred a curse upon himself and his crewmates:

*"And I had done an hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow."*

This gesture of one's evil temper against a creature of nature triggers other tragic incidents which start the process of punishment for the guilt-ridden and spiritually tormented Mariner.

By reading the poem, it is easy to add that through the storyline of the mariner, Coleridge themes sin, penitence, and even the synthesis of life within the world. If one carefully understands the metaphor, the poem forces one to think on what humanity owes the natural environment and what is the continued fate that awaits its mistakes.

8. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF GUILT

In regard to symbolism, guilt and sin are also prominent in the poem. They are clearly illustrated through the gradual change of the main character's consciousness with all its psychological and moral consequences. Initially dismissive of his deed, the mariner is gradually consumed by remorse as he witnesses the dire consequences of his actions: Initially dismissive of his deed, the mariner is gradually consumed by remorse as he witnesses the dire consequences of his actions:

*"Ah! well-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung."*

The sin that the mariner committed turns to be symbolized by the albatross around his neck after it was reduced from a symbol of beauty and power to an object that the mariner has to carry all over because of his guilt. This transformation is the reflection of the author's deep understanding of the destructive nature of guilt and its consequences for the human soul.

Again it is the theme of guilt, which becomes a force for social and natural disorder, as the mariner's tale progresses. His crewmen die successively, and their deaths are a kind of a moral retribution for the mariner's sin and the curse which has taken control over him. The mariner's isolation at sea mirrors his internal turmoil, highlighting the poem's exploration of existential angst and spiritual alienation: The mariner's isolation at sea mirrors his internal turmoil, highlighting the poem's exploration of existential angst and spiritual alienation:

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

9. EFFECTS OF GUILT ON THE MARINER'S PSYCHE AND BEHAVIOUR

As the poem unfolds, Coleridge vividly portrays the profound effects of guilt on the mariner's psyche and behaviour. Haunted by his guilt the mariner witnesses illusions and dreams that blur reality and fantasy. The eerie presence of figures, like Death and Life in Death highlights the mariner's turmoil and spiritual isolation.

Guilt not troubles the mariner internally. Also shapes his connection with nature. His newfound respect for nature shown through his empathy towards sea creatures and admiration for creations beauty signals a change in his awareness. Through his hardships and self imposed penance the mariner embarks on a journey towards growth and moral redemption.

So, Coleridge's examination of guilt in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" goes beyond storytelling. It serves as a reflection on the complexities of human life and the repercussions of ethical wrongdoing. By exploring the roots of the mariner's guilt its moral impacts and how it transforms his mind and actions this analysis sheds light on Coleridge's timeless observations about humanities struggles and aspirations, for rebirth.

10. THEMES OF PENITENCE AND REDEMPTION IN 'THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER'

The Mariner's Journey towards Penitence

The poem unfolds as a profound exploration of guilt, redemption, and the transformative power of penitence. Central to the poem is the mariner's spiritual journey from moral degradation to spiritual enlightenment, marked by his gradual acknowledgment of guilt and his quest for redemption.

"I shot the Albatross."

At first, the mariner's act of shooting the albatross symbolizes his moral transgression and the rupture of harmony with nature. The curse that befalls him and his crewmates serves as a harsh reminder of the consequences of his actions.

*"Ah! well-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung."*

As the narrative progresses, however, the mariner begins to undergo a profound inner transformation. His haunting experiences at sea and encounters with spectral figures like Death and Life-in-Death compel him to confront the depths of his guilt and seek reconciliation with both nature and the divine.

*"Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns."*

The mariner's journey towards penitence is characterized by moments of introspection, remorse, and spiritual awakening. Through his suffering and self-imposed isolation, he gradually recognizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and embraces a newfound reverence for the natural world.

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

This transformative process reflects Coleridge's exploration of moral renewal and the inherent capacity for redemption in human experience. The mariner's journey from guilt-ridden despair to spiritual enlightenment serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of repentance and the enduring quest for moral absolution.

The poem stands as a timeless exploration of guilt, redemption, and spiritual awakening. Through the mariner's journey from moral degradation to penitence and spiritual enlightenment, Coleridge invites readers to contemplate the universal truths of human frailty, moral responsibility, and the transformative power of repentance. The poem remains a testament to Coleridge's literary genius and moral insight, offering profound insights into the complexities of human experience and the quest for spiritual fulfilment.

11. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND SYMBOLISM IN 'THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER'

- **Use of Supernatural Elements and Symbolism in Conveying Moral Themes**

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a poetic masterpiece by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, intricately weaves supernatural elements and symbolism to explore profound moral themes. Central to the poem is Coleridge's use of supernatural occurrences and mystical beings to underscore the mariner's spiritual journey and moral transformation.

Supernatural elements, such as the spectral figures of Death and Life-in-Death, imbue the narrative with a sense of otherworldly presence and cosmic significance. These figures, symbolic of mortality and spiritual judgment, haunt the mariner and serve as reminders of the consequences of his moral transgression. Through their interactions with the mariner, Coleridge illuminates the complexities of guilt, redemption, and the human condition.

Symbolism plays a crucial role in Coleridge's exploration of moral themes. The albatross, initially a symbol of nature's grace and the mariner's connection to the natural world, becomes a potent symbol of guilt and eventual redemption. Its killing by the mariner symbolizes his breach of harmony with nature and the ensuing curse that plagues him and his crewmates. However, the albatross also serves as a catalyst for the mariner's moral awakening and spiritual renewal, symbolizing the possibility of reconciliation and divine forgiveness.

- **Narrative Structure and Its Impact on the Themes of Guilt and Penitence**

Coleridge employs a distinctive narrative structure in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to heighten the poem's exploration of guilt and penitence. The poem opens with an ominous invocation, drawing the reader into the mariner's tale through the perspective of a mesmerized wedding guest. This framing device not only enhances the poem's sense of immediacy and intimacy but also underscores the mariner's need to confess his sins and seek moral absolution.

The use of a ballad form, characterized by its rhythmic meter and repetition, lends a lyrical quality to the narrative and emphasizes key thematic elements. Through the repetition of phrases and motifs, such as the refrain

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

Coleridge evokes a sense of haunting inevitability and existential dread, mirroring the mariner's psychological turmoil and spiritual crisis.

The poem's episodic structure, marked by distinct narrative sequences and vivid descriptive passages, allows Coleridge to explore different facets of guilt and penitence. Each episode, from the mariner's initial transgression to his encounters with supernatural beings and his eventual redemption, contributes to the overall thematic development of the poem. This narrative progression not only heightens the poem's emotional impact but also reinforces its moral and philosophical undertones.

- **Symbolic Significance of Key Elements (Ship, Water, Death, Life-in-Death)**

Throughout "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge employs symbolic imagery to convey deeper thematic meanings and philosophical insights. The ship itself becomes a symbol of human frailty and vulnerability in the face of natural forces. As the mariner and his crewmates are subjected to the wrath of the elements, the ship serves as a metaphor for the precariousness of human existence and the consequences of moral transgression.

Water, omnipresent throughout the poem, symbolizes both life and death, purity and corruption. Its dual nature reflects the mariner's spiritual journey from guilt and despair to repentance and renewal. The absence of drinkable water amidst the vast ocean underscores the mariner's isolation and existential anguish, highlighting the poem's exploration of human suffering and divine mercy.

Death and Life-in-Death, personified as spectral figures that play dice for the mariner's soul, embody cosmic forces beyond human comprehension. Their presence underscores the poem's exploration of mortality, fate, and the existential choices that shape human destiny. Through their eerie presence and enigmatic dialogue, Coleridge deepens the poem's allegorical dimensions and underscores the moral stakes of the mariner's journey.

In conclusion, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" stands as a testament to the power of narrative techniques and symbolism in conveying profound moral themes. Through the use of supernatural elements, a distinctive narrative structure, and rich symbolic imagery, Coleridge explores themes of guilt, penitence, and redemption with literary finesse and philosophical depth. By examining the poem's use of symbolism and narrative techniques, this analysis illuminates Coleridge's enduring insights into the human condition and the quest for spiritual enlightenment.

12. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CULTURAL IMPACT

- **Comparison with Other Romantic Works Dealing with Guilt and Redemption**

The poem, resonates within the broader context of Romantic literature, particularly in its exploration of guilt, redemption, and spiritual transformation. Compared to other Romantic works such as William Wordsworth's "The Prelude" and Lord Byron's "Manfred," Coleridge's poem stands out for its vivid supernatural imagery and profound moral allegory.

In "The Prelude," Wordsworth delves into themes of guilt and personal growth through introspective exploration of memory and experience. The protagonist's journey towards self-awareness and moral clarity parallels the mariner's quest for redemption. Similarly, Lord Byron's "Manfred" explores themes of guilt and existential despair through the protagonist's confrontation with supernatural forces and his ultimate quest for spiritual absolution.

What distinguishes Coleridge's work is its fusion of Gothic elements with Romantic sensibilities, creating a narrative rich in symbolic depth and moral complexity. The mariner's journey from moral transgression to spiritual renewal reflects Coleridge's belief in the transformative power of conscience and repentance, resonating with broader Romantic ideals of individualism and spiritual awakening.

- **Influence on Later Literature and Cultural Impact**

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" has left an indelible mark on literature and culture, influencing generations of writers and artists. Its exploration of guilt and redemption continues to resonate across diverse literary traditions and cultural contexts.

In literature, Coleridge's poem inspired later writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, whose macabre tales often explore themes of guilt and psychological torment. Poe's "The Raven," with its haunting refrain and melancholic protagonist, echoes the gothic atmosphere and moral introspection found in Coleridge's work.

Moreover, Coleridge's use of supernatural elements and symbolic imagery has influenced the development of fantasy and speculative fiction. Authors like J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, in their respective works "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Chronicles of Narnia," draw upon similar themes of moral choice, redemption, and cosmic struggle against dark forces, echoing Coleridge's exploration of human frailty and spiritual resilience.

Culturally, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" has permeated popular imagination through adaptations in music, art, and film. Artists such as Gustave Doré and David Scott have visually interpreted the poem's haunting scenes, capturing its atmospheric intensity and moral ambiguity. Musical adaptations by composers like Ralph Vaughan Williams and Iron Maiden have translated its narrative into evocative symphonies and rock ballads, further extending its cultural legacy.

In conclusion, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" stands as a seminal work of Romantic literature, exploring timeless themes of guilt, redemption, and spiritual transformation. Its comparative analysis with other Romantic works underscores its thematic depth and literary innovation, while its enduring influence on later literature and cultural expressions attests to its universal appeal and enduring relevance.

13. CONCLUSION

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge transcends its status as a mere narrative poem, delving deep into themes of guilt, penitence, and spiritual redemption. Through the mariner's harrowing journey and encounters with supernatural forces, Coleridge crafts a timeless allegory that continues to resonate with readers today.

Throughout the poem, Coleridge intricately explores the psychological and moral implications of guilt. The mariner's initial transgression of shooting the albatross serves as a catalyst for his spiritual descent and existential crisis. As guilt consumes him, he confronts the consequences of his actions, leading to a profound inner transformation marked by remorse and self-awareness.

Penitence emerges as a central theme as the mariner seeks redemption through acts of repentance and recognition of his interconnectedness with nature. The symbolism of the albatross, initially a symbol of grace and divine favour, becomes pivotal in his journey towards moral clarity and spiritual renewal. Through his suffering and isolation, the mariner ultimately embraces a renewed reverence for life and a deeper understanding of moral responsibility.

Coleridge's moral message in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" extends beyond the individual plight of the mariner. It underscores the universal human experience of moral frailty and the enduring quest for spiritual enlightenment. The poem invites readers to reflect on the consequences of ethical transgression, the complexities of guilt, and the transformative power of moral introspection.

Moreover, Coleridge's exploration of guilt and penitence resonates with contemporary concerns about environmental degradation, ethical responsibility, and the fragile balance between humanity and nature. The mariner's journey serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the moral imperative to respect and preserve the natural world.

In conclusion, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" stands as a testament to Coleridge's literary genius and moral insight. Through its evocative narrative and symbolic depth, the poem challenges readers to contemplate the enduring relevance of guilt, penitence, and spiritual redemption in navigating the complexities of human existence. Coleridge's moral message continues to inspire contemplation and discourse, offering profound insights into the enduring quest for ethical integrity and spiritual fulfilment in the modern world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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