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Religious Symbolism, Mystical And Supernatural Element In Coleridge's Poem *The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner*

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Abstract

This research paper explores the Christian themes and symbolism in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, focusing on the albatross as a Christ-like figure. The killing of the albatross is analyzed as a symbolic representation of original sin, disrupting the harmony between humanity, nature, and the divine, leading to supernatural punishment and suffering. The Mariner's journey mirrors Christian concepts of sin, guilt, atonement, and redemption, with the albatross serving as a divine intervention and its death symbolizing humanity's rejection of Christ. The paper further connects the Mariner's punishment to the biblical story of Cain, emphasizing the parallels in guilt, divine justice, and the burden of transgression. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the ecological and spiritual dimensions of the poem, reinforcing the idea that respecting nature is intertwined with respecting the divine order.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the Christian themes and symbolism within *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, illustrating how Samuel Taylor Coleridge integrates religious motifs, particularly through the figure of the albatross, into the Mariner's journey. The Albatross represents nature's innocence and the consequences of disrespecting harmony. The use of an albatross in the poem *Ancient Mariner* parallels Christ's role as a savior. When the Mariner and the crew are trapped in ice, the Albatross appears and brings them deliverance. This mirrors how

Christ is often depicted as a divine figure who brings salvation to humanity. The crew welcomes the bird with reverence, treating it as a benevolent force.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner presents the albatross as a symbol often interpreted as a figure like Christ. This interpretation emerges from the bird's role in the poem – bringing hope, grace, and salvation to the mariners, only to be wrongfully slain by the mariner. The death of Albatross initiates a series of supernatural and moral consequences that resemble the Christian way of looking at sin, redemption, and suffering:

**“As if it has been Christian soul,
we held in God's name”¹**

The description highlights the religious reverence given to the Albatross, likening it to a Christian soul, foreshadowing its later functions as a Christ-like figure. The Mariner's senseless act of killing the albatross is often interpreted as the crucifixion of Christ. Just as Christ is innocent yet crucified for the sake of humanity, the Albatross is an innocent creature that meets an unjust death. The repercussions of this act resemble the consequences of original sin, as a crew suffers from supernatural punishments, including stagnation and thirst. The Albatross is depicted as a divine intervention. Before its appearance, the ship is trapped in ice waters, symbolizing human suffering and isolation. The Albatross brings relief by guiding the ship out of danger. Here, it mirrors the role of Christ as a savior who delivers humanity from spiritual death.

Both the Mariner and the crew view the Albatross as a blessing, a connection to nature's divine harmony. The impulsive act of killing the albatross is similar to humanity's rejection of Christ. Just as Christ was crucified despite bringing salvation, the Albatross is killed despite guiding the sailors. The sin marks the beginning of the Mariners' suffering just as humanity's original sin leads to spiritual and moral exile. The immediate consequences - parching thirst, supernatural torment, and the death of the crew – suggest divine retribution, much like the suffering that follows mankind's fall from divine grace. The crew initially condemns the Mariners act, but when they find themselves momentarily safe, they justify it – only to be punished later.

Further, the manners of the Mariners' guilt parallel Christians' themes of sin and atonement. The act of killing the Albatross disputes the harmony between nature and the human world, much like sin is believed to disrupt the intended order of God's creation. Before its death, the Albatross symbolizes the interconnectedness of nature and humanity. Its presents suggest a divine balance between humans and the natural world. By killing the Albatross, the Mariner disrupts the harmony, causing nature itself to turn against him and his crew. The sea becomes a barren, lifeless wasteland, reflecting how human actions can lead to environmental disaster. The idea aligns with romantic ideals that nature possesses a secret quality and humans must respect it.

The Albatross reminds us of the importance of living in harmony with the natural world. Ultimately, the Mariner's journey mirrors spiritual transformations emphasizing themes of sin, panels, and redemption. Through

this, Coleridge reinforces the idea that respecting nature is equal to respecting the divine, making the albatross a powerful symbol of both spiritual and ecological harmony.

The poem is analyzed through the lens of original sin, where the Mariners' act of killing the albatross symbolizes humanity's fall from grace. This interpretation aligns with theological and philosophical views on sin, punishment, and redemption.

In Christian theology, original sin stems from Adam and Eve's disobedience. Similarly, the Mariner's act is one of the definitions against the natural order. The Albatross, like nature itself, represents divine creation, and its murder signifies a rejection of harmony between man and God's world. This is like the existentialist philosophy. Human suffering often arises from alienation and self-inflicted transgression. Just as humanity is condemned to toil and suffering after original sin, the Mariners endure his punishment – supernatural torment, isolation, and the burden of retelling his story. Nietzsche, for instance, looks at suffering as integral to growth, much like the Mariner's transformation through pain. The Mariner's actions are spontaneous, highlighting human free will, but the consequences seem predestined, reflecting theological debates between free will and divine justice.

The killing of the Albatross symbolizes a grave moral and spiritual transaction. The albatross initially appears to be a good omen guiding the sailors through the treacherous waters; however, when the albatross is killed, it disrupts the natural order and brings a curse upon himself and the crew. The weight of the sin is emphasized through the suffering that follows like the ship is becalmed, the crew endures thrust and hardship, and the supernatural forces, including death and life in death condemn the mariner to a fate vs death. His fellow sailors perish, and he alone is left to bear the consequences.

The Mariner's sin is further symbolized when the crew hangs the dead Albatross around his neck, a physical manifestation of his guilt and burden similar to the Christian concept of baring a cross. Redemptions begin when he unconsciously loves the sea creatures, demonstrating a newfound appreciation for life and nature, leading to the eventual fall of the albatross from his neck. Ultimately, the Mariner is doomed to wander the earth retelling his tale as penance. The killing of the Albatross is not just a crime against nature but a spiritual violation.

The killing of the Albatross in the poem is compared to Cain's curse, particularly in guilt, divine punishment, and the burden of sin. In the biblical story of Cain and Abel, Cain kills his brother Abel out of jealousy. As a researcher, God curses Cain, making him a wanderer, forever burdened with his kill. Cain also suffers from eternal restlessness and alienation from society, serving as a symbol of divine retribution. In Coleridge's poem, the Mariner kills an Albatross and endures immense suffering and isolation, ultimately condemned to wander the earth telling his tale as a warning to others. Thus, Cain's curse and the Mariner's punishment are parallel in their portrayal of guilt and divine justice as a form of atonement.

The poem is rich in Christian philosophical symbolism. The Albatross is a Christ-like figure whose unjust killing reflects the burden and consequences of original sin. The poem explores the necessity of suffering, the weight of guilt, and the possibility of grace, making it a profound meditation on human existence.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner explores themes of sin, guilt, punishment, and redemption, similar to the biblical story of Cain. Both the Mariner and Cain face the consequences of their wrong actions, leading to a life of suffering and isolation.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a rich, multifaceted work that intertwines themes of mysticism, religious symbolism, and Romantic theology. These elements are central to the poem's exploration of the human soul's journey, the divine, and the interplay between nature and the supernatural. Let's break down how these themes manifest in the poem:

Mysticism:

Mysticism, in the context of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, refers to the idea of direct, personal experiences of the divine or the transcendent, often beyond rational understanding. Coleridge employs mystical imagery and a sense of the supernatural to suggest that deeper truths about existence and spirituality cannot always be grasped through logic but instead require intuitive insight and emotional depth.

The Mariner's Transformation: The Mariner's journey is marked by a series of mystical experiences that transform him. Initially, he is driven by pride and a lack of reverence for nature, symbolized by his senseless killing of the albatross. However, after the death of the bird, the Mariner undergoes a series of mystical events, including the curse of the ship's crew and his eventual redemption. In his solitude, he perceives the divine presence in the natural world, particularly in the "water-snakes" that "flashed" and "frolicked" around him. His mystical vision of the beauty and sanctity of nature, which he had previously ignored, becomes a key moment of spiritual awakening.

The Albatross as a Symbol of the Divine: The Albatross itself can be seen as a mystical symbol—an intermediary between the natural and the divine realms. The bird's death brings about a curse, signifying that the Mariner has disrupted the spiritual harmony between humankind and nature. Only after recognizing the sacredness of nature, through a mystical vision, does the Mariner's curse lift. His moment of realization, marked by his spontaneous blessing of the "slimy things" in the sea, represents a mystical union with nature and the divine.

Religious Symbolism:

Religious symbolism is rife throughout *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and the poem can be read as an allegory of sin, repentance, and salvation, themes central to Christian theology. Coleridge uses various symbols from Christian tradition to convey the Mariner's spiritual journey.

The Role of the Cross: The albatross, after it is killed, is hung around the Mariner's neck like a cross, a powerful image that draws upon Christian iconography. The Mariner's burden is not just the physical weight of the bird but also the spiritual weight of his sin. The cross-like image of the bird suggests a process of spiritual redemption, where the Mariner must carry the weight of his guilt and find a path to redemption, much like Christ's sacrifice for humanity's sins.

The Mariner's eventual redemption is a form of spiritual purification and restoration. His recognition of the sanctity of nature and his realization that:

"He prayeth well, who loveth well

Both man and bird and beast"¹

signifies his repentance. The act of blessing the creatures of the sea can be seen as an expression of Christian love, where true grace is found in reverence and compassion for all of God's creation. His redemption is not just about appeasing divine wrath but understanding a deeper, spiritual connection to the world and the divine.

Romantic Theology:

Romantic theology, as seen in Coleridge's work, often emphasizes a personal, emotional connection to the divine and the importance of nature as a medium through which humans can experience the sacred. This is quite different from the more rational and institutionalized approach to religion that was characteristic of the Enlightenment.

Nature as a Spiritual Force: In *the Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, nature is portrayed as a manifestation of the divine, where the natural world is not separate from the spiritual realm but deeply interconnected with it. The Mariner's moment of epiphany comes when he connects with the natural world, especially when he sees the beauty of the water-snakes. This realization is both a moment of personal insight and a religious awakening. Coleridge is using nature to explore theological questions: How can one find the divine? In this case, nature, when approached with reverence, becomes a conduit for experiencing God's presence.

The Role of Imagination: Romantic theology, especially in Coleridge's poetry, is often connected to the power of the imagination to transcend ordinary experience and connect with the divine. The Mariner's journey is as much a journey of the mind as it is a physical one. His spiritual transformation occurs not through reason but through a mystical, imaginative realization of the divine in the world around him. Coleridge's view of religion is not confined to dogma but is seen as a more personal, imaginative, and emotional connection to the divine.

The Supernatural as Part of the Divine: The supernatural elements in the poem (the ghostly ship, the spirits, the curse) are part of a broader Romantic theological perspective, where the divine is not distant or abstract but is present in the world in mysterious and often unsettling ways. This engagement with the supernatural suggests

that the divine is often encountered in ways that defy human understanding, aligning with the Romantic ideal that intuition and feeling are just as valid as reason in understanding the divine.

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge blends mysticism, religious symbolism, and Romantic theology to depict a profound spiritual journey. The poem explores themes of sin, redemption, and the possibility of transcendence through a deep connection with nature and the divine. The Mariner's transformation from a careless sinner to a redeemed soul reflects Christian and Romantic views of the spiritual journey: a path marked by suffering, insight, and eventual reconciliation with a greater divine order. Through mysticism and religious symbolism, Coleridge portrays the human quest for meaning and salvation, showing that nature, the human mind, and the divine are interconnected in the search for spiritual truth.

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