

# On the naturalistic connotation of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner from the perspective of Christianity

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**Abstract.** Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." is his most important and complete literary work, published in the first Lyric Ballads, started the English romantic poetry "supernatural" mystery theme. As one of the representative poets of the Romantic period, Coleridge's poems have been interpreted by numerous critics in various ways. Through their analysis, readers have a deeper understanding of his aesthetic thoughts, religious beliefs and critical theories. This paper will make a deep analysis from the subject of crime and punishment in Christian meaning, and at the same time from the perspective of ecocriticism analysis of the symbolic meaning and naturalism connotation of the poem.

**Keywords:** Song of the Ancient Mariner; Christianity; Naturalism.

## 1. The Christian theme of sin and punishment

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is first and foremost a poem about the implications of Christian faith. Coleridge said of the process of writing The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, "I began with original sin, supported by the maxim, and ended with the doctrine of the realization of atonement." Coleridge begins the poem with a quote from Thomas·Burnet : "I find it easy to believe that there are more things in the universe that we cannot see than that we can see." He goes on to point out that, precisely because no one can describe to us what is invisible, people are often confused in matters of creation, so it is easy to adopt a sophisticated and skeptical attitude. "We must be alert to truth, adept at discerning certainty from uncertainty, night from day." In a sense, it can be said that this long poem is based on this attitude.

In the first part of the poem, the old sailors' ship is blown by a storm into the icy world of Antarctica. An albatross comes to their ship through the snow mist. The albatross, who ostensibly kept them company and shared their food, was actually guiding the ship out of the ice, but the old sailor accidentally shot it to death with an arrow. What the poet is implying here is the fall of man. Soon the whole ship was destroyed. Apparently, the albatross's death caused a disaster for the entire ship. A bird is a common symbol in Christian doctrine, connecting the causes and consequences of the disaster and revealing the spiritual world beyond the physical world. The poem, based on Christian principles, reveals that people should love all of God's creatures and "be alert" to the spiritual world beyond the physical world, through the later experience of the old sailor. Thinking about that invisible realm allows one to further enrich the spiritual world and to imagine a greater and better world. Such thoughts can provide people with a better Angle to think about the trivial things in daily life. Such thinking is not meant to lead people away from the truth. Depending on the context of the poem, the introduction to the poem can be interpreted as follows:

The first is that there is a spiritual world whose mysteries, though not fully understood, must be respected. The old sailor's mistake was to despise the spirit world, and to kill an albatross that was clearly the spirit world.

Second, the mystery of this spiritual world is that it is extremely beautiful, miraculous, but also terrible. You can describe it, but you're better off feeling it than analyzing it. When the old sailor unknowingly "blesses them" (i.e., water snakes), his spiritual regeneration also begins.

Third, the sense of wonder at the unseen can lead to a better understanding of the world. This is evident in the story of the old sailor.

The poet tells the story of the old sailor who shot the albatross. This is a naturally occurring act that hardly draws attention to its symbolic significance, but the poem presents the reader with a startling ending and tries to prove that the ending is just.

The attitude of the old sailor's associates towards him is also noteworthy. When the sun came up, not long after he had been killed, the sailors rejoiced and said to the old sailor, "'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,/That bring the fog and mist. " Then, for many days without wind or rain, the ship could not proceed, and the weather was so hot and dry that the companions " throat/Was parched, and glazed each eye./A weary time! a weary time!/How glazed each weary eye," People began to shoot evil looks at the old sailor, and hanged dead birds around his neck as punishment. He was hated by his comrades not for the crimes he had committed, but for the disaster his actions had caused them. But God punished his fellow sailors first. One by one, 200 sailors fell dead on deck because of the heat and drought. The old sailor, however, experienced a kind of torment which ceased to exist. He experienced a punishment more painful than death. "Alone, alone, all, all alone,/Alone on a wide wide sea!" God's punishment of the sailors was inconceivable according to moral principles. A God who loves both humans and birds is supposed to be kind and forgiving, but the God in this poem is full of jealousy. The poem offers a message, or a threat, that the slightest offence against God will bring merciless and permanent punishment. If you want to avoid conscious or unconscious sin, you have to retire from an active, fiery life and live forever in endless prayer. And men love God not through spontaneous participation, but through fear and forced obedience.

This poem has a remarkable feature. Many scenes and images in the poem connect the human factors with some supernatural factors in an absurd way, bringing readers a sense of the fusion of fantasy and reality, which is manifested as the communication between human beings and fairies, and the rebirth after death. The whole poem is filled with the atmosphere of terror, and this atmosphere is not confined to one part, but throughout the poem. The theme of crime and punishment runs through the old sailor's actions in the poem story, as well as some events, scenes and images in the poem. Narrated in the first person, the poem tells of the dead at the feet of the old sailors, the dead bodies covered with cold sweat, they neither stink nor rot, and the eyes they gazed at the old sailors as they died never died. He closed his eyes, daring not to open them, beating like a pulse, the sky and the sea pressing down on his tired eyes. The body of the dead person can still sweat, and the body can keep the state of life for a long time. These scenes are not in line with common sense, giving people a horrible and absurd feeling, making people feel the pain of the old sailor, but also revealing the theme that the old sailor needs to obtain forgiveness through atonement. The poet uses his rich imagination to depict the known real world and the unknown mysterious world. These scenes, which are difficult for ordinary people to understand, not only show the elements of horror and romance, but also reveal the deep theme of crime and punishment. The meaning of the text is not adventure and fantasy, but to give people a warning. In addition, some images of ghosts in the poem reveal the theme, which is the product of the combination of potential concepts and human imagination. In addition to helping to create the weird atmosphere and horror of the poem, the activities of people and things in the poem are more deeply rooted in the human heart. The poet makes the characters and ghosts directly relate to each other, and these images are actually created from the human heart. By analyzing the psychological feelings of the characters, we can feel the psychological effects of crime and punishment and some abnormal mental states. Crime, punishment and atonement are vividly depicted and reflected in the poem, especially in the end, the old sailor's attitude towards the albatross is a reflection of Coleridge's expression of the theme of crime and punishment.

At the end of the poem, only the old sailor, the "originator" of all the disasters and punishments in the story of the poem, survived. Different scholars and predecessors have explained this problem mostly from the perspective of the view of nature. The theme of harmony between man and nature is an ancient and evergreen one. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner uses "the ship in the Painting" to show the disastrous consequences caused by the opposition between human and nature with the suffocating waiting for the punishment of fate. It implies that only by loving nature and others can people achieve the harmonious coexistence between human and nature and obtain the way of self-

salvation. "The old sailor went through the triple cycle of being in nature -- being away from nature -- returning to nature, realizing the powerful power of nature. After suffering, he became a wise man who told this painful experience to give advice to the world. Man and nature changed from ignorance to conscious cooperation, but this time not out of instinct but after the disaster of conscious action. The relationship between man and nature finally ushered in a beautiful harmony. 'He (the old sailor) had retraced his course to the place from which he had started, and suffered, of course, but his suffering was explored in the context of charity, and his perception of a truth that went far beyond the rules of religion and became an affirmation of the harmony of the universe.'" The old sailor just began to sail on the sea with other sailors. Everything was calm and steady, suggesting the harmony between man and nature. At this time, the sea was the representative of nature. According to the Bible, the sea is the carrier of human birth, and we can see the power of the sea from the example of Noah's Ark. The sea can give birth to man, or it can destroy him. When the albatross, the representative of the Messenger of life, was unconsciously shot by the old sailor, the sea, representing nature, began to retaliate violently against human beings. The human beings represented by the old sailor were now far away from nature. Just like the development of industrial civilization in the poet's time, and our society today, nature's revenge on human beings is violent and cruel, with all human lives as the highest price. The only way for mankind to achieve salvation is to love and protect nature again. Another incarnation of nature, the water snake of the sea, successfully completed the salvation of mankind, and the old sailor grasped this opportunity to survive.

## **2. The symbolic significance of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is analyzed from the perspective of ecocriticism**

Although "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is filled with scenes of mystery and horror, and shrouded in a supernatural divine power, it seems to tell a story of retribution and religious moralization, Coleridge's sense of truth goes far beyond religious rules, Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is an ecologist poem that uses the cover of religious themes to help the world and save people. Dissatisfied with English politics and yearning for the French revolution, Coleridge and Southey hatched a Platonic "Republic" in America, but it collapsed. As a result of Robert Southey's defection, Coleridge was caught in a complex psychological conflict. While he remained loyal to the democratic and liberal ideals of the French revolution, he was also disillusioned by the horror of the violence it unleashed. So he, like Wordsworth, finally turned to nature. His sense of social responsibility and historical mission did not fall on the revolution, but with the insight of a philosopher and the foresight of a strategist, he focused his eyes on the environment that threatened the future survival and development of mankind. As an amateur biologist, Coleridge had a keen interest in biology and was more sensitive and forward-looking about the destruction of the natural environment than other Romantic poets.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is undoubtedly an ecological allegorical poem. People have speculated about the burning red light described in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner, as well as about the rotting sea. In fact, the burning red flame refers to the red tide caused by pollution in the sea, which looks like a burning flame from a distance. The rotting seas are the result of thousands of sea creatures, especially fish, being killed by toxic red tides and left stranded on the coast to rot. Thus, "The water, like a witch's oils," and though "Water, water, every where, / Nor any drop to drink." How similar is this to today's ocean pollution scene!

Coleridge, with the sensitivity of a poet and the insight of a biologist, foresaw the ecological catastrophe facing mankind as the train of the Industrial Revolution rolled forward with its thick black smoke and its boundless vision. The ecological consequences of the industrial revolution did not begin to gain traction until the late 19th century, when it was too late. Elme in Ted Hughes's collection "The Ruins of Elme" (1979) epitomizes the ecological disaster caused by the Industrial Revolution. More than 100 years have passed since the Industrial Revolution, but the damage it inflicted on the environment in Erme has yet to be healed, and no one knows how long it will take. Coleridge foresaw

the cataclysmic potential of the Industrial revolution more than 200 years before anyone else, so it is no wonder that *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was unintelligible, and a testament to his acuity and foresight. In this sense alone, there is no doubt that Coleridge is a great ecological prophet, and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* deserves the reputation of "the greatest ecological fable".

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a metaphor for the evolution of human beings from the primitive ignorance of nature, instinctive reverence for nature and attachment to nature, into the stage of opposites and conflicts between human and nature in civilized society, to the future stage of reflecting on the ecological crisis and finally realizing the harmonious coexistence of human and nature. Therefore, it is an ecological poem about human growth.

Man's dependence on nature is the initial form of the relationship between man and nature. In the face of the powerful nature, the power of human childhood is very weak, subordination, obedience and awe are the way people rely on nature. The sailors in "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*" are helpless in the face of storms, fog and ice, waiting for the wind to clear and the snow to melt. The first chapter of the poem shows the instinctive dependence of man on nature in the ignorant age of infancy. With the continuous improvement of human subject power and ability, human beings are no longer willing to crawl at the foot of nature but over it, and the relationship between human and nature has undergone qualitative changes. When human beings try to conquer nature and get rid of nature for free development, it is actually cutting the umbilical cord connected with mother nature, but also stepping into the dangerous situation of confrontation and conflict with nature. The old sailor shooting the albatross was the beginning of man's journey away from nature to conquer it. The moment when man rejoiced in the temporary triumph of nature was the moment when crisis was rapidly building and brewing. As Engels put it, "Let us not get carried away with our triumph over nature. For every such victory nature retaliates against us ". Though for a while the sun was still shining when the old seaman shot nature's representative, the albatross, but soon things changed and nature's revenge began. All of a sudden, the beauty was gone, and the horror of the nightmare grew ever stronger. In the 6th verse of chapter 2 to the 13th verse of chapter 4, the poet shows people how the serious conflict between man and nature has driven mankind to a desperate situation. Faced with the terrible disaster, the old sailor finally realized his danger. He was determined to restore his relationship with nature. He wanted to pour love into every living individual in nature. He blessed the first life he saw, the water snake, which is a metaphor for human beings' love for natural life after their painful thinking, and thus the conflict between man and nature became history. Then, the nightmare passed, the earth was glad to rain, and the old sailor who had suffered through the ordeal became the wise man who told the story of history and counseled the world. Man and nature once again hand in hand, this time not out of instinct but after the disaster of conscious action. The relationship between man and nature has finally ushered in a beautiful spring. From the 14th verse of chapter 4 to the end of the poem, the long process is narrated and the beauty of the future is finally set.

### 3. Conclusion

Obviously, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* describes the process of human's understanding of nature, which is a true portrayal of the relationship between human and nature in the process of human growth. Therefore, it is a long narrative poem with the theme of human growth. It not only contains the past of the relationship between man and nature, but also reveals the current situation of the deteriorating relationship between man and nature in the age of Koch, and warns the world with ecological eschatology. At the same time, it looks forward to the future of the relationship between man and nature. It not only transcends the temporal and spatial boundaries of reality, but also contains history. Therefore, it is undoubtedly an epic work as well as a cautionary work with strong allegorical color. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* incorporates religious themes into the poem. It seems to be a religious theme, but in fact it examines the relationship between man and nature and explores their harmonious coexistence.

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