

## **Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" : As a Christian Allegory.**

**(B.A.English Hons. Part-1, Paper- 2)**

### **As a Christian Allegory:**

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge's** "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a lyrical ballad that seems more like a miniature epic. However, not only it is a ballad talking about the adventure of an old mariner who is cursed for life because he kills an albatross; deeper than that, it is also a religious allegory conveying numerous themes pertaining to Christianity. On the one hand, if one reads "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" simply as a tale at sea, the poem stands remarkable because of its simple

rhyme and easy flow. On the other hand, if one reads deeper into the intricate details, symbolism, themes, and literary aspects, Coleridge will therefore have produced a masterpiece.

Furthermore, many critics agree that there are several religious connotations in this ballad; however, very few agree upon it being a religious allegory carrying a main religious theme that reflects Christian beliefs. This paper will discuss all the possible religious notions conveyed in Coleridge's artwork.

Christianity preaches that life is a trial by which we either pass and go to heaven, or fail and go to purgatory. Also, the human body is a victim of the human thought and action, which is represented by the soul. Therefore, in relation to the ballad, we can refer to the ship as the human body and the Mariner who steers the ship and leads it to destruction as the human soul. This ship led by the Mariner goes through a trial of storm and winds, but fails because of the Mariner. In Christianity, when a person is over with the trial (dies), his body rots away, "...for dust you are and to dust you will return," (Genesis 3:16 – 19), and the soul remains alive, either tortured, or pleased. The ship sinks. However, the Mariner becomes a

captive of Life-in-Death (purgatory) and remains perpetually cursed for the mistake he has done.

Another symbolism conveyed through Coleridge's ballad is the Albatross that symbolizes Jesus Christ. When things start to fall apart in the ship, and the storm destroys all, the

Albatross appears as a good omen that saves the ship from the remnants of the storm.

Just as the time when Christ was born and things gradually started to improve, sick people were healed, the blind saw, the deaf heard, and the mute spoke.

*"At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came ;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name."*

(Mariner, p. 424)

The Albatross leads the ship to its right track, just as Christ leads His followers to heaven. "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). However, salvation is not a mate during the trip, for the bird is killed.

Another reference of the Albatross to Christ is when the Mariner kills it by a cross-bow, as a symbol of the cross Christ died on. Also, after the murder, guilt strikes him for killing a good spirit: "*Instead of the cross, the Albatross/About my neck was hung*" (p. 426). Again, referring back to the Holy Bible we see that Judea kills himself because of the great guilt of turning in Christ to the cross and denying his name three times before dawn (just as he was told by the Lord.)

After killing the albatross, a second skeletal ship appears carrying Death and Life-in-Death. This ship represents man's life without Christ; Christianity states that life without religion and faith is void and empty. Hence, the skeletal ship carries death and its partner and reaches for the Mariner, since his life appears to be without Christ, for he kills His symbol.

The Mariner's story can also be related to Cain's, the son of Adam and Eve, who kills his brother. God curses him to forever wander, but marks him with a sign so that no one shall kill him (mark of Cain). The Mariner, here, becomes cursed forever and doesn't die, but lives Life-in-Death, which is much worse than dyeing. He is destined to wander around with a burden and narrate his story whenever necessary to make him feel better.

Moving away from symbolism, numerological Christian references are also significant in the ballad. Number three represents The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit (The Holy Trinity), as well as Christ's resurrection on the third day after He got crucified. In the ballad, in Part III, Death-in-Life wins the battle and whistles three times. Furthermore, the Hermit, his son, and the Mariner, together in one boat, are very relevant to the Trinity, where the Hermit and his son are the Father and Son, and the Mariner is the soul (as I had mentioned), the Holy Spirit. Number seven is significant in the Bible because it counts the number of days it took God to create the earth. In the ballad, the Mariner remains afloat for seven days until he gets rescued by the boat; and for seven days and seven nights he is haunted by the curse of the dead shipmates' open eyes. Nevertheless, the poem is made of seven parts; Part III includes the climax - the important part of the story - where the Mariner gets cursed, and Part VII is where the ballad ends with the moral.

Another important religious theme is the one that relates the Mariner's story to Adam and Eve's, conveying the notion of sin, punishment, and regret. The first people on earth were the first sinners, so does Genesis say. Adam



and Eve were the cause of all humankind's suffering, just like the Mariner's sin which causes his shipmates pain and torture. In both stories, a sin is committed, a punishment and a curse are set, and regret is felt after living the curse, which leads to moments of epiphany. The snake in Adam and Eve's story is a major character that encouraged them to sin. In the Rime of the Ancient Mariner however, the religious irony stands in the snakes, for they are there for him to bless in order to be freed of the curse. Ironically, the Mariner needs to praise the cause of his torture (for if it wasn't for Adam and Eve's snake we'd all be in paradise now), in order to feel better.

Finally, the theme of narration sums up the whole story; the Mariner narrates his story to the wedding guest, and will always have to narrate it wherever he goes. Relating this theme to religion, it can be the notion of preaching. On the surface, the Mariner narrates his story to feel better. On a deeper level, the Mariner preaches the moral of respect and reverence towards God's creatures. In the Bible, the theme of preaching is very significant, for this is one reason why Jesus was sent to us, and that was the job of the apostles after Him. Here, the Mariner could be a symbol of Christ himself who suffers in order

to preach the message to others in order to save them from mankind sin.

Therefore, once this ballad is read and apprehended, one would realize how deep its Christian allegory is and how important it is to understand the symbols conveyed by the author to the reader. There is no doubt that Samuel Taylor Coleridge is one of the best poets of his time; for this ballad, with its intricate meanings and rimes, could've never been written as such by an ordinary poet. In fact, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is one of the poems that carry various themes in which a person would enjoy studying and writing about in depth. The more we read it, the more we learn about it, and the more we admire it.

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