

The Images in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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The paper mainly talks about the background of S. T. Coleridge and the images of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. As for the images, the wind, the albatross and the snake will be thoroughly discussed. There are many different images which also have different meanings and connotations in the context. What's more, the poem expresses the theme of the metabolic relationships between men and nature: harmony, conflict or compromise.

Keywords: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, S. T. Coleridge, images

Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is one of the most significant poets and critics in English literature. Generally, his poems are mainly composed of two parts: one is using common language to depict common things and ordinary people; the other is using unique imagination to describe supernatural things. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* belongs to the second group (Coleridge, 2004). It is one of his famous poems, which helps him win lots of fame and makes him firmly stand in literature field. Meanwhile, this poem is also Coleridge's major contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Some critics blame Coleridge for his lack of morals in his poems. But actually, this poem contains lots of morals according to Coleridge. Coleridge succeeds in exploring the theme of sin by his rich imagination and the depicting supernatural. In the poem, Coleridge prudentially builds a symbolic world of supernatural wind, albatross, and so on. All of these images serve to develop the theme from the unreasonable crime to the spiritual punishment and lastly to the redemption. They play important roles in the poem that we even take it as a symbolic poem.

He is also generally considered the romanticism as the first English Romantic literary school. The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* with William Wordsworth marks the beginning of the Romanticism in England (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 1988). Coleridge, Wordsworth and Robert Southey form the so-called "Lake Poets" in the last few years of the 18th century for they all lived in the Lake District. Meanwhile, these three men had radical inclinations in their youth but turned conservative at last. After the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge went to Germany. Later he became interested in Germany literature. Afterwards, he returned to the Lake District and soon got ill which greatly affected him and was a great factor in his opium abuse.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner tells the story of an ancient mariner who kills an albatross, and then ominous disasters follow. The poem creates a supernatural atmosphere through symbolism represented by

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elements such as a crew of dead men, a phantom ship, an overhang curse of the albatross, magic breeze and polar spirit. His imaginative versification, intertwining reality and fantasy are the best incorporation.

From the poem, we can see it contains searching questions and tentative solutions of the artistic and philosophic ideals. Some of the descriptions are so brilliant especially the magical wind, the mysterious albatross and the beautiful snake. What is more, the poem supplies various religious and supernatural images to depict a moving journey of doubtful and renewal redemption. This article will elaborate on the functions of the such major images as the wind, the albatross and the snake.

The Wind

Coleridge bestows the wind with a great deal of supernatural powers like mysterious, changeable and omniscient. Meanwhile, the wind appears many times in different ways and accompanies all the mariner's journey.

At first, the ship was accompanied by good wind and fair weather, and sails southward smoothly. The wind is just like the engine pushing or compelling the ship to come forward the South Pole. With Ship drives fast, the crews are all in good mood and they pool their efforts together to go. The environment is so harmonious. It appears to be a good and fantastic journey. Suddenly when ship reaches the equator, a storm comes. The tyrannous and strong wind strikes "with his overtaking wings" and drives the ship southward to the South Pole.

And now the STROM-BLAST came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong;
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.
With sloping masts and dipping prow, as who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe
And forward bends his head,
This ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled. (Coleridge, 2015, I. 11)

Here we can see the wind frightens the crew because they don't know where to go in the wind. Accompanied by the mist and snow, it grows wondrous cold. They are trapped in the unknown and uncertain place with powerlessness. While we cannot conclude it is the terrible or evil wind for it doesn't harm to the crew and bring the devastating effects.

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariner's hollo! (Coleridge, 2015, I. 18)

Here we can get that the good wind helps the crew get out of the dreadful world of cold. While the old mariner kills the albatross without reason. At first the sun still rise upon the right out of the sea, and the good south wind still blow behind. That is why all crew say that it is right to kill the albatross because they believe it is the albatross bringing the mist and the fog. But this good weather seems to be hurtful to the crew because it is too hot and too dry in a few days. Gradually water is everywhere but no drops to drink. All the boards shrink

and every tongue is withered at the root so that they could not speak. They have been choked with soot. But they still don't feel their sin and crime, so all crew are sadly dead in the end except the old mariner, because he hang the dead albatross on his neck instead of the cross.

From the tiny sea creatures, the old mariner finds love again and realizes his friendship and kinship with other natural creatures. The symbol of sin has gone, and the mysterious wind appears again in another form. It can only be heard but cannot be felt or touched. Though the wind never touches the ship, it brings the rain to refresh and baptize the mariner in a more significant way. The rain washes the sin and crime away.

Finally, when the repentance is complete and the spell is expiated, he can turn his eyes away from his shipmates. Then comes again the magical and mysterious wind. It touches the mariner softly and gently. After the mariner gets rid of the sin and crime through his repentance and his discovery of love for all natural creatures, he becomes a new man. He knows what is more important among men and what is the true love.

The Albatross

The albatross in the poem is like Jesus Christ who save humans from troubles. When the crew get into trouble and couldn't tell the right direction, the albatross come. It always accompanies the crew, and finally they get through the mist and fog.

At length did cross an albatross;
Through the fog it came;
As if it has been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name. (Coleridge, 2015, II. 22)

When the crew hail it in God's name, they regard the albatross as an Christian. Actually it's do like Christian who saves people's life. Also it is like Jesus Christ who is killed unreasonably. What's more, the dead albatross is like the cross to be hung on the neck in order to be saved.

After the albatross is killed, all crew on the ship are glad because they think it is the albatross who brings the mist and fog. But after they get into the trouble once more, they change ideas. They blame the old mariner to kill the bird and hang the dead bird around his neck which symbolizes his sin.

Ah! Well a-day! What evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung. (Coleridge, 2015, II. 27)

We may ask why the crew hang the dead albatross around the old mariner's neck. Actually nobody could find the exact answer. But truly in the end, we can comprehend the function of the bird which is really great and powerful. At last all crew except the mariner drop dead one by one. The mariner is enveloped in the loneliness both physically and spiritually.

Alone, alone, all, all, alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony. (Coleridge, 2015, III)

We can get the albatross is not a mere bird, it symbolizes "happy, happy things". It has great power to affect and control the others' lives. From here, we learn that the albatross and the Jesus Christ both are adorable

sons of God. The spirit living in the South Pole loves this albatross, and the albatross loves the man who kills him. So Jesus plead God to forgive him, and the albatross gives the old mariner life finally. The mariner get redemption and salvation.

The albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea. (Coleridge, 2015, III. 33)

Love and pray are kinds of strength and power in the world. However, it doesn't mean everyone has this power only the one who is reverent can be rescued.

The Snake

The snake is also another image or life of nature without prejudice. From this poem, we can also find the mariner defines the albatross as a king of animal. And the spirit involves the albatross, sea, moon and the snake as the equal things with humans. If humans kill the other living things unreasonably, they will pay debts for their evil crimes.

In this poem, the albatross is a virtuous thing which symbols God. While the snake is not like devil who seduces Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit. Under the description of Coleridge, the snake is beautiful and pure. These lovely living creatures arouse the interests of humans so that the old mariner receives salvation and gets out of trouble.

We can see that in the heart of Coleridge, everything is beautiful and amazing. All of them are the living "humans", just like people themselves.

Conclusion

The wind, the albatross, the snake and the humans are the sons of nature. We should live together harmoniously. From the end of this poem, we can see the old man becomes a new man who full of love for everything. And he decides to pray and preach his ideal and story making people love each other.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (Coleridge, 2015, V)

In a word, the magic wind, the mysterious albatross and the beautiful snake are all important elements that we cannot ignore. They guide the mariner get out of crime and sin and witness his redemption and salvation. Also they play important parts in the relationship between man and nature. From the whole poem, we can conclude we must love every natural creature. God is philanthropic and sacred who loves every natural creature including animals, plants and humans. We must regard every natural creatures as our friends and live in harmony with all natural things in a peaceful co-existence.

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