



## RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM IN S. T. COLERIDGE'S *THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER*

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### ABSTRACT

*Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an English Poet of the Romantic Movement, best known for his allegorical Sea-faring poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". In this poem, Coleridge uses symbolic language to express his own religious thoughts and deep religious truths to the readers. The poem describes the life of an Ancient Mariner, Who had committed a sin by killing the sea bird, Albatross, Which is considered to be a sign of good omen. The Albatross hung around the Mariner's Neck as a curse for the sin which he had committed. It fell down from his neck, when he repented for his sin and pray for clemency. The voyage is a symbolic representation of the Mariner's life, his path towards sin and his subsequent repentance. This present paper aims to explore the deep religious symbolisms in this poem, which reveals the universal message that Selfish Pride will lead us towards sin and Self Repentance will keep us away from sin.*

**Key Words:** *Mariner, clemency, Self - Repentance*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Religious Symbolism

Religious symbolism is an art, which helps the writers to express the universal message of a religion by using metaphor in their writings. Coleridge in his moral narrative poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" uses the symbolic representation of the Christian religion to convey the readers, the moral law of god. It gives the readers the complex messages by its rich symbolism. It is not a direct religious sermon. But there are many symbols of the Biblical Interpretations such as Sin, Punishment

and Repentance, which can be seen throughout the poem. Coleridge covers a large part of this poem on the basis of sin.

### **Religious Symbolism in *The Rime of Ancient Mariner***

The poem begins, as the Mariner stops a wedding guest with his powerful glittering eye and forces him to listen a story in which he kill an Albatross during a journey he makes with other sailors in the sea. The voyage is a symbolic representation of Mariner's life and his path towards sin. Albatross here symbolically refers to Jesus Christ. In Christianity, Christ was sent by God to save the Mankind. The same thing happens here as the Albatross sent here to save the ship. But the Ancient Mariner kills the Albatross with his cross – bow and thereby, he destroys the belief of Christians. Coleridge's comparison of Albatross with the Christ can be seen in the following lines.

*“At length did cross an Albatross,  
Through the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.” (63-66)*

Coleridge explores the poem with deep religious thoughts. He reveals to the readers that the Mariner, who kills the bird, which is a symbol of good omen is now feel guilty and cursed. Ignorance and Self – pride leads the Mariner to commit the sin. He wants to repent for the sin, which he has committed. From here we can understand the religious belief of Christians that god should punish everyone who indulge in committing sin and should forgive those who repent for their past sin.

A sinner has the guilt or burden on his soul for the wrong deed he did. The Ancient Mariner and the ship has been cursed due to the misdeed of the Mariner. As a punishment for his act, the sailors hung the dead Albatross around his neck. The Ocean becomes thicker and the sailors lips are parched by heat and thirst. The curse torments everyone in the ship. The dead Albatross, which hung around the Mariner's neck symbolizes the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as it can be seen in the below lines.

*“Ah! well a-day! What evil looks  
Had I from old and young!  
Instead of the cross, the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.” (139-142)*

At that time, a ship came there with two supernatural beings. One is Death and the other is Life-in-Death. The Mariner has two options only, whether to live or to die here Life-in-Death

symbolically refers to punishment. Death traps the sailors in its web and all of them die one by one and drop down. Life-in-Death win the Mariner as it indicates the punishment that he must endure penance throughout his life and he must seek people to tell his tale, unless his soul will torment him until he delivers the tale. He feels guilty and carries burden on his soul for the misdeed which he did. He wants to seek refuge from the God and try to pray. But he is prevented by a wicked Whisper. At last, the Moon rise on the sky, reflecting the shadow of the ship across the waters. The water snakes moves freely in the sea and the Mariner's heart filled with full of love and appreciation for them. He blesses the beautiful creatures. At that moment, the Mariner find himself able to pray, and the dead Albatross fell from his neck and sank into the sea. From this act, Coleridge states that God has created every creature in this world and we must love them all.

*“He Prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both Great and Small;  
For the dear god who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.” (614-617)*

### **Conclusion**

Coleridge write this poem as a medium to express his own religious thoughts and the underlying religious truths. He uses the Sun and the Moon as an important symbol in this poem. The Sun indicates the wrath of god as most of the troubles happens to the Mariner during the day. While the Moon represents the quality of forgiveness, as the mariner free from his curse and return home during the presence of Moonlight. Thus, the poem with its rich symbolism carries an universal message that whoever transgress the god's law will be punished and those who regret his misdeeds and repent for his sins will be forgiven by the god.

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