
ANALYSIS OF THE TREATMENT OF SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS IN THE RHYME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER BY S. T. COLERIDGE

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Abstract

Supernatural is an ever present force in the history of English literature. From the old history of English literature to the contemporary writings, it is one of the themes. Among the English Romanticists of the first generation, Samuel Taylor Coleridge possesses the most vigorous mind. He goes to the supernatural. This research article focuses on the analysis of Coleridge's treatment of supernatural elements in the light of his famous concept of poetic faith, the willing suspension of disbelief with special reference to his ballad The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. His creative supernatural elements become credible and convincing in the hands of Coleridge. He acquires from the reader the willing suspension of disbelief and establishes poetic faith. This paper explores that Coleridge's treatment of supernatural remains psychological phenomena. He gives a new dimension to this supernatural activity. He shows complete departure from contemporary writers in employing the supernatural elements. He has connected the supernatural elements to human reality. His explanations to things are not descriptive rather than suggestive to show the mystery. The presentation of unseen things comes in front of the readers as seen and vivid through colour of imagination and different from the Gothic setting.

Keywords:

Romanticism;
Gothicism;
Willing Suspension of disbelief;
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Poetic faith ;

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1. Introduction

Scarborough (1917) observes that the supernatural elements as a theme holds a prime position in the annals of English Literature. From the beginning of old English literature to the present time, supernatural elements played a prominent role as a theme. In the Middle Ages, it is observed in the whole atmosphere for example, in an anonymous ballad Beowulf, it comes in the shape of dragon, dragon's mother and many more. In the sixteenth century, in Shakespearean tragedies, it appears in the form of ghost as Hamlet and witches in Macbeth. In Edmond Spenser's Faerie Queene, supernatural appears in allegorical form. However, in the Nineteenth century it takes a prominent position in the hands of Coleridge.

Bowra (1950) reveals that Coleridge was interested to put into use *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* with an essay on supernatural. Due to his inconsistency, this was not materialized, though he lectured in 1818 on the Subject. Now the researcher can assume from pieces of writing that he highlighted this main theme of supernaturalism. According to Wordsworth, Coleridge's ideas of his masterpiece *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* came from the dream of Mr. John Cruikshank. This dream was about a person suffered as a result of curse due to his crime later on. A skeleton ship is also mentioned. This story is narrated by Coleridge to Wordsworth. Coleridge (1919) in Biograpia Literaria shared his scheme about writing.

The overall objective is to analyze the supernatural element in Coleridge's poetry in the context of *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* to understand his concept the willing suspension of disbelief. There are several points to observe the tendency and introduction of supernatural elements in Coleridge's *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*. Legouis and Cazamian's observation in the History of English Literature (1933) as recorded that the wonder of the Romanticists is the fascinating detection, the progressive lighting-up of an inner horizon, which extends beyond the limits of clear consciousness; it is the insight of objects in the magic garb with which our fresh vision invested them of yore, and which our tired eyes had forgotten. The obsession of distant century is the mysterious attraction of strong modes of feeling of which collective memory has preserved a confused recollection, and which it naturally associates with remote phases of its experiences. (Legouis & Cazamian, 1933, p.999)

Bowra (1950) has thoroughly analyzed that among the Romantics, the second flower of Romantic period Samuel Taylor Coleridge has a different attitude towards supernatural. Coleridge not only appreciates it but connects it with daily experiences of life as well. We see the importance of supernatural in his finest work *Kubla Khan, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Christabel*. Since childhood Coleridge used to read books of old romances and of weird and strangeness. The Arabian Nights series is one of them. Samuel Coleridge Taylor's involvement with occult and its impact on his work was clear. At the same time, he knew about his difficulty that much terrific literature would lead him to Gothic setting. So he thought all perspectives and tried his best to introduce supernatural in its own way as humane as he could. *Christabel, The Rime of The Ancient Mariner and Kubla Khan* have a supernatural subject, but its effect was much more than a simple thrill and horror. He was to make the unreal as real 'willing suspension of disbelief that constitutes poetic faith.' The present article examines his this different treatment of supernatural in this study. Coleridge (1817) in his Criticism *Biographia Literaria* has mentioned:

It was agreed, that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (Coleridge, 1817, para.2).

There is abundance of literature review on the presence of supernatural elements in English literature, which earned a unique position in the hands of Coleridge in the nineteenth century. Before going to discuss his concept and the treatment of supernatural elements in Coleridge's poetry limited to *The Ancient Mariner*; it is of vital importance to know what is supernatural. And what is the significance of supernatural elements as a theme in the light of previous studies. Why Coleridge has employed it in his work and what was its impact later on? Dictionary.com's 21st century Lexicon defines supernatural as "relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe; especially: of or relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit, or devil.

Why supernatural elements are fashioned in the pieces of art? Scarborough (1917) highlights that man's love for supernatural elements for the reason that they dignify him and give him the position to attain those things and power which is denied to them elsewhere, which they do not have authority to achieve. He sets his own universe according to his taste and mindset, where he finds the guards of demons and devils all the time. Dr. Faustus and Macbeth acquired power through their supernatural beings. The unearthly beings meet us in all guises. Literature had provided us with opportunity to meet the supernatural beings in the light of our strong imagination.

Lovecraft (1935) shows that Renaissance world of wonder presented the supernatural in allegorical form. Shakespearean tragedies presented it in the form of ghosts and witches. He highlights in the *Dawn of the Horror Tale*, that "It was from no empty background that the Renaissance magicians and alchemists—Nostradamus, Trithemius, Dr. John Dee, Robert Fludd, and the like—were born. The eighteenth century fashioned the supernatural." (Lovecraft, 1935, P.5). Scarborough (1917) in her study evaluates that the Gothic novels were the real harbinger of supernatural elements in the novels while in poetry it was already in use. The novelists Mrs. Redcliff, Monk and Horace Walpole are the prominent names in employing supernatural terrors. Horace Walpole is regarded as the real founder of horror tales. In general this movement is regarded as Gothic. (P. 16).

Daiches (1960) expresses that the beginning of the Romantic Movement as opposed to the 18th century Neo-Classical, the Romantics justified the term in the light of their poetic theory and taste, which pervaded throughout the Europe in the latter part of the 18th century. The Romantic Movement first questioned the philosophy of the 18th century idea especially in rejecting John Lock's and Newton's explanation of the visible world. Bowra (1950) in his book *The Romantic Imagination*, highlights that the Romantics found solace in the world of spirit. They tried to explore the inner. They did not believe in the world of appearance rather than focused on the world what was unknown. They wished to pinpoint the mysteries of life and though it what life is and its worth. Through their power of imagination they hoped to understand both the present and the unseen world.

Unlike their German contemporaries, who were satisfied with the horror and thrill, the Romantics used to pursue their lines of imaginative enquiry until they found satisfied answers. For example the powers which is seen by Wordsworth in nature, S. T. Coleridge in supernatural and P. B. Shelley in love can really be felt through their vision. (Bowra, 1950, P. 9-10)

Joshua (2014) defines that the Gothic horror arose from the Goths, a Germanic tribe dates back to the fourth Century. Scarborough (1917) explores that in order to enjoy the liberty in the expression the writer of the time turned to the legends and myths. Steven (2002) asserts that in the Eighteen Century, however, Gothic elements in the novels of Mrs. Redcliff, Orlando to name a few. This Movement has an immense impact on the society of the time in general but on the Eighteen Century society in particular. To avoid the rationalism of the Enlighten, the writer turned to the 'Gothicism' and adopted the Gothic elements. This has inspired the readers in particular the way they used to enjoy thrill and horror in the fictions which they could not enjoy in the real life.

Bowra (1950) guesses that Coleridge's visit to Germany brought him into the contact with Gothicism of the writer but he did not imitate the things as for his theme. He changed the style for his writing. In his visit with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, in the Quantock hills, out of which came the Lyrical Ballad, was a loyal devotion to the poetry for its own sake. Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel* and *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* are full of supernatural elements and emerged a great influence upon the readers and the society. William Wordsworth was inclined towards nature. He, among the Romantics' saw the spirit of God in nature. The host of golden Daffodils served as a bliss of solitude. He worshipped nature. Coleridge, on the other hand, took interest in supernatural, invisible and mysterious things. He highlighted his poetic theory to procure from the reader the 'willing suspension of disbelief' in the realm of supernatural. (Coleridge, 1919, para. 2). A willingness to suspend one's critical faculties and believe the unbelievable; sacrifice of realism and logic for the sake of enjoyment.

Ardhendu de (2012) illustrates that Coleridge was interested to write in such a way supernatural would be dealt as real. Ordinary person would be able to believe that such occurrences could happen. His aim was not to terrorize his readers as the Gothic stories of the Eighteen century Mrs. Redcliff, Horace Walpole and Monk Lewis had done. Rather than Coleridge excited the interest through unreal happenings. And with his concept of suspension of disbelief, the common man could relate to his account. He creates the supernatural element not only within the main character Mariner but also through the description of ship, its crew and thee changes of atmosphere throughout the poem. No ghosts or witch appear rather than elegant and psychological description enhance the charm.

Scarborough (1917) states that dream plays an important role in the inspiration of the tales of terror. The relation of dreams to the uncanny tale is interesting. Bowra (1950) study shows that *The Ancient Mariner* came from Mr. Cruikshank's dream but, once he saw this, he made full use of it and shaped his poem in accordance with it. The killing of Albatross creates the panic and fear in the Mariner and his mind is filled with dread and fear of the curse of the dead sailors indeed lead him to hallucination. As a result, irrationality was supposed to come on the forefront. But Coleridge creates a world which is not too difficult to accept for the moment the ancient belief that spirit watch over human actions, and once we do this, we see that it is right

for them to interfere with men and to do extraordinary things to them. Both the figures on the skeleton ship and the spirits who guide the Mariner on his northward voyage have sufficient reality for us to feel that their actions are appropriate to their characters and circumstances. Poetic faith is achieved when the readers observe that the ship at last comes home, it sinks; it has passed through adventures too unearthly for it have a place in the world of common things. It and its stricken inmate bear the marks of the ordeal, and it is no wonder that the pilot's boy goes mad at the sight and that the only person able to withstand their influence is the holy Hermit. (Bowra, 1950, p. 58). Here Coleridge has masterly associated dreamy atmosphere with the above all incidents in order to achieve the poetic faith.

2. Research Method

The present study, which targets the treatment of supernatural by Coleridge in his ballad *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, is done qualitatively. The mode of enquiry is textual analysis. Excerpts from the text is selected keeping in view regarding the key research problem. Qualitative research gives a holistic view about the problem in hand. It gives the clear picture of diverse range of themes and sub-themes regarding studies. It is the best possible option of the text presented in the poem *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*.

The primary data for the research comprises the seven parts of *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*. Internet, research journal, books of criticism on Coleridge's treatment of supernatural have been used as a secondary sources. Following are the research questions that have been addressed in the research article:

1. What is Coleridge's involvement with the supernatural in the context of *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*?
2. How the supernatural elements are introduced to the reader?
3. How does the myth of crime and punishment provide a structure for the supernatural element?

3. Results and Analysis

The Rime Ancient Mariner introduces the Mariner with his action the killing of albatross. He, with two hundred sailors, has undertaken journey of southward and the ship crossed the equator. The title of the poem and the description of the voyage around Polar region lead the reader to unknown and remote land. The setting of the poem shows the remoteness. Such remoteness prepares the ground for the supernatural reality. Similarly, his poem *Christabel* takes us back to the Middle Ages. The natural description of ship's journey to the equator with fine weather.

The ship was cheered, the harbor cleared,

Merrily did we drop,

Below the kirk, below the hill,

Below the light house top. (Coleridge, 1919, stanza, 20-Part I)

The scene and impact of sun in the following lines:

The sun came upon the left,

Out of sea came he!

And he shone bright, and on the right

Went down into sea. (Coleridge, 1919, stanza, 25- Part II)

The journey was safe and sound and the natural description is apt to show the normal situation. And then a storm drives the ship towards the South Pole.

And now the storm blast came and he

Was tyrannous and strong

He struck with his o'ertaking wings,

And chased us south long (Coleridge, 1919, stanza, 40-Part I)

With the introduction of mist and snow, the scene takes a weird look. Ice, mast high as green as emerald sends a dismal sheen. The Mariner announces:

We were the first that ever burst,

Into that silent sea. (Coleridge, 1919, stanza, 105-Part- II)

The atmosphere is conceived as supernatural. The ship looks painted ship on a painted ocean. The weird adventures of Mariner take place not in the trite Gothic setting of a medieval castle but on the "boundless sea "with days of pitiless sun and soft night lit by a moon and attendant stars. (Bowra, 1950, P. 55).

Implied supernatural

The supernatural elements do not appear directly. Rather than suggestiveness becomes a prominent quality in the gradual insinuation of supernatural element. The Setting of the poem is very realistic, which enhances the effect of the supernatural occurrences. Stanza 4 of Part I, the narrator says:

He holds him with his glittering eye

The wedding guest stood still

And listens like a three years child

The Mariner hath his will. (Coleridge, 1919, stanza, 10-Part I)

This suggestiveness of Coleridge inspires the reader to accept the presence of supernatural element in the poem. The wedding-guest like a three years old child is compelled to listen to Mariner and unable to reject the spell of Mariner's 'glittering eye' and 'he cannot choose but hear'. All these things seem to be realistic and vivid.

The bloody sun at moon,

No bigger than the moon (Coleridge, 1919, stanza, 113-115 Part II)

The water life a witch's oil

Burnt green, and blue and white.(Coleridge, 1919,stanza,130-131 Part II)

Through different words from this stanza mystery is presented where nature is charged of mystery. All the natural objects contribute to the eerie mystery through their cognomen.

Natural and Supernatural

In the treatment of supernatural, Coleridge aptly mixes the natural and supernatural in order to make it more convincing. As in the following lines:

The unusual sight of dead bodies of the sailor

The cold sweat melted from their limbs

Nor rot nor did they:

They look with which they look on me

Had never passed away.(Coleridge,1919,stanza,254-258-Part-IV)

The sailors dead bodies are neither rot nor they give their gesture of being dead or might be this is realized by the Mariner:

But oh! More horrible than that

Is the curse in a dead man's eye?

Seven days, seven nights, I saw the curse-

And yet I could not die. (Coleridge, 1919, stanza, 260-264-Part-IV)

In the midst of dead bodies Mariner is all alone to suffer, who himself is responsible for the death of 200 hundred sailors. This becomes convincible only when we place ourselves in that particular situation which is being experienced by the mariner. At least we suspend our analytical faculties to accept the

situation. In other words, the 'willing suspension of disbelief is procured' in the light of unique amalgamation of natural and unnatural. The readers are compelled to read non-stop to get an idea what might be the end of the Mariner at the end of story. Therefore, the readers are also spell bound by Coleridge's trance and supernaturalism.

Md. (2014) advocates that the approach of the skeleton ship with the description of woman with her "red lips" and "free looks" is nothing about ghostly figure but the atmosphere is made uncanny to create fear (p.254). While the Mariner's ship is still, the skeleton ship is fast arouses fear among the reader how it can carry forward its journey? Here the supernatural elements come to the forefront and the natural and unnatural find the secure blend.

Subjective Representation

While discarding the ghastly and artificial devices, Coleridge tracked the subjective and 'psychic'. In his book Parsad (2007) explores that Coleridge has presented the supernatural as a phenomenon of the mind and through the impact it had on mind (p. 248-249). As we see that the poet does not tell the Mariner is with some unusual face to arouse horror but describes the effect on the pilot's face that the pilot after shrieking lost his consciousness and fell down.

Life-in-Death scene manifests the reality of the inner mind of the Mariner in the words of Maurice Bowra that the Mariner feels himself abandoned by God and unable to do anything as a result, for his own salvation. Besides physic phenomenon, Coleridge had made the supernatural as a symbol of the misery of life and a symbol of love that binds man (Bowra, 1950, p. 261). Due to his own perplexed condition and confusion, the Mariner is unable to appreciate the birds, beasts and slimy creatures. On the one hand, he suffered from his motionless of the ship, which shows his own soullessness while on the other hand, he observes the prosperity of slimy creatures.

Bowra (1950) reflects the view that in *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*, the terrible experience through which the Mariner had passed was a result of the violation of this law. He came to the conclusion that the deepest emotions of the soul are explored by the experience of the supernatural. Instead of confining himself to the outworn dread of phantom and specters he moved over a wide range the motions of human heart and touched equally on guilt, remorse, suffering, relief, hatred and forgiveness, grief and joy. The process of rebirth begin with the love gushes from his heart for the creation of God. The supernatural occurrences at once find the credibility with the forgiveness of the Mariner. We feel sympathy for the Mariner in his state of agonies and distress and feel terror for ourselves. Bowra (1950) has aptly interpreted in his book *The Romantic Imagination* that:

"Coleridge was too modest when he said that all he wished to secure was 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.' His poem creates not a negative but positive condition, a state of faith which is complete and satisfying because it is founded on realities in the living world and in the human heart." (P.74-75)

This research article identified Coleridge's treatment of supernatural elements in his masterpiece ballad *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*. The findings of the study consisted of the observation that supernatural becomes natural in the hands of Coleridge. The study analyzes supernatural as a theme and a stylistic technique in connection with Coleridge's use of supernatural elements the willing suspension of disbelief. Title, symbols, character and incident of the ballad represent mysterious picture with the real description. His representation is psychological phenomena. Theme of crime and punishment provides the structure for the supernatural activity. The guilt of the mariner presents the situation and ultimately his punishment gives him regeneration. This story comes to the reader through supernatural agency.

4. Conclusion

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is aptly the best representation of supernatural elements. His creative supernatural elements become credible and convincing in the hands of Coleridge. He procures from the reader the willing suspension of disbelief and constitutes poetic faith. Coleridge has succeeded not only in employing supernatural elements but also procures from the readers the willing suspension of disbelief in the mentioned poem. The blending of natural and supernatural has masterly been made and the readers have to suspend analytical function to feel the agonies of the Mariners. To put it differently, the willingness of the readers come through the 'suspension of disbelief' (Coleridge, 1919, para, 2). The killing of the albatross leads the Mariner to suffer the Life-in-Death position. He has to face the curse in the dead bodies of the sailors and at the same time he has to suffer due to intense thirst in the midst of water. Apparently, nothing is unusual but the way the storm comes, the uncanny experiences come to the forefront and in spite of no wind the skeleton ship approaches fast while the ship of the Mariner is still, are the manifestation of eerie mystery to intensify the presence of supernatural element. The readers are not at once made familiar to the supernatural elements rather than they have to face the gradual insinuation of supernatural elements.

Coleridge was interested to write in such a way supernatural would be dealt as real. His aim was not to terrorize his readers as the Gothic stories of the Eighteen century Mrs. Redcliff, Horace Walpole and Monk Lewis had done. Rather than Coleridge excited the interest through unreal happenings. And with his concept of suspension of disbelief, the common man could relate it to his account. He creates the supernatural element not only within the main character Mariner but also through the description of ship, its crew and the changes of atmosphere throughout the poem. Norwood (1975) in his *Dynamics of Literary Response* pens down that "the literary text provides us with fantasy which we interject experiencing it as though it were our own supplying our own associations to it" (P. 311). Not only the writer but the readers as well enter into the work of imagination and therefore, the readers become the author of fantasy. Coleridge's presentation of the supernatural is not seen by the as it used to happen in Gothicism rather than is perceived by the mind through anxiety of the Mariner. The Mariner is abandoned both by his sailors and God. He is unable to do anything for his salvation. He comes across the still ship and sees the phantom ship working without any wind. Hough (1968) aptly interprets the situation, "what happens to him when he blesses the water-snakes in the tropical calm is a physic rebirth- a rebirth that must at times happen to all men and creatures... (P. 63). This psychological expedition of the Mariner presents the impression of supernatural credible and real. Hence the poetic faith is established through the willing suspension of disbelief.

Coleridge's concept of this psychological representation and his theory 'willing suspension of disbelief' got popular position later on in the hands of famous writers.

Bronte (1977) has proficiently used the narrative technique and theory as popularized by Coleridge in her worth reading novel *Wuthering Heights*. She carried forward the journey through this poetic theory of willing suspension of disbelief where in the novel the readers do not question the appearance of major character Catherine after her death rather than accept her with sympathy. In the words of Md. (2014), Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* whereas in the *Wuthering Heights* Bronte involved the modern readers in the magic realism, where the possible and impossible are blended beautifully. They succeeded in keeping the readers in suspense till the end of the story. Coleridge chronicles the story where the readers are anxious to know along with the wedding guest in the story whether Mariner is going to be relieved from the reverie. In fact, Coleridge's mastery lies in the gradual insinuation of supernatural elements and suspend the analytical faculties for the time being to win the readers' faith in the Ancient Mariner.

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