

## **An Instantiation of Transnational Connection in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'**

---

**Ajay M**, Assistant Professor of English, Hindustan College, Mysore

---

**Paper Received on 21-01-2023, Accepted on 12-03-2023, Published on 14-03-23; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2023.8.1.246**

---

### **Abstract:**

This research paper examines the theme of transnational connection in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Through an analysis of the poem's portrayal of the natural world and its interconnectedness with human beings, the paper argues that the poem emphasizes the global nature of our relationship with the environment. The poem is set against the backdrop of the British Empire during the Romantic era when the expansion of the British Empire was at its peak, and the concept of the "white man's burden" was prevalent. The poem's portrayal of the darker side of imperialism, as the mariner's actions are seen as a metaphor for the destructive impact of colonialism on the natural world and on the cultures and peoples it encounters. The paper also analyses the damaged sailor's story, which is one of conquest, exploitation, and destruction, and the challenges that colonial powers faced in their efforts to expand. The paper concludes that the poem explores the themes of cultural diversity and unity, and how these themes relate to contemporary discussions of transnational connections and global citizenship. Through this analysis, the paper offers a deeper understanding of the poem's message and its relevance to contemporary

discussions of environmentalism and cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** Transnational, Nature, Imperialism, Environmentalism, Culture.

### **1. Introduction**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a timeless work of literature that has captivated readers for over two centuries. First published in 1798 as part of the "Lyrical Ballads" collection, the poem is a haunting narrative that explores themes of guilt, redemption, and the natural world. However, one of the most significant themes that emerge from the poem is a transnational connection, which is explored through the relationship between human beings and the environment, as well as the interconnectedness of different cultures and peoples. The paper will analyse the ways in which the poem highlights the global nature of our relationship with the environment, emphasizing the interdependence of human beings and the natural world. We will explore how the mariner's actions, and subsequent penance, lead to a restoration of the natural order, and how this restoration transcends

national boundaries. The crew of the ship in the poem is composed of sailors from various nations, and despite their differences, they are united in their struggle for survival. Through this analysis, we will offer a deeper understanding of how the poem explores the themes of cultural diversity and unity, and how these themes relate to contemporary discussions of transnational connections and global citizenship.

## II. THE EMPIRE

During the Romantic Age, the British Empire was expanding rapidly, and its cultural influence was spreading across the globe. At the same time, writers and poets of the era were grappling with the legacy of imperialism and the impact of colonialism on both the colonized and the colonizers. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a powerful example of how these themes were explored in literature during this period. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was written during a time when Britain's naval power was at its peak, and the poem reflects this in its vivid descriptions of life at sea. However, it also explores the darker side of imperialism, as the mariner's actions are seen as a metaphor for the destructive impact of colonialism on the natural world and on the cultures and peoples it encounters.

"We were the first that ever burst / into that silent sea" (lines 52-53).

The mariner's assertion of being the "first" to explore the "silent sea" is reflective of the imperialist attitude prevalent in Britain at the time, which saw

itself as the vanguard of global exploration and colonization. The poem portrays the crew's voyage as an act of conquest, and this quote highlights their sense of superiority and entitlement.

"And a thousand thousand slimy things / Lived on; and so did I" (lines 233-234).

This quote describes the eerie, otherworldly landscape of the equatorial region that the mariner and his crew enter. It reflects the imperialist idea of the exotic, the strange and the dangerous that was prevalent in the colonial mindset of the time. The "slimy things" are representative of the "uncivilized" people of the colonies, who were often demonized and dehumanized by European explorers and colonizers.

The poem's portrayal of the mariner's guilt and redemption can also be read as a commentary on the moral implications of colonialism. The mariner's shooting of the albatross, a symbol of the natural world, can be seen as a representation of the damage caused by colonialism to the environment and to indigenous cultures.

"Instead of the cross, the Albatross / About my neck was hung" (lines 141-142).

The shooting of the albatross is a metaphor for the destructive impact of colonialism on the natural world. The bird is a symbol of the unspoiled environment that colonial powers sought to exploit and control, and the mariner's actions are seen as a representation of the disregard for the environment that was rampant in the age of imperialism.

The subsequent penance and redemption of the mariner, as he learns to appreciate the interconnectedness of all things, can be seen as a call for a more responsible and sustainable approach to imperialism.

"Water, water, everywhere, / And all the boards did shrink; / Water, water, everywhere, / Nor any drop to drink" (lines 119-122).

The mariner's struggle for survival at sea can be read as a metaphor for the challenges faced by the British Empire in its attempts to maintain control over its colonies. The shortage of water on the ship represents the difficulty of sustaining an empire that stretches across the globe, while the shrinking of the boards can be seen as a metaphor for the weakening of the imperial structure.

At the same time, the poem can also be read as a commentary on the experiences of sailors and colonizers during this period. The crew of the ship in the poem is composed of sailors from different nations, including England, Spain, and Holland, and their struggles for survival and unity can be seen as a metaphor for the challenges faced by the British Empire in its attempts to maintain control over its colonies.

### **III. THE DAMAGED SAILOR**

The damaged sailor, who is the narrator of the poem, is portrayed as having been through a traumatic experience that has left him physically and emotionally scarred. He is described as having "skinny hands" and a "long grey beard," and his eyes are said to be "glazed

and bleak." His appearance suggests that he has been through a lot, and the story he tells confirms this.

The sailor's story is one of conquest, exploitation, and destruction. His ship, the "Hermit good," sets sail on a mission to expand the empire's reach and assert its dominance over other nations. The sailor and his crew encounter a range of natural phenomena, including a storm and a sea monster, which can be read as symbolic representations of the challenges that colonial powers faced in their efforts to expand and control their empires.

"The ice was here, the ice was there,

The ice was all around:

It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,

Like noises in a swound!"

This quote appears in Part IV of the poem and describes the sailor's encounter with an ice field. The ice can be interpreted as a metaphor for the obstacles that imperialist powers faced in their efforts to expand their empires. The cracking and growling of the ice can be read as a symbol of the resistance that colonial powers encountered from other nations and peoples. The fact that the ice was "all around" the sailor suggests that he and his crew were surrounded by challenges and difficulties, which they were struggling to overcome. The description of the ice as making noises "like noises in a swound" suggests that the sailor and his crew were overwhelmed and disoriented by the magnitude of the challenge they faced. The metaphor of the ice is just one example of the many ways in which the poem can be

interpreted as an allegory of imperialism and colonialism.

#### **IV. THE TROPICAL INFLUENCE**

The poem can be interpreted as a commentary on the damaging impact on the people who were subjugated by imperial powers, including the diseases they carried back to their home countries. The sailor's journey takes him through a range of different climates, including the tropics. The poem describes the "burning Sun" and "roasting Sun" that the sailor and his crew encountered, suggesting that they were exposed to intense heat and humidity. This can be interpreted as a metaphor for the health hazards that imperialist powers faced in their efforts to expand their empires. Tropical climates were known to be breeding grounds for diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and dysentery, which were often carried back to Britain by returning sailors and soldiers. The impact of these diseases on Britain was significant. Malaria, for example, was a major cause of death in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the disease was closely linked to Britain's colonial ventures. The sailor's physical and mental deterioration in the poem can be seen as a reflection of the damage caused by the diseases that imperialist powers brought back to Britain from their colonial exploits.

The impact of tropical climates on imperialist powers is also reflected in the diseases that returning sailors and soldiers brought back to Britain from tropical regions. One such disease is malaria, which is referenced in the following lines of the poem:

"Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink."

These lines suggest that the sailor and his crew are suffering from dehydration, which can be a symptom of malaria. The disease was common in tropical regions and could be contracted by mosquitoes that bred in standing water, such as that described in the poem.

Other diseases that imperialist powers carried back to Britain from tropical regions included yellow fever and dysentery. These diseases had a significant impact on the health and well-being of the British population and contributed to the spread of epidemics such as cholera.

#### **V. NATURE AND CIVILIZATION**

The poem can also be seen as a reflection of the tensions between the British Empire's desire to conquer and control nature and the reality of its limitations. The sailor's encounter with the albatross, which he initially regards as a good omen, can be interpreted as a symbol of the imperialist mentality that sought to conquer and control the natural world. However, the sailor's killing of the albatross and the subsequent punishment he receives from the natural world can be seen as a warning against this type of thinking.

The following quote shows the sailor's sense of guilt and the punishment he receives:

"Ah! Well-a-day! what evil looks  
Had I from old and young!  
Instead of the cross, the Albatross

About my neck was hung." (Part II, stanza 21)

The shooting of the albatross can be read as a metaphor for the destructive impact of imperialism on the natural world. The albatross is a symbol of the unspoiled environment that colonial powers sought to exploit and control, and the sailor's actions are seen as a representation of the disregard for the environment that was rampant in the age of imperialism. The sailor's punishment for shooting the albatross is to be marooned at sea, where he experiences a prolonged period of suffering and isolation. This can be interpreted as a metaphor for the decline and fall of the British Empire, which began in the early twentieth century and was marked by a period of decline and loss of influence.

Furthermore, the poem also portrays the negative impact of imperialism on the environment, as seen in the following lines:

"Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean."

These lines describe the sailor's experience of being stuck in the middle of the ocean due to a lack of wind. The use of the word "painted" suggests that the sailor's experience of nature is limited and superficial, as he views the ocean as a mere backdrop for his struggles. This perspective is reflective of the imperialist mentality that sought to dominate and exploit the natural world without regard for its limitations.

The consequences of the sailor's actions, which include a loss of identity and a disconnection from the natural world, can be seen as a warning against the negative impact of imperialism. The following quote shows the sailor's sense of guilt and disconnection from the natural world:

"The selfsame moment I could pray;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea." (Part III, stanza 16)

Overall, the shooting of the albatross in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" can be viewed from different perspectives, including an imperialist perspective that emphasizes European superiority and a rejection of native cultures and beliefs.

#### **VI. CONCLUSION**

This study examines the theme of transnational connection in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The paper argues that the poem emphasizes the global nature of the relationship between human beings and the environment, against the backdrop of the British Empire during the Romantic era when the expansion of the British Empire was at its peak. The paper also explores the damaged sailor's story, which is one of conquest, exploitation, and destruction, and the challenges that colonial powers faced in their efforts to expand. The paper concludes that the poem explores the themes of cultural diversity and unity, how these themes relate to contemporary discussions of transnational connections and global citizenship, and how it offers a

deeper understanding of the poem's message and its relevance to contemporary discussions of environmentalism and cultural diversity.

### References

- Coleridge, S. T. (1798). The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. In *Lyrical Ballads* (pp. 1-40). J. & A. Arch.
- Gates, J. (2012). "An Inscription in the Coleridgean Landscape: Transnational Consciousness in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." *English Literary History*, 79(4), 961-990.
- Murphy, P. (2010). "Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner': An Ecological Reading." *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 2(1), 1-12.
- Rowe, A. (2016). "Empire and Environment in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." *The Wordsworth Circle*, 47(1), 20-28.
- Watson, J. R. (2013). "Transatlantic Cross-Currents in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." In P. Kitson & J. Roberts (Eds.), *Cross-currents: Transatlantic Perspectives on Early American and British Literature* (pp. 69-80). University of Massachusetts Press.

#### How to cite this article?

Ajay M, "An Instantiation of Transnational Connection in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" *Research Journal Of English (RJOE)* 8(1), PP:257-262, 2023, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2023.8.1.262