

## Nature-Human Bond in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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### Abstract

This research paper entitled “Nature-Human Bond in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* “ concentrates on nature-human bond. The paper tries to explore the bond from the perspectives of environmental biocentrism which specifically deals with nature-human relationship. To find out the bond it also showcases the human behavior, its impact on nature and its relation with the nature. The poem thus was explored, analyzed and scrutinized employing the theory of biocentrism which predominantly confirms the concept of relationship between ecology and human beings. The poem is written by S. T. Coleridge which exhibits the interconnection and inter-relation between the human world and the non-human elemental world of nature. Coleridge suggests that we need to create a balanced role between nature and human beings. Nature is the source of human happiness so we need to preserve it. This study justifies the nature and human relationship ought to be in equilibrium. The nonexistence of one generates tribulations in the whole ecological system.

**Key words:** anthropocentric, biocentrism, ecocentrism, ecology, ecological balance, etc.

### Laying the Foundation

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by S. T. Coleridge was written in between 1797-98 and published in 1798 in the first addition of *Lyrical Ballads*. All of the God’s creations are equally important and he loves everyone is the basic foundation of the poem. Each one is a living testimony to his authority and to the magnificence of the earth. Pride separates human and god. The acceptance of the man’s spiritual relationship to god and rest of the creation is the key. Accurate humanity scores only from abundant grief. Gratification for sin is attained only through admission and genuine deeds of repentance. Coleridge, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* concentrates on the bond of nature-human. The poem presents Albatross as a striking conception of nature as the Mariner exterminates it, their evil time starts. Earlier to the killing of Albatross everything seems to be perfect. Albatross, wind, sun, rain, etc. all signify nature and have purposely set and picturized in the poem. With the help of all these elements poet want to justify nature-human bond.

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is not only about principles and unselfishness on human relations but also for the Mariner who has forgotten his responsibilities and killed an Albatross like an irrational being. The Mariner is proud of his deed of killing the bird hence shares to his companions proving his heroism but the act turned counterproductive and hence they have to face the ill consequences. Killing an innocent bird exploiting human power thinking the bird’s

existence as of least significance results in the human suffering. The harmony among all the elements is primary for the existence otherwise everyone suffers is the crux.

### **Biocentricism in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner***

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* induces an indication of biocentric harmony which demands a philosophy of the bond between human and nature, and trusts that nature does not exist to be oppressed by humans; rather humans are simply one species among many belonging to an ecosystem. Cheryll Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), explains ‘ecocriticism,’ as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (as cited in Garrard 3) whereas biocentrism attempts to determine the dispute of nature culture dichotomy by distorting the wall between them. When deep ecology conveys the perception that man is an integral part of nature, the culture which is the product of man involuntarily falls under nature. Eradicating the delusion of nature/culture alterations, Frederick Turner in his “Cultivating the American Garden” states:

Nature bears the weight of our activities, but in the long run renews itself and remains just as it was left to itself, nature settles into a balance, a rhythm that is eternal and unchanging [...] nature is dangerous but purifying, innocent yet wise the only real touchstone of what is good and right and beautiful. (45)

Gandhi’s article “The Limits and Promises of Environmental Ethics: Eco- Socialist Thought and Anthropocentrism’s Virtue” contends:

Environmentalism can benefit from directly adopting commonly shared democratic and anthropocentric values for which aspects of eco-socialist thought can be providing useful insight and an analytical framework for better understanding the case and possible solution to certain environmental problems. (37)

Bio critics dispute this bond by consuming innumerable perceptions; anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism and deep ecology etc. Timothy Clark in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* positions:

Anthropocentric is the world view where human beings are given the central position and all other entities are pushed to the margin. This privileging of one entity over the other gives rise to all sorts of power structure exploitation. Anthropocentrism names any stance, perception or conception that takes the human as center or norm. An ‘anthropocentric’ view of the natural world thus sees it entirely in relation to the human, for instance as a resource for economic use, or as the expression of certain social or cultural values – so even an aesthetics of landscape appreciation can be anthropocentric. (3)

Biocentrism is most ordinarily allied with the work of Paul Taylor, exclusively his book *Respect the nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*. Taylor articulates that biocentrism is an “attitude of respect for nature”, whereby one endeavors to make an effort to live one’s life in a way that esteem the wellbeing and integral significance of all corporeal organisms. He contends

“humans are thought of as member of the earth’s community of life, holding that membership on the same terms as apply to all the nonhuman members” (76). He concentrates on the codependent of all living things in an originally integrated order whose equilibrium and permanency are indispensable conditions for the recognition of the virtuous of its constituent biotic community.

Coleridge embraces the biocentric worldview challenging the human targeted disposition and their unsympathetic opinion concerning nature. He anticipates to display the equivalent connotation of all worldly mortals regardless of their corporeal power. Every creature performs a critical role in sustaining an equilibrium in the ecosystem, no matter whether it is the so-called rational creature, human beings or it is any other seamy creature which apparently has less prominent.

Coleridge primarily exhibits the irresponsible nature of human being, congregation of elucidation accentuating the existential insignificant massacre of the Albatross in an unfathomable world and offence as mentioned “the shooting is an act, unpremeditated and unmeant, that nevertheless must be accounted for ... (Buchan 97). The lack of the accountability of Mariner leads him to commit the sin. The Mariner and his fellows face hard time as the ship halts. Instead of regretting the sin he committed the Mariner gets annoyed and cursed his destiny, the sea and other creatures around him. He lacks gratitude and does not appreciate the universe around him and all the God’s creation. Later a ship advances to them “death and life in death” with a roll of the dice, death wins all lives of the crew and ‘life-in-death’ wins the life of the Mariner. All his fellow men die one by one, sparing the Mariner isolated and terrified as he utters “alone on a wide sea! And never a saint looks pity on my soul in agony” (245). Then he is compelled to live in isolation for a week where he goes into flashback of every event and mostly the dead fellow men’s gaze fixed on him charging him the blame as the line illustrates “but oh! More horrible than that is the curse in the dead man’s eyes!” (245). Here, reception commences his isolation is no longer a penalty, but an opportunity for him to comprehend the perfection of the world. At the sight of the water snake the Mariner contrarily and abruptly observes its beauty which is because of the experience he receives earlier that compels him to commence identify things contrarily for the first time. His perception regarding these creatures as inferior and insignificant needs to be condemned instead God’s creation needs to be appreciated, loved and respected. The novel comprehension discharges him from his imperceptible shackles and he is able to offer a sanctification from the water snakes as expressed “he is on the verge of learning that mysterious and omnipotent spirits govern his destiny” (Buchan 98).

The Mariner commences to expand his understandings and admits the divine miracle and joy of the world. He needs to liberate his negativity and set free the spirit of his dead shipmates. Their spirit ascents, enhancing the Mariner in his journey and conducting him to the hermit. Although the Albatross is no more on his neck, and the ship is in return to the progression to home the Mariner still lacks absolution. The polar spirit authorizes this when they state “the man hath penance done and penance more will do” (249). He also learns forgiveness mustn’t be asked rather it must be earned.

Although the Albatross was no more on his neck but he still picturizes its blood on him so he thinks that the Hermit will help him come out of this as replicated here “He’ll shrive my soul, he’ll wash away. The Albatross’s blood” (251). He senses that if he is given the chance to confess his crime, he will be liberated from the internal anxiety as he wishes the Hermit asks Mariner “what manner of man art thou?” (253) offering him the chance to confess his sins for penance.

Meanwhile, nature becomes compassionate to Mariner, and recompenses as he steps towards union with it as Watson indicates, “nature heals the man who makes no effort but simply opens himself ‘unaware’, of its influence” (103). Mariner starts enjoying and realizing the beauty of nature which surrounded him, because of the knowledge he possessed out of experience that generated love and gratitude which is seen in his sense of rain and wind which signify imagination, music and positivity. In opposition as the Mariner dissects the passage of departure, he concludes human and natural catastrophe. Rendering to it J. Robert Barth asserts “love is eternal that unifies multitudes” (5-6) and the individual experiences a restricted form of love till he approaches to the power of love pervading nature, subsequently he attains deeper and more meaningful experience of love and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* replicates a journey of an individual through various junctures of his bond with nature.

Along with the journey, the individual realizes that departure from nature results in agony and disorder of life. In opposition to this the effective relationship with nature which can be attained by having harmonious bond results in love, sympathy, gratitude and imagination with sense of peace and pleasure. The journey begins with the Mariner’s innocence by disregarding the nature which forces him to consider nature to be distinctive from human beings. Later he comprehends all creatures are equal. The Mariner then internalizes the prominence of the bond and unity as he expresses “He prays best, who loves best, all things both great and small, for the dear god loves us, he made and loves all”().

The Mariner associates himself with nature and comprehends the bareness of being and the significance of the core deep sophisticated attachment and elucidation of nature. As the poet talks about the state that can be empty, ‘plague’, hollow’, ‘as whirlwind’ ‘with my cross brown’, ‘shot’ poet compulsions to apprehend, human beings are only a part and parcel of the ecosystem.

And a good south wind sprung up behind;  
The Albatross did follow,  
And everyday, for food of pray,  
Came to the mariner’s hollow!  
In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,  
It perched for vespers nine;  
While all the night, thought for- smoke white,  
Glimmered the white moon – shine. (71-78)

The Mariner's shooting of the Albatross without any reason is the act done to prove one's worth and satisfy his ego. It is a deed which satisfies his superiority complex. The act of killing the Albatross doesn't have any connection with bringing good or bad luck.

The killing of Albatross caused crisis of water which resulted in drying up of the Mariner and his fellows throats so much so that they are unable to cry for help hence the Mariner bites his own arm and wets his throat with his own blood and shouts: "A sail A Sail" and the situation was very tough as the lines state:

There passed weary time, Each throat  
Was parched, and glazed each eye,  
A weary time! A weary time!  
How glazed each wary eye. (143-146)

The ship approached so close that the he Ancient Mariner can see who crewed it: death, embodied in a naked man and the night-mare life-in-death embodied in a necked woman. The letter was mysterious and attractive with red lips, golden hair and skin "as white as leprosy". As "certain things are simply beyond human understanding" (Vallins 54). She whistled three times just as the last of the sun sank into the ocean; night fell in an instant and the ghost ship hustled away, through its crew's sighs could be caught long after it was out of sight. The setting is horrible, immoral and full of emotions and breaking unity with nature.

Are those her ribs through which the sun  
Did peer, as through a great?  
And is that Woman all her crew?  
Is that a death DEATH? And are there two?  
Is DEATH that woman's mate?  
.... mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,  
Who thick's man's blood with cold. (185-94)

The climax is when the Mariner, after the skeleton ship comes near finds the rest of the crew consists of death and life. The morality was in crisis breaking the unity with the nature as the Mariner had played a negative role. While narrating the tale of the expedition, positioning one of the marriage guests under the control of his "skinny hand" and "glittering eyes", the mariner displays the problematic state:

Day after day, day after day  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean. (115-18)

The atop excerpt demonstrates the magnitudes of killing the Albatross and the problematic state the humans had to endure. The Mariner, only to substantiate his heroism to his fellow mates, killed the bird which signify the humanity is dead in the Mariner. Not only the Mariner other fellow people in the ship had to suffer along with him. The incident clearly justifies lack of rationality and anthropocentric consciousness in the Mariner which broke the nature-human bond and

resulted in demolishing the universal harmony which leads to the level that they are unable to get water to quench their thirst despite the abundance of water as the stanza displays:

Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the birds did shrink;  
Water, water everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink. (119-22)

The given stanza depicts the fact that the intimate relationship between human being and nature is must. The act of shooting is a disobeying God in Nature, as “God is not, for Coleridge, [...] a mysterious supernatural agent [...] but the intelligible ground and archetype of the sensible realm” (Hedley 223). Due to the erroneous action ‘water’ in the form of nature is not able to fulfill the desire of cruel and proud, human being.

The Mariner’s narrative commences with his ship proceeding on its expedition. Apart from initial good luck, the ship is propelled south by a storm and ultimately gets stuck in Antarctic. An Albatross appears and leads the ship out of the predicament, although the crew members praised Albatross the mariner kills the bird.

However, the mariners alter their mind when the weather converts warmer and the mist appear:

“Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,  
That brings the fog and mist” (101-102).

They shortly realized that they commit a blunder by accompanying the crime of the killing of the bird, as it stimulates the wrath of spirit who then persecute the ship “from the land of the mist and snow”, the south wind that had primarily led them from the land of the snow now sends the ship into uncharted waters near the equator, where it is unruffled.

The very deep did rot- O Christ!  
That ever this should be,  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs,  
Upon the slimy sea. (123-126)

The mariners again alter their mind and blame the Mariner for the anguish of their thirst. In annoyance, the crew compels the mariner to put on the dead Albatross on his neck, feebly to elucidate the liability he requires to endure of killing it, or possibly as an emblem of guilt.

Then the hermit rescues the Mariner from his sinking ship. As Mariner sees the Hermit, he yells with ecstasy anticipating his possible unity with the nature;

It is the Hermit good!  
He sights loud his godly hymn  
That he makes in the wood  
He’ll shrive my soul, he’ll wash away  
The Albatross’s blood. (509-513)

The lines from the poem explain that the mariner trusts that as the Hermit is a person who is in harmony with both nature and god, will be capable to clean him off of his sin. Along with this, it

also demonstrates that, no matter how much penance he does, or how much mercy he is shown upon, the Mariner will constantly feel the remorse of what he has done.

Conclusively, as the Mariner reaches to the sight of his homeland he primarily is indeterminate and he thinks whether he is hallucinating as the extract explains:

Oh! Dream of joy! Is this indeed  
The lighthouse top I see?  
... drifted o'er the harbor-bar,  
And I with sobs did pray-  
O let me be awake, my God!  
Or let me sleep away. (564-571)

The trodden remains of the ship sink in a whirlpool, excluding only the Mariner behind. A hermit of the mainland had perceived the forthcoming ship and had come to meet it with his boy in a boat. When they pull him from the water, they think he is dead but when he opens his mouth the pilot has a fit. The hermit prays and the mariner wakes up to row.

### **Conclusion: Human-Nature Bond**

In conclusion *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by S. T. Coleridge is a long poem which is a replica of an individual's journey the Mariner and the humanity as a whole who pass through different phases- the difficult situation, emptiness, hollowness, lack of consciousness and the biocentric worldview of nature. The Ancient Mariner kills the Albatross because he wanted to teach humans the lesson about the spiritual world. The Albatross signify an animal, spirit and the nature itself this is why its extermination resulted in the spiritual devastation of the mariners. Thus, the poem tries to justify the strong bond between nature and human where each and every element created by god are of equal significance and must have mutual respect. Every creature and elements in the universe are in existence only because of the interdependence and interconnectedness.

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