

The Speaker's State in S. T. Coleridge's Selected Poems: A Psychoanalytic Study

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Abstract

The romantic poet in Romanticism lives alone and is estranged from his society because he is unhappy with everything around him. The mystery of life and the fate of man, in other words, are the main topics that are frequently addressed in romantic poetry and are readily addressed in the works of the majority of romantic poets. However, during the romantic era, the speaker's states and related elements—such as loneliness, alienation, sadness, misery, loss of joy, despair—were important topics in play, poetry, and fiction. Based on the aforementioned, it is evident that Coleridge is one of the few poets that writes about this abstract topic because his poetry is full of ideas and symbolism. There is a cause-and-effect connection between this issue and Coleridge's poetry. Suffering is a manifestation of the former (the cause), which can take many forms, including loneliness, alienation, pain, loss of joy, despair...etc.

Key Words: Loneliness, Alienation, Gothic, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, Kubla Khan

الملخص

في الرومانسية، يدفع استياء الشاعر الرومانسي من كل ما يحيط به إلى العزلة والاعتراب عن مجتمعه. بعبارة أخرى، تُعدّ غموض الحياة ومصير الإنسان من المواضيع الرئيسية التي يُعالجها الشعر الرومانسي على نطاق واسع، وهو أمرٌ يسهل تناوله في قصائد معظم الشعراء الرومانسيين. ومع ذلك، تُعدّ حالات المتكلم وما يرتبط بها من جوانب، كالوحدة، والاعتراب، والكآبة، والألم، وغياب الفرح، واليأس، من المواضيع الرئيسية في الأدب القصصي والشعري والمسرحي خلال العصر الرومانسي. بناءً على ما سبق، يتضح أن شعر كولريدج زاخرٌ بالمواضيع والرموز، مما يجعله من الشعراء النادرين الذين يكتبون ويتناولون هذا الموضوع المجرد. وترتبط هذه المسألة بشعر كولريدج بعلاقة السبب والنتيجة. فالسبب (السبب) يتجسد في المعاناة، ويتمثل في جوانب عديدة، كالوحدة، والغربة، والألم، وفقدان الفرح، واليأس، وغيرها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوحدة، الاعتراب، القوطية، قصيدة البحار القديم، كريستابل، كوبلا خان.

1. Introduction

One of the most significant figures in English poetry is Coleridge. All of the great poets of the day were greatly and directly impacted by his poetry. Southey and Wordsworth relied on his expert guidance because he was regarded by his peers as a painstaking craftsman who was more rigorous in his diligent reworking of his poetry than any other poet. With many critics attributing the concept of "Conversational Poetry" to Coleridge, his impact on Wordsworth is especially significant. It's possible that Coleridge had the concept for Wordsworth's famed use of commonplace language to convey profound poetic imagery and thoughts nearly totally. It is hard to picture Wordsworth's masterpieces, such as *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, ever having been composed without Coleridge's inventiveness as a direct influence. (Unsworth, 1988)

Coleridge's contribution to poetry as a critic was just as significant as his contribution as a poet. He spent many years developing his philosophy of poetry, which has had a significant impact on literary criticism. Critics like I. A. Richards and A. O. Lovejoy exhibit this influence. (Unsworth, 1988)

2. Coleridge and the influence of the Gothic

Coleridge wrote reviews of Ann Radcliffe's books and *The Mad Monk*, among others. He comments in his reviews: "Situations of torment, and images of naked horror, are easily conceived; and a writer in whose works they abound, deserves our gratitude almost equally with him who should drag us by way of sport through a military hospital, or force us to sit at the dissecting-table of a natural philosopher. To trace the nice boundaries, beyond which terror and sympathy are deserted by the pleasurable emotions, – to reach those limits, yet never to pass them, hic labor, hic opus est." and "The horrible and the preternatural have usually seized on the popular taste, at the rise

and decline of literature. Most powerful stimulants, they can never be required except by the torpor of an unawakened, or the languor of an exhausted, appetite...We trust, however, that satiety will banish what good sense should have prevented; and that, wearied with fiends, incomprehensible characters, with shrieks, murders, and subterraneous dungeons, the public will learn, by the multitude of the manufacturers, with how little expense of thought or imagination this species of composition is manufactured." Nonetheless, Coleridge employed similar ideas in poems like *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan* (published in 1816, but already known in draft form), and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), and he undoubtedly had an impact on other poets and authors of the day. Poems such as these were both influenced by and contributed to the Gothic romance fad. In his commercially successful play *Remorse*, Coleridge also heavily referenced Gothic motifs (van Woudenberg, 2018).

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is mentioned twice in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, who was close to Coleridge, and it is indirectly referenced in a few of the novel's descriptions. Her father, William Godwin, respected Coleridge's views and frequently visited the Godwins, despite the fact that they disagreed on numerous significant matters. Later, Mary Shelley remembers hearing his voice singing *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* while she was cowering behind the sofa. (van Woudenberg 2008)

2.1 The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, and Kubla Khan

Coleridge's larger poems, especially *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, are undoubtedly his most well-known works. The quote "water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink" (which is almost always translated as "but not a drop to drink"), the phrase "a sadder and a wiser man" (which is typically translated as "a sadder but wiser man"), and the metaphor of an

albatross around one's neck are all examples of how the Rime has influenced even people who have never read it.

The line "All creatures great and small" may have been inspired by The Rime: "He prayeth best, who loveth best;/ All things both great and small;/ For the dear God who loveth us;/ He made and loveth all." Millions more people who have never read the poem are now aware of its plot because to the 1984 song "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by the English heavy metal band Iron Maiden. Christabel's Gothic narrative, vocabulary, and rhythm are all well-known. (Coleridge 1989).

Although it is shorter, Kubla Khan, also known as A Vision in a Dream, A Fragment, is as well-known. The fact that Christabel and Kubla Khan were never completed lends them both an extra "Romantic" feel. According to Stopford Brooke, both poems' "exquisite metrical movement" and "imaginative phrasing" make them unmatched.

2.2 Conversation poems

A Conversation Poem (1798) to refer to the seven other poems as well (Morley 1984). Harold Bloom has stated that "With Dejection, The Ancient Mariner, and Kubla Khan, Frost at Midnight shows Coleridge at his most impressive." This is because many commentators believe that the poems are among Coleridge's best verses. And, as we'll see later, these are some of his most influential poems.

"...more fluent and easy than Milton's, or any that had been written since Milton," Harper thought the eight poems exemplified a type of blank verse. Robert Koelzer discussed another facet of this seeming "easiness" in a 2006 article, pointing out that conversation poems like "Coleridge's *The Eolian Harp* and *The Nightingale* maintain a middle register of speech, employing an idiomatic language that is capable of being construed as un-symbolic and un-musical: language that lets itself be taken as 'merely talk' rather than rapturous 'song'." (Coleridge 1985)

At Watchet Harbour in Somerset, England, there is a statue of the Ancient Mariner. Harper selected the final ten lines of Frost at Midnight as the "best example of the peculiar kind of blank verse Coleridge had evolved, as exquisitely artistic as the most complicated sonnet, but as natural-seeming as prose." The poem's narrator is speaking to his sleeping infant son:

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
 Whether the summer clothe the general earth
 With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
 Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
 Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
 Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,
 Or if the secret ministry of frost
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
 Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

In 1965, M. H. Abrams wrote a broad description that applies to the Conversation poems: "The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied by integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely involved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation. Actually, Abrams was discussing the Conversation poems as well as other works that were impacted by them. One "touchstone of literary criticism" is Abrams' essay. As Paul Magnuson described it in 2002, "Abrams credited Coleridge with originating what Abrams called the 'greater Romantic lyric', a genre that began with Coleridge's 'Conversation' poems, and included Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, Shelley's *Stanzas Written in Dejection* and Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, and was a major influence on more modern lyrics by

Matthew Arnold, Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens, and W. H. Auden." (Dickins 1989)

3. The speaker state in Selected Coleridge's Poems

Everyone experiences loneliness. Man has experienced a terrible sense of loneliness due to certain issues in each culture, in addition to the unsolvable issues in his mind about God, nature, and the mystery of life and death. It states that "standing alone or separation from other things or persons" is the definition of isolation (Bowra 1976). This sensation, then, is one way to experience the soul's sense of homelessness and alienation in one's own domain.

Since man is a social creature by nature and existence depends on social ties, loneliness and solitude are actually similar to death in life; Coleridge typically addresses this theme in his poetry. In the state of isolation, two forces are at odds: the external force, which is represented by societal obligations, and the internal force, which is represented by man's own wishes.

Poetry is mostly a way to decompress from stresses and worries, which ultimately lead to loneliness. Therefore, loneliness is largely to blame for the creation of great literature. Therefore, it is impossible to declare with certainty that Coleridge discusses loneliness in every poem, but his poetry does convey his pain and suffering, whether he does it directly, through his characters, or through symbols and imagery. As a result, his poetry's themes of loneliness and dissatisfaction are instantly relatable. There are sporadic instances of loneliness throughout "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Coleridge publicly acknowledges the mariner's loneliness in section 4, stanza 3:

*Alone, alone, all, all Alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony
(Ancient Mariner, ll.232-235)*

The repetition of the word ‘alone’ emphasizes the state of loneliness which is as harsh as travelling alone on a ship, surrounded by the dead bodies of the crew. His state is the state of helplessness and solitude, (Bowra 1976).

The mariner’s sense of loneliness and helplessness develops. His anguished soul is punished by ‘Life-in-Death’. His shipmates die one by one and, he, just like slimy creatures, lives alone surrounded by death and fear:

The many men, so beautiful!

And they all dead did lie:

And a thousand thousand slimy things

***Lived on; and so did I.* (ll.236-239)**

The guilty soul becomes conscious of what it has done and of its isolation in the world. The mariner begins to realize the consequences of his action for the first time when he sees the phantom ship which decides his fate:

The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,

***Who thicks man’s blood with cold.* (ll.193-194)**

The night at which the mariner’s companions die can stand for the darkness of the soul when it suddenly finds itself alone, robbed of familiar ties, (J. R. Watson 1988). That lonely soul culminates in the horror of utter solitude:

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been

Alone on a wide wide sea:

So lonely’t was, that God himself

***Scarce seemed there to be.* (ll.597-600)**

Here, the mariner’s loneliness reaches its highest peak. He is alone surrounded by dead bodies in the empty sea as if the grace of God had departed the world. In such a state man’s faith in God is shaken.

The ancient mariner shoots the harmless albatross, and hospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen. By this action, he commits an unforgivable sin. As a result, he suffers from loneliness, alienation and agony.

Though the scene of “Kubla Khan” in general is that of death, yet one can handle it with loneliness. In fact, its interpretations are varied, yet they should be pressed into any specific meaning. “Kubla Khan” is full of images and symbols, whose meaning is elusive and whose presence in the poem abides beyond any thematic meaning, (Watson 1988). In this respect, it is not unusual to find out the theme of loneliness in the poem besides other main themes. Loneliness appears through the four major images that are presented in the poem. From the very beginning, the image of the dome of the palace shows the theme of loneliness:

IN Xandu did Kubla Khan’

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

(Kubla Khan, ll.1-2)

Coleridge presents a picture of that lonesome dome without explaining its surroundings. Finding a palace is a very strange sight, as though the location were ripped from its surroundings and placed in a strange location where life has never known how to get there. The description of that enigmatic river, Alph, likewise deviates greatly from its natural surroundings:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea. (ll.3-5)

There are romantic overtones to the river's image in this remote location. It is violent and full of mystery. Typically, rivers are encircled by picturesque landscapes with space for various natural elements like animals and birds. However, Coleridge creates a feeling of isolation here by using the fictitious image of that enigmatic river that rushes and wastes its beauty and waters in a barren area. As though water were not one of the primary components of existence, there is no indication of life within or surrounding it. The image of a damsel with a dulcimer then appears, further elaborating on the theme of loneliness. Instead of focusing on inanimate objects, it now addresses a human:

A damsel with a dulcimer

*In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played
Singing of Mount Abora. (ll.37-41)*

The speaker sings about Mount Abora, a mountain or lofty place of God, and recalls seeing a damsel from Abyssinia. She plays a dulcimer to accompany herself (Abrams 1966). The collective existence is actually not suited to this image. There is a subliminal sense of superiority or sacredness in her alone as she sings to the mountain of God. In this way, the poet exalts loneliness and conveys a subliminal message that is initially connected to his own predicament—that of loneliness.

The presence of the poet, who was believed to be from a different world and era, demonstrates the alternative image of loneliness:

*And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise. (ll.48-54)*

Here, the poet appears to be a primitive person who needs to be kept out of society. Inspired by a paradisaical vision that would be both beautiful and frightening, he appears dangerous in his solitude and spiritual inspiration (Harry 1972).

4. The Use of Alienation in Coleridge's Selected Poems

It is reasonable to assume that the dilemma of dying may include feelings of isolation. They have a close relationship since one of the effects of death is a sense of estrangement. However, since loneliness and alienation are essentially related, it is challenging to draw a clear separation between them. In essence, both are predicated on social disengagement or detachment from peers and society.

For two reasons, Coleridge is an alienated man. First, alienation is a prominent theme in Romanticism, and it is expressed both

directly and indirectly by the majority of romantic poets. Secondly, it is focused on his personal life. He endures a lot of suffering throughout his life. His home life is erratic. His dissatisfied love for Sara Hutchinson is dealt with by the lack of understanding between him and his wife (John 1985). His condition, which made his already troubled life even more agonizing, was a major factor in his separation from everyday life. These issues cause him to reflect extensively on his existential worth, which undoubtedly results in alienation.

He lives this state of alienation and expresses it in his wistful call to Wordsworths when he was in Germany:

*William, my head and my heart,
dear William and Dear Dorothea!
You have all in each other; but I am
Lonely and want you!(14)*

It is a wish of being alone as the following narrative tells us about his running away from the Wordsworths: (George 1988)

*To be beloved is all I need,
And whom I love I love indeed*

Coleridge left Scotland, but his sense of alienation is heightened by being separated from his closest loved ones. He is homeless and travels from place to place while bringing his ailments and pains with him. His anguish intensifies his sense of estrangement, which becomes an inseparable aspect of him (Berkoben 1975). Because of his talent, he is able to write about his estrangement in a variety of ways. He discusses estrangement explicitly at times, symbolically at others, or through his characters. The first lines of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" contain instances of alienation:

*It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
— "By they long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?
(Ancient Mariner, ll.1-4)*

The poem opens with a scene of alienation. The ancient mariner stops one of the wedding guests and alienates him from his fellows. With his skinny hand and glittering eye, he stops by force that young man and prevents him from attending the celebration of marriage, (Christopher 1973).

From the very beginning, the sense of alienation is quite clear. The mariner is alone, alienated from people and from the atmosphere around him as if he belonged to another time and world, while the people, as a group, celebrate the renewal of life, represented by marriage. He is old and they are young. He is carrying a sad terrifying story, and thinking of death; the people are happy, full of life and enjoying the wedding celebration. In addition, the story of the ancient mariner, the way through which he narrates the story, and the setting of the recitation all foreshadow the atmosphere of alienation which dominates the story.

In the second stanza, part one, the young man still thinks of happiness in the bridegroom's doors:

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,

And I am next to kin:

The guests are met, the feast is set:

May'st hear the merry din. (ll.5-8)

The happiness represented by the ritual of celebration contrasts with what the ancient mariner is going to tell concerning his terrible voyage, a matter which evokes the sense of alienation.

Alienation, as it is mentioned previously, can be expressed in different ways: directly and indirectly. In stanzas number 16 and 17 alienation appears in more than an aspect:

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,

It ate the food it ne'er had eat, (ll.63-67)

In these lines, there are two or more aspects of alienation. The albatross for instance, is alienated; he comes alone as if he were

alienated from his group. He also eats, drinks and stays with them and this is an unusual behaviour for a bird. In fact, this bird, albatross, comes from (fog) and this word refers to the mystery enfolding him. Hence, alienation is shown indirectly here through the place or environment to which the bird frequently comes which definitely does not suit him.

Though in "Kubla Khan" alienation appears in a different way and somehow far from death, yet to be unusual and apart from society it means death. A close reading of the last stanza of "Kubla Khan" and a return to some religious and mythical narratives make the relationship between death and alienation quite possible:

A damse with a dulcimer

In a vision once I saw:

It was an Abyssinian maid,

And on her dulcimer she played,

Singing of Mount Abora.

(Kubla Khan, ll.37-41)

There is an aspect of similarity between the poet and this lonely African lady. Both suffer from sense of alienation. She is singing alone in a place far from man's habitations so is the poet who is wholly alienated at home when he wrote this dreamful poem.

5. Conclusion

According to what has been mentioned and discussed, alienation can be looked upon as an aspect of death; psychological death of course. Death, in its simple meaning, refers to be parted or separated from others. Alienation in its turn is a state of being alienated from others either physically or spiritually. However, the two aspects: loneliness and alienation are twin, initially associated to each other, though one might lead to the other, yet they spring from the same source and lead finally to be some aspects of death, in the psychological sense.

The poet's fondness to the past and the state of nostalgia to the days that will never come back on one hand and his drab present

on the other deepen the sense of alienation in him and draws him far from the busy life in which man should be involved.

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