

Explanation of Guilt, Morality, and Death in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner from the Perspective of Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is written by an English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This study focuses on the elements of guilt, morality, and death in the poem the Rime of the Ancient Mariner from a Psychoanalytical perspective. The mariner kills an albatross which represents Christian's soul and then the man (mariner) being punished by God for killing it. This also leads towards destruction of all the other crew mates as well as the mariner. After killing the albatross, the mariner feels guilt which leads them towards the fear of death. This is a qualitative research study where the text is analyzed through close reading to find out the above elements. This study shows that morality is the way to lead a life without creating any problems for others. The crew members also learn this from guilt and morality after the punishment of mariner who killed albatross. Mariner gets the effects of killing the bird and he usually observes his death in front of his eyes. His death drives other crew members to be on positive side and not to harm anyone till the end of the poem. The researcher has analyzed the primary source which is the poem and secondary sources which are other research articles and books to support the topic under study.

Keywords: Thanatos, Guilt, Morality, psychoanalysis, death

1. Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was an English poet, critic and philosopher. His Biographia Litreria, Kubla Khan, and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner are the most significant works of literature, philosophy, imaginative and criticism from English romantic period (Beer, 2023).

The Rime of Ancient Mariner, first published in 1798 as a part of "Lyrical Ballads" which is the collaborative work of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This collection is considered as a milestone in English literature because it was the beginning of Romantic Movement. This poem is written by Coleridge as one of his great works where he applied supernatural elements (Haven, 1972). It is a narrative poem that discusses about the hauntingly breathtaking tale by a mariner, who stops a wedding ceremony and starts telling his tale about what he experienced in his voyage of the sea. The mariner explains how he and his crew encountered with a sea bird Albatross, at the time when there was no hope of getting out from the giant ice mountains; then albatross came to them as a good luck and one day mariner killed that bird by his cross-bow that brings curse upon the ship. Crew suffers lack of air and water and got dead one by one and only this mariner left alone with all his crew's corpse on his sides. This experience spiritually awakens him. His punishment is to wander on the earth and spread his story to

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others and become living example for others. Show others; the punishment of violating the nature and its interconnectedness with other natural beings. This poem discusses guilt, remorse, punishment, supernatural elements, and the vivid imagery with rich symbolism (Brown, 1945).

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This research paper is about to analyze Coleridge's poem Rime of Ancient Mariner by the theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian psychologist and the founder of psychoanalysis. He despised religion, theism and Bible; although his goal was to remove the problem of **guilt**, so he is responsible for confusing it. His aim was to convert neurosis; sin into sickness. Freud believed into the elimination of guilt under the norms by elevating the standards so to sustain within the moral chains. Freud viewed himself as a breaker of conventions and thought of him as missioned to break the relationship of guilt from sin, make it problem of science rather than faith. As long as we think guilt and sin is the source that ends with science rather than the fault of individuals, Freud is with us. Secular thinkers say him as a legend of modern minds whereas Christian critics consider him unholy creator of sad modern mind, in the line of Marx and Darwin (Mayhall, n.d.).

Freud (1962) in his book "civilization and its discontents" discusses, the interplay of internal psyche and societal influences constructs **morality**. He says that there is a constant tension in between the pleasure instinct (id) and the pressure/ demands of society that is super ego; it is an internal tool that shapes the moral standards and creates the sense of guilt and conscience. He says that the development of morality may leads an individual towards internal conflicts and psychological discomfort. He published his theory of **death drive** in 1920 publication, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle.' **Thanatophobia** is fear of death which is a Greek word. Freud is the first theorist who discusses **death anxiety** and discusses how an individual cope with it. In his book he discusses that individuals' hypothesized unconscious desires drives him toward self-destruction and aggression that's leads him back to his inorganic state. He introduced two concepts; Eros that is instincts and Thanatos that is death instincts. He says Eros leads towards self-preservation and pleasure, whereas Thanatos leads towards aggression and destructive tendencies (Pandya & Kathuria, 2021).

1.2 Research Objectives

- Examine the elements of guilt in the main character of the poem, the Rime of Ancient Mariner.
- Explore the morality and its impact on setting and feelings of the characters in the poem.
- Illustration of death and its instincts in the light of Sigmund Freud's Thanatophobia.

1.3 Research Questions

- How guilt is related to the ancient mariner with the reference of the text of the poem?
- Which engraved elements in the text reflects the morality and moral violation in the poem?
- What are the death instincts that's been faced by the characters of this poem?

2. Literature Review

Morality is defined as the principles of how people should treat each other and welfare each other, respect justice and others rights (Cook, 1984). Morality not only includes the id and superego but it also includes the understanding of prosocial behaviors, emotions

beliefs and intentionality all these factors intermingles for the development of morality (Richardson et al., 2013). Similar as behaviorism, socialization is the primary tool for moral development (Skinner, 1938). As opposite of Freud, he was finding struggle between internal and external forces whereas, Skinner focused on powerful external forces to shape individual's development. But both Freud and Skinner focused on the external factors that shapes morality. Kohlberg (1963) argued that development extends itself from selfish desires to avoid punishment (personal) to avoid humiliation (societal) to sustain the ethical universal principles (moral). Cook (1984) created a comparison between moral and social rules and defined as they both work for to run the regulations of the world smoothly.

Guilt: we find ourselves struggling between freedom and culture's attempt to make us conform. These urges leads to nagging with a sense of guilt, an "uneasiness" of concise (Freud, 1962). Freudian guilt says from either dreads of external authority or demands of external and internal punishments of super ego. It is through drive repressing guilt and resulting sublimations by civilization. Guilt is a murder of primal father. In the book "crisis in psychiatry and religion" Mowrer (1961) writes: emotion is not the primal irregularity but behavioral. The doer is not a victim of his conscience but the violator of it. He must stop blaming others and take responsibility for the poor actions. Problems will be solved not by ventilation of feelings but by confession of sin. In the biography of Freud Earnest Jones (1953) writes; "the intention of Freud was to represent that the sense of guilt is most important issue and highest evolution of the culture, for pricing the progress of civilization, it creates the highest sense of guilt for forfeiting highest happiness"(p. 342).

In 1933 Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein both were invited to exchange their thoughts on the topic, "why war?," and those letters reveals that Freud justifies the cruelty and violence that comes through instinctual-biological hypothesis which is the product of innate aggression, he names it; Death Drive (Carel, n.d.). These are his remarks by the closing pages of Why War:

"This [death drive] would serve as the biological justification for all the ugly deeds and dangerous impulses we are fighting. It must be admitted that these instincts stands nearer to nature than does our resistance for it, which an explanation also needs to be found... there is no use of trying to get rid of man's aggressive nature and its inclinations" (Freud, 1953-1974/2024, p. 211).

As Carel examined, Freud drives death drive as a component of human mind, he saw the mind has two opposite forces one that drives life, Eros; another drives death, Thanatos. These two emerges to produce inner dynamics of mind. Where Eros promotes the unity and cohesiveness, drives towards positivity, creativity and pleasure, on the other hand Thanatos promotes towards destruction. The tension between these two creates duality, ambivalence and strife that makes mind and behavior humanistic. Freud declares conflict and confusion so close to the human mind, so close that it becomes the part of psyche, internalized as one. Not only are these the part of psyche even they are the part of psychic process. It has hidden element; violence and discontent. "Organisms preserves their own life by destroying an extraneous ones" (Verlag, 1972, p. 282-283).

3. Research Methodology

This study applies qualitative research method by the help of close textual reading of the poem (the rime of ancient mariner), dives into its inferential and inter-textual meanings of the verses. Qualitative research assumes negotiated and dynamic reality, although data is collected through magazines, newspaper, books, treaties, etc. the researchers read books to analyze the meaning of its text (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Creswell (1988) adds, the qualitative is the empirical research, where data is not in the form of numbers, it is the approach by which data is focused by its subject manner in an interpretive way. As Denzin

and Lincoln (2011) says, textual analysis and close reading sets the reader to the way that gives the reader, insights to understand and interpret the nature of the sentence. In this paper researcher works on the psychoanalysis of *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to find out the elements of morality, guilt and death instincts as Sigmund Freud explains in his theories with the help of qualitative research method.

4. Textual Analysis

The Rime of Ancient Mariner is full of psychological Christian redemption somehow based on Coleridge's own trial of poetic imagination. It can be related to the mind of our today's society because it's moral lessons are immortal. The anxiousness of this piece of work is grand (Warren, 2000). When we compare the life of Coleridge (according to his notebook), we find out that this poem is subsequently directs the signals towards his own life, in a clairvoyant way. For instance, his guilt, his isolation, the loss of love, the exploration, the experience of opium addiction. Coleridge seems pre-occupied with Christian redemption which shows life and imagination both, side by side; these things verifies this poem as a metaphysical document as well as biography (Lefebure, 1976). Discontent is so visible in this poem; this poem is centralized by ambivalence whereas the poem's unacknowledged part is its guilt, on the other hand, mariner's encounter with death causes lifelong psychological wound on the reader as well as the mariner himself, from which only pseudorecovery be possible. The connection between guilt and death leads almost the whole poem. The fact is neither cannot be explained without the other, as they both are going along in this poem and creating disturbing psychological ambivalence. The element of ambivalence can make sense by understanding the poem's moral (Beer, 1977, pp. 145-146).

The Morality

According to Freud (1933), the construction of superego begins from conscience. He discusses the quotations of Kant that talks about the starry sky above and the moral law within. He talks about the necessity of physics and its morals to work with balance for heavens so stars will remain shining as same as the conscience is necessary for to sustain the law of morality as it is the practice of humanity and goodness. These two experiences are the great example for the greatness of God (p.223).

He prayeth best, who loveth best

For the dear God who loveth us,

All things both great and small;

He made and loveth all.

(Coleridge, 1798, p. 17, l. 615-619).

These are the ending lines of the poem about moral lessons which is narrated by mariner to the wedding guests. These lines are the core and all the poem comes to this end from anywhere mariner goes, whatsoever he does, comes back to the understanding that life and death is in the hands of God and he made us all. This poem gives concept of morality in the light of Christianity and in these lines Coleridge wants to explain that Jesus prays to the God specially who is keeping care and love for others. "There is a steady agreement between physical reality and mathematical concepts requires in description," refers to "harmony between mathematics and physical reality" (Maschler, 1971, p. 40). It seems similar to the moral sphere, which contains moral cause and effect of the experience in the light of rewards and punishments impose at the end by world (as morality is the part of superego).

**And I had done an hellish
thing,**

**And it would work 'em
woe:**

**For all averr'd, I had
kill'd the bird.**

(Coleridge, 1798, p. 3, l. 91-93).

His shipmates cry out against the ancient mariner for killing the bird of good luck which shows that he indeed kills the bird but before the call out from his crew, he does not contain

any sense of morality as superego results morality and directly comes from social conformity.

As Coleridge (1907) says “it sometimes happen that we gets punishment for our circumstances, faults by incidents, and the causations of this; the faults we do not share. And like this, I have felt severest punishments” (Coleridge, 1907/Ed., p. 207). As the crewmates of mariner dies one by one because of the fault of the mariner and he remains, out without death.

One after one, by the star-dogg'd Moon, Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang,
Too quick for groan or sigh, (Coleridge,
 1798, p. 6, l. 211-215). **And cursed me with his eye.**

(His shipmates drop down dead):

Four times fifty living men With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan), They dropp'd down one by one.
216220

(Coleridge, 1798, p. 6, l. 216-220).

The morality dies only from mariner, but with him, all of the others also gets the punishment. As they does not stop him while he shot the albatross and in the end they accuse him of killing the bird, whereas they all were together in that voyage so how could be it the fault of only one which is uncertain, so the morality through lesson of god comes and play its part and divides the punishments equally because society is also at the fault as superego by the name of morality sometimes causes suffocation to the individual, this may be the symbol of that as Coleridge (1907) himself is so much frustrated because of getting punishments of things which he didn't do (p.207).

The guilt

In the biography of Freud, Jones (1953) writes the intentions of the society to represent the guilt which is the most important problem of the evolution of culture and it is clear that the price of sin is paid by forfeiting the happiness through heightening the sense of guilt. Freud shifts from sin to dissociate guilt with his attempt to reckon the idea of Christian guilt. As he says, regardless of culture, a person who struggles with guilt wanders helpless.

'God save thee, ancient From the fiends, that plague thee Mariner!
thus!—
 (Coleridge, 1798, p. 3, l. 80-81).

Wedding guests when hear the story of mariner, claims that God can only save you and the people that you infected in the ship, because you seem trouble maker and as you are saying you shot albatross that was the Christian soul, felt savior of you all and now you killed it, you may be ended punished for all the sin you have done.

And I had done an hellish For all averr'd, I had kill'd the bird thing,
And it would work 'em woe: That made the breeze to blow

(Coleridge, 1798, p. 3, l. 91-94).

The sin, is recognized by the mariner and now he is agreeing that the thing which has happened is something shameful the death of goodness causes the birth of evil. The reality principle governs the ego, attempts to prevent the discharge the tension and try to replace

it with something satisfactory for instance we say the cheeseburger is an example of food that can easily be obtained and could be eaten which eventually will eliminate hunger. Better replacement for something that is out of reach for the moment (Mayhall, n.d., p. 27). So as the mariner evokes everyone's punishment by his sin and he is for sure guilty of this as these lines shows the word "hellish" directly comes by the sinner for his deeds reflects that he is ashamed of his wrongdoings, on the other hand; after surpassing all the horrible incidence if he is using the word hellish as a replacement for his deeds, it's not causing so much for him as he found easier way to admit his sterilities.

Will, mind and conscience are three systems that comprises psyche from the personality, Christian scholars have recognized that no modern thinker has discussed the issue of guilt as Freud does. He faces religious issues with messianic faith in science's ability, if not dissolved guilt, at least to reduce it with biology and to answer it with scientific understanding (Mayhall, n.d., p. 28)

Instead of the cross, the About my neck was hung Albatross

(Coleridge, 1798, p. 4, l. 141-142).

The burden of killing an innocent soul, mariner's guilt allows his crewmates to let the bird hung around mariner's neck otherwise he is the senior most at the ship, how could any member dare to do this to his senior. But its mariner's sense of guilt that results the albatross on his neck whereas he could wear cross, in order to protect himself from evil spirits and he might try to save himself.

Death Drive

The death drive is an inherent tendency that cannot be eliminated but diverted or sublimated "There is no question of getting rid of human aggression and impulsion." We can control the aggression by following superego, which aggression but in an unhappy way, which is obeying societal rules (Freud, 1953-74, p. 211).

**The death-fires danced The water, like a Burnt green, and blue, at
night; witch's oils, and white.**

(Coleridge, 1798, p. 4, l. 128-130).

In the form of sublimation of death drive, mariner see the colors of waters; haunting. The horror and terror of silence and stagnant sea symbolizes the instinct that death is near because there is nothing that shows Eros, everything seems Thanatos. The colors, burning blue, white and green shows the colors of deep fir which is filled with poison and has no life like red or orange fire, these things clear the idea of death instinct. The meaning of civilization is, struggle between Eros and Thanatos. Among the instinct of life and instinct of death as it creates continuation in human species. This struggle is what life actually exist upon. (Freud, 1953-74, p. 212).

The idea of wandering in the world without death is the sublimation of aggression of God by the decision of higher powers we see that death is a small punishment that has achieved by small characters i.e. crewmates of mariner, sudden death! On the other hand, the real sinner is running freely, why? The answer is given by Freud himself in his concept of Thanatos; As Verlag (1972) discusses that it's acceptable that there is and existence of aggression in human psyche but in what ways we can channel it into something positive, at least in the non-destructive way. So this idea is the point where we drop the dualistic model, so the death drive is no longer a destructive force where antidote is only Eros, instead aggression can be considered as neutral force which can be used for various aims for instance, a will for power and well-being of humans. There is no need of creating the whole binary opposition for death drive (p. 249).

**To walk together to the kirk With a goodly company!— To walk together
to the kirk, Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And all together pray, While each to his great Father bends,**

And youths and maidens gay!

(Coleridge, 1798, p. 17, l. 6014-610)

These lines symbolize that mariner's punishment is prior than death, his bad deeds assigns him to spread lesson and his story to all humanity all will born grow and die but only mariner will stay and spread his word to whom he'll meet. Share God's message and reminds the world of Church (kirk). Reminds the world of rage of God different way of punishments, tell the world that death is not the end, there are some exceptions where death is the ultimate desires and could not be obtained as mariner wants. This reflects the idea of Vager to turn aggression into something that is entirely Eros, instead create something neutral, decentralization of Thanatos.

5. Conclusion

This poem discusses the rules of nature and God's punishment in the form of the story of a mariner whose punishment is to wander on the earth and show other people; the results of trying to take the authorities of God within own hands. This paper talks about the concepts of Sigmund Freud's guilt, morality, and death. In the light of these concepts, researcher discusses the poem for the evidence of these elements in the poem. The aim of this paper is to find out these elements in the poem Rime of Ancient Mariner in the light of Freud's psychoanalysis perspective. Morality is defined as how people should treat each other for the sake of getting better in this life as well as getting better in after life. Morality in other words could be called an extension of super ego, which always requires confirmation of society. Guilt is a form of realization of a mistake when society forces us to see the other's perspective as well. Guilt shows the good and bad of a person, guilt always comes from the violation of conscience. Death which was explained by Freud as Thanatos, opposite of Eros. Death instinct is a feeling of the end is coming whereas the Eros is the instinct of life coming both are binary opposite to each other. This paper is based on qualitative research where the primary evidence is text of the poem. In this poem, the researcher sees morality in the form of the lesson of god which mariner delivers also the punishment other crewmates get because of the mariner and their dead eyes curses him to death, is a form of morality we see. Then guilt, in the form of admittance of mariner that he has done the hellish thing. Also when crewmates hang the albatross in the neck of mariner and he lets them hang it, shows that he is guilty and somehow trying to compensate for it, which is impossible. Death drive 'Thanatos' is when we see that at the end mariner sermons everyone to go to church, care for your loved ones and be with good company also do good deeds shows that he wants other people to pack their bags with goodness for their hereafter. Though the punishment of mariner is to roam over this earth till the very end and he will see everyone, so he wants to reveal the reality of Thanatos to other people so they can prepare themselves and he turns his aggression and impulsions into something positive which is guiding others after learning out of his experience so they don't repeat the mistake of mariner.

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