

Ancient Mariner - Samuel Taylor Coleridge

In the previous class we have discussed Romanticism in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Now we will discuss Supernaturalism in The Ancient Mariner.

We have seen that Coleridge employed supernatural elements, the incidents and agents are supernatural and treated them in a purely poetic way. As a poet of the supernatural, Coleridge's place is supreme and unique. "Coleridge made an epoch in the poetry of supernatural." In the words of A.D. Trail, "Coleridge's imagination seems to acquire poetic distinction in the region of fantastic and supernatural" and to quote Peter "It is delicacy, the dreamy grace in the representation of the marvellous which makes Coleridge's work so remarkable. The too palpable intruders from a spiritual world in almost all ghost literature, in Scott and Shakespeare even, have a kind of coarseness or crudeness. Coleridge's power is in the very fineness with which, as with some really ghostly finger, he brings home to our inmost sense in his invention daring as they are."

What is supernatural:- Supernatural means, beyond nature. The term supernatural is used for events and beings

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which are out or beyond the ordinary laws of cause and effect in the human world. The primitive and the medieval people were the strong believers of the supernatural. They looked at the phenomena of nature with awe and wonder. The Catholic legends and the mystic experiences of Christian Saints sought to present the supernatural as holy truths. The literature of Middle ages - the romance and the ballads - freely exploited the supernatural or the marvellous. Ghosts, witches, demons, orges appear quite frequently in the medieval literature. Nevertheless; the supernatural in the medieval literature is crude, hair rising, sensational and palpable. With the Renaissance the supernatural is presented in all allegorical and symbolical cover. The efforts are made to make it more natural and convincing.

The supernatural elements was handled by Mrs Radcliffe, Horace, Walpole, Monk Lewis in the 18th century. They presented supernatural scenes and



and Characters in their novels. But these novelists of the school of horror presented them in gruesome and horrible manner. They tried to produce an atmosphere of horror and mystery by artificial methods, such as noise and thunder and ghostly shapes. They actually depicted ghosts and witches playing with the lives of innocent persons. Their aim was to cause horror by means of supernatural machinery.

Coleridge avoided this gruesome and terrifying machinery of Supernaturalism. He discarded the objective representation of the supernatural elements and adopted the subjective one ~~to~~ according to which the readers were to interpret the supernatural according to their intuition and beliefs. That means he handled the supernatural in a psychological ~~and~~ manner. He also portrayed the effect of the human characters. Thus he introduced subtle, human and psychological method of treatment. It is not only that he succeeds in making the supernatural seem natural and, thus in making it credible, but he deals with supernatural in a way in which it had never been done before. Summing up his intentions, he says that it was agreed that whereas Wordsworth would

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deal with the natural, Coleridge would deal with "persons and characters supernatural."

The supernaturalism in Coleridge is refined and subjective. It does not have the objective palpability and crudeness of the marvellous in almost all pre-Coleridgean ghost literature. In making the supernatural a psychic phenomenon, Coleridge was a pioneer. His supernatural is as "the spot on the brain that will show itself out." Its pleasure is not seen by eye, it is felt by the mind through the agitation or terror it excites in the mind. In *The Ancient Mariner*, the horror of the mariner's face is conveyed by the terror it excites in the minds of one of the three guests.

"He holds him with his skinny hand  
There was a ship, quoth he  
Hold off unhand me grey-beard loon  
Eftsoons his hand dropt he  
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's supernaturalism is highly



suggestive, subtle, intuitive and subjective. It is the reader who has to infer himself what he understands by a supernatural agency or element. It is not sudden but slowly distilled into the air.

Mystery shrouds and surrounds the supernatural of Coleridge. Everything is dim and vague, nothing is made very apparent and clear. Coleridge does not place all cards on the table, much is held back for the sake of mystery and suspense. The poet excites curiosity, but does not gratify it. The supernatural in Coleridge does not have definite or fixed character. It is difficult to say how much of it is real and how much of it is merely a subjective illusion. The dividing line between the subjective and the objective is often blurred; it often becomes difficult to assess how much of a particular experience is objective and how much is pure hallucination.

In order to make his supernaturalism realistic and convincing, Coleridge humanizes it. It appears in his work, not in a traditional blood-curdling and hair-raising form, but assumes the ordinary human personality. Thus, Geraldine, though a 'demoniac sublime', is a beautiful girl, attractive and charming. Moreover, she has common human weaknesses. She suffers

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from shame and misery. So do have the Mariner and Christabel a human element. The supernatural elements convey a moral useful for normal life of a man.

Thus, to sum up we may say that in the treatment of the supernatural, Coleridge stands on high pedestal, among all the romantic poets. "The mystery, the strangeness, the weirdness of the supernatural cast a peculiar spell on the dreamy imagination worked most vigorously when it was called up mysterious vision of the unseen world. Behind and beyond the seen world of nature of reality, is the unseen world of supernatural and this unseen world people with mysterious beings and powers, was what Coleridge sought to make real by the wonder working power of his imagination." So Coleridge, made a great use of supernatural

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