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Romanticism and Rebellion: Coleridge's Poetic Resistance to the Enlightenment through *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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Abstract

This research aims to see the romanticism contained in the poem and uses descriptive qualitative as the method. The results of this research are characteristics from the romantic era, which are nature, freedom, supernatural, and gothic. The choice of supernatural and gothic themes came from Coleridge's childhood memories of folk oral traditions as a child; "Gothic Ballads." Childhood memories were also chosen because of the saturation at that time, which only discussed something empirical and did not believe in something that could not be proven. This poem shows that the world as a strange experience is an important relationship between humans and their feelings. It offers the spirit and soul as weapons against the Enlightenment era, which is full of science and rationalism. This poem becomes one of the ways to express the freedom of thought. This spirit also makes "Lyrical Ballads" as the opening door of the romantic era.

INTRODUCTION

The Romantic Era is the term used in literature for the era between 1785 and 1830. This era is rooted in Kant's and Rousseau's thoughts from the previous era, the Enlightenment, which promotes individual freedom. Many great writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Blake, and others were born at this time. Writers of this time never called themselves romantics. However, at this time, each writer claimed to have different intellectual and imaginative characteristics, which was then called "the spirit of the age" (Greenblatt, 2006).

The works of five great poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats later became the basis for the notion of romanticism (Greenblatt, 2006). As one of the maestros at this time, Coleridge wrote many things related to everyday life in his poetry. He was fascinated with natural laws and simple events (Burwick, 1989); even in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*, Coleridge exposed himself to a type of poetry that depicted mystery and magic.

Things correlated with supernatural powers are grouped under the label "romantic," a term eventually used to name the Romantic era (Greenblatt, 2006). Supernatural is a work that transforms reality into something beyond logic but not beyond imagination. Imagination itself is close to the psychological side of an individual, which is also one of the characteristics of the Romantic Era (Chandler, 2008). Coleridge himself showed an interest in dreams and nightmares, such as waking up under the influence of the opium he was consuming.

Not only the supernatural and psychological side of individuality but also several other characteristics of the romantic era. The topic of nature is one of the characteristics often found in literary works of that era. This element is one of the thoughts of the writers of that time. Nature is a thought, not a structure or system as objectively presented to humans, but rather a total creative process in which humans, human creations, and human artistic creations are all involved (Fyre, [1963](#)). In the writer's works, nature is the source of life and the end of life. Nature is also a dream scene in romance, a strategy to introduce the reader to a world of possibilities related to reality.

Apart from that, gothic elements are also one of the characteristics that are very closely associated with that era. Gothic is literature about nightmares usually found in dream landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination. Fiction is amorphous and induces fear common to all human beings, employing a mixture of some material, some from the writer's subconscious, and some from folklore, myth, fairy tales, and romance (MacAndrew, [1979](#)). Longueil says that the phrase "gothic imagination" was used in 1804 to describe wild or ghostly imagination (Longueil, [1923](#)). Gothic Stories are tales of mystery and horror meant to give goosebumps. This element sometimes contains the supernatural. The term supernatural, which is from super or supra, "above" and "nature," pertains to existence beyond the scientifically visible universe; it is close to meaning with mystification or spiritualization (Ardian, [2017](#)). Gothic elements are also full of mystery and horror. The existence of death also shows the characteristics of the Gothic element. The built atmosphere is full of gloom and darkness. The essence of romance relates to the romantic principle that writers create new concepts of the world and believe in the power of creativity and imagination.

In this era, writers appeared who were affiliated with radical Protestant traditions where they assumed there would be the end of time as written in the Holy Book. Coleridge and Southey are some of them who pay attention to this. They opposed the establishment of the Anglican Church and proposed "the republic of God's own making," although in the end they were also interested in that. This radical Christian opposes Christian free will and becomes a current against economic politics (Chandler, [2008](#)).

Economic politics is a political system that was in place at that time. Coleridge, as a writer at that time, became more concerned about politics and paid attention to how important a worker is for a country (Chandler, [2008](#)). Between 1600 and 1807, English traders shipped three and a half million enslaved people (Brumwell & Speck, [2001](#)). These enslaved people came from Africa and were treated no better than animals. Coleridge and the other poets of the Romantic era, such as Blake, Southey, and Wordsworth, paid attention to this problem. They had an abolitionist or liberationist spirit. They began their poetry careers when the issue of slavery heated up, and they all wrote works on the subject of slavery and the slave trade; even Coleridge and Southey campaigned together against it. It is suitable with the essence of romanticism that is aimed at liberating the human personality from the fetters of social convention and social morality (Russel, [2002](#)).

The Romantic era is also referred to as the "Age of Revolutions" because, at that time, people who had given up on the structure of society and politics expressed their opinions in a work where this work became their vessel for conveying their message of soul equality and the heroic dimension and life to readers. In 1797, views emerged that were more unrestricted, which was also called a major revolution marked by *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge (Van Spackeren, [1994](#)).

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born on 21 October 1772 in Ottery St. Mary, Devor, England. After the death of his father, he was sent to Christ's Hospital, a charity school in London, where he spent his childhood studying and writing poetry. He has a good relationship

with his father but not with his mother. The distance between him and his family resulted in the emotional damage he experienced. Then, after graduating from school, he continued his education at Cambridge. Previously, he had been friends with Wordsworth. He was even close to the Wordsworth family. This is evidenced by the writings that Dorothy Wordsworth wrote about those who went on walks. Then, he decided to collaborate with Wordsworth to write *Lyrical Ballads*. His close relationship with Wordsworth continued when he returned to England and decided to move to Keswick, an area close to the Wordsworth settlement. After that, he experienced domestic problems and then became ill, so he was forced to consume opium (Gillman, [1838](#)).

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is Coleridge's first poem in *Lyrical Ballads*, which he co-wrote with Wordsworth. This poem was inspired by the dream story of a friend named Cruikshank (Greenblatt, [2006](#)). Cruikshank had a dream about a skeleton ship. Coleridge expanded on that dream to include the old navigator's eternal sins, the punishment ensuing, and the navigator's penance for his sins. This poem is also inspired by James Cook's second voyage of exploration in 1772-1775. This was inseparable from Coleridge's tutor, an astronomer on the aircraft carrier James Cook, and had a close relationship with Cook. A publisher once told Coleridge that many sales of the work were bought by sailors who thought it was a naval chant (Joavani, [2014](#)). This poem also describes Coleridge's views on slavery. Keane ([1994](#)) interprets this poem as an exploration of the guilt and anxiety caused by maritime exploration, the slave trade, and colonial expansion. This poem has several contributions from Wordsworth, such as the ships navigated by the "dead sailors" surrounding the mariner and the hunt for the ship's workers who shot the albatross (Bloom, [2001](#)).

Since this poem is Coleridge's first poem in *Lyrical Ballads*, it is interesting to discuss the romantic elements in that poem. This research aims to discover those elements and what influenced Coleridge's writing this poem. Previously, some research has studied *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge as their objects. Some research studied the nature elements in this poem, such as *The Relationship between the Individual and Nature in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Poem* (Bal, [2004](#)), which focuses on the relationship between the individual and nature and shows the relation between God and the world. The other research studied about nature in this poem is *Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Treatment of Nature and Supranatural in "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner"* (Rustam, [2019](#)). It explained that Coleridge perceives nature as something that surrounds man and considers it a privilege to interpret it. Another research that uses this poem as the object is *The Ancient Mariner: Colonizer or Colonized?* (Abbasi et al. [2011](#)). It explains the hybridity and in-betweenness of the characters in this poem. Then the other research is *Narrating the Wound: Trauma and Memory in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner and Poe's the Raven* (Ezzeldin, [2022](#)). This research studied how reliable the character narrates the story. Those researchers used *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as an object of the research but did not focus on romanticism as the freedom of thought movement.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, which consists of two parts of the research method. They are the data collection and the data analysis. Each research method consists of several research procedures. The primary data source for this research is the poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This primary data source is supported by secondary data about the author and written sources describing the author's background related to this work. In addition, other supporting data are written sources about the history behind the creation of this poem. After finding the data collection, the next step is to analyze the poem,

focusing on the characteristics of romanticism: supernatural, gothic elements, and freedom of expression. The historical and biographical approach is used in the process of analyzing to find out the romanticism elements in the poem. The historical and biographical approach is famously related to Hippolyte A. Thine, who created the phrase *race, milieu, et moment*. This approach believes that a literary work reflects the author's life and times or the times of the characters in the work (Guerin, [1966](#)).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The poem entitled *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1998 and is the first poem in *Lyrical Ballads*. The poem is divided into seven parts and set on an endless sea with a relentless sun and a moonlit night. This poem begins with an argument which contains a summary of the entire poem, which consists of two narratives. The first is an explanation to the right of the stanza, and the second is the poem, which deals with the extraordinary adventures of "the ancient mariner." The atmosphere in this poem is full of mystery due to the combination of the supernatural and the mundane, dreamlike elements and stunning visuals.

The first part of the poem, "The Ancient Mariner," introduces many of the themes explored in the poem. In the first verse, "The Ancient Mariner," a long beard and sparkling eyes join the three wedding guests. Of the three wedding guests, only one was restrained. This happened without knowing why; perhaps Coleridge wanted to show that there was a supernatural hypnosis performed by "The Ancient Mariner," which functioned as a supernatural message that could not be explained or made no sense (Bloom, [2001](#)). This is proven by the explanation in the poem, which states that the wedding guests could only listen like a three-year-old child. At the end of part one, an albatross appears as a Christian soul, but "The Ancient Mariner" kills this holy messenger.

In the second part of the poem, we can see a more detailed description of the gloomy landscape and climate and the difficulty of navigating the ship after "The Ancient Mariner" killed the albatross. "The Sailors" started blaming "The Ancient Mariner." In the absence of the sacred bird, the environment became like hell, "the bloody Sun, at noon." The ship and all of its crew died. Death in question is the absence of movement and activity. They began to predict disasters according to their superstitious clues, "*about, about, in reel and rout / the death-fires danced at night.*" It also shows a gloomy atmosphere, like gothic characteristics. Depictions of the sun and moon also show another romantic feature, which is nature.

In the third part of this poem, a sense of inadequacy is attacked, and basic human needs are neglected. These were merciless, hopeless, and suffering times. "*There passed a weary time. Each throat / Was parched, and glazed each eye. / A weary time! A weary time!*". Depictions of hell and nightmares arose. Such a supernatural spirit wreaks violence on the killing of the holy albatross. Coleridge establishes a poetic collaboration between the world of distorted nature and the spiritual world of revenge. Then came the figures of "Death" and "Life-in-Death," which then played the dice for life on the ship, which then ended with the death of "The Sailors" and all passengers leaving "The Ancient Mariner" alone and isolated.

The fourth section returns to the wedding guests listening to "The Ancient Mariner." He said he was afraid of "The Ancient Mariner," "*I fear thee, ancient Mariner! / I fear thy skinny hand!*" which was then answered by "The Ancient Mariner," "*Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest! / This body dropped not down.*" He then went on to say that he carried a grave sin on his hands, living a hellish life as he was surrounded by death and destruction. Then, at the end of this chapter, "The Ancient Mariner" will experience a spiritual awakening he was

unaware of. *'O happy living things! no tongue / Their beauty might declare: / A spring of love gushed from my heart, / And I blessed them unaware.'*

The fifth chapter, "The Ancient Mariner," continues its spiritual renewal. He becomes less aware of his physique. He said that he lived without feelings and was like living in death. Then came the animation of a corpse that made the wedding guests start to worry. This animated corpse is not only a supernatural element but also reflects his interest in the world of science. Later in this chapter, as "The Ancient Mariner" falls unconscious, which is another version of life and death, he hears voices in the air talking to each other, wondering if he is the one who took down the dangerous albatross. The voices are identified correctly. They agreed that even though he had paid for his crimes, he still had to make a complete atonement: *"The man hath penance done, / And penance more will do."*

The sixth part of this poem continues the condition of "The Ancient Mariner" in the spell. He still heard voices in the air. The first voice speaks of a strange, mysterious force driving the ship, while the second responds with advice *"Fly, brother, fly! More high, more high! . . . For slow and slow that ship will go, / When the Mariner's trance is abated."* When "The Ancient Mariner" regained consciousness, he was confronted by the eyes of the dead with a collective gaze from which he could not look away. However, his fear soon turned to joy when he felt the wind blow against him, *"It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek / Like a meadow-gale of spring."* The healing made him realize the heavenly beings, the angels descending on the ship, *"The seraph band, each waved his hand: / It was a heavenly sight."* It is a holy presence that has the power to wash away sins. "The Ancient Mariner" confessed his sins and was forgiven by the good ascetic, *"He'll shrive my soul, he'll wash away / The Albatross's blood."*

The seventh part is the closing part, "The Ancient Mariner" and the hermit is miraculously saved from the sudden sinking of the ship. His body floated and soon stood on the ground. When asked by the ascetic what type of man he was, his body was twisted by an invisible force. Then, finally, "The Ancient Mariner" tasted freedom. The evil spirit left his body. This final trial is the imaginative journey of "The Ancient Mariner" who is now forced to tell his story. Moreover, this poem ends with the wedding guests unable to attend the wedding; even though the story "The Ancient Mariner" has ended, and he has learned that humans must love both big and small things, the narrative in this poem is still ambiguous. The wedding guest is still in the grip of "The Ancient Mariner" as if holding him back from attending the wedding, not to hear his story.

In this poem is full of elements of romanticism. From start to finish, Coleridge describes nature. The existence of a setting in the ocean, the change of day and night, and the presence of storms indicate a natural aspect. Muhammad Rustam, in his research entitled *Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Treatment of Nature and the Supernatural in "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner"* states that the reader will see two forms of nature depicted in this poem, namely the nature seen by the author himself and the nature after being entered by imagination. The poet's creativity exposes Nature's spirit, which embodies beauty, and thus, the two worlds of the objective and the subjective amalgamate.

This poem also contains supernatural elements, which Coleridge conveys without abandoning religious elements. The religious element, the presence of an albatross as a sacred animal, is shown in the first part of the poem, in the 16th stanza, which reads,

"At length did cross an Albatross / Thorough the fog it came / as if it had been a Christian soul / we hailed it in God's name" (Wordsworth & Coleridge, [2013](#)).

Coleridge describes a direct parallel between God and the world and the relationship between individuals and nature (Bal, [2004](#)). The supernatural elements themselves are abundant in every part of the poem. In the first part, when "the ancient mariner" stops the wedding guests and the guests can only listen like three-year-olds. This is like showing the influence of hypnosis. In part three, the 10th and 11th stanzas, there are the figures "Death" and "Life-in-death". Then, in the fourth part, the 12th stanza, it is described as "water-snakes". Gothic elements are also very strong in this poem. In the first part, there is a depiction of the figure of "the ancient mariner" with a mysterious "skinny hand", "grey-beard" and "glittering eye". Then, a gloomy atmosphere is created by nature, such as "the storm-blast came" in the first part of the 11th stanza. The 19th stanza shows "mist or cloud", in the second part of the 7th stanza shows "bloody sun", as well as the tense atmosphere that was created from the emergence of "Death" and "Life-in-death" and then the death of "the sailors" also showed gothic elements in it.

One of the reasons behind creating this poem is to make money for the journey that has already begun. On 13 November 1779, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Dorothy Wordsworth traveled to Alfoxden. Then Coleridge and Wordsworth started talking about doing a piece together to cover their traveling expenses, and they eventually decided to write a gothic ballad. The selection of this genre was influenced by Coleridge, who remembered this type of poetry when he was a child. Gothic ballads are short, highly dramatic poems that originally came from the people's oral tradition and were in vogue in the 1790s (Bloom, [2001](#)). In addition, Coleridge demanded more "imagination-modifying colors" and a hold on the supernatural. He finds the supernatural to be an effective decoy to bring the reader back from the "dusty road" to a pre-empirical view that understands the moral dimensions of the world and liberates from the "despotism of the eye" that has made the mind of materialism deadlier. Coleridge uses the supernatural and argues that humans only see what can be imagined—suspending belief in trust (Burwick, [1989](#)).

This poem shows that the world as a strange experience is an important relationship between humans and what they feel. Coleridge and Wordsworth strive for fresh and creative work. One way is to bring back the feelings of childhood to maturity and incorporate children's wonder of new things that are actually for adults often encountered (Burwick, [1989](#)). They want to express that there is an invisible realm that is full of spirit and soul. Spirit and soul are two interchangeable terms among the romanticists (Schutze, [1918](#)). One feels something sublime in an object because the object conveys that such a spiritual realm exists in the universe (Wake, [1999](#)). The Romantics distrusted calculation and stressed the limitations of scientific knowledge (Marjuni, [2017](#)). This is also proof that society still exalted science and truth based on existing facts or evidence at that time, so they seemed to want to make new thoughts that were more free. This romantic movement involved a revolt against convention and authority and a search for freedom in personal, political, and artistic life. American Romantic and Transcendental movement also used this spirit as the background of the reaction against the 18th Century age of Enlightenment's emphasis on science and rationalism as ways of discovering truth. This movement believed that the government may not interfere with the freedom of expression (Haydel, [2009](#)). This spirit also makes lyrical ballads the opening door of the romantic period.

CONCLUSION

The Romantic period or the "Age of Revolutions" is the term for the era between 1785 and 1830 in world literature. This period was marked by the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's lyrical ballads. As one of the pioneers of the Romantic period, Samuel Taylor

Coleridge has many works related to the supernatural and gothic. One of his works, which is also included in the *Lyrical Ballads*, is a poem entitled *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. This seven-part poem tells the story of “The Ancient Mariner” who tells a wedding guest about when he killed an albatross and experienced a terrible incident.

This poem contains characteristics from the romantic period, nature, freedom, the supernatural, and gothic. The background for writing this poem was Wordsworth and Coleridge, who wanted to collaborate on a work to finance their trip. They also want to share ideas that promote imagination, freedom, and nature. A story about a ship was chosen because a publisher had told Coleridge that the work sold well to sailors. The choice of supernatural and gothic themes stems from Coleridge's childhood memories of folk oral traditions when he was a child, gothic ballads. Childhood memories were also chosen because of the saturation at that time, which only discussed something empirical and did not believe in something that could not be proven. This poem shows that the world as a strange experience is an important relationship between humans and what they feel. It also offers the spirit and soul as weapons against the Enlightenment period, which was full of science and rationalism. This poem becomes one of the ways to express the freedom of thought. This spirit also makes lyrical ballads the opening door of the romantic period.

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