Manipulation Of Christianity In The Sea Farer

Introduction

‘The Sea Farer’ is one of the oldest poems of the Anglo Saxon period. Today’s world has the opportunity to know about this poem because of the Exeter Book which is one of the four surviving manuscripts of that age. This is one of the greatest passages of English literature. The 124 lines of the poem are supposed to represent the Anglo Saxon society of that time but surprisingly although being a part of Anglo Saxon literature, this has some Christian elements blended inside. The sea farer seems to narrate his past life and his journey after being exiled. He is thought to be a self-exiled person but ironically he doesn’t seem to be content wholly with his decision in the first part. ('Anglo-Saxon Poetry - New World Encyclopedia') He seems to be in a dilemma whether or not his decision is right. In the second part the situation changes so dramatically that it is hard to believe if the narrator is the same person. Suddenly he doesn’t regret of his decision and confidently goes through the ‘whale road’ which doesn’t seem so harsh like earlier. The sudden and abnormal change of perspective can be explained by the manipulation of Christianity to the Anglo Saxon Literature.

Literature Review

According to W. W. Lawrence, ‘The Sea Farer’ can be a metaphorical conversion between two different sailors about their way of life. The old sea farer is tired of the waves of sea. ('The Seafarer (Poem) - Info galactic: The Planetary Knowledge Core') His weariness can be understood from the very beginning of the poem- “Sitting day-long at an oar’s end clenched against clinging sorrow,/ breast drought I have borne and bitterness too.” On the other hand, the young sea-farer is excited to be in the journey which can be clearly seen in the second part of the poem where he says, “Cuckoo’s dirge drags out my heart, / whets will to the whale’s beat/ across wastes of water: far warmer to me/ are the Lord’s kindness than this life of death/ lent us on land.”

There are also debates that this poem has not two but three sections. O.S. Anderson believes the first lyric part shows paganism; the second lyric part shows a little bit of Christianity. The third part, which is in prose, is thought to be written by a Christian monk because of it’s fully Christian tone. ('Arngart, Bjork, Schotte') Some critics believe that ‘The Sea Farer’ is a well written monologue.

Thomas D. Hill believes ‘The Sea Farer’ is an allegorical story and is a part of the Sapiental books or Wisdom literature which are mainly used in biblical studies to evoke morality. He says, “It has significant sapiential material concerning the definition of wise men, the ages of the world, and the necessity for patience in adversity”. (Wisdom (Sapiential) Literature) John F. Vickrey believes this poem is a psychological allegory. It represents the life of a sinner by using ‘the boat of the mind’ as a metaphor. (Some Hypotheses Concerning The Seafarer)

Faust and Thompson, in their ‘Old English Poems’ shared their opinion by saying that the later portion of this literary piece maybe added after the original version. (Old English Poems)

According to Anna Marie Sorenson, the Anglo Saxon literature was dominated by natural elements but there are some unusual twists in some parts where religion comes and dominates the subject matter. (Sorenson)

What is Manipulation?

Manipulation means playing with one's mind and making them act like your choice. It is a method which is used to pursued people and depends on your convincing power. One can justify himself, even if he or she is wrong, by the power and use of manipulation.

According to the book 'Who's Pulling Your Strings? How to Break The Cycle of Manipulation' By Braiker, the people who try to manipulate others use 'positive reinforcement' as a weapon. ('Top 11 Take Aways From "Who'S Pulling Your Strings" By Harriet Braiker') The Christians did the exact thing by 'helping' them to preserve their literature. And according to Simon's theory, The Christians used the technique 'Rationalization', which is actually an excuse for their inappropriate doings. ('In Sheep's Clothing - Dr. George Simon')

Idea of Paganism in Anglo Saxon Literature

The term 'Pagan' comes from the Latin word 'paganus'. It is thought to be religion outside of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Some people refer this as being without a religion as it does not have any official doctrine. People of ancient Greece and Rome used to follow paganism. They had a polytheistic belief in many gods. Most pagans believed that everything present in this universe is individual and sacred. ('Religion In The Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms')

In the poem 'The Sea Farer' there are many references to paganism. The speaker explains the setting with lots of imageries which shows one of the major features of paganism- worshiping the nature. 'Ice cold seas', 'whole winters', 'swan's blare', 'cries of gannets', 'music of the gull', 'storm striking the stone cliffs' suggest the love for natural elements by the Anglo Saxon pagans. 'The Sea Farer' does not only show their love for the nature but their love for earthly possessions too. The Line 90 "There are no gold givers like the gone masters" represents their lust for earthly possessions. The line 105, "A man may bury his brother with the dead" shows how the pagans thought that riches can help them not only in their earthly life but also in their afterlife.

Coming of Christianity in the Anglo Saxon Society

Christianity came to Roman civilization in the 3rd century and through Roman invasion in England, Christianity came to Anglo Saxon literature in the middle of the 5th century through Pope Gregory I. He sent St. Augustine to England from Ireland as he wanted to convert the people of England into Christianity. Augustine came in 597 AD and established his base at the main town of Canterbury. They slowly began to reform the Anglo Saxon pagan religion in the mould of Christianity. ('Christianity In Anglo-Saxon England | Dickinson College Commentaries')

Manipulation of Christianity in 'The Sea Farer'

Christianity came in England in the 5th century with much to ‘give’ rather than only the religion. They had the promise to a secured afterlife which the pagans did not have. The idea of after life was not clear to the pagans. Taking this chance, the Christians made the idea of afterlife clearer than ever to them.

Earlier the main motivation of the Anglo Saxon people was heroism. The Germanic tribes the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes had different kings and often indulged in wars. All the kings had their personal scops or bards who would orally produce epics in order to motivate the warriors. Soon it became a tradition and oral literature became a part and parcel of Anglo Saxon life. But it had it’s limitation. People had to memorize the long narrative poems and pass along with generation. The Christians proposed a welcoming solution to this problem. The people associated with the Christian churches knew how to write and only the had the authority to write. The Anglo Saxons happily took the solution of preserving their literature. But they never knew the solution was itself a problem. The Christians tactfully put some Christian elements inside the pagan literature. The procedure was slow so they did not get caught. They could commit a perfect crime in the name of religion and nobody could point it out because only the Christians knew how to write in Roman and Latin letters. If we assume that the Anglo Saxons protested this act of ‘preserving’ the literature by the Christians, still it doesn’t matter because sadly, we have only one source to know about that time which is written by the Christians.

The Christians mixed paganism and Christianity mainly in two aspects. Pagans used to believe ‘fate’ is the most powerful entity in this world and nothing can be done except fate or ‘wyrd’ wants it as fate controls everything. Christians did not oppose the idea but just added that fate is controlled by God. In ‘The Sea farer’ the line “yet Doom is stronger and God is mightier than any man’s conception.” Shows the blend of these ideas. Secondly where the pagans were busy in earthly life, Christians provoked the paradoxical idea that one should keep him busy in the earthly life, ignoring the earthly pleasures to get the heavenly pleasure. The lines “No man blessed/with a happy land-life is like to guess/how I, aching hearted, on ice- cold seas/ have wasted whole winters” is totally contradictory from the line “through its happiness, what hardships they suffer”. At first he was feeling sorry for his being in such a poor condition but suddenly he starts to feel pity for the same people he felt jealous of. Maybe the sea farer went on the voyage because he felt tired of this world and searched for peace but the subject matter was manipulated by Christians with words like ‘God’ and ‘Lord’; something we find hard to make peace with in this literary piece.

Conclusion

Religion is supposed to bring peace to the core of human mind, not having problem within it’s own core. It is thought to guide a person spiritually, not to misguide them from something they are spiritually connected. It is supposed to originate enlightenment, not to keep someone’s originality in darkness. It should evoke morality, not provoke falsehood. Truth should be the base of a religion not only the face. Christianity seems to forget all of these while converting the Anglo Saxons. To welcome the Anglo Saxons into their religion they welcomed the way of provocation and manipulation, thinking that the Anglo Saxons would be thankful for this. They not only harmed the Anglo Saxon religion but also the Anglo Saxon literature. Literature is thought to be the mirror of life. But in this case it is not a mirror but a bioscope which only shows what the Christians wanted them and the rest of the world to see. ‘The Sea Farer’ is the burning proof of this as still it creates a perplex situation because of its both pagan and

Christian elements. It has the elements of both pagan and Christianity but lost the element which any literary piece should have: pleasure of reading. The manipulation of Christianity in ‘The Sea Farer’ has driven away the pleasure of a literary piece by neglecting it’s originality and welcoming a horrible blunder which would not make sense even to a nonsense.

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