

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

# Life

- Coleridge was born in Devonshire, the 10<sup>o</sup> child of Rev. Coleridge.
- He received an excellent education but didn't finish his studies at Cambridge University.
- During these years he sympathised with the FRENCH REVOLUTIONARIES, especially Robert Southey. With him, he wanted to go to America and found a PANTISOCRACY: an ideal democratic community of 12 families, in which there was no private property and all work was shared.

- However, this project failed and Coleridge abandoned his revolutionary sympathies.
- In 1797 he met William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy and they lived together in the Lake District.
- Together, they wrote and revised the Lyrical Ballads, in which Coleridge wrote the most important poems. Later, their friendship came to an end.
- Coleridge became addicted to opium, which he started taking as pain reliever. He died in 1834.

# The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

- It's a LONG POEM written in the form of a BALLAD.
- It is divided in 7 parts.
- It starts during a wedding. In the first part, the mariner starts to tell his story to a man on his way to the wedding.
- He tells that he killed an albatross. This shooting brought bad luck to the ship and its crew and the crew blamed him.

- Then, the ship is brought to the Equator by the south wind and the crew starts to thank the Mariner, but the supernatural spirits are angry to him and follow the ship.
- The ship is then blocked under the sun; the mariners are tortured by thirst and the crew blame the mariner. They hang the dead albatross around his neck.

- Suddenly a ship arrives, where there were DEATH (a skeleton) and the NIGHTMARE DEATH-IN-LIFE, a pale woman, who are playing dice.
- Death wins the crew's life. Death-in-Life wins the Mariner's life. So the crew dies and the mariner survives.
- When he arrives on the land, a hermit gives him his final penance for his crime: he must travel from land to land and tell his story to the people he meets, so that they learn, through his example, to love and respect all God's creatures.

# Structure

The stanzas composing The Rime of the Ancient Mariner are often divided by some **CAPTIONS**.

They are like summaries or comments on the story through the viewpoint of an external narrator.

But who is the Narrator?

Coleridge added these captions in the years to give the Rime a more **MORALISTIC** meaning.

According to others, the captions are added by all the people who listen to the Mariner's story.

# *'Biographia Literaria':* imagination

In 'Biographia Literaria', Coleridge expresses his thoughts about poetry.

In his poetry there are 2 fundamental concepts:

- Imagination
- Unity.

Imagination can be divided in 2 kinds:

- PRIMARY imagination is at the basis of the process of knowledge: thanks to this ability, our perceptions are transformed into ideas and so we can communicate them.
- SECONDARY imagination is activated by CONSCIOUS WILL and is more powerful than primary because it not only makes you understand the world, but it can also create new worlds.

# FANCY

- UNITY, and consequently HARMONY, is the essence of beauty in art.

Primary and Secondary Imagination are different from FANCY.

Imagination belongs to infinite, it's close to divine creation.

Fancy is connected with things that already exist. It is NOT a creative power, it only transforms what we perceive.

# SUPERNATURAL

- Coleridge set magical incidents/elements **WITHIN A NATURAL WORLD.**
- The Mariner is on the *boundaries* of the **natural & supernatural** and can participate in both, because these 2 worlds exist one beside the other.
- The elements of natural world are transformed into supernatural pictures.

# Style

- Coleridge's verse is characterized by musicality.
- He makes frequent use of sound devices such as ALLITERATION and ONOMATOPOEIA, and his language is often archaic.
- He believed that the elements of a poem had to be adapted to the poet's intended effect.
- Metre and rhyme scheme are often irregular.
- His poems are full of SYMBOLIC meanings in natural elements. For example, in the Ancient Mariner, the Sun represents a punishing God, the Moon represents imagination and the Sea represents the creative power of Man.

# 'Kubla Khan'

- **Kubla Khan** or **A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment**, was composed one night after he experienced an opium-influenced dream after reading a work describing *Xanadu*, the summer palace of the Mongol ruler and Emperor of China **Kublai Khan**.
- In the summer of 1797, the Author was ill and he took a medicine. The effects of the medicine made him fall asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the book.
- The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep. When he woke up, he had a distinct **recollection** of the dream, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly wrote down the lines. At this moment he was called out by a person from Porlock. When he returned in his room, he only had a vague memory of the vision.
- The poem could not be completed according to its original 200–300 line plan because the interruption caused him to forget the lines.