

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

He was Wordsworth's best friend. In fact they published together the "Lyrical Ballads".

He was born in 1772, but his life was ruined by opium and alcohol. He was addicted to them because he suffered from rheumatism.

This damaged also his poetic production. He died in 1834. In his life he revaluated Shakespeare's works that weren't appreciated during the 17th century because they were full of feelings (and Enlightenment didn't accept them).

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

Coleridge's masterpiece can be considered "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". It's the story of a Mariner telling a supernatural voyage in which the ship on which he was travelled towards South Pole. He was stuck in the ice but an albatross came up and the ship started to move again. But the Mariner killed the albatross and

the ship kept travelling. First the crew didn't react to the killing, but then the wind stopped blowing and the ship was "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean". The crew blamed the Mariner and bounded him to the mast hanging the albatross from his neck. They had nothing to eat or to drink. Meanwhile slimy things came on the ship and another ship came up. In that there were two allegories: Death and Life-in-Death. They were playing dice for the lives of the Mariner and the members of the crew. The Mariner was saved, while all the crew died. He blessed all the creatures, God sent again wind and all the corpses ascended to the sky. The Mariner was lead by the currents towards North and met a boat on which were three people (a pilot with his son and a hermit) that saved him.

There are various interpretation of the ballad.

One is religious. The killing of the albatross is seen as an irrational gesture, a sin, against nature. First the sin has no consequence, then there is the punishment when the ship is stuck on the ice. But the Mariner repents and his repentance contributes to the blessing of all creatures.

Finally he is saved by God (the pilot, one of the three characters that represent the human world), but must expiate his sin by telling his story to the people he meets.

The religious interpretation is linked to the Presbyterian education Coleridge had received. He was obsessed by sin.

Another interpretation sees the ballad as the poetic process and the difficulties the poet meets while writing poems.

We have seen there are many symbols and supernatural elements in the ballad. But they are described in a so realistic

way that we are led to think that they are true. There are alliterations, onomatopoeia and rhyme in the poetry. The language is quite simple.

Coleridge and Wordsworth

We can see that Coleridge's poetry takes its origin from supernatural or ideal concepts to give a moral teaching useful in the real world. He creates the "willing suspension of disbelief" to get his aim.

On the other hand, poetry will be for Wordsworth a way that leads the reader from real to ideal or supernatural recollecting real emotions in tranquillity. In this way the poet reaches an ideal or supernatural world.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798)

Summary (pp 48-51)

The elements of the story are very similar to the ones of Be's tales. In this case we have a wedding feast to which three people are going. A Mariner appears and stops one of the three. Since the man tries to free himself, the Mariner holds him with his glittering eye. The guest can only listen to the story, he can't go to the feast. The glittering eye is the fundamental element of Be's "Bell-bale Theob". When the Mariner begins to tell a story: he was on a ship which was lead towards South by a tempest. The more they went South, the colder it got. This story is very similar to Be's "175 found in a bottle". They saw the ice and its strange clours. They thought there wasn't life there,

but an Albatross, a sign of goodomen,
comes up and leads them through the ice.
They are all happy about the Albatross
except from the Mariner who shot it
with his crossbow.