
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

He was born in 1772 and he went to Cambridge, but he left without a degree. He met Wordsworth with whom he wrote the Lyrical Ballads. They travelled in Germany, where Coleridge studied the poets, playwritings, and philosophers of German Romanticism. He died in 1834.

The Rime of the ancient Mariner

This is a ballad. It deals with tragedies and comedies of life: love, death, heroic and supernatural events. Coleridge use of this form and contents reflects the Romantics' interest in the Medieval period.

This ballad had a lot of symbolically and literary contents: the detailed description of the voyage and the symbolical meaning of the landscape, the studied use of personification and alliteration, the moral at the end, are all foreign to the old forms. The use of archaic terms places the poem in the past, as if it were a Medieval text.

It was published in 1798 as one of the Lyrical Ballads. It is a tormented and salvific poem that, with its shape similar to that of a popular ballad, ranges in literary fields from travel books to medieval sea stories, from classical myths to Christian ritualism. It is packed with Gothic elements, like the strange and frightening weather, the albatross as a bird of good omen, and the madness and deaths of the crew members.

The poem tells the tragic events of the sailor's ship trapped near Antarctica by a terrible storm that puts the lives of the entire crew at risk. A great albatross, a good wish bird, lays on the ship's tree indicating the way to salvation, but is seamlessly killed by the sailor with his crossbow, a gesture that will send a powerful evil to the ship. The whole ballad plays on the contrasting plans of the real

world and the supernatural world, between rationality and irrationality and the eternal clash between good and evil.

Thus, in the poem, the protagonist seaman is punished for doing a free act of violence: the assassination of an albatross. He will, however, regenerate through the compulsive narrative of his own story to a privileged listener: the reader. The narrative is, therefore, his salvation.

Killing the albatross conducted all the crew to death, the mariner was left alone. A skeleton ship appears, there were two spirits, Death and Life-in-Death, the last one won the mariner's soul.

Thanks to a supernatural event the ship is brought back to his native shore, and the mariner met the wedding guest and told him his story.