



The Sublime

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1824), together with William Wordsworth, is the most representative poet of the first English romantic generation.

The friendship between the two poets gave origin to the joint production of the "Lyrical Ballads", which is considered the "Manifesto of the English romantic movement; the side I want to analyse is Coleridge's "Sublime poetics" which we can find in the first part of the poem: at a wedding reception, the old Mariner tells the young man about this travel, when his ship, after crossing the Equator, was dragged by a tempest towards the South Pole.

The poem, one of the masterpieces of romantic literature, consists of 625 verses, divided into seven parts and preceded by a short explanation where the author presents the matter of the story: it sounds like a travel tale modelled on Captain James Cook's itinerary during his second exploration of Antarctica (1772).

As a matter of fact, it would be limitative to place the Ballad in travel literature. In this suggestive poem, rich in allegoric and moral meanings, we can find the myth of the sea and polar ice, adventure and sin, sun and moon, death and expiation, angels, ghosts and devils: it offers a lot of interpretations. The side I want to analyse is Coleridge's "Sublime poetics" which we can find in the first part of the poem: at a wedding reception, the old Mariner tells the young man about this travel, when his ship, after crossing the Equator, was dragged by a tempest towards the South Pole. The poet, according to the Sublime Aesthetics, describes the terrible fury of the breaking out tempest: it runs after the ship which is pushed forward, as far as the South Pole.



Coleridge describes the polar landscape wrapped in an iced fog, sad and lifeless, and the floating blocks of ice surrounding the ship and ominously loud.

These images of the stormy sea, this feeling of loneliness enlarged by the always impending danger of the ice, give the readers a sense of panic and anxiety but, at the same time, a feeling of astonishment, admiration and fascination. S.M.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in Devonshire in 1772. At the age of 10 he was sent first to Christ's Hospital School in London, and then to Cambridge, where he never graduated. He was heavily influenced by French revolutionary ideals, which made him an enthusiastic republican.

After the disillusionment with the French revolution, he and the poet Robert Southey, planned to establish a utopian community in Pennsylvania under the name of Pantisocracy, where every economic activity was done in common and private ownership did not exist, in order to provide labour and peace, and create the best possible environment for everyone. This project came to nothing in the end.

As he suffered from chronic rheumatism, the doctors prescribed opium to ease his bodily pains and he developed a growing addiction to this drug. In 1797 he met the poet William Wordsworth and settled in Somerset, where an important collaboration, which proved to be crucial for Coleridge's creative output, started. Most of his best poetry belongs to these years.

- *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, his masterpiece, written in 1798; it is the first poem of the collection "Lyrical Ballads", that became, along with the preface to its second edition, the Manifesto of the English Romantic movement.

- *Christabel*, an unfinished poem, set in the Middle Ages, about a young girl under a witch's spell, was written in 1797 but published in 1816.



Samuel Taylor Coleridge

- *Kubla Khan*, again unfinished; this 54-line fragment was written in 1798 but published only in 1816. Supposedly composed under the influence of opium, Coleridge described the this dream-like poem as a psychological curiosity.

In 1799 he joined Wordsworth and his sister in the Lake District.

He then spent a period of solitude in Malta between 1804 and 1806, after which he returned to England and began a career lecturing in literary concerns and in journalism, even though his addiction to opium continued to plague him. The lectures he gave on Shakespeare between 1808 and 1818 laid the foundations of Shakespearian criticism.

Finally he settled in London, where he produced *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a classic text of literary criticism and autobiography. Here he explained the dual task which he and Wordsworth had set themselves in the Lyrical Ballads. In contrast to Wordsworth's preoccupation with subjects from ordinary life, his own task was to write about extraordinary events in a credible way. He died in 1834.

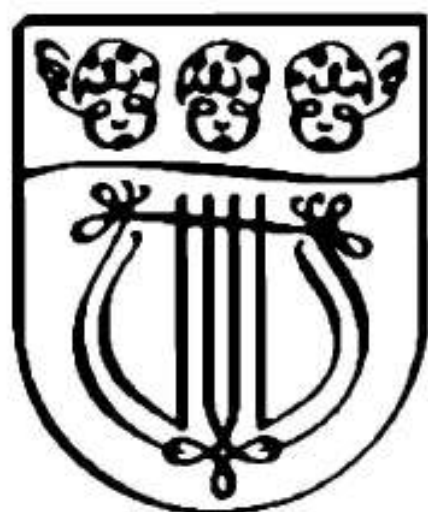
S.M.

The Rime content:

- In the first part the ancient Mariner stops a wedding guest to tell him his dreadful tale. He narrates of how he and his fellow mariners reached the equator and the polar region after a violent storm. After several days an albatross appeared through the fog and was killed by the Mariner. The shooting of a bird may seem a matter of little moment, but Coleridge makes it significant in two ways. First of all, he does not say why the Mariner kills the albatross and what matters is precisely the uncertainty of the Mariner's motives which suggests the essential irrationality of the crime. Secondly, this action is against nature and breaks a sacred law of life.
- In the second part, the Mariner begins to suffer punishment for what he has done, and Coleridge transfers to the physical world the corruption and the helplessness which are the common attributes of guilt. The world which faces the Mariner after his crime is dead and terrible; the ship has ceased to move and the sailors are tortured by the thirst, and the only moving things are slimy creatures in the sea at night.
- The third part shows how the Mariner's guilty soul becomes conscious of what he has done and of his isolation in the world. A phantom ship comes closer to the doomed crew and is identified as a skeleton ship. On board death and life-in-death cast dice; the former wins the Mariner's fellows, who all die, and the latter wins the Mariner's life.
- In the fourth part this sense of solitude is stressed. Then the Mariner, unaware, blesses the water snake and begins to re-establish a relationship with the world of nature.
- The fifth part continues to process of the soul's revival. The ship begins to move and celestial spirits stand by the corpses of the dead men.
- In the sixth part the process of healing seems to be impeded(makes difficult).
- In the last stanzas of the seventh part the Mariner gains the wedding guest's sympathy. Coleridge does not tell the end of the story, but lets the reader suppose that the Mariner's sense of guilt will end only with his death. S.M.



Liceo B. Pascal – the Ovada's official test center for



Trinity

The International Examinations Board