



Peter Vandyke, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 1795,  
London, National Portrait Gallery.

# Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Compact Performer - Culture & Literature  
Marina Spiazzi, Marina Tavella,  
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**ZANICHELLI**



Samuel Taylor Coleridge

# 1. Life



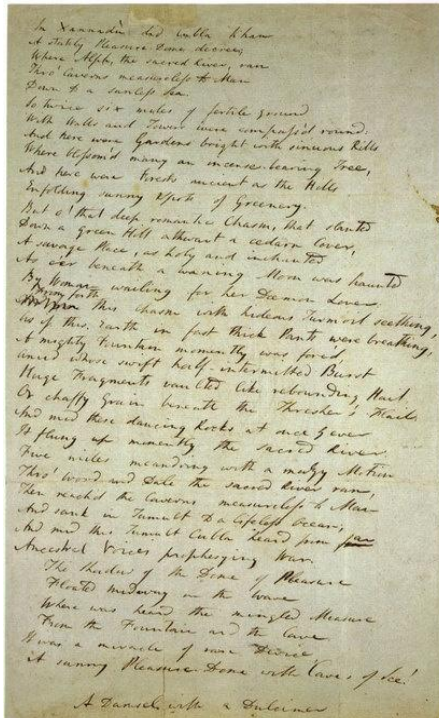
Christ's Hospital School

- Born in Devonshire in 1772.
- Studied at Christ's Hospital School in London, and then in Cambridge, but never graduated.
- Influenced by French revolutionary ideals.
- After the disillusionment with the French Revolution, he planned a utopian society, Pantisocracy, in Pennsylvania, based on equal rights and without private property. This project failed.
- Fruitful artistic collaboration with the poet and friend William Wordsworth in the 1797-1799 period.
- Died in 1834.



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## 2. Main works



Hand-written page from  
*Kubla Khan*

1798 → *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*,  
the first poem of the collection *Lyrical  
Ballads*

1816 → the dreamlike poem *Kubla Khan*,  
composed under the influence of opium

1817 → *Biographia Literaria*, a classic text  
of literary criticism and autobiography.

Coleridge also held lectures about  
literature and journalism. He started  
Shakespearian criticism.

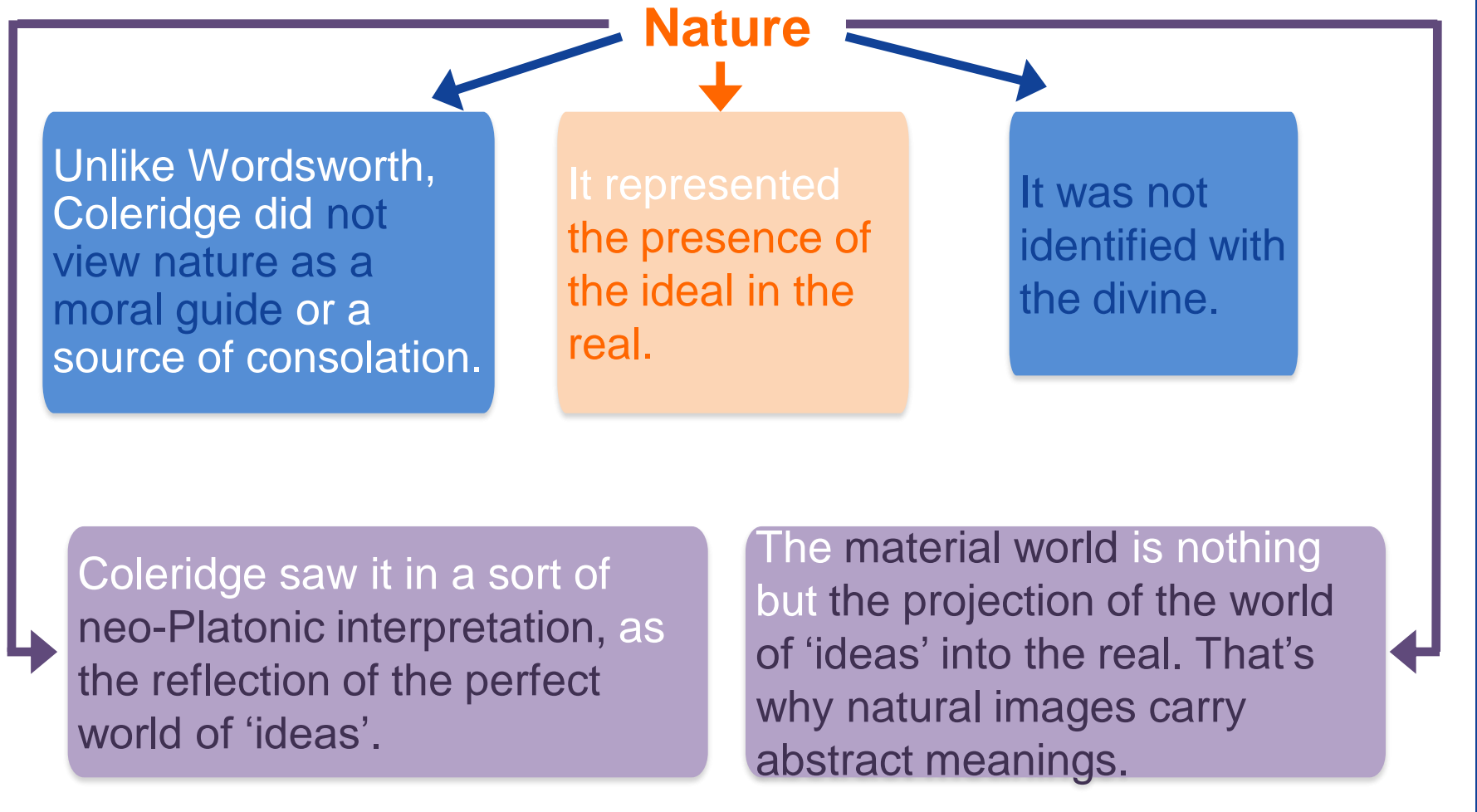


# 3. Coleridge and Wordsworth

	Wordsworth's poetry	Coleridge's poetry
<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Things from ordinary life</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supernatural characters and events</li></ul>
<b>Aim</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To give these ordinary things the charm of novelty and show the moral values of simple life.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To make extraordinary events credible (so supernatural and realistic elements coexist)</li></ul>
<b>Style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The simple language of common men</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Archaic language rich in sound devices</li></ul>
<b>Main interest</b>	Relationship between man and nature; imagination as a means of knowledge	The creative power of imagination



## 4. Coleridge's nature





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## 5. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

The story of a mariner who commits an act against nature by killing an albatross.

- At the beginning of the poem the mariner stops a wedding guest: he ‘cannot choose but hear’ a sad, mysterious story about the burden of the mariner’s guilt.
- The mariner expiates his sin by travelling around And telling the people he meets his story → to teach them love and respect to nature’s creatures.
- The reason *why the Mariner kills the Albatross* remains a mystery: it’s an act against nature and it probably represents the eternal conflict between man and nature. Man always tries to overcome its limits, going against natural laws.
- The atmosphere is mysterious and dream-like.



Gustave Doré, *The killing of the Albatross*, 1877

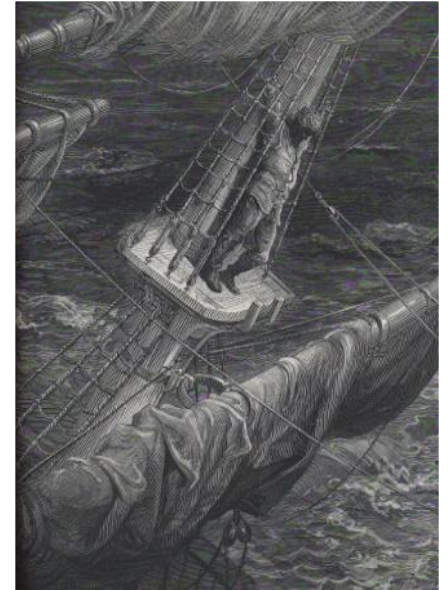


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## 5. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

### The characters

- **The mariner** → He is **unnaturally old**, with skinny hands and 'glittering Eyes'.
- **Sailors** → **Ill-fated** members of the ship carrying the mariner.
- **Wedding guest** → One of three people on their way to a wedding reception. After the Ancient Mariner's story, he becomes both '**sadder and... Wiser**'.



Gustave Doré, The mariner is left alone on the ship



## 6. The Rime and medieval ballads

	The Rime	Medieval ballads
<b>Structure</b>	Mostly written in four-line stanzas; a mixture of dialogue and narration	Written in four-line stanzas; a mixture of dialogue and narration
<b>Content</b>	A dramatic story in verse	A dramatic story in verse
<b>Language</b>	Archaic; realistic in details and imagery	Archaic
<b>Style</b>	Frequent repetitions, refrain; alliteration and internal rhyme	Repetitions, refrain, alliteration
<b>Theme</b>	Travel and wandering; the supernatural	Magic, love, domestic tragedies
<b>Aim</b>	Didactic	No aim



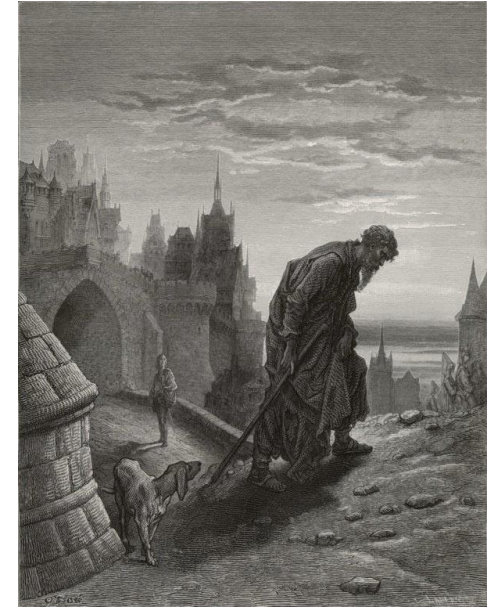


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## 7. The Rime: interpretations

This poem has been interpreted in different ways:

- Description of a dream.
- Religious reading: an allegory of the life of the soul: from crime, through punishment, to redemption (it's also a metaphor of man's original sin in Eden).
- An artistic reading: the mariner represents the poet who looks for truth and knowledge in his everyday life. He goes through a painful experience, but is finally saved by the power of imagination.
- For both readings the turning point in part 4, when he blesses the water snakes: he is able to see the beauty even in the worst aspects of nature.





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## 8. Coleridge and Leopardi

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Coleridge expresses the **feeling of the sublime** in the human fear, the paralyses and terror in front of intense natural phenomena, like extreme weather conditions (the storm, the ice and its frightening sounds, the scorching sun...). So, the sublime comes from impressive natural elements.

In *L'Infinito* by Leopardi the feeling of the sublime is not generated by impressive natural phenomena, but by something the poet can't actually see. He can only imagine the dimension of the infinite (beyond the hedge, beyond his human limits). So, the sublime comes from **the power of imagination**, from the poet's mind and not from the outside world.



## Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,  
E questa siepe, che da tanta parte  
Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.



He can't see, he  
imagines the infinite  
space

Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati  
Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani  
Silenzi, e profondissima quiete

Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco



Feeling of the sublime

Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento

Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello  
Infinito silenzio a questa voce



He compares the sound of  
the wind to the silence of  
infinity, and he thinks of  
eternity.

Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,  
E le morte stagioni, e la presente

E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa  
Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:

E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.



The sublime: attraction and  
fear for the infinity.