Samuel Taylor Coleridge

1. Life

- **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.
1. Life

- After the **disillusionment** with the French Revolution, he planned a **utopian commune-like society**, Pantisocracy, in Pennsylvania. This project came to an end.

- Fruitful artistic **collaboration** with the poet and friend **William Wordsworth** in the 1797-1799 period.

- **Died** in 1834.
### 2. Main works

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

**1816**  □ *Christabel*, an unfinished narrative poem.

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

**1817**  □ *Biographia Literaria*, a classic text of literary criticism and autobiography.
3. Coleridge and Wordsworth

Wordsworth’s poetry

- **Content**: Things from ordinary life.

- **Aim**: To give these ordinary things the charm of novelty.

William Shuter, *Portrait of Wordsworth*, 1798
3. Coleridge and Wordsworth

Wordsworth’s poetry

- **Style** The language of common men purified by the poet.

- **Main interest** Relationship between man and nature; imagination as a means of knowledge.

William Shuter, *Portrait of Wordsworth*, 1798
3. Coleridge and Wordsworth

Coleridge’s poetry

- **Content** | Supernatural characters.

- **Aim** | To give them a semblance of truth.
3. Coleridge and Wordsworth

Coleridge’s poetry

- **Style**  ❯ Archaic language rich in sound devices.

- **Main interest**  ❯ The creative power of imagination.

Washington Allston, *Portrait of Coleridge*, 1814

Only Connect ... New Directions
4. Coleridge’s imagination

**Imagination**

- Creative, original, used unconsciously
- Human individual power to produce images
- The power to give chaos a certain order

**Fancy**

A kind of logical faculty: the mechanical ability the poet has to use devices, like metaphors, alliterations in poetry in order to blend various «ingredients» into beautiful images

Poetic faculty, which not only gives shape and order to a given world, but builds new worlds.
Unlike Wordsworth, it is *not a moral guide* or a source of consolation. It represents the *awareness of the presence of the ideal in the real*. Not identified with the *divine*. Coleridge saw it in a sort of neo-Platonic interpretation, as the reflection of the perfect world of “ideas”. The material world is nothing but the projection of the real world of “ideas” on the flux of time.
6. 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 story, the mariner stops a wedding guest: he “cannot choose but hear” a sad, mysterious story about the burden of the mariner’s guilt.
The story of a mariner who commits an act against nature by killing an albatross.

- 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.
6. 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*
7. The atmosphere and the characters

- **Death**: Embodied in a hulking form on the ghost ship. He plays dice with Life-in-Death and *wins the lives of the sailors*.

- **Life-in-Death**: Embodied in a beautiful, ghostly woman. She wins the Ancient Mariner's soul playing dice and condemns him to a limbo-like living death.

The atmosphere is **mysterious** and **dream-like**.
# 8. *The Rime* and medieval ballads

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

This poem has been interpreted in different ways:

1. **Description of a dream**.

2. **An allegory of the life of the soul**: from crime, through punishment, to redemption.

3. **Metaphor of man’s original sin** in Eden.

Gustave Doré, *The Mariner is gone*

This poem has been interpreted in different ways:

4. **The poetic journey of Romanticism:**
   - The mariner = poet
   - His guilt = the origin of poetry

Regret for a state of lost innocence caused by the Industrial Revolution

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Gustave Doré, *The Mariner is gone*