

# The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

## An Introduction

CLASSMATE

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Page \_\_\_\_\_

The Rime of the ancient mariner' which is now justly regarded as a masterpiece in English poetry was written by S. T. Coleridge in 1797 and was published in 1798 in 'Lyrical Ballads'. When it was written it was coldly received. Even the poet's own friends, Southey, Lamb and Wordsworth, did not show any approval of it. Southey spoke of it as 'a very Dutch attempt at sublimity'. Lamb said that 'he disliked all the miraculous part in it'. Wordsworth thought that the poem had great defects. Time has, however, abundantly vindicated the excellence of 'The Ancient Mariner' and it has now come to be regarded as one of the world's great poems, and the greatest written by its author.

• Source of the poem — The incident of the Albatross was taken by Coleridge from a book entitled 'A Voyage around the World by the way of the Great South Sea by Shetlocke'. In that book the second captain of the ship shoots at an albatross which continually hovered near the ship. The interpretation of the incident is to be attributed entirely to Coleridge. The poem was published in 1798 in 'Lyrical Ballads' but was afterwards revised. It is one of the poems written in 1797 when Wordsworth and Coleridge were on tour together and some details were suggested by Wordsworth.

• The Origin of the poem —

Coleridge's great contribution to the 'Lyrical Ballads' was 'The Ancient Mariner', his one perfect and complete achievement. The way in which this marvellous poem came to be written was commonplace enough. On the afternoon of November 13, 1797, Coleridge, Wordsworth and his sister set off together from Alfoxden on a walking expedition

'with a view' Wordsworth tells us, 'to visit ~~London~~ Linton and the Valley of Stones near it: and as our united funds were very small, we agreed to defray the expenses of the tour by writing a poem to be sent to the New Monthly Magazine. Accordingly we set off, and proceeded along the Quantock Hills towards Watchet, and in the course of this walk was planned the poem of The Ancient Mariner, founded on a dream as Mr. Coleridge said, of his friend, Mr. Cruikshank - 'a dream of skeleton ship manned by skeleton sailors'. With this dream as the starting point, other hints and suggestions were taken from various sources. Wordsworth, who had been reading in Shelrocke's voyages about the albatrosses of the South Seas, suggested that the mariner should be represented 'as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon themselves to avenge the crime.' He also contributed a few lines, but soon the manners of the two 'proved so widely different' that he withdrew, and Coleridge completed the work himself.

### Purpose for writing 'The Ancient Mariner'

Coleridge wrote the Ancient Mariner to fulfil his plan of writing a series of supernatural poems, in which the incidents and characters are to be at least in part supernatural and yet so to present them as would impress the readers with a sense of their reality. This is a part of the literary programme he had made along with his friend Wordsworth. There is another purpose behind the composition of the poem, and this is purely mercenary. It was to defray the expenses of a journey to Linton and neighbourhood that he had undertaken in the autumn of 1797 along with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy.