

## Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an English poet, critic, and philosopher who is, along with his friend William Wordsworth, widely considered to be among the founders of the English Romantic movement. While many group Coleridge and Wordsworth together, believing that they shared a mutual poetic vision, Coleridge was in fact a far more radical and revolutionary poet than Wordsworth. Today, Coleridge is highly respected for not only his lasting poetic contributions, but also for his work as a literary critic and philosopher.

During his youth, Coleridge was a lonely, bookish child who took a great interest in poetry and scholastic study at a very young age. Coleridge, as many of his biographers have argued, probably suffered from depression in his childhood, an illness that continued throughout the remainder of his life and had a tremendous influence— both for better and for worse—upon his poetry. His poetic career took off in 1798, when he and his friend William Wordsworth published one of the most important works of the Romantic age, *Lyrical Ballads*. *Lyrical Ballads* is a remarkable and highly original collection of some of both poets' early poems, including what is often considered Coleridge's greatest poem, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. While the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* firmly established Coleridge's reputation as one of the finest poets of his generation, he soon also established himself as a gifted lecturer on literary subjects and as one of England's premiere critical philosophers. However, while Coleridge's intellectual and artistic careers flourished, his dependency on opium for relief from chronic pain developed into a full-blown addiction that began to consume his life. (Coleridge allegorized this dependency in his great poem "Kubla Kahn.") Coleridge's opium habits severely imperiled his health and destabilized his personality, to the point that he began to alienate himself from his friends and family. Despite his addiction and frail mental health, Coleridge nevertheless produced some of the finest poetry of the English Romantic age. Critics and readers found (and continue to find) his poetry to be painstakingly precise, rich with emotion and intellectual insight, and highly original in theme and style, particularly in terms of his use of the supernatural and spectacular in many of his poems to express profound states of mind. Along with his famous *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and "Kubla Kahn," Coleridge authored such remarkable and closely-studied poems as *Cristabel*, "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison," and "Dejection: An Ode."

Coleridge was posthumously regarded as among the most influential and stylistically and intellectually profound of the English Romantic poets. While alive, he never achieved the respect that was afforded Wordsworth or the fame that Byron and Shelley enjoyed—but he is now considered to be the most visionary and insightful of the English Romantic poets.