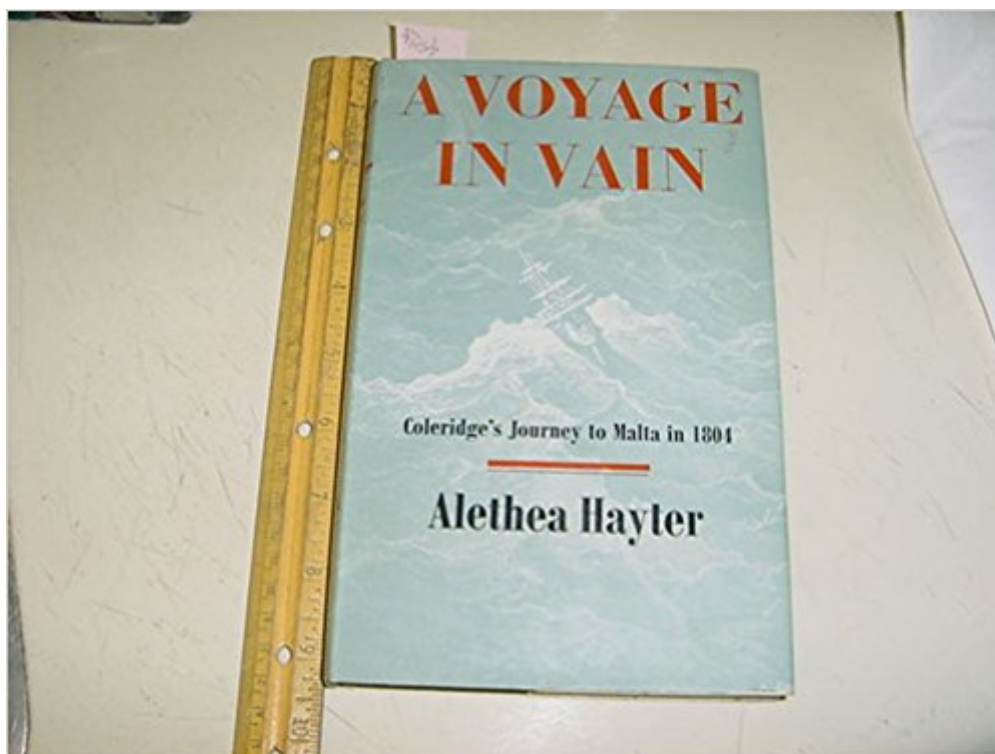


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Voyage In Vain: Coleridge's Journey To Malta In 1804



Synopsis

In the spring of 1804 Coleridge sailed to the Mediterranean in the hope of restoring his health, recreating his poetic energies and solving his emotional problems. During the voyage he kept a very detailed diary, and from this and from his and his friends' letters Alethea Hayter has painted a close-up portrait of Coleridge - both the outer and the inner man - at a comparatively little studied moment of his life, but a pivotal one. It was also an increasingly critical period in the Napoleonic War, and the movements of warships and convoys in the Mediterranean, and the problems of Nelson - personal as well as strategic, and in some ways parallel to Coleridge's - are interwoven with the narrative. Sara Hutchinson, the Wordsworths, Southey, the Lambs and Coleridge's other friends at home are also shown going about their affairs amid their anxieties about him during the six weeks while he travelled through storm and calm to reach an intellectual and emotional destination which was not the one he set out for. As those readers already familiar with Alethea Hayter's work would expect, *A Voyage in Vain* combines the pleasures of thoroughly researched biography, and criticism and social history, with the narrative sweep of a novel. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Alethea Hayter (1911-2006) read modern history at Oxford, and after a period writing for *Country Life* she joined the British Council, retiring in 1971. Her many books include *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1962), *The Wreck of the Abergavenny* (2002) and the acclaimed *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968). She was appointed Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1962. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Covering six weeks in 1804 when the poet Samuel Taylor-Coleridge embarked on a voyage to Malta for the sake of his health (plus his other issues: "terrifying intermissions of poetic impulse, the raw decay of his marriage, unfulfilled love for another woman, unacknowledged servitude to opium.") Referring to his diaries and letters, Alethea Hayter gives a picture of life on board a small ship, Coleridge's illnesses and inspirations from the sea and landscape. Yet this is not just an account of those few weeks: as we read of his letters to friends, they too are introduced into the narrative from their homes in - mainly - the Lake District, and something of their personal circumstances. Also, this was the era of the Napoleonic War: Coleridge's ship, like all British ships in the Mediterranean, was obliged to travel in a convoy, under the supervision of a commodore, to protect them from the French and corsairs. And so Hayter introduces a certain amount of naval history - we even meet Nelson. Although well-researched, this for me was 'neither one thing nor the other.' Readers with an interest in Coleridge will want to find out what happened to him (and his friends) after his ship docked in Malta. Those whose interest lies with naval warfare will again not find enough to satisfy them.

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