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Christabel

PREFACE

The first part of the following poem was written in the year 1797, at Stowey, in the country of Somerset. The second part after my return from Germany, in the year 1800, at Keswick, Cumberland. It is probable that if the poem had been finished at either of the former periods, or if even the first and second part had been published in the year 1800, the impression of its originality would have been much greater than I dare at present expect. But for this, I have only my own indolence to blame. The dates are mentioned for the exclusive purpose of precluding charges of plagiarism or servile imitation from myself. For there is amongst us a set of critics, who seem to hold, that every possible thought and image is traditional; who have no notion that there are such things as fountains in the world, small as well as great; and who would therefore charitably derive every rill they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man's tank. I am confident, however, that as far as the present poem is concerned, the celebrated poets whose writings I might be suspected of having imitated, either in particular passages, or in the tone and the spirit of the whole, would be among the first to vindicate me from the charge, and who, on any striking coincidence, would permit me to address them in this doggerel version of two monkish Latin hexameters.

'Tis mine and it is likewise yours !
But an if this will not do;
Let it be mine good friend ! for I
Am the poorer of the two.

I have only to add, that the metre of *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle : namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.

TEXT AND ANNOTATIONS

PART I

'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
 And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;
 Tu—whit ! —Tu —whoo !
 And hark, again ! the crowing cock,
 How drowsily it crew. 5

Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,
 Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;
 From her kennel beneath the rock
 She maketh answer to the clock,
 Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour : 10
 Ever and aye, by shine and shower,
 Sixteen short howls not over loud;
 Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.

Is the night chilly and dark ?
 The night is chilly, but not dark. 15
 The thin grey cloud is spread on high,

(Note how in the very opening lines 1—5 the note of eeriness is struck and a medieval atmosphere of mystery is created by means of minute touches in simple words). L. 1. **the castle clock**—brings the picture of a medieval castle with a clock-tower before our mind's eye. L. 2. **owls**—owls are supposed to be birds of evil omen and its hooting fills our mind with expectant horror. **the crowing cock**—The word crowing is proleptic. The cock crowed after being awakened by the hooting of the owl. The crowing of the cock is generally associated with the approach of the morning and disappearance of ghosts. Here the unusualness of its crowing at midnight is something ominous. L. 3. **Tu—whit**—this is onomatopoeia; the word suggests the sound. L. 4. **hark**—listen. **drowsily**—sleepily. L. 6. **Sir Leoline, the Baron rich**—The mention of the name of the rich Baron deepens the medieval colouring. The story is now introduced. L. 7. **mastiff**—a breed of powerful watchdog. This is also a medieval touch. **toothless**—suggestive of decay and death and adds to an ominous atmosphere. **kennel**—a sort of house for dog. L. 8. **rock**—This word suggests that it was a rock-built castle. L. 9. **maketh answer to the clock**—by barking every time the clock struck the quarter of an hour and the hour. L. 11. **by shine and shower**—in sun and rain, in all kind of weather. L. 13. **some say she sees my lady's shroud**—Here is direct mention of something supernatural and uncanny. People say that the mastiff sees the ghost of Christabel's mother dressed in white shroud. **shroud**—the cloth in which a body is wrapped for burial. L. 15. **The night is chilly but not dark**—Pitch dark nights are not so suitable for the appearance of supernatural beings as cloudy moonlit nights. L. 16. **thin grey**

It covers but not hides the sky.
 The moon is behind, and at the full:
 And yet she looks both small and dull.
 The night is chill, the cloud is grey : 20
 'Tis a month before the month of May,
 And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

The lovely lady, Christabel,
 Whom her father loves so well,
 What makes her in the wood so late, 25
 A furlong from the castle gate ?
 She had dreams all yesternight
 Of her own betrothed knight;
 And she in the midnight wood will pray
 For the weal of her lover that's far away. 30

She stole along, she nothing spoke,
 The sighs she heaved were soft and low,
 And naught was green upon the oak,
 But moss and rarest misletoe:
 She kneels beneath the huge oak tree, 35

cloud—almost like a grey veil, through which the moonlight is coming out less bright and almost dim. L. 17. **It covers but not hides the sky**—The cloud is almost transparent. Though it overcasts the sky, it does not hide it. The moon from behind this thin and transparent cloud is easily seen. L. 18. **at the full**—it is a full moon. The full moon, it may be noted, was a benevolent influence for Coleridge; Its being dull and small signifies something wrong. L. 19. **small**—it is a scientific fact. Shining from behind a thin cloud the moon looks smaller than her actual size. **dull**—because the thin cloud partially obstructs her light. L. 20. **the cloud is grey**—Being thin, the cloud cannot obstruct the light of the moon. It cannot, therefore be dark or black cloud. Because of the light of the moon shining through it, it looks grey. L. 21. **'Tis the month**—It is the month of April, and the Spring season has just begun. (The stanza contributes to an atmosphere of chilly mystery and grips the reader's attention). L. 23. **The lovely Christabel**—A romantic note is struck here in introducing Christabel. The term 'lovely' had moral implications for Coleridge. L. 25. **What makes her**—What makes her to go into the forest? L. 27. **yesternight**—last night. L. 28. **betrothed knight**—the knight to whom she is engaged. L. 30. **weal**—welfare, health and happiness. **that's.....away**—either he has gone to the battlefield in some distant land or, otherwise, is living far away. L. 31. **stole along**—walked on quietly. **nothing spoke**—did not speak anything aloud. L. 32. **heaved**—sighed. L. 33. **naught**—nothing. L. 34. **misletoe**—an evergreen plant. It very rarely grows on the oak. Hence the word rarest has been used here. The Druids

And in silence prayeth she.

The lady sprang up suddenly,
The lovely lady, Christabel !
It moaned as near, as near can be,
But what it is, she cannot tell—
On the other side it seems to be,
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.

40

The night is chill; the forest bare;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak ?
There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek—
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its *clan*, *a group of leaves that a tree bears*
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

45

50

Hush, beating heart of Christabel !
Jesu, Maria, shield her well !
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,
And stole to the other side of the oak.

55

What sees she there?

worshipped it whenever they found it on an oak tree. (Note the contrast between the dried tree and the green moss.) L. 37. **sprang up suddenly**—was startled. L. 39. **as near...can be**—very near. L. 40. **she cannot tell**—she did not know. **broad-breasted**—with a wide trunk. There is a humanising touch given to the oak tree. (Note the noise is introduced in characteristically ballad style.) L. 43. **bare**—naked; because the trees had shed their leaves in winter. L. 44. **bleak**—dull and cheerless. L. 47. **from...cheek**—a romantic picture. L. 48. **twirl**—cause it to turn around quickly. L. 49. **clan**—a Scottish word for a tribe. Here it is used for the group of leaves that a tree bears. This leaf is the last left on the trees. L. 51. **light**—lightly because it is dead and dry. L. 52. **twig**—small branch of a tree. **that...sky**—the highest branch of the tree: so that the breeze there is not obstructed. Even if the slightest breeze were there, the leaf would have started dancing. L. 53. **Hush, beating heart of Christabel**—The heart of Christabel was beating fast on hearing this mysterious moan, so close to her. L. 54. **Jesu, Maria, shield her well**—The whole background, painted so far, is suggestive of trouble and uneasiness. So it evokes a response, this cry. There is a danger, from the influence of which the holy spirits of Christ and Mary are invoked to protect Christabel. It is a characteristic of Middle Age piety. L. 55. **She...cloak**—in prayer most probably to check the effect of anything evil; also partly in fear. L. 56. **stole**—moved quietly and cautiously, out of a lurking fear

There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone;
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled in her hair.
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so richly clad as she—
Beautiful exceedingly !

60

65

'Mary mother, save me now !'
(Said Christabel,) 'And who art thou?'

70

The lady strange made answer meet,
And her voice was faint and sweet:—
'Have pity on my sore distress :
I scarce can speak for weariness,
Stretch forth thy hand and have no fear !'
Said Christabel, 'How camest thou here ?
And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet,
Did thus pursue her answer meet:—

75

'My sire is of a noble line,
And my name is Geraldine:
Five warriors seized me yesternorn,
Me, even me, a maid forlorn:

80

They choked my cries with force and fright,

of the cause of the mysterious moan. L. 57. **What...there**—The poet suggests, that she sees there something unusual. A note of suspense and anxiety is struck. L. 58. Geraldine is introduced. **damsel bright**—a bright maiden. L. 59. **robe**—dress. L. 60. **shadowy**—which shone dimly in the moonlight. L. 61. **that**—refers to the neck of the lady. **wan**—pale. L. 63. **blue veined**—blue veins, in addition to being considered a sign of beauty, were regarded as a mark of a noble descent. These realistic details make us accept the supernatural. **unsandal'd**—without sandals. L. 64. **wildly**—with great luster. The term also gives a touch of supernatural. L. 65. **entangled**—interwoven. L. 66. **frightful**—causing fear. L. 69. **Mary mother**—This is the sudden cry for holy protection, which the presence of this strange lady calls forth from Christabel. L. 71. **meet**—proper. L. 73. **sore**—great. L. 74. **Scarce**—hardly. **for weariness**—because of feeling tired. L. 75. **stretch forth**—spread out. L. 78. **did pursue**—feeling tired. L. 79. **sire**—father. L. 81. **yesternorn**—last morning. L. 82. **a maid forlorn**—helpless maiden. **even me**—this is intended to emphasise her helpless state. L. 83. **choked**—stopped. **fright**—fear.

And tied me on a ^{horse} palfrey white.
 The palfrey was as fleet as wind, 85
 And they rode furiously behind.

They spurred amain, their steeds were white,
 And once we crossed the shade of night.
 As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,
 I have no thought what men they be; 90
 Nor do I know how long it is
 (For I have lain entranced I wis)
 Since one, the tallest of the five.
 Took me from the palfrey's back
 A weary woman, scarce alive. 95
 Some muttered words his comrades spoke.
 He placed me underneath this oak;
 He swore they would return with haste:"
 Whither they went I cannot tell—
 I thought I heard, some minutes, past, 100
 Sounds of a castle bell.
 Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she),
 And help a wretched maid to flee."

Then Christabel stretched forth her hand,
 And comforted fair Geraldine: 105
 'O well, bright dame ! may you command
 The service of Sir Leoline;
 And gladly our stout chivalry
 Will he send forth and friends withal
 To guide and guard you safe and free 110
 Home to your noble father's hall.'

She rose: and forth with steps they passed
 That strove to be, and were not, fast.
 Her gracious stars the lady blest;
 And thus spake on sweet Christabel: 115

L.84. **palfrey**—horse. L.85. **fleet**—swift. L.87. **spurred amain**—with power made the horses move with the spurs. L.88. **shade of night**—darkness of the night. **crossed...night**—rode like this the whole night long, till day dawned. L.89. **as sure as...**—as I am sure God will help me. L.90. **what men...be**—who they were. L.92. **entranced**—in a fit of unconsciousness. I wis—I know. L.95. **scarce alive**—hardly alive. L.96. **muttered**—whispered. L.102. **'stretch...hand'**—Geraldine says thus. L.103. **to flee**—to run away. L.106-107. **May...Leoline**—In the true tradition of hospitality, Christabel assures Geraldine of help that her father can give. L.108. **stout chivalry**—In the Middle Ages, every nobleman had his own band of knights. **stout chivalry**—brave knights. L.109. **withal**—together with that. **forth**—onward. L. 111. **hall**—big house of a nobleman. L.112. **strove to be**—tried to be. L.114. **gracious stars**—good fortune.

'All our household are at rest,
 The hall as silent as the cell;
 Sir Leoline is weak in health,
 And may not well awakened be,
 But we will move as if in stealth, 120
 And I beseech your courtesy,
 This night, to share your couch with me.'

They crossed the moat, and Christabel } *ditch round the castle*
 Took the key that fitted well;
 A little door she opened straight, 125
 All in the middle of the gate;
 The gate that was ironed within and without,
 Where an army in battle array had marched out.
 The lady sank, belike through pain,
 And Christabel with might and main 130
 Lifted her up, a weary weight,
 Over the threshold of the gate :
 Then the lady rose again,
 And moved, as she were not in pain.

So free from danger, free from fear, 135
 They crossed the court: right glad they were,
 And Christabel devoutly cried
 To the Lady by her side:
 'Praise we the Virgin all divine
 Who hath rescued thee from thy distress !' 140

L.116. **at rest**—are asleep. L.117. **cell**—a small room in a monastery. **The hall...cell**—the Baron's castle, at this hour, is as silent as a monk's cell in a monastery. L.119. **may not well awakened be**—It is better that he should not be disturbed in his sleep. L.120. **as if in stealth**—as if we were thieves. L.121. **beseech**—request. L.123. **moat**—a deep ditch round a castle for defence. L.125. **straight**—at once. L.127. **ironed...without**—bolted with iron bolts on both sides to make it impenetrable by the enemy. L.128. **where...out**—The big gate was used for army to pass through; on other occasions it would be kept closed. L.129. **belike**—as if. **The lady...pain**—here is the double art of the poet: (i) psychological treatment of the supernatural; and (ii) mystifying the reader. The lady is an evil spirit. But as she reaches the gate of the castle, the abode of the innocent Christabel, her conscience seems to trouble her, and she loses courage to enter. L.130. **might and main**—with all the strength. L.131. **weary weight**—a dead weight or burden as of a person who has been so thoroughly fatigued as Geraldine told herself to be. L.132. **threshold**—door step. **devoutly**—religiously; piously. L.136. **Virgin**—Mary, Christ's mother.

'Alas, alas! said Geraldine.
'I cannot speak for weariness.
So free from danger, free from fear,
They crossed the court: right glad they were.

Outside her kennel, the mastiff old 145
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.

The mastiff old did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make !
And what can ail the mastiff bitch ?
Never till now she uttered yell 150
Beneath the eye of Christabel.
Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:
For what can ail the mastiff bitch ?

They passed the hall, that echoes still,
Pass as lightly as you will ! 155

The brands were flat, the brands were dying,
Amid their own white ashes lying;
But when the lady passed, there came
A tongue of light, a fit of flame;
And Christabel saw the lady's eye, 160
And nothing else saw she thereby,
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,
Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.

divine—because the mother of Lord Christ. L. 140. **rescued**—freed from danger. L. 141. **Alas! alas**—instead of saying Amen to Christabel's prayer, she only utters these words. An evil spirit cannot pray. L. 143. **So free...were**—The repetition in lines 143—144, increases the suggestion of evil. L. 148. **angry moan did make**—The mastiff-bitch seems to have been endowed by the poet with a super-sensitiveness to the presence of supernatural influences. Just as her short howls in answer to the tower-clock were regarded to be due to the fact that she saw the ghost of Lady Leoline, so her angry moan, as Lady Geraldine passed by her, is suggestive of her perception of an evil spirit in that lady. L. 149. **ail**—trouble. L. 150. **yell**—a sharp cry of horror, or agony. L. 152. **scritch**—schreech, howl. L. 154. **echoes**—resounds with the noise of the foot-steps. Another touch of eeriness. L. 156. **brands**—the pieces of wood, burning or partly burned. L. 158. **lady**—Geraldine. L. 159. **a fit of flame**—Here, again, we have a suggestion of the presence of the supernatural. L. 160. **lady's eye**—There are hints in Part II of this poem that there is something serpentine in the constitution of Geraldine. L. 162. **boss**—raised ornament. L. 163. **murky**—dark, gloomy. **niche**—shelf built into the

'O softly tread,' said Christabel,
'My father seldom sleepeth well.'
Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,
And jealous of the listening air. 165

They steal their way from stair to stair,
Now in glimmer, and now in gloom, 170

And now they pass the Baron's room,
As still as death, with stifled breath !
And now have reached her chamber door;
And now doth Geraldine press down
The rushes of the chamber floor.

The moon shines dim in the open air,
And not a moonbeam enters here. 175

But they without its light can see
The chamber carved so curiously,
Carved with figures strange and sweet,
All made out of the carver's brain, 180

For a lady's chamber meet :
The lamp with two fold silver chain
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

The silver lamp burns dead and dim:
But Christabel the lamp will trim. 185

She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,
And left it swinging to and fro,
When Geraldine, in wretched plight,
Sank down upon the floor below.

'O weary lady, Geraldine,
I pray you, drink this cordial wine ! 190

wall. L. 164. **tread**—step. L. 167. **jealous**—suspicious. **listening air**—The air that caught up the noise of the footsteps and echoed them. L. 169. **glimmer and gloom**—half light. As they pass through the castle, they are sometimes in partially dark places and some times in total darkness. L. 171. **stifled breath**—almost without breath. L. 172. **chamber**—room. L. 174. **rushes**—mats made of rushes, a marsh plant. Rushes were spread on the floor in medieval castles, for softness and warmth. L. 176. **here**—in the bed-chamber. L. 178. **curiously**—with artistic designs. L. 179. **strange and sweet**—these two words suggest Geraldine and Christabel respectively. L. 180. **carver**—artist. L. 181. **meet**—suitable. L. 183. **angel's feet**—the feet of the carved figure of an angel. L. 184. **burns dead and dim**—emits a very dull and dim light. L. 187. **Left...fro**—The poet's pictures are vivid. L. 188-189. **Geraldine...below**—Is it because the brightened lamp shows more clearly the figure of the angel or is it because Geraldine has to make a fierce struggle with good in order to cast her evil spell.

It is a wine of virtuous power:
My mother made it of wild flowers.'

'And will your mother pity me,
Who am a maiden most forlorn?' 195

Christabel answered —Woe is me!
She died the hour that I was born.
I have heard the grey-haired friar tell,
How on her death-bed she did say,
That she should hear the castle-bell
Strike twelve upon my wedding-day. 200

O mother dear! that thou wert here!
I would', said Geraldine, 'She were!
But soon with altered voice, said she—
'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!
I have power to bid thee flee.' 205

Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?
Why stares she with unsettled eye?
Can she the bodiless dead espy?
And why with hollow voices cries she, 210
'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—
Though thou her guardian spirit be,
Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.'

Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,
And raised to heaven her eyes so blue— 215

l. 191. **cordial**—a tonic; a refreshing wine. L. 192. **virtuous**—wonderful; effective. Note the use of this word also suggests an ethical quality. L. 195. **forlorn**—forsaken. L. 196 **Woe is me**—It is an exclamation of grief and sorrow. L. 198, **grey-haired friar**—the old friar. A friar is a Roman Catholic priest. L. 201. **that...here**—a childlike pathetic cry. L. 202. **I would...she were**—As in *Macbeth* (Act III, Sc. iv) the ghost of Banquo appears on Macbeth's hypocritical utterance; 'would he were here', so Geraldine's words conjure up before her eyes the spirit of the dead mother. Christabel, however, does not see the ghost. Thus, again, the evil in Geraldine has been emphasised, is also her sense of guilt. L. 204. **altered voice**—changed voice, because the ghost of Christabel's mother appears before her. L. 205. **wandering mother**—the ghost of Christabel's mother that has come out of its grave and wanders about. **peak and pine**—grow weak and die. L. 206. **bid thee flee**—make you disappear. L. 208. **unsettled**—restlessly moving. L. 209. **bodiless dead**—ghost. **espy**—see. L. 211. **This hour is mine**—I am master of this hour. Not the good spirit of her dead mother, but the evil spirit in Geraldine, has control over Christabel at that hour. L. 212. **guardian spirit**—Even Geraldine suggests that the ghost of Christabel's mother was to act as her guardian. L. 213. **'tis given to me**—Perhaps, it means: "At

'Alas!' said she, 'this ghastly ride—
Dear lady! it hath wildered you!
The lady wiped her moist cold brow,
And faintly said, 'Tis over now!'

Again the wild-flower wine she drank: 220
Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright.
And from the floor whereon she sank,
The lofty lady stood upright;
She was most beautiful to see,
Like a lady of a far countree. 225

And thus the lofty lady spake—
'All they who live in the upper sky
Do love you, holy Christabel!
And you love them, and for their sake
And for the good which me befell, 230
Even I in my degree will try,
Fair maiden, to requite you well.
But now unrobe yourself; for I
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie.'

Quoth Christabel, 'So let it be,' 235
And as the lady bade, did she.
Her gentle limbs did she undress
And lay down in her loveliness.

But through her brain of weal and woe
So many thoughts moved to and fro, 240
That vain it were her lids to close,
So half-way from the bed she rose,

this hour it is I who have got full control over Christabel." L. 216. **ghastly**—terrible. L. 217. **wildered**—bewildered, upset. Christabel does not suspect that Geraldine is an evil spirit. L. 218. **moist**—wet; she perspired probably because of her fierce struggle with the spirit of the mother of Christabel. L. 219. **faintly**—in a faint voice. **It is...now**—It may mean, either (1) that the fit is over and I am all right now, or (2) now, the struggle with the spirit of the mother is over. L. 220. **wild-flower wine**—wine prepared from wild flowers. L. 221. **'gan**—began. **glitter bright**—shine brightly. L. 223. **lofty**—tall. **lady**—Geraldine. **upright**—erect. L. 225. **countree**—country. Is it perhaps to suggest that she is from the world of the spirits. supernatural. L. 227. **All they who...sky**—the angels and god. L. 230. **good which me befell**—the kindness shown by Christabel. L. 231. **In my degree**—as far I can. L. 232. **requite**—repay. L. 233. **unrobe**—undress. Ll. 233-234. **I...pray**—This is a lie. The fact is that she is still hesitating to do Christabel harm. L. 235. **quoth**—said. L. 239. **of weal and woe**—of happiness and sorrow. L. 240. **moved to and fro**—passed through her mind. L. 241.

And on her elbow did recline
To look at the lady Geraldine.

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed, 245
And slowly rolled her eyes around;
Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast; 250
Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view.
Behold! her bosom and half her side—
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs; 255
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!
Deep from within she seems half-way
To lift some weight with sick assay, *weak att*
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;
Then suddenly, as one defied, 260
Collects herself in scorn and pride,
And lay down by the Maiden's side!—
And in her arms the maid she took,
Ah wel-a-day!
And with low voice and doleful look 265

vain—impossible. L. 243. **recline**—to rest or repose on. L. 246. **slowly rolled her eyes around**—a psychological study of a guilty mind. L. 247. **Then...aloud**—the hint of a snake's hiss. L. 248. **shuddered**—trembled with fear. L. 249. **cincture**—belt. L. 250. **vest**—a knitted or woven undergarment. L. 252. **Behold her etc.**—Coleridge deliberately excites expectant horror, and then increases it by leaving the sight unexplained. L. 255. **nor speaks nor stirs**—She did not speak, nor did she move in the least: it seems as if the conflict in her conscience has paralysed her awhile. L. 256. **stricken**—smitten; she was evil but even she felt the pricks of conscience that made her hesitate to work evil on an innocent and chaste lady, who had been kind to her. L. 257. **Deep from within**—as if some great mental struggle was going on within her. L. 258. **sick assay**—weak attempt. L. 259. **eyes the maid**—looks at Christabel. **seeks delay**—hesitates. Geraldine seems reluctant to act. **defied**—challenged. L. 264. **Ah well-a-day**—a similar expression to woe is me. L. 265. **doleful**—

These words did say:
'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
Thou knowest to-night and wilt know to-morrow 270
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;
But vainly thou warrest,
For this is alone in
Thy power to declare,
That in the dim forest 275
Thou heard'st a low moaning,
And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;
And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air'.

THE CONCLUSION TO PART I

It was a lovely sight to see 280
The lady Christabel, when she
Was praying at the old oak tree.

Amid the jagged shadows *never*
Of mossy leafless boughs,
Kneeling in the moonlight, 285

To make her gentle vows;
Her slender palms together prest, *pressed delicate*
Heaving sometimes on her breast;
Her face resigned to bliss or bale— *joy or sorrow*
Her face, oh call it fair not pale, 290
And both blue eyes more bright than clear,
Each about to have a tear.

With open eyes (ah woe is me)!
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis, *think*

mournful, sad. L. 268. **is lord...utterance**—will control your power of speech. L. 269. **Thou...tomorrow**—You will never forget. L. 270. **This...shame**—The mark of disgrace. **seal...sorrow**—suggests that Geraldine was active under some compulsion. L. 271. **warrest**—fight against it. L. 282. **jagged**—uneven. L. 283. **mossy**—covered with moss. L. 285. **To make...vows!**—to pray. L. 286. **slender**—delicate. **prest**—pressed. L. 287. **heaving some time on her breast**—The delicate palms, which were pressed together, lay on her bosom; and, as the bosom of the lady heaved, the palms, too, seemed to be heaving. L. 288. **resigned**—calmly submissive to the will of God; prepared. **bliss or bale**—joy or sorrow. L. 292. **with open eyes**—so great is the strain on her mind at the sight of Geraldine's bosom etc., that she cannot close her eyes. L. 294. **fearfully dreaming**—The repetition increases the impression of the

Dreaming that alone, which is — 295
 O sorrow and shame ! Can this be she.
 They lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?
 And lo ! the worker of these harms
 That holds the maiden in her arms,
 Seems to slumber still and mild, 300
 As a mother with her child.

A star hath set, a star hath risen,
 O Geraldine ! since arms of thine
 Have been the lovely lady's prison.
 O Geraldine ! one hour was thine— 305
 Thou'st had they will ! By tairn and rill,
 The night-birds all that hour were still.
 But now they are jubilant anew,
 From cliff and tower, tu-whoo ! tu-whoo !
 Tu-whoo ! tu-whoo ! from wood and fell! 310

And see! the lady Christabel
 Gathers herself from out her trance;
 Her limbs relax, her countenance
 Grows sad and soft, the smooth thin lids
 Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds— 315
 Large tears that leave the lashes bright!

misery of Christabel's plight. **I wis**—I think. L. 295. **dreaming that alone etc.**—Of what was she dreaming? Of nothing else but the hideous sight that she had seen, when Geraldine undressed herself. By suggesting horror Coleridge succeeds in supernatural. L. 298. **the worker of these harms**—Geraldine, who has done all the evil. L. 300. **still and mild**—calmly and sweetly. L. 301. **As a mother with her child**—False Geraldine, the worker of all these harms is usurping the place of Christabel's mother, who was all love for her. Note the contrast between the two situations. L. 302. **A star...hath set etc.** It is the next morning. The two stars are the morning star, which sets at dawn, and the sun, which rises, suggesting that a change has come over Christabel. The pure virgin is no more. L. 304. **Lady's prison**—physically as well as spiritually. L. 306. **tairn**—a small mountain lake. **rill**—a small brook. L. 307. **The night-bird...still**—even nature stood aghast at the evil done to Christabel holding the breath at this ghastly deed. L. 308. **jubilant**—After that hour, the night-birds begin to call cheerfully again. L. 310. **fell**—a barren hill or rock. L. 312. **gathers**—recovers. **trance**—a state of semi-unconsciousness. L. 313. **relax**—become less rigid. **countenance**—face. L. 314. **sad and soft**—mellowed with mental suffering. L. 314-315. **Smooth...eyes**—the tension is now relaxed and she

And oft the while she seems to smile
 As infants at a sudden light!
 Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
 Like a youthful hermitess, 320
 Beauteous in a wilderness,
 Who, praying always, prays in sleep.
 And, if she move unquietly,
 Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free
 Comes back and tingles in her feet. 325
 No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.
 What if her guardian spirit 'twere.
 What if she knew her mother near,
 But this she knows, in joys and woes,
 That saints will aid if men will call : 330
 For the blue sky bends over all !

PART II

'EACH matin bell', the Baron saith,
 'Knells us back to a world of death.'
 These words Sir Leoline first said,
 When he rose and found his lady dead : 335
 These words Sir Leoline will say,
 Many a morn to his dying day !
 And hence the custom and law
 That still at dawn the sacristan

closes her eyes. L. 317. **oft the while**—often. L. 318. **infant**—a child. L. 319. **Yea**—yes. L. 320. **hermitess**—woman living in solitude. L. 321. **beauteous**—full of beauty. **in a wilderness**—in a place of wild, natural beauty. L. 324. **perchance**—perhaps. **blood so free**—because she is youthful and her blood is warm and circulates freely. L. 325. **tingles**—causes a sharp thrilling sensation or pain by its sudden rush. L. 326. **vision**—dream. **sweet**—pleasant. Geraldine's power is over and Christabel's mother cheers and comforts her now. L. 330. **If men will call**—if men will pray for their help. L. 331. **blue sky bends over all**—it is love that always triumphs over evil. The blue sky over our heads symbolises the all-embracing love of God. Cf. The moral of *The Ancient Mariner*. L. 332. **matin**—morning. **matin bell**—The bell that is rung in the morning to intimate people about the morning prayers in the church. **Baron**—Sir Leoline. **saith**—says. L. 333. **Knells**—indicates the sound of the bell that is rung solemnly at death or at a funeral. **Knells us back to**—Reminds us of. L. 335 **his lady**—his wife. L. 337. **to his dying day**—Upto the time of his death. L. 338. **the custom and law**—a custom so well established that it has acquired the force of law. L. 339. **still**—always, every day. **sacristan**—A person in a church in charge of the sacred vessels and other movables. It is his duty to ring the bells of a church

II. PARAPHRASE OF THE POEM

Part I

✓ **LI. 1—5.** The clock that is put up on the wall of the castle indicates that it is twelve in the night. The screech of the owls has disturbed the cock which is crowing (with a feeble sound), though it is in a sleepy state.

✓ **LI. 6—13.** Sir Leoline, the rich Baron keeps a watch-dog which has lost its teeth (owing to old age). The dog is chained in its house built under the rock, and unfailingly barks when the clock strikes. It may be fair or foul, sunshine or rain, the dog must howl in response to the strokes of the clock. For each quarter, it will howl once and for full hour twelve times, i.e., sixteen short howls, not too loud, for one hour. Some people believe that it does so because the dead body of its mistress wrapped up in the shroud is visible to the animal.

✓ **LI. 14—24.** Is the night chilly and dark? It is cold but not dark. The grey cloud which covers the sky is so thin that we can see the sky through it. On this night the moon is full but looks very small and dim behind the cloud. The night is chilly, the cloud is grey and it is the month of April when spring has set in.

✓ **LI. 25—28.** What is the lovely Christabel, the darling of her father, doing in the woods at this late hour at a distance from the Castle?

✓ **LI. 29—32.** Last night she saw in a dream the knight to whom she was engaged to the married. (She apprehended some calamity to him). That is why she has gone to the woods at night. There she will pray for the well-being of her lover who is far away from her.

✓ **LI. 31—36.** She went stealthily and silently; she heard low and gentle sighs. With the exception of lichen and mistletoe there was no other sign of greenness on the oak tree. Under it she knelt and prayed.

✓ **LI. 37—42.** The lovely lady Christabel sprang up suddenly. She heard the sound of sighing coming from very near. But she was not definite about it. It appeared that it was coming from the other side of the big oak tree which had its branches spreading in all directions.

✓ **LI. 43—52.** The night is chilly; all the trees in the forest are denuded of their leaves. Was it (the sigh) the dull and cheerless sound of the wind blowing through the trees? But the breeze was too weak to disturb the curls of hair falling on the cheeks of lovely Christabel. There was not sufficient breeze to move even one red leaf that was left hanging loosely on the topmost branch pointing upwards.

✓ **LI. 53—57.** May Christabel's heart (which was beating fast on account of fear) calm down. And may Christ and Virgin Mary protect her from harm!

She folded her arms beneath her clock and went noiselessly to the other side of the oak. What sight meets her eyes there?

✓ **LI. 58—70.** Christabel saw under the oak tree a beautiful maiden dressed in white silken robes that shone in the dim moonlight. Her neck was so milky white that her white dress looked pale in comparison with it. Her magnificently beautiful neck and her arms were bare. Her feet were so white that the blue veins in them were easily visible and she was without sandals on. She wore in her hair gems that glittered here and there. I think that the sight of such a lady, so beautiful and dressed in such brilliant robes, must have been very dreadful. Christabel prayed in her mind and asked her who she was.

✓ **LI. 71—78.** In a hollow (ghost-like) and sweet voice the lady Geraldine gave the answer which was appropriate to the occasion: "I appeal to you to take pity upon me. I am a distressed lady and am in a sad plight. I am tired and so can hardly talk. Extend your hand and be not afraid of me." Christabel asked her how she had come there, and the lady who had been interrupted in her speech spoke in a faint and sweet voice. Her reply was suitable to the occasion.

✓ **LI. 79—103.** "My name is Geraldine and we are descended from a noble stock. Five men armed with weapons of war laid hands upon me, a weak and helpless woman and forcibly gagged my mouth at the point of the bayonet, thus preventing me from raising cries for help. They tied me hand and foot, on a white saddle horse. The five warriors rode white horses at full speed in order to keep close to my horse which ran as swift as the wind. I have a faint recollection that we journeyed also for a few hours at night (besides journeying throughout the day). May God never forgive me if I tell a lie! I have not the least idea who those men were nor do I remember how long I have been here, since I was in a state of unconsciousness. One of those five warriors—and he was the tallest—helped me get down from the white horse on which I was riding. At that time I was feeling so wearied, both in spirit and in body, that it appeared I had no life in me. His companions uttered a few words which were not intelligible to me. The tallest warrior seated me under this oak tree. He promised on his honour that all of them would come back very soon. I cannot say where they have gone. I fancy that a few minutes ago there fell on my ears the sound of a castle bell ringing. Extend your hand and help me, a miserable lady, run away (from the clutches of the ruffians)."

✓ **LI. 104—113.** When Geraldine had finished speaking, Christabel extended her hand and gave comfort to the beautiful lady. She said: "You should have no fear; the services of my dear father are at your disposal. He has a strong cavalry. All the resources of my father—strong horsemen and other friends of his—will be employed to guard you against your enemies and you will be safely escorted back to your noble father's house. Be comforted and have no fear." Saying these words Christabel stood up and both tried to walk fast but (due to tiredness and fear) they could not.

LI. 114—122. The gracious Christabel thanked her lucky stars, and in this way continued her speech. "All the members of our family are enjoying peaceful sleep. The hall is as silent as the underground rooms there. My father is keeping bad health and it is, therefore, not proper to disturb him. We shall move very noiselessly and stealthily. I beg of you to be so good as to share your bed with me tonight."

LI. 123—132. Both crossed the ditch that had been constructed round the Castle. Christabel used the proper key and at once unlocked the door that lay in its middle. In order to make the door stronger, steel had been used on both sides; in the past a regular army drawn up for purposes of war had marched out of this gate. While passing through the threshold of the gate, Geraldine broke down: possibly through pain; and Christabel used her full force to lift her who was too heavy a burden (for a delicate girl, like herself).

LI. 133—144. Geraldine (who had collapsed) stood up (with the help of Christabel) and began walking as if her pain had passed away. Being out of the pale of fear and danger, they crossed the compound of the castle, and both of them were exceedingly happy. Christabel spoke these pious words to Geraldine who was walking by her side, "Let us praise the Holy Mother (Virgin Mary) who has saved you from dangers and harms." Geraldine said, "Alas, alas! I am too tired to speak." In this way, being out of the pale of fear and danger, they crossed the court of the castle and they were very happy.

LI. 145—153. In the wintry night when the moon was shining, the old bitch lay fast asleep outside the kennel. It did not get up, (when the two ladies passed through the court) but in its sleep, it gave a growl. The bitch must have some trouble (as it was growling); never before had it given a cry of pain in the presence of its mistress. Perhaps it is the hooting of the young owl; otherwise what else can be responsible for the bitch's trouble?

LI. 154—168. They passed through the hall and the hall echoed the footsteps, even though they trod as noiselessly and softly as they could. The burning pieces of wood lay flat; their fire was dying and the faggots lay covered with their own white ashes; yet, when Geraldine passed, the extinguished fire blazed into life and there appeared a bright flame of fire. With its help Christabel saw the face of Geraldine and a boss of her father's shield, which was hanging in a dark corner of the wall. Nothing else could she see. Christabel requested Geraldine to walk softly and noiselessly lest the sound of their footsteps should disturb her father who seldom enjoyed a sound sleep.

LI. 169—174. Christabel put off her sandals and walked very quietly, but still the air nearest her leg could hear the sound of their footsteps. She, therefore, grew jealous of it and tried to walk still more noiselessly. In this way they walked softly from one stair to another, sometimes in faint light and sometimes in darkness. When they were passing near Sir Leoline's room, they suspended

their breath and walked as noiselessly as death. Now both of them have reached the door of Christabel's bedroom and Geraldine's feet pressed down the rushes spread on the floor.

LI. 175—183. The moon is shining dimly outside the bedroom and yet not a single beam is making its way into it, but the two ladies can see the artistic carving—creation of the artist's brain—decorating the walls of the chamber. The carvings of these strange and beautiful figures were perfectly suitable for a lady's bed-chamber. A lamp is hanging by means of double silver chain which is tied to the feet of an angel.

LI. 184—189. The silver lamp is burning giving a faint and dim light. But Christabel will trim the candle in order to make it give brighter light, and this was what she did. She allowed the lamp to move to and fro, while Geraldine who was feeling miserable and wretched collapsed on the floor of the chamber.

LI. 190—193. Christabel requested Geraldine who was feeling tired and distressed to drink the wine which had been prepared by her mother from wild flowers. It possessed miraculous properties and would revive her spirits.

LI. 194—203. Geraldine asked if Christabel's mother would take pity on a miserable woman like her (Geraldine). Christabel answered, "Alas! She died at my birth. I have heard the old priest telling that my mother, while dying, said that she would come on my wedding day, at midnight, to hear the castle bells. I wish my dear mother were here!" Geraldine replied, "I too wish so."

LI. 204—213. Immediately after uttering the words ("I wish she were here") Geraldine changed her voice and said, "Disappear from this place, you spirit (Christabel's mother's spirit). I possess power that will compel you to vanish." What is it that is troubling the mind of Geraldine? Why is she gazing from one side to the other? Is it because she is looking at the dead spirit of Christabel's mother? And why does she utter the following words in a very faint, ghost-like voice, "Get away, O you woman! During this time Christabel is under my influence. I shall rule her destiny for the time being, though you may be her guardian angel, because now the control over Christabel has been given to me."

LI. 214—226. There Christabel knelt by the side of Geraldine in a prayerful attitude with her beautiful blue eyes raised towards heaven. She said, "I feel very sorry because your mind has been bewildered on account of the bad effects of the most frightful ride (you had with the five warriors)." The lady wiped the cold drops of perspiration that had appeared on her forehead (due to fear, weakness and tiredness), and answered in a hollow voice, "I am feeling better." She again drank the cordial wine prepared from wild flowers. She stood up erect from the floor where she had collapsed and her large beautiful eyes began to

glitter. She looked most beautiful; she appeared a spirit of the next world, and not of this world.

✓ **LI. 226—234.** The tall lady (Geraldine) stood erect in all her majesty and uttered the following words. "You are the soul of goodness and all the angels who live in upper regions love you for your virtues and you love them. I shall try, as much as lies in my power to reward you for your love and for the good lot that has fallen to me through your instrumentality. But now put off your clothes and retire to bed. As for myself, I shall pray before I go to bed."

✓ **LI. 235—244.** Christabel said, "Be it so" and she undressed herself as ordered by Geraldine. She put off her clothes from her soft body and lay down in the bed. How lovely and beautiful she looked at that time! But so many thoughts of good and evil passed through her brain that she could not get sleep. While she was half-asleep, she got up from her bed, and supporting herself on her elbow watched what lady Geraldine was about.

LI. 245—263. The lady (Geraldine) bent down under the lamp and slowly moved her eyes around. She took a deep breath like a person who shudders at the sight of danger, and unfastened the girdle from underneath her breasts. Her silken dress and her underwear fell down to the ground, and now her breast and half her side were fully visible. This sight can be better imagined than described. We can see such sights in our dreams; they cannot be put into words. May the heavenly spirits guard Christabel (from the evil influence of Geraldine)! But Geraldine neither speaks nor does she make any movement with her body. Her looks indicate that she is affected with pain and misery. It appears she had half succeeded in her faint and desperate attempt to remove a heavy weight that was oppressing her soul. She looks at Christabel and hesitates going to bed. All of a sudden she realizes that her authority has been challenged. She musters all her courage, summons her pride and contempt and sleeps with Christabel on the same bed and takes her in her arms.

LI. 264—278. Woe to the day! Sadly and in a low voice she uttered the curse, "this embrace will work such a magic spell upon you that you will lose the power of disclosing the secret of my shame and sorrow. This sign of my disgrace and the mark of my grief will be known to you tomorrow, but your struggle to regain your power of speech will be quite useless. You can never tell the story of my shame and sorrow to any one. Only one thing is in your power to tell others; how you heard a low moaning sound in a dark forest, how you found there a bright lady of peerless beauty; how you brought her home out of love and charity in order to protect her from her enemies and from the cold weather."

CONCLUSION TO PART I

✓ **LI. 279—291.** What a lovely sight to see the Lady Christabel kneel, in the moon-lit night, to offer her gentle prayers under the old oak tree where these falling shadows cast by mossy branches of tree that had shed their leaves! She was kneeling with her delicate hands folded. Sometimes she placed them on her breast. Now as her breast rose and fell (due to her breathing), her hands also rose and fell. Feelings of joy and sorrow were reflected in her face. Her face looked fair rather than pale and her blue eyes bright rather than clear, as from each eye a tear seemed to fall down.

✓ **LI. 292—301.** It is a matter of grief that, though the eyes of Christabel are open, she is dreaming frightful and horrible dreams. I think the nature of those dreams is so frightful that words cannot describe it. This is a matter of great sorrow and shame. Can this be the same lady who had knelt under the old oak tree? And look! the lady who is the author of all these evils, who embraces Christabel (like a mother her child) in her arms, appears to be enjoying a quiet and gentle sleep.

✓ **LI. 302—310.** O Geraldine! The evening star has set and the morning star has risen since you embraced the lovely Christabel (your embrace is like a prison-house). O Geraldine for one hour you could have Christabel under your complete sway and you could work your will upon her. At that time the birds and streamlets were still. But now they are again feeling jubilant and their cry, 'tu whoo' is heard from the tower of the castle, from the wood and from the rocks and barren mountain sides.

LI. 311—318. Look there! the spell cast upon Christabel having broken, she is waking up from the state of deep sleep in which she had lain so far. Her body grows less rigid; her face becomes sad and gentle; the soft eye-lids shut; and Christabel sheds big drops of tears that make her eye-lashes bright. In the midst of these tears she also smiles very often, just as small children do at the sight of sudden light in the darkness.

LI. 319—331. Like a young and beautiful hermitess who lives in a forest and spend her life in the meditation of God, Christabel at one time weeps and at another time smiles. And if she moves restlessly (if she moves about her legs in a restless manner), it is because part of the blood (that is now free to circulate in her body) comes back to her feet and produces a tightening sensation. Christabel is now surely dreaming a sweet dream. Who knows that it may be the spirit of her mother who is always trying to protect her from evil harm? Christabel knows this moral and spiritual truth that whatever may happen, in joy or sorrow, the saints will come to man's help if they are called upon, because the divine spirit looks after the moral good of all creatures.

IV. THE STORY OF *CHRISTABEL*

Sir Leoline of Langdale had a lovely daughter, named Christabel. Once she went to the woods at midnight—the hour of witches and ghosts to pray for her absent fiancé. In the chilly April night she met a damsel who was alone and dressed in the silken clothes and surpassingly beautiful. She related her story thus: “My name is Geraldine and I am the daughter of Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine. Yesterday, I was forcibly abducted by five warriors who gagged my mouth and carried me on a white palfrey to this deserted place where they have left me promising to come back soon.” The touching story moved Christabel.

As Geraldine entered the Castle, a few strange things happened. She sank over the threshold of the gate; the old mastiff made an unwanted angry moan; the smouldering brands gave a ‘tongue of light or flit of flame.’ All these occurrences had an air of mystery about them.

They shared the same bed. At night Geraldine wrought her evil spell upon Christabel. The charm was so powerful that under its effect she could only say that she had succoured a lady of surpassing loveliness in the forest and brought her home and fed her. She had no power to say anything else concerning Geraldine.

During her sleep Christabel had dreadful and happy dreams one after the other. In the morning, Christabel repented for the evil thoughts that had come to her during her sleep, and she cheerfully led Geraldine to meet her father. When the Baron came to know that the distressed lady was the daughter of his old friend (Alas! the two friends had quarrelled and parted) he made a vow that he would avenge the outrage to Geraldine the noble lady. He embraced her fondly. At this time Christabel had a vision (this was the second vision). In the vision she saw the same cold bosom of Geraldine. She shuddered and hissed.

The father could not understand what the real matter was. In the meantime the witch assumed the pose of injured innocence and wanted to be sent home. The Baron asked his poet (Bracy) to go to Sir Roland and request him to come with his equipage to take his daughter. Bracy wanted permission to postpone his departure. He had seen a vision, he said, and in the vision he had seen a bright green snake (Geraldine) encircling a gentle dove (Christabel) and ready to kill it. The Baron interpreted the dream differently and took the snake to mean the ruffians who had abducted her. Geraldine played the lady and thanked the Baron in the most fashionable manner. She looked at him with her large bright divine eyes, but at Christabel she looked askance. The pure maid had her third vision in which only one image—the dull and treacherous look of Geraldine—seemed to be fixed upon her mind.

After the trance was broken, Christabel appealed to her father to send Geraldine away. He carried the impression that his daughter had grown jealous. He felt insulted and disgraced. He got enraged and furious and repeated his orders to the Bard. Bracy went and the Baron turning his back upon his own daughter, led forth Geraldine.

V. A CRITICAL SUMMARY OF THE POEM

LI. 1—22. According to the clock in Sir Leoline’s castle, it is midnight. The cock has begun to crow. Sir Leoline’s mastiff bitch howls sixteen times, and the midnight is chilly; it is a moonlit night, but the cloud obscures the moon light. Being the month of April, spring has only just commenced.

LI. 23—36. Christabel, beloved of her father, Sir Leoline, is alone in the forest late at night, praying for the welfare of her lover who is far away; silently, she is kneeling and praying beneath the huge oak tree.

LI. 37—78. Christabel is suddenly disturbed in her silent prayers by a nearby moaning sound. It cannot be the wind that makes the moaning sound—for there is very little wind in the air. Christabel walks round to the other side of the oak tree and sees there a beautiful lady lying in some disorder. When asked to explain who she is, the lady says that she is too weary to speak; but, presently, she starts telling her story.

LI. 79—103. The lady says that her name is Geraldine; she had been kidnapped by five warriors in the morning; she had been secured on the back of a horse; the whole day they had travelled and when night came, one of the five had taken her from the horse’s back and left her at the foot of the oak tree. They had vowed to come back soon. When they left her, she had become unconscious—it was the castle clock that awoke her. Having told her story, the lady requests Christabel once again to stretch forth her hand and help her to escape from her enemies.

LI. 104—122. Hearing Geraldine’s sad story, Christabel extends her hand to her and promises her that Sir Leoline will send her (Geraldine) safe to her own father’s hall. As they walk slowly together, Christabel tells Geraldine that Sir Leoline being too weak in health, should not be disturbed till the morning. Geraldine can, however, sleep for the night in Christabel’s room on the same couch.

LI. 123—174. Walking together, Geraldine and Christabel cross the moat; Christabel opens the door in the middle of the gate, and they cross the court, and then the hall. Seeing them, the mastiff bitch moans angrily; when they pass the dying fire leaps up into a sudden blaze. They find their way from stair to stair, and at last they enter Christabel’s room.

LI. 175—219. Christabel's room is contrived by clever workmen and sculptors like a real lady's chamber. Christabel trims the silver lamp and makes it bright. Meanwhile Geraldine sinks upon the floor, as though she is very tired. Christabel offers her a cordial wine made out of wild flowers by her late mother. Geraldine is now suddenly frightened by some mysterious presence—probably the spirit of Christabel's mother—and cries out wildly. She presently recovers her poise and pretends that her fit has subsided and that she is all right once again.

LI. 220—244. Geraldine drinks some more wine and regaining her strength, stands erect on the floor; she is alluring and strange, as if she has come from a distant place. She asks Christabel to undress and go to bed. But Christabel cannot sleep now, and hence she reclines on her elbow and observes Geraldine from the bed.

LI. 245—278. Slowly and with a shudder as it were, Geraldine too undresses, she neither speaks nor stirs for a time; her face shows sorrow and hesitation; but suddenly she seems to make up her mind and lies down by Christabel's side. She now takes Christabel in her arms and pronounces a charm upon her, which puts her under Geraldine's power.

LI. 279—331. Christabel, as she was kneeling and praying at the foot of the old oak tree, looked so innocent so beautiful. Now she is lying by the side of Geraldine, and dreaming the most fearful dreams. Her eyes are open, and yet she is unconscious; such a fearful change has come upon her. But, by her side, Geraldine is slumbering in ease, unmindful of the happiness she has wrecked. An hour passes; the hour of Geraldine's absolute triumph is over. The night-birds are calling lustily and Christabel too comes out of her night marish trance; she sheds tears of happiness and smiles like a child; for she has now seen a sweet vision, the vision of her guardian spirit, the vision of her dead mother, Lady Leoline.

Geraldine's look reverts to its previous brightness as she meets the Baron's gaze. As for Christabel, she shudders aloud with a hissing sound, she has no thought but the memory of the serpent glance; her own eyes shrink in irresistible response into the smallness and maliciousness of the serpent eye; and she stares at her own father with this deformed look. After a little while, her features relax, she is again her own sweet self; she prays inwardly and kneeling before her father, earnestly entreats him to send Geraldine away at once. The spell is still so strong that she is unable to say more by way of explanation.

LI. 621—655. This request throws Sir Leoline into some confusion. On the one hand, he loves his daughter; his wife had died praying for the welfare of his daughter, Christabel, his child and his late wife's child, is doubly dear to him. On the other by making this request, Christabel has dishonoured him, spoilt his hospitality to his friend's daughter. He suddenly makes up his mind, orders Bracy to go on his errand at once, and leaving Christabel alone, leads forth the lady Geraldine.

LI. 656—677. As a little child—a nimble fairylike child with beautiful cheeks—Christabel was always happy and always gladdened her father's eyes. On the occasion however, he treated her roughly; but this was due to the very excess of his love. It is strange that contradictory thoughts—love and anger—should sometimes live together; it is strange that people should love and at the same time say or do cruel things to the objects of love. But such "Giddiness of heart and brain" is generally caused by anger and pain.

VI. CRITICAL APPRECIATION AND INTERPRETATION

Christabel was written between 1797 and 1800. It is a fragment, but the reason why it has been left unfinished is not that the poet did not know how to finish it—for he had the whole plan entire from the beginning to end, in his mind—but that he feared he could not carry on with equal success the execution of the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one.

England has not so far produced a greater writer of supernatural poetry, nor a finer dreamer. Coleridge has been called the *master of natural supernaturalism, a wizard who creates an atmosphere of eerie mystery and horror by purely natural means*. *Christabel, Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*—these three poems stand in a class by themselves. In their own field they are unrivalled in the whole range of English literature.

Christabel is a story of a witch who casts her evil spell upon an innocent soul. It is a supernatural tale of mystery, horror, wizardry and wonders. The dream faculty of the poet has given it a very high rank among works of pure creative art. It is one of the three or four master-pieces of Coleridge on which his reputation as one of the great poets of England rests. About these poems Stifford Brook remarks, "All that he did excellently well might be bound up

in twenty pages, but it should be bound in pure gold."

Supernaturalism. *Christabel* is a tale of enchantment, sorcery and magic. Its place as a work of literary craftsmanship in the realm of supernatural poetry is very high. The pure and innocent Christabel, Sir Leoline's daughter, falls a victim to the wicked influences of Geraldine, a lovely and fascinating sorceress. The charm is so potent that under its effect the poor soul loses her power to disclose the shameful story of the witch even to her father. The language is the language of incantation and the setting and the atmosphere are supernatural.

Mark the masterly skill of the poet in preparing the ground for the meeting between Christabel and Geraldine. It is the middle of night. The owls are screeching 'Tu-whit!' 'Too-Whoo'; they have awakened the drowsy cock. The Baron's toothless mastiff 'from her kennel beneath the rock maketh answer to the clock, four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour, sixteen short howls, not over aloud.' 'The night is chilly but not dark.' 'The moon is full and yet she looks both small and dull.' 'The thin grey cloud is spread on high.' 'It covers but not hides the sky.' 'It is a month before the month of May.' The forest is bare and bleak. The wind is unusually still and motionless.

Before Coleridge many writers had trodden the field of supernaturalism and brought out stories of ghosts and witches. But the only feature of such stories was that they created sensation and made our flesh creep. They lacked imagination and were divested of human interest. In the hands of writers like Monk Lewis and Anne Radcliffe they had degenerated into a mere orgy of crude sensationalism. But Coleridge changed all this. He gives his supernatural tales *a human interest and a semblance of truth*. He tells his tales against a *psychological background*. He creates a *willing suspension of disbelief*. The reader readily believes what he is reading without questioning the possibility of events and incidents recorded in the tales. Doubts never cross his mind. Coleridge's stories are undoubtedly fantastic, unreal and improbable, but by his supreme art he has given them an air of plausibility, has made them look real. In blending the supernatural with the natural lies the greatest achievements of the 'subtle souled psychologist.'

Every word of what has been written in the above paragraph applies to *Christabel*. It is a 'story from the world of spirits. It is 'witchery by moonlight.' It is, "an imaginative romance pervaded throughout by the supernatural." But, "while we read it, we are all the while in our real and living world." The human and the supernatural elements have been so skilfully blended that it is well-nigh impossible to separate one from the other. Our credulity is never shocked. We do not doubt even for a moment the existence of Geraldine, Christabel or other human characters nor do we ever call in question the *raison d'etre* of happenings like the visions and dreams recorded in the poem. The

supernaturalism of Coleridge is therefore *psychological, subtle and refined*. It is realistic supernaturalism.

One of the secrets of the success of Coleridge as a great supernatural poet is that his stories are not blood-curdling, nor does he consciously attempt to produce sensationalism in his readers. In *Christabel* the feeling of horror is produced indirectly. Coleridge does not describe or define horror, he only suggests it. He does not actually describe the horrible sight; he merely gives us the effect of that horrible sight:

Alas! What ails poor Geraldine?
Why stares she with unsettled eye?
Can she the bodiless dead espy?
And why with hollow voice cries she
"Off woman, off! this hour is mine".

Here what Geraldine saw has not been described; the spirit of the dead body of Christabel's mother has not been dragged into the story. But the poet has succeeded in conveying to us the effect of the dreadful sight Geraldine saw.

Again, Coleridge leaves many things in the poem deliberately vague and indefinite. At several places there is an air of mystery which the poet has not cleared. The poet excites the reader's curiosity but leaves it ungratified till the end. In the lines:—

Again she saw that bosom old
Again she felt that bosom cold,
And drew in her breath with a hissing sound

We are left to conjecture the exact nature of the sight Christabel saw in the cold bosom of Geraldine. It has not been clearly defined.

Medievalism. The scene of the poem is laid in the Middle Ages. The Medieval times were marked by superstition and piety. During that period the people were superstition-ridden; they believed in magic and witchcraft. They were also deeply religious. This period was characterised by feudalism. The feudal lords lived in castles round which moats were built; they took part in tournaments. Now in *Christabel* we find that characters, situations, scenes all belongs to the Middle Ages. The theme of the story is magic. One of the characters is a witch who casts her evil spell upon her innocent victim. There is the chivalry of Middle Ages in Sir Leoline who lives like a feudal lord in a fortified castle, attended by innumerable attendants, pages and heralds, and takes part in tournaments. The piety of the Middle Ages is seen in the prayers to Jesus and Maria and in the reference to the bell. We have a reference to Medieval art in the Chamber of Christabel—'Carved so curiously'.

Narrative Skill. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Love and Kubla Khan* all bear eloquent testimony to his narrative skill. He is a storyteller par excellence and a supreme master of this art. His narrative skill in

Christabel is worthy of a very high praise. The poet has with consummate skill made use of almost all weapons in his armoury to make the story interesting. Except at one or two places it never flags; it is a gripping tale. It is full of action and excitement; it is told against a psychological background; there is human interest in it. It arouses curiosity and produces a feeling of suspense; it appeals to us and thrills our souls. Many things in the story have been left intentionally vague and indefinite so that the reader fills up the details according to his imagination. Its language is very simple.

Metre, Imagery, Music, Melody, etc. In *Christabel*, Coleridge has introduced a new metrical novelty. On this point he himself says: "The metre of *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle, namely, that of counting in each line the accent, not the syllables. Though the letter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accent will be only four. Nevertheless, the occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of imagery and passion."

Art of Picture. Coleridge is deft in the art of picture making with the help of simple words. "Coleridge's success is not a little due to the perfection of his language. From the simplest material of ordinary words he weaves a web of music and imagery. By slight deft touches he creates a picture, the details of which are quickly filled in by a responsive imagination. He is a master of harmony...with that supreme art which ever seems artless, he weaves such a sound, colour and detail as to defy all attempts at analysis".