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Faculty of Letters
Department of English Studies

Christabel – The Nemesis of Coleridge and Wordsworth’s Friendship

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Master Course in English Studies
English Literature
2009

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Dissertation of the Master Course
in English Studies, presented at
the Faculty of Letters of University
of Lisbon. Mentored by Professor
Alcinda Pinheiro de Sousa.

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To my family and friends

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am eternally grateful to the following people in realizing this thesis: to my parents, Radoljub and Dragica, for their endless love and support during the most difficult times of our lives in war-torn Yugoslavia; to my brother, Dragan, for his professional perspective in understanding the psychological implications of this thesis; to my Portuguese family, Maria Margarida and Maggie, for their outstanding and generous kindness and love, without which none of this would have been possible; to my English colleagues, Joanna and Luis, for their help in proofreading the text; to all my friends for their sincere friendship and needed technical support; to the professors I worked with during my Master course; and last, but not the least, to my professor and mentor, Alcinda Pinheiro de Sousa, who believed in me, and who, with wisdom and genuine dedication, guided me in writing this thesis. To all of you, I thankfully dedicate this dissertation.

RESUMO

Embora actualmente Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834), poeta inglês da época romântica, seja celebrado como uma das figuras públicas mais importantes do seu tempo, a sua vida profissional e privada é prova de que este estatuto nem sempre o acompanhou durante a vida. Frequentemente criticado pelos seus pares contemporâneos, viu como os seus poemas, em particular *Christabel* (1816), eram geralmente incompreendidos e rejeitados como sendo pouco merecedores da sua autoria. O poema *Christabel*, foco da nossa atenção nesta dissertação, funcionou como nemesis, como inimigo-mor, razão pela qual (entre outras) a amizade entre Coleridge e o seu melhor amigo, William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850), começou a definhar.

Duas ideias fundamentais levaram-nos a escrever esta tese. A primeira diz respeito à natureza da amizade entre Coleridge e Wordsworth. Enquanto representantes do Romantismo inglês, marcaram o final do século XVIII e o início do século XIX. Coleridge e Wordsworth tornaram-se amigos íntimos em 1797, e esta amizade, considerada das mais relevantes na literatura inglesa, deu origem a uma colecção comum de poemas, as *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), cuja publicação marca o princípio do Romantismo em Inglaterra. Daí que esta amizade, e as complexidades que lhe são subjacentes, constituam a motivação da nossa investigação.

A segunda ideia directriz, envolvendo directamente tanto Coleridge como Wordsworth, é, de facto, o poema inacabado de Coleridge, *Christabel*. É um poema que tencionavam incluir em último lugar na segunda edição das *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Infelizmente, mesmo antes da impressão dessa edição, Wordsworth decidiu excluí-lo. Esta decisão teve um efeito devastador sobre Coleridge, tanto do ponto de vista poético como psicológico. Profundamente perturbado pela reacção de Wordsworth, entre outras razões, Coleridge tornou-se viciado no ópio até ao fim da vida, lamentando-se que os seus poderes poéticos tinham desaparecido. Assim, *Christabel* tornou-se numa verdadeira vingança na vida de Coleridge, num destruidor indesejado daquela amizade, que, à semelhança de uma maldição ou de um feitiço, atormentou Coleridge pela vida fora.

Tendo em consideração tanto a amizade entre Coleridge e Wordsworth, como o poema da autoria de Coleridge, *Christabel*, propomos a actual dissertação, que se encontra dividida em duas partes. A primeira parte, intitulada 'Auto-Confiança Readquirida', explora a natureza

da amizade entre Coleridge e Wordsworth ao longo de três fases distintas. Na primeira secção olhamos para o começo da sua amizade; na segunda, para o conceito das *Lyrical Ballads* dos dois poetas; e, finalmente, na terceira secção, centramo-nos na obra *Biographia Literaria*, escrita por Coleridge. Tal como já referimos, a amizade entre Coleridge e Wordsworth teve um impacto forte na literatura inglesa da época romântica, e o poema *Christabel* foi escrito antes de esta amizade começar a definhar, mais precisamente no período de maior intimidade. Assim sendo, consideramos extremamente importante ilustrar *exactamente* em que consistia tal relação.

Assim, na primeira secção da primeira parte desta dissertação, chamada ‘Caleidoscópio de Sentimentos’, propomo-nos contribuir para a análise dos primórdios dessa amizade. Os dois poetas eram vizinhos no oeste de Inglaterra – Coleridge vivia em Nether Stowey, Wordsworth em Alfoxden. Através de uma análise aprofundada deste período das suas vidas, pretendemos fornecer algumas provas daquilo que os aproximou, designadamente as suas visões partilhadas sobre poesia e o seu amor pela natureza. Foi nas colinas de Quantock que Coleridge e os Wordsworth começaram a dar frequentes passeios na natureza, um hábito a que se entregariam entusiasticamente durante o período em que a sua amizade foi mais forte. Foi precisamente nessa altura que os dois poetas perceberam a coincidência dos seus sentimentos e sensibilidades poéticas. Assim, o período das Quantocks, de 1797 a 1798, marcou a colaboração mais prolífica de Coleridge e Wordsworth.

Na segunda secção, intitulada ‘O Projecto Comum e as Suas Implicações’, procuramos mostrar que não tardou muito que Coleridge e Wordsworth tivessem a ideia de compilar os seus poemas numa colecção anónima, que seria como que o culminar, ou o coroar, da sua escrita colaborativa – surgindo, assim, as *Lyrical Ballads*. Este projecto foi iniciado na esperança de render dinheiro suficiente para a viagem que tinham planeado fazer à Alemanha. Foi concebido como um volume anónimo de versos compostos pelos dois poetas, nos quais Wordsworth se centraria em temas da vida quotidiana, enquanto Coleridge exploraria o sobrenatural e os elementos irracionais. Esta distinção derivava dos interesses diferentes de cada um deles relativamente aos seus respectivos processos de construção imaginária. Esta secção concentra-se, portanto, nos elementos em torno do projecto das *Lyrical Ballads*, exemplificando a sua importância e, ao mesmo tempo, fornecendo a necessária ligação ao poema *Christabel*.

Por fim, na terceira secção, denominada ‘Uma Cura pelas Palavras’, abordamos alguns aspectos da obra *Biographia Literaria* (1817), focando a nossa análise nas opiniões de Coleridge quanto à amizade entre os dois poetas, demonstrando em que pontos as suas filosofias divergiam. É nesta secção que pretendemos dar exemplos de alguns dos aspectos principais das ideias de Coleridge, relativamente a Wordsworth, no que toca à imaginação, à fantasia, ao poema, à poesia e à métrica, ideias essas que Coleridge expressou na sua *Biographia Literaria*. Entre outras coisas, Coleridge exprimiu nesta obra os seus sentimentos, há tanto tempo reprimidos, sobre as questões acima referidas, que eram aquelas em que até certo ponto diferia de Wordsworth. O que provocou a decisão de Coleridge de realizar o projecto da *Biographia Literaria* foi o prefácio de Wordsworth à colecção de poemas publicada em 1815. Ao exprimir publicamente as suas opiniões a respeito das diferenças entre si próprio e Wordsworth, em termos psicológicos, Coleridge ambicionava uma espécie de catarse, uma libertação que toda esta iniciativa poderia oferecer.

A segunda parte desta dissertação, intitulada ‘Descrença Voluntariamente Suspensa’, centra-se no poema *Christabel*. Tal como terá sido demonstrado na primeira parte da tese, *Christabel* foi o poema que marcou o início do fim da forte amizade e colaboração produtiva entre Coleridge e Wordsworth. Assim, focamos nesta segunda parte os diversos aspectos do poema em si.

Na primeira secção da segunda parte, chamada ‘Integridade Fragmentada’, discutimos alguns aspectos da forma fragmentária do poema *Christabel*. Pretendemos, com isto, levantar algumas questões sobre a ideia de fragmento, sobre o valor paradoxal que o próprio estado de incompletude acarreta. Esta discussão é de suma importância, em especial porque Coleridge vivia atormentado pela sua incapacidade de concluir o poema. Na verdade, como nunca o fez, achamos que esta questão deve ser levada em conta antes de procedermos à análise do poema em si. Sugerimos também várias hipóteses quanto à razão pela qual Coleridge nunca terminou o poema *Christabel*. Tão misteriosa quanto o próprio poema é a pergunta intrigante sobre a inspiração do poeta relativamente a *Christabel*, pergunta essa que continua por responder, assim como a problemática em torno da sua incapacidade de terminar este poema.

Seguem-se a esta discussão as duas últimas secções, intituladas ‘Os Puros de Coração Traídos’ e ‘O Veredicto da Imaginação’, nas quais interpretamos as duas partes do poema, tendo em consideração diversas abordagens críticas. Procuramos revelar as dificuldades que

surgiram na análise do poema *Christabel*, reflectidas na incapacidade de académicos e críticos encontrarem respostas uniformes e universais para a miríade de questões levantadas pelo poema. A razão principal desta incapacidade é o facto de o poema nunca ter sido concluído, de modo que quem quer que tente encontrar o seu caminho só consegue embrenhar-se mais e mais no labirinto da imaginação de Coleridge.

Palavras-Chave:

1. Coleridge / 2. Wordsworth / 3. Christabel / 4. Amizade / 5. Biografia

ABSTRACT

Although Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834), an English poet of the Romantic period, is now celebrated as one of the most important public figures of his time, his professional and private lives prove that this status he presently has was widely challenged during his lifetime. He was frequently criticised by his contemporaries, while his poems, *Christabel* (1816) in particular, were generally misunderstood and rejected as not worthy of his name. This poem, the one we focused on in this thesis, acted as a true nemesis, the key enemy, which happened to be one of the reasons why Coleridge's friendship with his best friend William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) began to fade.

The following two ideas guided us in writing this thesis. The first idea involves the nature of Coleridge and Wordsworth's friendship. These poets marked the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They became close friends in 1797. Their friendship resulted, among other things, in a joint collection of poems, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), whose publication is generally taken as the beginning of Romanticism in England. This complex friendship, with its implications, motivated us to undertake this research.

Our second guiding idea is Coleridge's unfinished poem *Christabel*. It was supposed to conclude the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Unfortunately, Wordsworth decided to exclude it which devastated Coleridge poetically and psychologically. Profoundly disturbed by Wordsworth's decision, among other reasons, Coleridge turned to opium, lamenting over lost poetic powers. *Christabel* consequently became a true nemesis for Coleridge, which as some sort of a spell, tormented Coleridge till his death.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. The first will explore the nature of Coleridge and Wordsworth's friendship. The second will focus on the analysis of *Christabel* which initiated the disintegration of the poets' strong friendship and prolific collaboration.

Key-Words:
1. Coleridge / 2. Wordsworth / 3. Christabel / 4. Friendship / 5. Biography

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INTRODUCTION

> Year after year, and in societies of the most different kinds, I had been entreated to recite [*Christabel*]: and the result was still the same in all, and altogether different in this respect from the effect produced by the occasional recitation of any other poems I had composed. This before the publication. And since then, with very few exceptions, I have heard nothing but abuse, and this too in a spirit of bitterness at least disproportionate to the pretensions of the poem, had it been the most pitiably below mediocrity, as the previous eulogies, and far more inexplicable.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 680)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834) observed in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that his poem *Christabel* (1816) had been warmly received before its publication whereupon it received mostly negative reviews. We shall argue that it is the poem that played, perhaps, the most important part in Coleridge's life and career. It both influenced his relationship with William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) and his own life, being one of the factors which drove him into a long period of drug abuse and self-pity. As Coleridge himself observed, the process of trying to finish it proved to be more than he could handle: '(…) I undertook to finish a poem which I had begun, entitled Christabel, for a second volume of the Lyrical Ballads. (…) I tried & tried, & nothing would come of it. I desisted with a deeper dejection than I am willing to remember' (S. T. Coleridge to J. Wedgwood, 1 November 1800, *in* Coleridge 2000, I: 643).

There are two main ideas that fundamentally guided us in writing this thesis. The first one has to do with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth's friendship. As representatives of English Romanticism, they marked the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Coleridge and Wordsworth became close friends in 1797; and their friendship, regarded as one of the most important ones in English literature (McFarland 1981: 56), gave birth to a joint collection of poems, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), whose publication is generally considered to be the onset of Romanticism in England.[1] Therefore, their friendship, with its underlying implications, provided the motivation for our research.

The second idea, which directly involves both Coleridge and Wordsworth, is, in fact, Coleridge's unfinished poem *Christabel* (1816). It is a poem that was supposed to be printed as the concluding one of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Unfortunately, just before the printing of the second edition, Wordsworth decided to exclude it. That decision had devastating effects on Coleridge, both poetically and psychologically speaking. Deeply disturbed by Wordsworth's reaction, among other reasons, Coleridge began his lifelong addiction to opium, lamenting that his poetic powers were gone. *Christabel*, thus, became a true nemesis in Coleridge's life, an unwanted destroyer of the friendship, which, as some sort of a curse, or a spell, tormented Coleridge throughout his life. This metaphor presented itself as suitable in our enterprise, and therefore justified the title for this thesis.

Bearing both Coleridge and Wordsworth's friendship and Coleridge's poem *Christabel* in mind, we propose the following dissertation, which is divided into two parts. The first one will explore the nature of Coleridge and Wordsworth's friendship throughout three different stages. In the first section we will deal with the beginning of their friendship, in the second one, the issue is the conception of *Lyrical Ballads* by the two poets, and finally in the third section, the focus will be on *Biographia Literaria*, written by Coleridge. Since, as we have mentioned, Coleridge and Wordsworth's friendship had an important impact on English literature of the Romantic period, and since *Christabel* was written before their friendship began to fade, i.e. during the period of the most intense bonding, we feel that it is of paramount importance to illustrate *exactly* what constituted such a relationship.

Therefore, in section one of the first part of this dissertation, entitled 'Kaleidoscope of Feelings', we wish to contribute to the analysis of the initial period of their friendship, in the west of England where the two poets were living as neighbours, and to provide some evidence of what drew them towards each other – namely, their shared views on poetry, as well as their love of nature. In section two, 'The Joint Project and Its Implications', we will try to show that it did not take long for Coleridge and Wordsworth to come up with the idea of compiling their poems into an anonymous collection which would serve as a sort of culmination, or crowning, of their collaborative writing – this collection being *Lyrical Ballads*. Finally, in section three, ‘A Talking Cure’, we will consider some aspects of *Biographia Literaria,* focusing on the investigation into Coleridge’s opinions on their friendship by showing where their philosophies diverged.

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[1] The dictionary entrance on 'Romanticism', in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2003), among other things, gives this information. See, Drabble, Stringer 2003: 555.

The second part will focus on the poem *Christabel.* As we will illustrate in the first part of this dissertation, *Christabel* was the poem that marked the beginning of the end of Coleridge and Wordsworth’s strong friendship and prolific collaboration. So, in the second part of this thesis, we shall concentrate on the various aspects of the poem itself. In ‘Fragmented Wholeness’, section one, we shall discuss some aspects of *Christabel*’s fragmentary form. After that, in ‘The Pure of Heart Betrayed’ and ‘The Verdict of Imagination’, the two last sections, we are going to interpret the two parts of the poem respectively, taking into account different critical approaches.

As it is known today, this poem has been analysed, read and reread, generally from two major points of view. The first regards it as a Christian/moralistic tale of virtue, evil and the possibility of redemption of the fallen. The second generally deals with the electrifying sexual aspect of the poem, stressing the importance of sexuality, gender roles, and the metaphorical loss of innocence as a necessary step in everyone’s development. ‘The history of criticism of the poem, however, has (…) been the history of attempts to complete it, or at least to suggest how its disunity could be repaired’ (Harding 1995: 144). It is not our intention to immerse ourselves into such a demanding, and perhaps, impossible task, although we shall provide examples of such instances. We *do* feel that another equally important aspect of the poem is worth looking into – the possible connection between *Christabel* and Coleridge’s private life.

Thus, in exploring the friendship between Coleridge and Wordsworth, with as many background elements as possible that composed it, and in analysing *Christabel*, paying attention to the most important aspects of the poem and its critical approaches, we suggest the possibility that *Christabel*, one of the most important Coleridge’s poems, played a pivotal part in Coleridge’s life. Firstly, we propose, it was because of *Christabel* that Coleridge and Wordsworth’s friendship started to fade; and secondly, that by rejecting the poem, Wordsworth contributed to driving Coleridge into the opium-based self-pity out of which, as it will be discussed in the last section of the first part of our dissertation, he emerged as a restored and self-appreciating poet and philosopher.

We shall base our thesis on three major bodies of texts – theoretical, biographical, and poetical. As to the first kind of texts, the most important work written by Coleridge, to be considered in the first part of the dissertation, is his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). We find it fundamental for any investigation into Coleridge's work, especially because, as Coleridge himself subtitled it *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, it exemplifies not only his philosophical frame of mind, but also his opinions on his own past life, Wordsworth, poetry, imagination, fancy, and the scheme behind *Lyrical Ballads*. As for the edition of *Biographia Literaria*, we shall be using the 1847 edition.[2]

As to the biographical texts written on Coleridge, we find the studies of Richard Holmes indispensable, *Early Visions* (2005a) and *Darker Reflections* (2005b), as well as Adam Sisman's *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Friendship* (2006). These works provide a thorough insight into the life of Coleridge, especially into the nature of his relationship with Wordsworth. Poems by Coleridge and Wordsworth were read in the R. L Brett and A. R. Jones' edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (2005), and poems by Coleridge were read in Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano's edition of *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* (2004).

Considering all of the above, it becomes clear that *Christabel* is the crucial element that unites the two parts of this thesis. As to the edition we shall use, Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano's *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* (2004), which contains the original 1816 version of the poem with stanza breaks at lines 56, 123, 189, and 310, whereas later versions do not. Moreover, Norton's edition includes Coleridge's marginal annotations and revisions, as well as comments by John James Morgan (1775? – 1820), a lawyer, and by James Gillman (1782 – 1839), a surgeon with whom Coleridge lived in the later two consecutive periods of his life.

In the bibliography, we have included only the works that are quoted or referred to in this thesis. Some of these works have been taken from the Internet. As to the extensive list of works written by Coleridge and on Coleridge, it is of our opinion that the two following sources are very illuminating – 'Guide to Further Reading' in Lucy Newlyn's edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* (2002), and 'Selected Bibliography' in Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano's edition of *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* (2004).

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[2] See n39 in section three of the first part herein.

In her *Sexual Personae* (2001), Camille Paglia investigates into Coleridge's *Christabel*, where she offers the following perspective on Coleridge and Wordsworth's friendship regarding the poem itself – one of the views we shall be considering in this dissertation:

> Wordsworth and Coleridge were locked in a sadomasochistic marriage of minds, where Wordsworth kept the hierarchical advantage and Coleridge surrendered himself to ritualistic self-abasement. (…)
>
> Coleridge did his best work under Wordsworth's influence. After they separated, Coleridge languished poetically and never matched his early achievements. The nature of their collaboration was this: Wordsworth was a father/lover who absorbed Coleridge's self-punishing superego and allowed his turbulent dream life to spill directly into his poetry. The supreme irony (…) is that everything that is great in Coleridge is a negation of Wordsworth. (…) Wordsworth's leading moral idea of nature's benevolence is annihilated in Coleridge. Coleridge sees the chthonian horror in nature that Wordsworth could not acknowledge. The vampires of *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are the true nature-mother. Wordsworth reawakened sleeping pagan nature-cult, then flew from the spectres he had roused. (…) By his pregnant servitude to Wordsworth, Coleridge bore monstrous children who would destroy their father.
>
> (Paglia 2001: 319-20)

SELF-CONFIDENCE REGAINED

Until you understand a writer’s ignorance,
presume yourself ignorant of his understanding.
(Coleridge 1847, 1: 333)

1. KALEIDOSCOPE OF FEELINGS

> My walks (…) were almost daily on the top of Quantock, and among its sloping coombes. With my pencil and memorandum-book in my hand, I was *making studies*, as the artists call them, and often moulding my thoughts into verse, with the objects and imagery immediately before my senses.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 1: 300)

This is how Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834) described his daily routine while he was living in Nether Stowey, Somersetshire, some six and a half kilometres east of Alfoxden[3], where William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) and his sister Dorothy (1771 – 1855) moved to on 16 July 1797. Even though the Wordsworths were not well off, they rented a fairly expensive mansion there, primarily because they wanted to be as close to Coleridge as possible, considering the fact that the three of them were becoming bosom friends.

Just before the Wordsworths moved to Alfoxden, they had been invited to spend a fortnight at Nether Stowey with Coleridge. Charles Lamb (1775 – 1834), a poet and Coleridge's friend from school, joined them there. Coleridge was overwhelmed by the prospect of spending time with his friends, walking and enjoying the scenery of England's west, as underlined by Holmes:

> This sudden influx of friends in the summer of 1797, and the new open-air existence of hill-walking, eating together, and talking poetry long into the night, had a profound effect on Coleridge's imaginative life (…)
>
> (Holmes 2005a: 153)[4]

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[3] We shall retain the commonly used spelling of it, although the correct one is Alfoxton, see Sisman 2006: 183.

[4] Richard Holmes won the 1989 Whitbread Book of the Year Prize for *Coleridge: Early Visions*, and in 1998 the Duff Cooper Prize for *Coleridge: Darker Reflections*, both extensive biographical works on Coleridge. We have consulted both of his books. However, since the editions at our disposal were both from 2005, to distinguish between the two when quoting, the *Early Visions* shall be labeled as Holmes 2005a, and the *Darker Reflections* as Holmes 2005b according to the chronological order of their first publications.

Unfortunately, Sara, Coleridge’s wife, accidentally spilt a skillet of hot milk on his foot immediately upon his friends’ arrival, thus preventing him from going on walking tours during their stay. On one occasion, while everyone went out to the Quantocks for a walk, as the evening was approaching, Coleridge, sitting alone under the lime trees, in the arbour of his friend and next-door neighbour, Thomas Poole (1765 – 1837), feeling sad and lonely for not being with his friends, wrote a poem belonging to his Conversation[5] Poems, *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison*[6], in which he tried to imagine what his friends might have been seeing, at the same time contrasting that image with his accidental imprisonment within the boundaries of the household.

The poem, addressed to Charles Lamb (whom Coleridge most eagerly wanted to show the poetic beauties and delights of the English western countryside as opposed to Lamb’s urban London life), reveals Coleridge’s growing interest in this type of blank verse Conversation Poems, and for the first time, his thoughts about them as an autonomous group. Under Coleridge’s careful command, slowly progressing from ‘mid-day’ (l.11) to ‘late Twilight’(l.57), the poem juxtaposes the pining feelings of imprisonment and those imagined delightful images of the Quantocks and their surroundings seen through his friends’ eyes. The poet beckons the nature to reveal its beauties to his friend so that he can, just as the poet himself has done before, enjoy the charms of nature:

> Ah slowly sink
> Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
> Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
> Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
> Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
> And kindle, thou blue ocean! – So my Friend (…)
> (…) gaze till all doth seem

---

[5] Richard Holmes defines the style of this type of Coleridge’s poems as ‘(…) an intimate, low-key, blank verse style very close to his most personal letters’ (Holmes 2005a: 85).

[6] Before its publication in 1800, in *The Annual Anthology* edited by Robert Southey (1774 – 1843), this poem had appeared in letter versions, one to Southey, the other to Charles Lloyd (1775 – 1839), both of them signed by ΕΣΤΗΣΕ (ES TEE SEE in Greek, standing for STC). On further significance of this Greek expression, see Coleridge 2000, II: 867,n1; Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 136n1; 226n3.

> Less gross than bodily, a living thing
> Which *acts* upon the mind – (…)
>
> *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison*, ll. 32-42 (Coleridge 2004: 137 – 38)

The third stanza opens with a shift in the poet's feelings. Influenced by nature surrounding him in the garden, he no longer feels as if being in a prison, lamenting on not joining his friends on their tour, but declares:

> A delight
> Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
> As I myself were there! (…)
> (…) Henceforth I shall know
> That Nature ne'er deserts wise and pure,
> No scene so narrow but may well employ
> Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
> Awake to love and beauty! And sometimes
> 'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,
> That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
> With lively joy the joys we cannot share.
>
> *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison*, ll. 44-46; 60-67 (*Ibidem*, 138)

Starting in summer 1797, the friendship and collaboration between Coleridge and Wordsworth would gradually grow and evolve, having at its peak their joint publication of *Lyrical Ballads* the following year. An example of the similarity in poetic feelings and sensibilities between the two poets, as well as their strong influence on each other, can be detected even during this early period of their careers. In the first stanza of *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison*, Coleridge, in enumerating places his friends are probably visiting, supposes they are now observing:

> The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
> And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
> Where its slim trunk the Ash from rock to rock
> Flings arching like a bridge; that branchless Ash

> Unsunn'd and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
> Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still
> Fann'd by the water-fall! And there my friends,
> Behold the dark-green file of long lank weeds,
> That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)
> Still nod the drip beneath the dripping edge
> Of the dim clay-stone.
>
> *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison*, ll. 10-19 (*Ibidem*, 137)

Almost a year later, in spring 1798, Wordsworth, still living at Alfoxden with his sister, composed the poem *Lines written in early spring* while he was sitting by the side of a nearby brook. The poem would be published in *Lyrical Ballads* that September, and in the following commentary on it, we can notice that Wordsworth was describing the same place Coleridge had put into verse the previous summer in his *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison*:

> The brook fell down a sloping rock so as to make a waterfall considerable for that country, and across the pool below had fallen a tree, an ash, if I rightly remember, from which rose perpendicularly boughs in search of the light intercepted by the deep shade above. The boughs bore leaves of green that for want of sunshine had faded into almost lily-white; and from the underside of this natural sylvan bridge depended long and beautiful tresses of ivy which waved gently in the breeze that might poetically speaking be called the breath of the waterfall. The motion varied of course in proportion to the power of water in the brook.
>
> (Wordsworth, W. 2005: 331)[7]

This instance introduces the idea that the two poets would not only spend time together, but also share ideas as well as edit and guide each other's verses. Even though they were of different character, Coleridge and Wordsworth had some substantial similarities, which, perhaps, could explain what stands behind this magnetism they felt between each other.

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[7] This note was dictated by Wordsworth in 1843, and published in *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth* in 1857, see Brett, Jones 2005: xxvi of the list of abbreviations as to the identity of the person who took the note Wordsworth dictated; 331 of Notes to the Poems as to the contents of the note; see also Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 137n3. Henceforward, after the surname Wordsworth in quotations, we shall place initials W. for William, and D. for his sister Dorothy for the sake of distinction.

Adam Sisman, a biographer, in his book *The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge* (2006), talks about their coming from respectable middle-class families, losing their fathers early in life leading to a devastating financial situation; both of them being promising students at school and then at Cambridge, however without finishing their studies. Sisman also observes that both poets were radicals, strongly supporting the ideals of the French Revolution, although both distanced themselves from any association with it due to its disappointing and unfortunate outcome. As poets, both wrote politically charged texts and published poems, however without much profit. But what was, perhaps, their striking trait was their belief in poetry as having a paramount effect on English culture; both admired John Milton and William Shakespeare; and surprisingly enough, even though they were still in their twenties in 1797, both decided to retire from the public scene, settle down in rural England and dedicate their lives to writing and studious reflections. Holmes, on the other hand, views the relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth as containing 'the essence of Romantic friendship':

> Coleridge would give Wordsworth unstinting critical admiration for his work, and greatly influence its direction; while the Wordsworths would support Coleridge emotionally, by confirming his fluctuating and uncertain sense of his own identity and genius. Wordsworth wanted above all else to be *a great poet*, and Coleridge told him he was; Coleridge wanted above all else to be *poetically wonderful* and *intellectually inspiring*, and the Wordsworths showed him this was true. *Each gave the other his ideal self*; it was the essence of Romantic friendship.
>
> (Holmes 2005a: 150, our italics)

Holmes continues by claiming that their friendship was of crucial importance in their professional lives, and that, together, they would eventually prove to be the most powerful team in the history of English Romanticism, even though their friendship would fade as years went by. Yet, the curiosity remains as to why Coleridge decided to assume a somewhat submissive role to Wordsworth. As Sisman points out: '(…) [Coleridge] was already a public figure, a radical polemist and a recognised poet whose work was about to appear in a second edition. By comparison, Wordsworth was a nobody. But Coleridge saw what Wordsworth was capable of, and decided that his calling was to help' (Sisman 2006: 179). Whatever the case may be, as soon as the Wordsworths moved to Alfoxden, Coleridge, William and Dorothy started visiting each other, and enjoying their walking tours of the region, exploring it thoroughly, almost on a daily basis. Besides Wordsworth, Coleridge almost immediately felt a sisterly fondness towards Dorothy, whom he admired and loved.

The intertwined nature of their Alfoxden year – frequent visits, shared ideas about nature and its elements, reflected in both Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry respectively – was partly recorded by Dorothy, who started keeping her *Alfoxden Journal*[8] in January 1798, over five months after they had settled in Alfoxden. Although it abounds in everyday trivialities, this journal contains poignant descriptive entries on nature as well, standing as a firm document not only of Coleridge's frequent visits, but also of their mutual inspiration and sharing ideas in a compatible and productive way. There are many instances of influence not only between the poets, but also between Coleridge and Dorothy. Such occasions, though it is sometimes difficult to establish who was influencing who, are evident on close examinations of Coleridge's poems from the Alfoxden period and of Dorothy's *Alfoxden Journal*. For example, the journal entries for 21 and 23 March 1798 read:

> *21st*. We drank tea at Coleridge's. A quiet shower of snow was in the air during more than half our walk. At our return the sky partially shaded with clouds. *The horned moon* was set. Startled two night birds from the great elm tree.
>
> *23rd*. Coleridge dined with us. He brought his ballad finished. We walked with him to the miners house. A beautiful evening, very starry, *the horned moon*.
>
> (Wordsworth, D. 2002: 150, our italics)

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[8] Pamela Woof, the editor of *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals* by Dorothy Wordsworth, explains, in the introduction, the history of both manuscripts.

> The teasing problem with the Alfoxden Journal is that there is now no manuscript. Between Professor William Knight's readings of it in 1889, 1897, and possibly 1913, it has not been seen. (…) Besides, the Alfoxden Journal does, as William Knight remarked in his edition of 1897, bring out 'the closeness of the tie between Coleridge and the Wordsworth household.' It explains the desire of all three writers and friends to repeat the Alfoxden experience in Grasmere.
>
> (Woof 2002: xxviii-ix)

For further information about the Journals, see Woof 2002: ix-xxix.

The following excerpt from Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* thus allows for the reconstruction of the situation that was at progress during March 1798:

> While clombe above the Eastern bar
> *The horned moon*, with one bright Star
> Almost atween the tips.
>
> *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, ll. 201-203 (Coleridge 2005: 61, our italics)[9]

Before finishing this ballad as well as immediately upon its finalisation, Coleridge would recite it to the Wordsworths, possibly inspiring Dorothy to use the same descriptive adjective to refer to the moon both on 21 and 23 March.

While on the subject of joint compositions, in his *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (1981), Thomas McFarland explores ‘the symbiosis’ of Coleridge and Wordsworth, as he calls it. According to him, the complex relationship between the two poets was somewhat unique in the history of literature in that it was not a relationship based upon the inferiority of one as opposed to the superiority of the other, nor was it a relationship between the two already formed and established individuals and poets, nor between a master and his disciple. Their relationship, or symbiosis, the term which perhaps serves the purpose quite suitably, was characterised by the poets’ continuous influence over each other, by their ability to adapt to the style of the other, to project themselves into each other’s modes of thinking, and by frequent rewriting and remodelling each other’s poems and expressions, either for their own purposes or as self-imposed attempts at collaborative intertwinement, as expressed by McFarland:

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[9] This quotation was taken from the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Regarding it, cf. 1834 version:

> Till clomb above the eastern bar
> The horned moon, with one bright star
> Within the nether tip.
>
> *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* ll. 209-211 (Coleridge 2004: 73)

Coleridge kept revising the poem throughout the subsequent editions, changing the archaisms, punctuation, deleting and adding parts of the poem. In the 1817 edition of his *Sibylline Leaves* when the poem appeared for the first time under his own name, he added the marginal gloss. For detailed account on the poem, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 54-99.

> Although most intellectual relationships mutually fecundate their participants at least to some extent, that of Wordsworth and Coleridge was nothing less than a symbiosis, a development of attitude so dialogical and intertwined that in some instances not even the participants themselves could discern their respective contributions.
>
> (McFarland 1981: 57)

The most obvious example of this symbiosis in Coleridge's and Wordsworth's careers, and the most fruitful one, was their composition period in 1797 – 1798, the year of their life in the Quantocks, or *annus mirabilis*[10], as it is frequently referred to due to their immense production, both in quality and quantity. The constant two-way fluctuation of the themes, ideas, expressions and experiments in poetic diction between Coleridge and Wordsworth was at its peak during this period.

Coleridge had more than a simple intellectual influence over Wordsworth. Actually, says McFarland, Coleridge possessed this 'chameleonlike ability to alter his own tone to conform to that of his friend' (McFarland 1981: 59). In favour of this thought, Coleridge's statement expressed in a letter to Southey might be based on true facts. In that letter, he claimed that the ideas behind Wordsworth's Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800)[11] had actually been conceived in such situations of repeated collaborative discussions, so interwoven, that it became impossible to say who had exactly suggested what,:

> Wordsworth's Preface is half a child of my own brain/& so arose out of conversations, so frequent, that with few exceptions we could scarcely either of us perhaps positively say, which first started any particular thought.
>
> (S. T. Coleridge to R. Southey, 29 July 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 830)

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[10] Sisman refers to the period of the most intense friendship and creativity of Coleridge and Wordsworth, i.e. between the summer of 1797 and the summer of 1798 as *annus mirabilis*, see Sisman 2006: 185. McFarland also refers to the most prolific year of Wordsworth and Coleridge's productivity as *annus mirabilis*, as he himself acknowledges that scholars have agreed to refer to it like that; cf. McFarland 1981: 223.

[11] Although the second edition was published in January 1801, it is always referred to as the 1800 edition.

That is why, perhaps, we cannot certainly say that Coleridge had nothing to do with the Preface, basing our belief on the style of the text. What's more, the Preface does not sound as Wordsworth alone composed it as well. Therefore it seems, the symbiotic process would be a possible suggestion because of the fact that, in itself, a product in which two parties incorporate their own ideas and sensibilities normally comes out as something new and autonomous, not necessarily in the likeness of solely one or the other party involved.

This adaptive characteristic Coleridge possessed is evident throughout his poetry of the period in which he enjoyed Wordsworth's close friendship. Coleridge's Wordsworthian style is evident in poems such as *To a Gentleman*[12], *The Mad Monk*[13], and *The Dungeon*[14]. McFarland, for instance, shows the similarities between Coleridge's *The Mad Monk* and Wordsworth's *Intimations Ode* by comparing the following extracts:

> 'There was a time when earth, and sea, and skies,
>   The bright green vale, and forest's dark recess,
> With all things, lay before mine eyes
>   In steady loveliness:
> But now I feel, on earth's uneasy scene,
>   Such sorrows as will never cease; —
>   I only ask for peace;
> If I must live to know that such a time has been!'
>
> *The Mad Monk*, ll. 9-16 (Coleridge 1997: 285)

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,

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[12] Coleridge composed it in 1807 after hearing Wordsworth recite his *Prelude*. Coleridge splendidly uses Wordsworthian blank verse, and upon finishing calls it *To William Wordsworth*. The other title dates back to 1815 when Wordsworth opposed to Coleridge's publishing it, so that Coleridge changed the name and published it. See Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 200.

[13] It was published in *The Morning Post* on 13 October 1800. There are speculations about the authorship of it due to the Wordsworthian style of writing. However, it is also suspected that Coleridge wrote it as either a parody or an imitation. The situation is that much complicated because neither poet claimed the authorship of it, see Mays 2001: 643-45.

[14] Both *The Dungeon* and *The Foster-Mother's Tale* were taken from Coleridge's tragic play *Osorio*. *The Dungeon* is actually a soliloquy of the hero who gets thrown into a dungeon by the Inquisition.

To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore; —
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

Intimations Ode, ll. 1-9 (Wordsworth, W. 2008: 140)

It seems as if the opening of Wordsworth's ode was modelled on Coleridge's poem, at least according to the chronology of both.[15] The phrasings and the rhythmical movements of both are similar. Most probably, these similarities stemmed from the poets' creative symbioses and from Coleridge's ability to adapt to his friend's mode of composition.

Further, there is another aspect of the poets' symbiosis at work – that of reworking or recycling, the most significant and doubtless examples of which are *Lewti; or, the Circassian Love-Chant* and *The Three Graves*[16] by Coleridge. *Lewti* is actually a reworked early Wordsworth's poem called *Beauty and Moonlight* (1786). Coleridge published it in April 1798, and again planned to do so in *Lyrical Ballads* in the same year, but as the collection was to be published anonymously, so as not to jeopardise and harm the reception of *Lyrical Ballads* as well as to avoid attacks on Coleridge (who favoured radical political ideas at the time not supported by the government), it was eventually substituted by his *The Nightingale*[17].

As for *The Three Graves*, it stands as an example of the poets supposed experiment at a joint enterprise. Initially, it was intended to contain six parts, the first two written by Wordsworth, the second two by Coleridge (which he published), and the remaining two were never written. However, it has not been established whether the poem was really a joint project, or simply another example of Coleridge's recycling early Wordsworth's verses. The fact that it was written in Wordsworthian style only supports the idea of the existing symbiosis between the poets.

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[15] Coleridge published *The Mad Monk* in 1800, Wordsworth composed *Intimations Ode* between 1802 and 1806 and published it in 1807.

[16] On further critical texts on *Lewti*, see Jackson 1968, 1: 467, 539; *Ibidem* 2: 147; and on *The Three Graves*, see *Ibidem*, 1: 73-92; 390-91; 2: 196-97.

[17] Coleridge's friendship with the Wordsworths was recorded in *The Nightingale* '(…) probably written at Alfoxden towards the end of April [1798]. Addressed to them both – 'My friend, and Thou our Sister!' – it describes a night expedition to listen to the nightingales (…)' (Holmes 2005a: 191). For connection between *The Nightingale* and Dorothy Wordsworth, see Wordsworth, D. 2002: 153; Woof 2002: 298.

Another joint venture by the poets was a prose composition *The Wanderings of Cain*. Coleridge gave a detailed account of its plan and execution in a Prefatory Note[18], explaining that Wordsworth had provided the first and Coleridge the second canto. He placed its composition in Somersetshire in 1798, took credit for the title, the subject matter and the detailed plan of each of the three cantos' renditions. However, the third one was never finished, and the text remained fragmentary.

Perhaps the most famous attempt at collaboration between Coleridge and Wordsworth was *The Ancient Mariner*. It remained only an attempt because Wordsworth felt the whole idea was getting out of his hand, so he left the composition to be finished by Coleridge. Nonetheless, Wordsworth did provide Coleridge with some of the essential elements of the poem. He suggested the idea of killing the albatross, the vengeance, the horrific persecution of the mariner as a result of his crime, the shipmate zombies, as well as his contribution to the general plan of the poem.

Yet, other instances of the similarity between Coleridge's and Wordsworth's work can be found on further investigation into *Lyrical Ballads*. Thus, Coleridge's *The Dungeon* and Wordsworth's *The Convict*[19] share Wordsworthian style; but *The Dungeon* is also thematically, although not verbally, similar to Wordsworth's *The Old Cumberland Beggar*[20]. As to these last two poems, McFarland comments:

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[18] This is an excerpt of the complete note. For the integral version, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 211-14.

> The title and subject were suggested by myself, who likewise drew out the scheme and the contents for each of the three books or cantos, of which the work was to consist, and which, the reader is to be informed, was to have been finished in one night! My partner undertook the first canto; I the second: and which ever had *done first*, was to set about the third.
>
> (Coleridge 2004: 212)

[19] One of Wordsworth's early works (1796), expressing Wordsworth's political position on the transformation of the penal law. Interestingly, after the first edition of the *Ballads*, Wordsworth withdrew it from the collection and substituted for Coleridge's *Love*.

> Both (…) develop the theme of life in nature *versus* life in an institution, and both eloquently choose the former. (…) Both poems (…) confront the conception of a man isolated from society, and both attack the conventional wisdom that justifies the isolation. Both then assert the view that even social misfits would be better if allowed their freedom in the healing environment of nature.
>
> (McFarland 1981: 79)

Furthermore, the symbiosis McFarland discusses also reflected itself in the fact that Wordsworth borrowed and used Coleridge's blank verse conversational style, even more successfully than Coleridge himself. The fact that it was actually Coleridge who developed the form lies in the chronology of the production of both poets. Before Wordsworth masterfully used it for his *Tintern Abbey* (July 1798), Coleridge had been using it in his *The Eolian Harp* (August 1795), *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison* (July 1797), *Frost at Midnight* (February 1798), and *The Nightingale* (April 1798).

In addition to this, one of the representative examples of Coleridge's influence over Wordsworth can be detected in the latter's project *The Recluse*. Wordsworth placed a special importance on it as a possible achievement of a lifetime. The idea was strongly supported by Coleridge, who deeply believed Wordsworth capable of such an enterprise. Unfortunately, even the most diligent approach to the writing of it did not prove to be rewarding for Wordsworth because, McFarland believes, he was too dependent on Coleridge's critical approach, guidance and direct help, all stemming from the fact that Coleridge was a well-read individual with powerful literary and theoretical/philosophical background, a feature Wordsworth always admired in him. The fact that Coleridge was at that time sinking into a heavy opium addiction, followed by his sailing to Malta in 1804, only to return to England in 1806, made Wordsworth that much anxious. Upon Coleridge's return, and following estrangement from Wordsworth in 1810, during which period Coleridge was in poor physical and psychological state, Wordsworth would have to wait for another five years to receive

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[20] A poem probably finished in January or February 1798, where Wordsworth presents his opinions about the Poor Law.

Coleridge's layout for his *Recluse*. But that plan, out of its complexity, was something that presupposed their previous type of friendship which was non-existent at the time; so, not having the required philosophical frame of mind to carry on with the composition on his own, Wordsworth realised that his *obra prima* was doomed to failure. McFarland observes:

> The relationship of the two men involved distortions as well as fecundations of their abilities. If Wordsworth allowed himself to be pushed into the uncongenial role of philosophical poet in order to satisfy Coleridge's propensities for abstract thought, Coleridge for his part allowed Wordsworth's poetic genius, along with his friend's sparseness of encouragement, to occultate his own poetic self-confidence. (…)
>
> So for Coleridge the symbiosis was a mixture of stimulation and defeat. His self-confidence was assuredly not helped by Wordsworth's critical inaptitude and lack of generosity, which contrast starkly with his own superb appreciation of Wordsworthian accomplishment.
>
> (McFarland 1981: 100-101)

The aftermath of this creative symbiosis between Coleridge and Wordsworth was ruinous for their poetic careers. Namely, when the friendship began to fade away, and the symbiosis simply died out, Wordsworth stopped producing great poems, and Coleridge turned mostly to metaphysics, leaving poetry to his former friend whom he considered a true poet. In a letter to John Thelwall (1764 –1834), a radical politician lecturer and a poet, who visited Somerset in summer 1797, he would say: 'As to Poetry, I have altogether abandoned it, being convinced that I never had the essentials of poetic Genius, & that I mistook a strong desire for original power' (S. T. Coleridge to J. Thelwall, 17 December 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, I: 656).

2. THE JOINT PROJECT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

> I devote myself to such works as encroach not on the antisocial passions – in poetry, to *elevate the imagination* & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life – in prose, to the seeking with patience & a slow, very slow mind (…) [w]hat our faculties are & what they are capable of becoming. – I love fields & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness – and because I have found benevolence & quietness growing within me as that fondness [has] increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implementing it in others — (…)
>
> (S. T. Coleridge to G. Coleridge, 10 March 1798, *in* Coleridge 2000, I: 397, our italics)

In this extract from the letter Coleridge wrote to his brother George, he pointed to his philosophy on imagination that would become the founding element of *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge here mentioned his love of nature, and qualified it as ‘a visionary fondness’. The nature he referred to is the West Country of England where he and Wordsworth had been discussing the revival of ballad form the previous autumn of 1797. Professionally speaking, Holmes states that Coleridge was in a delicate situation at that period because he was torn between the two opposing positions: the journalistic career of writing for the *Morning Post* in London and the poet’s career in the western countryside. The former was promising financial security, whereas the latter was much more challenging and alluring, especially for the fact that it involved living in proximity with Wordsworth and his sister.

That March of 1798, as Holmes states, Coleridge and Wordsworth, for the first time, discussed the possibility of a trip to Germany. Somewhat at the same time Coleridge would finish *The Ancient Mariner,* the two poets decided to try again to collaborate (since the collaboration on *The Ancient Mariner* fell through) so as to gather the means for the planned trip. This time, the collaboration was to embody the joint publication of their plays: Coleridge’s *Osorio,* and Wordsworth’s *The Borderers*. However, this scheme did not last long, since in April they would already be developing the idea for a joint collection of poems. Contrary to Coleridge’s later account of the plan in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) where he would try to portray *Lyrical Ballads* project as a rational and rigidly organised enterprise, the project itself was sudden and somewhat ‘haphazard’, as Sisman refers to it[21]. Coleridge’s account went like this:

> During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set, diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature. The thought suggested itself - (to which of us I do not recollect) - that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at, was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being, who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 441)

In May, Wordsworth wrote to Joseph Cottle[22] (1770 – 1853) asking him to visit them at Alfoxden to discuss the plan for the collection. Cottle visited the poets towards the end of May, and after Coleridge and Wordsworth had presented their plan, Cottle expressed two cardinal objections to it. Namely, he did not like the idea of publishing the poems of both poets in a joint volume. He would have preferred to publish only those written by Wordsworth under his name, i.e. not anonymously. Anonymity was his second objection as, judging from his experience as a publisher, he thought the anonymous publications sold poorly. However, Coleridge managed to persuade him to accept their conditions. He expressed his opinion on the anonymity preference in a letter to Cottle, where he humorously observed that ‘as to anonymous publications, depend on it, you are deceived. Wordsworth’s name is nothing to a large number of persons; mine stinks’ (S. T. Coleridge to J. Cottle, May 1798, in Cottle 1848: 136). Perhaps another reason why they insisted on the strict anonymity was the fact that Wordsworth feared negative reviews.

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[21] Sisman observes that ‘Coleridge’s description of how *Lyrical Ballads* came about in his *Biographia Literaria* was written nearly twenty years afterwards, and rationalized a process that seems to have been much more haphazard’ (Sisman 2006: 233).

[22] Cottle was a bookseller from Bristol who published, among other works, Coleridge and Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*.

As to the nature of the collection, both Coleridge and Wordsworth were aware of its boldness, which reflected itself in two striking novelties in respect to the style and the subject matter employed in *Lyrical Ballads* that were not in vogue of the day amongst their contemporaries. As for the themes, they would combine ‘rural low-life with figures on the edge of fantasy and madness’, whereas at the same time the poets would present those incidents in the ‘daring plainness of (…) style and forms’. As Holmes put it, these provocative features would constitute the ‘aggressive simplicity’ of the collection (Holmes 2005a: 188). The explanation for the themes of the volume was first given in the short introductory Advertisement written by Wordsworth, where he explained the experimental nature of the project and warned the readers that they should have to open their minds to the novelties the poems introduced so as to appreciate their beauties by relinquishing the established code of poetic practices of the day:

> The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers (…) will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness…
>
> Readers of superior judgement may disapprove of the style in which many of these pieces are executed (…). It will perhaps appear to them, that wishing to avoid the prevalent fault of the day, the author sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions are too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity.
>
> (Wordsworth, W. 2005: 49)

Since both poets were drawn to different interests regarding the imaginative construct of their sensibilities, the themes executed in the collection were divided between themselves according to their inclinations. Generally speaking, as Holmes puts it, the themes could be divided into three groups: the supernatural (psychology of the irrational), the rural (social realism) and the reflective (philosophy of the One Life[23]). Holmes asserts that precisely this trait of the volume gave it the uniqueness and the required unity. That unity was reflected in the handling of the marginal figures, verse-narrative, and the pedagogic importance of nature evident in the poems, as becomes clear in the following passage from *Biographia Literaria*:

> In this idea, originated the plan of the LYRICAL BALLADS; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that *willing suspension of disbelief* for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 441-42, our italics)[24]

In July 1798, Wordsworth would, as opposed to Coleridge, experience a period of prolific writing, which would become evident in the bulk of *Lyrical Ballads*, consisting of nineteen of his poems, whereas Coleridge would contribute with only four: *The Ancient Mariner*, *The Nightingale*, *The Dungeon*, and *The Foster-Mother's Tale*. However, due to the length of the *Ancient Mariner*, the total space Coleridge's poems would occupy amounted to approximately one third of the entire volume. It is also evident that the majority of Wordsworth's poems were written throughout 1798, whereas Coleridge would include poems composed earlier. Sisman observes that it was not clear why Coleridge did not submit any other of his unpublished poems. If *Lewti* was rejected on account of its previously having been published, Coleridge could have included his *Eolian Harp* (August 1795), *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison* (July 1797), *Kubla Khan* (October 1797[25]), *Frost at Midnight* (February 1798), or even the unfinished *Christabel* (April 1798), if not any of his lesser poems. Surprisingly, Wordsworth kept his poem *The Convict* (withdrawn from the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*), even though it had previously been published anonymously just as *Lewti* had been. Finally, while Cottle was with the poets in Somerset, they agreed on the title of the volume:

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[23] The expression 'One Life' was used by Coleridge in his poem *The Eolian Harp* in 1795. In his letter to Sotheby, he wrote that '[n]ature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of its own, & that we are all *one Life'*(S. T. Coleridge to W. Sotheby, 10 September 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 864), and that '[i]n Hebrew Poets each Thing has a Life of its own, & yet they are all one Life' (*Ibidem*, 866). For further discussion on the concept of One Life see Abrams 1972: 466-71; Bate 1969: 58-59; Sisman 2006: 218-20; Holmes 2005a: 113.

[24] An interesting formulation of the poets' plan for the volume can be found in *English Romanticism: The Grounds of Belief* (1983) by John Clubbe and Ernest J. Lovell, Jr.: 'One poet (…) set out to naturalize the supernatural, the other to supernaturalize the natural. Both poets proposed to alter basically the reader's mode of perception (…)' (Clubbe and Lovell 1983: 53).

> (…) [T]he volume should be published under the title of *Lyrical Ballads*, though fewer than half of the poems included could accurately be described as ballads. Nor were the ballads of the type that most readers would describe as 'lyrical'; indeed, to use the term 'lyrical' of such poems seemed like an act of defiance, a form of challenge to the conventional reader. A decision was taken to modify the title to *Lyrical Ballads, with a few other poems*, but it might have been more accurate to call the volume *A Few Ballads, with many other poems*.
>
> (Sisman 2006: 247)

Whatever the case, the striking influence of Coleridge continued and reflected itself in Wordsworth's poems. Coleridge's concept of the nature's healing power he had explored in *Frost at Midnight*, as well as his new style of poetry (the intimate, autobiographical-like rendition of his Conversation Poems) served Wordsworth to produce his *Tintern Abbey* (July 1798), where he, supported by Coleridge's technique, developed Coleridge's concepts. The volume was finally published in September 1798, but the Wordsworths and Coleridge would not be in the country to welcome the publication because they had left England on 16 September and were in Germany at that time. While in Germany, they were not present to witness the initial critical reactions to the poems.

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[25] On the difficulty about establishing the exact date of the composition of *Kubla Khan*, see Holmes 2005a: 167, 296; Sisman 2006: 193-94.

In the following four passages, included in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, we shall illustrate the critical reaction to *The Ancient Mariner*, which was generally negative. Southey, who knew beforehand the identity of the authors behind the anonymity of the collection, wrote the following lines in his unsigned review that appeared in *Critical Review* in October 1798:

> In a very different style of poetry, (…) [*The Ancient Mariner*] appears to us perfectly original in style as well as in story. Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible. (…) We do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit. (…)
>
> The ‘experiment’, we think, has failed, not because the language of conversation is little adapted to ‘the purpose of poetic pleasure’, but because it has been tried upon uninteresting subjects. Yet every piece discovers genius; and, ill as the author has frequently employed his talents, they certainly rank him with the best of living poets.
>
> (Jackson 1968, 1: 53-54)

Another review that appeared anonymously in *Analytical Review* in December 1798 regarded *The Ancient Mariner* in the following way:

> We are not pleased with it; in our opinion it has more of the extravagance of a mad german poet, than of the simplicity of our ancient ballad writers.
>
> (*Ibidem,* 52)

An unsigned review in *Monthly Review* issue of June 1799 later attributed to Charles Burney (1729 – 2824), a musical historian who wrote *History of Music* in four volumes, stated:

> Though we have been extremely entertained with the fancy, the facility, and (in general) the sentiments, of these pieces, we cannot regard them as *poetry*, of a class to be cultivated at the expense of a higher species of versification (…)
>
> The author’s first piece (…) is the strangest story of a cock and bull that we ever saw on paper: yet, though it seems a rhapsody of unintelligent wildness and incoherence, (of which we do not

> perceive the drift, unless the joke lies in depriving the wedding guest of his share of the feast) there are in it poetical touches of an exquisite kind.
>
> (Jackson 1968, 1: 55-56)

Finally, in the only review, though anonymous, which appeared in *British Critic* in October 1799, where Coleridge was identified as the author, his *Ancient Mariner* was described as:

> The poem [that] has many excellencies, and many faults; the beginning and the end are striking and well-conducted; but the intermediate part is too long, and has, in some places, a kind of confusion of images, which loses all effect, from not being quite intelligible.
>
> (*Ibidem*, 57-58)

Back in England, Wordsworth tried to discover what had happened with the collection in the meantime. Namely, he had read the criticism of *The Ancient Mariner* and became convinced that the bad reception of the volume was directly indebted to this ballad. Interestingly, he did not comment on the criticism of his own poems. In other words, during the period between October 1798 and October 1799, among other things, critics were referring to his poems as undeserving the effort, worthless of their design, displeasing, tiresomely loquacious, lamentable, too probable, being infantine prattles, or simply gloomy.[26]

In late autumn 1799, Southey was preparing *The Annual Anthology*, and wanted to include Coleridge's *Christabel* (still fragmentary and unpublished), urging Coleridge to finish it for the occasion. Poole also supported that idea, and together with Southey advised Coleridge to stop providing Wordsworth with anonymous poems should the latter choose to publish the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. At that time, Coleridge was in a dilemma about what to do. He had three possibilities: to move to London and pursue his career as a journalist, which was financially appealing; to stay in Somerset and dedicate himself to poetry and philosophy; or to follow his friend Wordsworth north to the Lake District and continue with their walking tours and symbiotic work begun in the Quantocks in 1797. Holmes's commentary on this follows:

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[26] To read full reviews, see Brett, Jones 2005: 371-97.

> With his fatal genius for being all things to all men, for trying to please everyone at once, and for trying to fulfil expectations on every hand, he fell into a pattern of prevarication and fragmentation in much of his work. He dreamed more than he planned, he planned more than he could execute, leaping from one brilliant conception to the next, never still or concentrated for more than a few weeks at a time.
>
> (Holmes 2005a: 243)

During the first half of November 1799, Coleridge went north, and together with Wordsworth, was exploring the Lakes. It felt as some sort of culmination of their nature appreciation, starting in the Quantocks, continuing over the mountains of Germany, and finishing with the landscapes of the north of England.

At that time, Coleridge strongly defended Wordsworth from negative criticism, especially from that of Poole and the Wedgwoods[27]. When Coleridge suggested the possibility of moving north, the three men did not like the idea and were worried that Coleridge 'might become Wordsworth's satellite' (Sisman 2006: 301). Wordsworth's influence over Coleridge had been alarming to Poole even before the German expedition took place, and when Coleridge and the Wordsworths decided to continue on their separate ways in Germany, Poole's letter to Coleridge read that there was an end to his and the Wedgwoods fear about the amalgamation of Coleridge and Wordsworth. The separation of Coleridge, who decided to go to Ratzeburg, from the Wordsworths, who went to Goslar, was good news to those supporting the former.

Finally, in July 1800, Coleridge moved to Keswick to be close to the Wordsworths who were now living in Grasmere. This marked the beginning of the second phase of their close friendship. The project started in the Quantocks would continue in the Lake District for the following three and a half years. Soon after moving to Keswick, he would start working with Wordsworth on the preparation of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).

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[27] Thomas (1777 – 1805) and his brother Josiah (1769 – 1843), the sons of the famous potter Josiah Wedgwood (1730 – 1795), provided Coleridge with £ 150 annuity from 1798 so that he could devote himself solely to poetry and philosophy. Sisman states that:

> (…) [T]he Wedgwoods, (…) like Poole[,] had strong misgivings about Coleridge's idolatry of Wordsworth. They had provided Coleridge with financial support in recognition of his own distinctive genius, not so that he could preach the gospel of Wordsworth.
>
> (Sisman 2006: 298-99)

Wordsworth wanted Coleridge as a co-author and an editor, and Coleridge persuaded Wordsworth to write some sort of a manifesto for the poems' new style and themes in the form of a preface. This Preface to the second edition of the poems would become Wordsworth's most famous non-poetical work. As it was mentioned in the previous section, Coleridge would later claim that the ideas behind the Preface were partially his. In the light of this, Sisman remarks that: ''Ironically, in years to come Wordsworth would disown the preface, maintaining that he 'never cared a straw about the theory', and that he had written it solely to oblige Coleridge. But this is surely very far from how he felt at the time'' (Sisman 2006: 310).

During the process of preparing the material for the second edition of the poems, Wordsworth expressed his negative feelings about *The Ancient Mariner*. He would keep it within the collection only with alterations of its faults – the archaisms and the overall strangeness. Therefore, Coleridge agreed to make some seventy changes to the ballad, including the deletion and inclusion of certain stanzas, spelling changes, and the omission of archaisms. Thus changed, the ballad was retained by Wordsworth, but shifted from its opening place to the penultimate one of the first volume, which ended with Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. Another substitution Wordsworth performed was to exclude his own poem *The Convict* due to its political overtones, and insert Coleridge's *Love*[28] instead.

As far as the ideals behind *Lyrical Ballads* project were concerned, they certainly disintegrated upon the publication of the second edition due to the fact that the two founding factors which constituted the poems in the first place (the anonymity of the enterprise and the balanced contribution of both poets reflected in their respective tasks) were disregarded by Wordsworth. To be precise, it was agreed to publish the second edition solely under Wordsworth's name, while he continued to disregard Coleridge's contributions in many ways. It appeared that Wordsworth did not care much about Coleridge's interests in the project but, Sisman observes as well, that Coleridge himself was ready to fulfil every Wordsworth's wish: '[h]is meekness in complying with Wordsworth's wishes was remarkable. He seemed ready to agree to any demand, no matter what the cost to himself. This was no longer a friendship of equals' (Sisman 2006: 313). In the light of these circumstances, Wordsworth added an apologetic note to *The Ancient Mariner* without discussing it with Coleridge, virtually lamenting its faults and acknowledging the fact that it remained in the collection on his own initiative:

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[28] This poem was published under the name *Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie* in the *Morning Post* in December 1799. Coleridge revised it for the purpose of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. For further information on *Love*, see Holmes 2005a: 250-255.

> I cannot refuse myself the gratification of informing such Readers as may have been pleased with this Poem, or with any part of it, that *they owe their pleasure in some sort to me*; as the Author was himself very desirous that it should be suppressed. The wish had arisen from a consciousness of the *defects* of the poem, and from the knowledge that many persons had been much displeased with it. The Poem of my Friend *has indeed great defects*; first, that *the principal person has no distinct character* (…): secondly, that *he does not act*, but is continually *acted upon*: thirdly, that *the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other*; and lastly, that *the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated*. Yet the Poem contains many *delicate touches of passion* (…); *a great number of stanzas present beautiful images*, and are expressed with *unusual felicity of language*; and *the versification* (…) is *harmonious and artfully varied*. (…) It therefore appeared to me that these several merits (…) gave to the Poem a value which is not often possessed by *better Poems*. On this account I requested of my Friend to permit me to republish it.
>
> (Wordsworth, W. 2005: 319-19, our italics)[29]

Perhaps the most blatant example of Wordsworth's neglecting Coleridge's interests was the last minute exclusion of *Christabel*, which consequently had devastating effect on Coleridge, both physically and professionally. Namely, it was agreed that *Christabel* (which Coleridge was supposed to finish for the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*) should end the second volume of the collection, and, while Wordsworth was preparing the Preface, Coleridge struggled to finish the poem, constantly oppressed with the oscillation between that and his journalistic duties towards the *Morning Post*. The pressure was too strong on Coleridge, and he expressed his feelings on the subject in a letter to James Webbe Tobin (1767 – 1814), slavery abolitionist:

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[29] This was a note, which Wordsworth's attached to the poem, written for the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Sisman concludes by saying that:

> One might think that Wordsworth would have been kinder to have discarded the poem, rather than to have retained it on such terms. To mention Coleridge's willingness to suppress it only deepened his humiliation. Wordsworth's disregard of his friend's feelings contrasted sharply with his own sensitivity. The other note he wrote at the same time warmly defended his own poem 'The Thorn' against the criticism it had received.
>
> (Sisman 2006: 315)

> Every line has been produced by me with labor-pangs. I abandon Poetry altogether – I leave the higher and deeper kinds, to Wordsworth, the delightful, popular and simply dignified to Southey; and reserve for myself the honorable attempt to make others feel and understand their writings, as they deserve to be felt and understood.
>
> (S. T. Coleridge to J. W. Tobin, 17 September 1800, *in* Coleridge 2000, I: 623)

Towards the end of August, Coleridge read the poem to the Wordsworths, which was evidenced by Dorothy in her *Grasmere Journal*; and in October 1800, the poem's two parts were finally finished, upon which Coleridge read it to the Wordsworths again. However, just on the next day, Wordsworth decided to omit it without giving any reasons for such an abrupt decision: *Sunday 29th* [*31st*] … Coleridge read us a part of Christabel' (Wordsworth, D. 2002: 19); '*Sunday Morning 5th October*. Coleridge read a 2nd time Christabel – we had increasing pleasure. (…) *Monday* [*6th*]. (…) [Wordsworth] [d]etermined not to print Christabel with the LB' (*Ibidem*, 24). Perhaps Wordsworth was irritated by Coleridge's constant procrastination in finishing it, which delayed the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. What was clear, though, was the fact that by rejecting *Christabel*, Wordsworth created a complete writer's block in Coleridge. On the other hand, as was expected, Coleridge defended Wordsworth's decision by saying the poem was too long for an anonymous contribution to another poet's collection; it was unfinished[30]; and that its medieval style was discordant with Wordsworth's rural poems. But this last argument might as well have been used for *The Ancient Mariner*, which remained in the collection. Thus, one of the initial ideas of the whole enterprise initiated in 1798 was destroyed, as illustrated by Wordsworth in the Preface to the 1800 edition:

> For the sake of variety and from the consciousness of my own weakness I was induced to request the assistance of a Friend, who furnished me with the poems of the ANCIENT MARINER, the FOSTER-MOTHER'S TALE, the NIGHTINGALE, the DUNGEON, and the Poem entitled LOVE. I should not, however, have requested this assistance, had I not believed that the poems of my

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[30] Wordsworth never complained about this fact. See Holmes 2005a: 284.

> Friend would in a great measure have the same tendency as my own, and that, though there would be found a difference, there would be found no discordance in the colours of our style; as our opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide.
>
> (Wordsworth, W. 2005: 287)[31]

Sisman notes that Wordsworth at one point declared how *Christabel*'s style was so discordant from his own poems that the publication of it was out of the question. To make things clear, Sisman adds:

> But the style of the poem had been known for more than two years. Moreover, Wordsworth's argument seemed to contradict what he had written in the preface, where he had acknowledged 'the assistance of a Friend' in providing five poems, 'for the sake of variety'. Somewhat lamely, he argued that these poems had 'the same tendency as my own, and that, though there would be found a difference, there would be found no discordance in the colours of our style'. In fact, the difference between the two styles was obvious to even the most casual reader. *Wordsworth utilised the same reasoning to explain the exclusion of 'Christabel' as he had used to justify the inclusion of the 'Ancient Mariner'.*
>
> (Sisman 2006: 321, our italics)

What remains is the fact that we do not know exactly why *Christabel* was omitted to this day. Perhaps Wordsworth did not like it, although Dorothy's journal evidently showed the opposite. Perhaps Wordsworth's 'subconscious resentment of Coleridge', to use the terms employed by Sisman, played the crucial factor in this decision.[32] The aftermath was clear: *Christabel* was dropped out and Wordsworth's *Michael*, a pastoral poem completely opposed to *Christabel*, took its place. As mentioned above, this Wordsworth's decision had a powerful impact on Coleridge, making him sink into a deep dejection. In addition to this, Holmes adds that Wordsworth completely, in a way, pushed Coleridge out of the *Lyrical Ballads* picture by using base means that would place a terrible blow both on Coleridge's psyche and his creative ability:

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[31] Holmes observes that:

> On 20 September [1800], Wordsworth sent a first draft of the preface to Cottle, including the following paragraph. 'For the sake of variety, and from the consciousness of my own weakness, I have *again* requested the assistance of a friend who contributed largely to the first volume, and who has now furnished me with *the long and beautiful poem of CHRISTABEL, without which I should not yet have ventured to present a second volume to the public*.' Wordsworth subsequently deleted the phrase 'long and beautiful'; and on 10 October the entire paragraph.
>
> (Holmes 2005a: 283-84, our italics)

The quotations from the Preface used herein are taken from the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, where Wordsworth enlarged and edited the 1800 version of the Preface.

> Having used Coleridge – even, one might think, having exploited him – as advisor and editor, drawing him up to the Lakes for that very purpose, he had entirely imposed his own vision of the collection on the final text. (…) [I]n terms of their friendship, their shared vision of a life dedicated to poetry in the Lakes, it was little short of a catastrophe. Coleridge had submitted himself to Wordsworth in the most humiliating and damaging way; while Wordsworth had shown extraordinary insensitivity to the effect that this rejection would have on Coleridge's powers and self-confidence.
>
> (Holmes 2005a: 285-86)

And again in a completely self-derogatory way, Coleridge continued taking Wordsworth's side against the critical attacks directed at him, and kept working under Wordsworth's command, secretly harbouring desperation and devastation.[33] This terrible blow led Coleridge to eventually admit the consequences of it in December 1800, when he expressed his feelings on the subject in a letter to Francis Wrangham (1769 – 1862), an Archdeacon of East Riding: ‘As to our literary occupations they are still more distant than our residences – He is a great, a true Poet – I am only a kind of a Metaphysician. – He has even now sent off the last sheet of a second Volume of *his* Lyrical Ballads –’ (S. T. Coleridge to F. Wrangham, 17 December 1800, *in* Coleridge 2000, I: 658, our italics). Coleridge was now sinking deeper into his opium addiction, a habit that would follow him till the end of his life.

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[32] Sisman proposed the possibility of Wordsworth's psychological reasons for the decision:

> Wordsworth might not have admitted it to himself, either then or later, but subconscious resentment of Coleridge may have played a part in the decision to reject 'Christabel'. His friend regularly reminded him about the need to make progress with *The Recluse*; this was more important than anything else. Wordsworth thought so too, which made Coleridge's persistence a form of torment. Coleridge's adulation made it impossible for Wordsworth to disappoint him. However much he twisted and turned, Wordsworth could not escape from *The Recluse*. Yet he could not write it either. Frustration bred a suppressed antagonism, which erupted in his cruel dismissal of his friend's work. How dare Coleridge urge him to write *The Recluse* when he could not even finish 'Christabel'?
>
> (Sisman 2006: 322-23)

[33] Consider Sisman's commentary on Coleridge's mental and physical state:

> Wordsworth's apologists have claimed that Coleridge accepted the rejection of 'Christabel' 'cheerfully', and quote his own self-justificatory letters afterwards in support of this argument.

The second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, although known as the 1800 edition, would be published only in January 1801.

> (…) And Coleridge tried to put a brave face on his disappointment. In reality he had suffered a mortal blow; his spirit was broken; he would never be the same man again.
>
> (Sisman 2006: 324-25)

3. A TALKING CURE[34]

The focus of this section is going to be on some of the main aspects of Coleridge's views on imagination and poetry in relation to Wordsworth, expressed in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), which marked the later part of his literary career[35]. It seems rather surprising that he managed to gather enough strength and the clarity of the mind to produce such a colossal work, considering the fact that he had been deeply immersed in opium-taking during 1813 and 1814, prior to 1815, when he began dictating *Biographia Literaria*. Even though his original idea was to write a short preface to his collection of poems, *Sibylline Leaves* (1815), along the process of composing it, the project evolved into what we have today. Coleridge's long-suppressed feeling that his views on poetry and philosophy somewhat differed from Wordsworth's surfaced in 1815, when he received Wordsworth's newly published *Poems* (1815). Namely, it was the preface to those poems that initiated Coleridge's decision to react. Perhaps, dictating *Biographia Literaria*, or, psychologically speaking, letting go of the repressed emotions regarding Wordsworth's opinions in respect of his own, had a therapeutic dimension for Coleridge, as Holmes observes:

> In a Freudian sense, one may think of it as a 'talking cure', an attempt to come to terms with his own achievements and failures, to re-edit his 'literary life and opinions' (its final subtitle) into a retrospective form – part fact, part fiction, part theory – which had both meaning and justification.
>
> (Holmes 2005b: 378)[36]

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[34] The title for this section was inspired by Holmes who uses the same expression to refer to *Biographia Literaria*.

[35] As to a detailed impact of Coleridge's philosophy, his influences as well as the list for further reading on the subject of *Biographia Literaria*, amongst other philosophical writings Coleridge produced, see Hamilton 2002: 170-86; and Newlyn 2002: 256-57, since, in our present enterprise, it was not our objective to pursue that aspect of the poet's work.

[36] On the history of its production, as well as its organization, see Engell 2002: 59-74; Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 372-76; Holmes 2005b: 378-418; *passim.* In a letter to R. H. Brabant dated 29 July 1815, Coleridge announced the finishing of *Biographia Literaria* where he, among other things mentioned that:

As early as 1802, Coleridge openly began to express his opinion that, after all, his and Wordsworth's conceptions of poetry may have differed. However, these expressions remained in the epistolary form until *Biographia Literaria* appeared. Writing to William Sotheby (1757 – 1833), who was a translator and playwright apart from other things, Coleridge, as well as mentioning metre and poetic diction, expressed for the first time his dissatisfaction with Wordsworth's ideas explained in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: 'Indeed, we have had lately some little controversy on this subject – & we begin to suspect, that there is, somewhere or other, a *radical* Difference [in our] opinions' (S. T. Coleridge to W. Sotheby, 13 July 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 812). Somewhat similar opinion is expressed in Coleridge's letter addressed to Robert Southey: '(…) I rather suspect that some where or other there is a radical Difference in our theoretical opinions respecting Poetry – / this I shall endeavour to go to the Bottom of – (…)' (S. T. Coleridge to R. Southey, 29 July 1802, *Ibidem*, 830). Coleridge's opinions regarding this 'radical Difference' between himself and Wordsworth reached their full confirmation in *Biographia Literaria*. Nonetheless, the onset, or the intimations of his preoccupation with such concepts as imagination[37], fancy, poem, poetry, poet, poetic diction, metrics, and the critique of Wordsworth are evident in the quoted letters to Sotheby and Southey.

It is not, perhaps, surprising that Coleridge would start voicing his opinions on these concepts in July 1802, because, as Holmes tells us, it was then that the Wordsworths went away, only to return to Grasmere in October. 'Their absence seems to have had a curiously liberating effect on Coleridge' (Holmes 2005a: 325). Therefore, being out of their influence, Coleridge could studiously reflect on Wordsworth's concepts; and his correspondence expressed his doubts and, figuratively speaking, announced the appearance of a Coleridge as a

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> I have given a full account (…) of the Controversy concerning Wordsworth's Poems & Theory, in which my name has been so constantly included – I have no doubt, that Wordsworth will be displeased – but I have done my Duty to myself and to the Public, in (as I believe) completely subverting the Theory & in proving that the Poet himself has never acted on it except in particular Stanzas which are the Blots of his Compositions.
>
> (S. T. Coleridge to R. H. Brabant, 29 July 1815, *in* Coleridge 2000, IV: 579)

[37] For a comparative overview of imagination in neoclassical and romantic terms respectively, see Hill 1977: 11-13.

critic. Perhaps one of the most famous distinctions between the two poets involved their notion of imagination and fancy. In September 1802, in another letter to Sotheby, Coleridge mentioned ‘Fancy, or the aggregating Faculty of the mind – not *Imagination*, or the *modifying*, and *co-adunating* Faculty’ (S. T. Coleridge to W. Sotheby, 10 September 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 865-66)[38]. Much later, in *Biographia Literaria*, he would state that:

> [r]epeated meditations led me first to suspect - (and a more intimate analysis of the human faculties, their appropriate marks, functions, and effects, matured my conjecture into full conviction), - that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or, at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 1: 204)[39]

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[38] On the history of the concepts of imagination and fancy prior to Coleridge’s redefining them, see Holmes 2005b: 394n. On the distinction between these concepts, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 416-17nn5-7; 449n6. Coleridge opened Chapter 10 of *Biographia Literaria* by calling imagination *esemplastic*:

> "ESEMPLASTIC. The word is not in Johnson, nor have I met with it elsewhere." Neither have I! I constructed it myself from the Greek words, εις εν πλαττειν, i.e. to shape into one; because, having to convey a new sense, I thought that a new term would both aid the recollection of my meaning, and prevent its being confounded with the usual import of the word imagination.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 1: 279)

On further information, see Coleridge 1847, 1: 279. Also, in his *Table Talk*, he compares imagination and fancy with delirium and mania. For integral text on this comparison, see Coleridge 1836: 305-07.

[39] The edition used herein was also used by Engell in his essay on *Biographia Literaria* published in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* (2002). He collaborated with W. Jackson Bate on the publication of the most fully annotated edition of *Biographia Literaria* (1983), which is the vol. 7 of the *Collected Works*, whose general editor is Kathleen Coburn.

As to the nature of our close reading of the crucial passages from both Coleridge and Wordsworth, the following pages will contain frequent quotations. In this way, keeping ourselves in the background, we hope to bring forth the direct evidence supporting the idea of the healing power of *Biographia Literaria*, which helped Coleridge regain the self-esteem and individual voice previously having been overshadowed by his subordination to Wordsworth.

Coleridge was prompted to explain his understanding of the difference between imagination and fancy after Wordsworth had published his 1815 *Poems*, where he had stated his own opinion on the subject in the preface, utilising Coleridge's concepts:

> To the mode in which Fancy has already been characterised as the Power of *evoking* and *combining*, or, as my friend Mr. Coleridge has styled it, 'aggregative and associative Power,' my objection is *only* that the definition is too general. To *aggregate* and to *associate*, to *evoke* and to *combine*, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy (…)
>
> (Wordsworth, W. 1832: xxxiii, our italics)[40]

Namely, at the end of Chapter 12 of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge objected to the formulation given by Wordsworth:

> I reply, that if, by the power of *evoking* and *combining*, Mr. Wordsworth means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the *aggregative* and *associative*, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the Imagination; and I am disposed to conjecture, that he has mistaken the co-presence of Fancy with Imagination for the operation of the latter singly. A man may work with two very different tools at the same moment; each has its share in the work, but the work effected by each is distinct and different.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 1: 368-69, our italics)

As James Engell states in his essay on *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge was not satisfied with Wordsworth's definition, because Wordsworth's associative account on imagination could not answer how the 'powers of imagination to perceive, and to create, and to transform and unify our perceptions' are formed. It just explained how people associate these perceptions (Engell 2002: 60-61). Such ‘dialogue of equals’, to use Holmes’s term, prompted Coleridge to give his famous definition of imagination and fancy at the end of Chapter 13, which also marked the end of Volume I of *Biographia Literaria*:

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[40] Coleridge said in Chapter 4 of *Biographia Literaria* that Wordsworth's explanation differed from his own because their objects were different. However, he also said that:

> (…) it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from the different effects to conclude their diversity in kind; while it is my object to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 1: 209)

> The Imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create: or, where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.
>
> FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 1: 378)

Kathleen Wheeler, in *Sources, processes and methods in Coleridge’s Biographia Literaria* (1980), tells us that Coleridge defined primary imagination as operating on the unconscious level, and that its nature stays unknown to the conscious mind. It produces our perceptions of everything around us, and composes this world likewise. In other words, primary imagination constitutes what we think we receive passively. Wheeler explains this further by stating that since primary imagination works from our unconsciousness, all the material our consciousness processes seems to be ‘ready made’, as Coleridge put it. Thus, secondary imagination takes care that our perceptive load surfaces to the conscious level. As for fancy and memory, she underlines that they are not creators, but that they only rearrange and recombine the materials which are merely ‘fixities and definites’. Wheeler concludes by separating three moments in our experience:

> (1) primary imagination, perception, senses, and, loosely, the unconscious realm; (2) fancy, memory, understanding and the realm of everyday ordinary consciousness; (3) secondary

> imagination, or the realm of poetic-philosophic consciousness. The first and third are both characterized by a quality of 'direct beholding', while the second is distinguished by its deductive, consecutive nature. The second has its proper role only as a mediating power between the two, as a kind of fulcrum, or a resting or assimilative stage.
>
> (Wheeler 1980: 139)[41]

Thus, in the binding Chapter 13, that operates as a sort of a bridge between the first (philosophical) and the second (critical) volumes of *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge attributes to imagination a metamorphic power to create entirely new and harmonious objects, as opposed to fancy, which only recombines and rearranges the existing ones, without the power to unify or transform.

Apart from the definition of imagination and fancy, Coleridge dealt with the concepts of a poem, poetry and poet as well. In Chapter 14, the opening chapter of Volume II, Coleridge pointed to his belief that all controversy about the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* stemmed from Wordsworth's Preface. The starting point in Wordsworth's erroneous opinions was when he extended the style of *Lyrical Ballads* to poetry in general, rejecting 'as vicious and indefensible all phrases and forms of speech that were not included in what he (…) called the language of real life' (Coleridge 1847, 2: 443). Such formulations provoked continuous criticism; and, so as to clearly state to what extent he agreed with Wordsworth, or what the differences in their ideas were, Coleridge proceeded firstly by defining a poem and poetry, respectively.

He began by stating that both a poem and a prose text have the same elements, and that different combinations of those elements are conditioned by different objects of both concepts. However, we must be careful in designating the object of a poem because, if the object is simply to ‘facilitate the recollection of any given facts or observations by artificial arrangement’ (Coleridge 1847, 2: 447), any type of metrical composition containing some sort of a rhyme scheme could be called a poem. To illustrate this point, he offered a rather amusing example of ‘Thirty days hath September, / April, June, and November’ (*Idem*). In this way he showed that superficially added metre and rhyme do not constitute a poem.

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[41] Catherine Miles Wallace, in her *The Design of Biographia Literaria* (1983), discusses fancy as one whose:

> (…) associative power collects from the artist's past those words and images and rhythms generally suitable to his present purpose. Yet these remain disparate heaps of things until imagination begins to work with and within what it has 'sent' fancy to gather. In imagination's final product, the diverse materials are fragments no longer, but parts of a whole which places each within a network of relations. These relations are so many and so intimate that each part is rendered integral both to the other parts and to the whole as such. (…) [F]ancy's function is merely instrumental, but it is nonetheless a crucial instrument.
>
> (Wallace 1983: 127)

Coleridge then proposed pleasure as the immediate object of a metrical composition, only to say that, in itself, this does not necessarily make the distinction between a poem and prose, whose immediate object is truth (as in works of science[42] or history), because novels and romances, too, may have pleasure as their immediate object, without being neither metrical compositions nor works of science or history. However, even if the composition in question, with superadded metre, contained pleasure as its object, it would still not be categorised as a poem because ‘nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise’ (Coleridge 1847, 2: 448). In other words, Coleridge held that should metre be added, everything else must be in unison with it. This is the place in *Biographia Literaria* where he gave his final, deduced definition of a poem:

> A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species - (having *this* object in common with it) - it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*.
>
> (*Idem*)

In other words, Coleridge said that a ‘*legitimate* poem’ must be the one whose parts ‘mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement’ (Coleridge 1847, 2: 449). In the same paragraph, he underlined how the reader should approach the given composition:

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[42] Engell tells us that Coleridge’s distinction between poetry and science ‘echoes Wordsworth’s discussion of the Man of Science and the Poet in the 1800 Preface’ (Engell 2002: 69). On this similar view shared by both poets, see Wordsworth, W. 2005: 301-02n50. Engell also observes that Romantic criticism was generally interested in the subject of Science versus Art ‘in part because of the rise of science and applied technologies and their challenge to the importance of poetry in society and personal life’ (Engell 2002: 69). For detailed account on science and technology as well as on arts and culture in the Romantic period, see Ruston 2007: 33-58.

> The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but *by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attraction of the journey itself.*
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: our italics)

This was how Coleridge defined a poem. What followed was his discussion on poetry. He held that answering the question ‘what is poetry?’ would be nearly the same as answering ‘what is a poet?’ Perhaps this view was conceived in July 1802, in a letter to Sotheby, where Coleridge had reflected on the notion of a poet as a metaphysician:

> It is easy to clothe Imaginary Beings with our own Thoughts & Feelings; but to send ourselves out of ourselves, to *think* ourselves in to the Thoughts and Feelings of Beings in circumstances wholly & strangely different from our own (…) and who has achieved it? Perhaps only Shakespeare. (…) [A] great Poet must be (…) a profound Metaphysician. He may not have it in logical coherence, in his Brain & Tongue; but he must have it by *Tact* / for all sounds, & forms of human nature he must have the *ear* of a wild Arab listening in the silent Des[e]rt, the eye of a North American Indian tracing the footsteps of the Enemy upon the Leaves that strew the Forest –; the *Touch* of a Blind Man feeling the face of a darling Child (…)
>
> (S. T. Coleridge to W. Sotheby, 13 July 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 810)

Back to *Biographia Literaria*, his definition of a poet would read in the following way:

> The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and, (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of Imagination.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 451)[43]

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[43] As to the fact that this passage was influenced by Friedrich Schelling (1775 – 1854), German idealist philosopher, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 495n2. Coleridge also equalised a poet and a philosopher while discussing Shakespeare in Chapter 15 of *Biographia Literaria* by saying that ‘ [n]o man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher’ (Coleridge 1847, 2: 459).

For the sake of comparison, we shall illustrate here Wordsworth's understanding of a poet, which was added to the Preface of his 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*:

> What is a Poet? (…) He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.
>
> (Wordsworth, W. 2005: 300n50)

Wordsworth's definition of a poet, evident in the passage above, regards him as a man with heightened sensibility, stressing the importance of emotions. It is someone whose knowledge of human nature and ability to sympathise with others set him apart from the rest of his fellowmen. We can notice that Coleridge's definition is more inclined towards the reconciliation of a poet with a philosopher, just as he held that poetry and prose could be reconciled, which he alluded to in the idea that 'poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem' (Coleridge 1847, 2: 450). In this respect, philosophy can also be poetry, and vice versa. Thus what can be deduced is that the '*ideal* perfection', Coleridge referred to, would aim at uniting truth and pleasure, and as Wheeler puts it:

> Philosophy becomes poetry when the genius of expression, musicality, and feeling are wedded to intellectual genius. In this way poetry is said to contain and supersede philosophy. But how can pleasure be said to supersede truth? Clearly the precise relation of truth to pleasure is the central issue. If the highest philosophy is poetry, and the best poetry is philosophy, then at the most perfect stage of intellectual experience, pleasure and truth must be identical (…)
>
> (Wheeler 1980: 124)

In Chapter 17 of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge examined the concept of poetic diction and challenged Wordsworth's opinions on it. In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth referred to the language of poetry he used and thought fit for that species of composition as, for example, ‘the real[44] language of men’ (Wordsworth 2005: 287), ‘language really used by men’ (*Ibidem*, 289n11), ‘a plainer and more emphatic language’ (*Ibidem*, 290), ‘the very language of men’ (*Ibidem*, 295), ‘language really spoken by men’ (*Ibidem*, 299n50). Coleridge objected to such a view by saying:

> My objection is, first, that in any sense this rule is applicable only to certain classes of poetry; secondly, that even to these classes it is not applicable, except in such a sense, as hath never by any one (…) been denied or doubted; and lastly, that as far as, and in that degree in which it is practicable, it is yet as a rule useless, if not injurious, and therefore either need not, or ought not to be practised.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 475)

He went on by quoting a passage from the Preface where Wordsworth explained his choice of low and rustic life as a model for poetic expression. According to Wordsworth, human passions are better cultivated, more mature and free in rural environments. Found thus in natural surroundings, they can be rightly contemplated, expressed, and ultimately, easily understood. Above all, such feelings may be fused with beauties from nature.[45] Considering this idea from the poems of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge concluded that in many of them, the characters were not taken from that social background, generally accepted as low and rustic, as well as that the language they used did not necessarily reflect their professions or status. He made himself clear by saying:

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[44] In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge opposed to using the adjective ‘real’. He proposed ‘ordinary’ or ‘*lingua communis*’ (common language), because if both low and rustic language and high-flown diction were purified and scanned for imperfections, the result would be common to both, i.e. the two idioms would not differ from one another. See Coleridge 1847, 2: 488-89.

[45] The passage from the Preface went like this:

> Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.
>
> (Wordsworth, W. 2005: 290)

> The thoughts, feelings, language, and manners, of the shepherd-farmers (…), as far as they are actually adopted in those poems, may be accounted for from causes, which will and do produce the same results in every state of life, whether in town or country.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 477)

For Coleridge, in *Biographia Literaria*, it is not enough just to be in nature in order to prosper and be stimulated creatively. Certain aspects of personality are conditionally needed for such an influence of nature to take effect. He explained this view convinced that:

> (…) for the human soul to prosper in rustic life a certain vantage-ground is pre-requisite. It is not every man that is likely to be improved by a country life or by country labours. *Education*, or *original sensibility*, or *both*, must *pre-exist*, if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant. And where these are not sufficient, the mind contracts and hardens by want of stimulants; and the man becomes selfish, sensual, gross, and hard-hearted.
>
> (*Ibidem*, 478, our italics)

Furthermore, Wordsworth at one point in the Preface said that he has 'proposed to [him]self to imitate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men' (Wordsworth, W 2005: 295). Coleridge, however, opposed him by suggesting that '(…) in a poem, (…) it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity' (Coleridge 1847, 2: 482)[46]. Wordsworth developed this further by proposing that the language adopted from low and rustic men be grammatically corrected before employed, because as such, it would be able to serve as the best vehicle for conveying 'the best objects' 'in simple and unelaborated expressions' (Wordsworth, W 2005: 290). Coleridge quoted Wordsworth here and objected to the whole idea because, if the rustic language were stripped of its colloquialisms and errors, it would not be different from the language of any average man. Such a view becomes clear in this extract from *Biographia Literaria*:

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[46] Interestingly, Southey, in his 1798 review of *Lyrical Ballads* already quoted in this section, when discussing Wordsworth's poem *The Thorn*, wrote that 'the author should have recollected that he who personates tiresome loquacity, becomes tiresome himself' (Brett, Jones 2005: 372).

> (…) a rustic's language, purified from all provincialisms and grossness, and so far re-constructed as to be made consistent with the rules of grammar (…) will not differ from the language of any other man of common sense, however learned or refined he may be(…) [T]he rustic, from the more imperfect development of his faculties, and from the lower state of their cultivation, aims almost solely to convey insulated facts, (…) while the educated man seeks chiefly to discover and express those connexions of things, or those relative bearings of fact to fact, from which some more or less general law is deducible. For facts are valuable to a wise man, chiefly as they lead to the discovery of the indwelling law, which is the true being of things, the sole solution of their modes of existence, and in the knowledge of which consists our dignity and our power.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 485)

What is more, Coleridge believed that rustics' vocabulary was incapable of constituting the best language for poetry, and therefore would not be able to convey all the mind's finesses and intricacies. On the contrary, he thought that '[t]he best part of human language (…) is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself' (*Ibidem,* 486).

In Chapter 18 of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge elaborated on the concept of metre, focusing on Wordsworth's claim that 'there neither is nor can be any essential[47] difference' between the language of prose and metrical composition (Wordsworth, W 2005: 298). First of all, Coleridge held that prose 'differs, and ought to differ, from the language of conversation; even as reading ought to differ from talking' (Coleridge 1847, 2: 493-94). Then, he observed that we should not ask whether prose and metrical compositions had the word order or lines equally suitable to both; but whether such occurrences would serve one and sound odd when applied to another. As for the answer, he concluded that 'this unfitness of each for the place of the other frequently will and ought to exist' (*Ibidem,* 496).

He proceeded defending his position in discussion about the origin of metre, its effects, and its form. In July 1802, in his letter to Sotheby, Coleridge stated that '*metre itself* implies *passion*, i.e. a state of excitement, both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of the Reader'

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[47] On Coleridge's discussion about the term 'essence', see Coleridge 1847, 2: 493-95.

(S. T. Coleridge to W. Sotheby, 13 July 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 812). Now, in *Biographia Literaria*, he moved on to suggest two conditions for the employment of metre:

> First, that as the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement. Secondly, that as these elements are formed into metre artificially, by a voluntary act, with the design and for the purpose of blending delight with emotion, so the traces of present volition should throughout the metrical language, be proportionately discernible. Now, these two conditions must be reconciled and co-present. There must be not only a partnership, but a union; an interpenetration of passion and will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 497)

As for the effects of metre, Coleridge pointed to its ability to provoke the shift on our feelings and attention by 'continued excitement of surprise, and by quick reciprocations of curiosity' (*Ibidem*, 498). Poetically, he compared metre with yeast, saying that in itself, it is 'worthless or disagreeable (...) but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionally combined' (*Ibidem*, 499). Formally speaking, Coleridge believed that metre represented 'the proper form of poetry', and that poetry would be 'imperfect and defective without metre' (*Ibidem*, 502). Thus, as poetry is the embodiment of passion, and as its creation involves being in a state of unusual excitement, the suitable variation in language therefore used should be different from the language we employ in everyday communication. Finally, before Chapter 22 of *Biographia Literaria*, where Coleridge would talk about Wordsworth's defects and excellences, and after extensive examples of verses supporting all the aforesaid, he closed Chapter 21 with a general and concise observation that if all the instances of Wordsworth's theory from his Preface were adapted to his poems, at least two-thirds of the bulk would have to be deleted due to their not reflecting what Wordsworth proposed. Likewise, in arguing about Coleridge's opposition to Wordsworth's theory, Wallace summarises:

> A poem's best speaker or its best character must be ideal, or a fully representative instance of the universal that the poem reveals. The best language for a poem is relational or philosophic.

> It follows from all this that the best model for the poet, or the best diction for poetry, is the language of the impassioned philosopher – the poet himself.
>
> (Wallace 1983: 119)

In Chapter 22, Coleridge generally observed that Wordsworth as if somehow, by insisting on the experimental nature of his poems, as well as by failing to successfully engage it but in a negligible number of them, missed to see the point that ‘the natural tendency of the poet’s mind is to great objects and elevated conceptions’ (Coleridge 1847, 2: 547). He consequently discussed five defects in Wordsworth, and as the first one he mentioned Wordsworth’s sporadic ‘inconstancy of style’. By saying that, Coleridge wanted to refer to:

> (…) the sudden and unprepared transitions from lines or sentences of peculiar felicity - (at all events striking and original) - to a style, not only unimpassioned but undistinguished. He sinks too often and too abruptly to that style, which I should place in the second division of language, dividing it into the three species; first, that which is peculiar to poetry; second, that which is only proper in prose; and third, the neutral or common to both.
>
> (*Ibidem*, 548)

The second one involved his frequent ‘*matter-of-factness*’[48], a term Coleridge coined to describe Wordsworth’s unnecessary detailed accounts in representation that did not adhere to the understanding of the storyline, as well as his use of ‘accidental circumstances’ – sharply criticised even by contemporary critics, simply because of his choice of characters. The third defect had to do with his tendency to use the ‘dramatic form’, which due to the disparity between the language of characters and of the poet often led to ‘incongruity of style’:

> Third: an undue predilection for the *dramatic* form in certain poems, from which one or other of two evils result. Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then

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[48] In a letter to Southey, Coleridge wrote that Wordsworth had written a number of poems, the greater number of which he thought ‘very excellent Compositions / but here & there a daring Humbleness of Language & Versification, and a strict adherence to matter of fact (…) and I have thought & thought again / & have not had my doubts solved by Wordsworth’ (S. T. Coleridge to R. Southey, 29 July 1802, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 830).

> there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks.
>
> (Coleridge 1847, 2: 564)

Defect number four included his repetition, verbosity, stagnation of thought development, whereas number five embodied his frequent '*mental* bombast', i.e. a concept that renders thoughts and images too large for the given subject of the poem – a defect, according to Coleridge, 'of which none but a man of genius is capable' (*Ibidem*, 565).

The fact that Coleridge thought Wordsworth was a man of a wonderful mind can be detected in his *Biographia Literaria*, where Coleridge gave perhaps one of the most beautiful contemporary overviews of excellences Wordsworth received in his life time. Due to our awareness that discussing those excellences in greater detail, especially supplying the quotations from Wordsworth's poetry Coleridge used as illustrations, would not be relevant to the nature of these pages, we shall, therefore, limit ourselves to illustrating them in brief fashion. With that in mind, Coleridge enumerated the excellences in the following order: 'an austere purity of language, both grammatically and logically'; 'weight and sanity of the thoughts and sentiments – won, not from books, but from the poet's own meditative observation'; 'the sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs'; 'the perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions'; 'a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility'; and lastly, 'the gift of Imagination' (Coleridge 1847, 2: 572-83 *passim*.). All this leads towards the culmination of Chapter 22 where Coleridge announced: 'What Mr. Wordsworth *will* produce, it is not for me to prophecy: but I could pronounce with the liveliest convictions what he is capable of producing. It is the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM' (*Ibidem*, 590).

WILLINGLY SUSPENDED DISBELIEF

In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell

Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!

Christabel, ll. 255-56 (Coleridge 2004: 169)

1. FRAGMENTED WHOLENESS

> The reason of my not finishing Christabel is not that I don't know how to do it; for I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire form beginning to end in my mind; but I fear I could not carry on with equal success the execution of the Idea – the most difficult, I think, that can be attempted to Romantic Poetry – I mean witchery by daylight. I venture to think that Geraldine, so far as she goes, is successful.
>
> (Coleridge 2004: 160)

In July 1833, Coleridge expressed this idea, recorded in his *Table Talk* (1836). *Christabel*, one of the three most important and most famous of Coleridge's poems – the other two being *Kubla Khan* and *The Ancient Mariner* – was published together with *Kubla Khan* and *The Pains of Sleep* in 1816. What is interesting about this poem, which together with *Kubla Khan* and *The Ancient Mariner* explores supernatural subjects, is the fact that it remained fragmentary. Coleridge never managed to finish it, and apart from sporadically rewriting and remodelling some of the lines, did little to clarify the ambiguities it contains, let alone to bring it to its satisfactory conclusion. Its 'Part I' and 'The Conclusion to Part the First' were written during the *annus mirabilis*, namely, in the spring of 1798, while Coleridge and the Wordsworths were living in the Quantocks.[49] On the other hand, Coleridge wrote 'Part II' and 'The Conclusion to Part the Second' while living in the Lake District, almost three years after the first part, in August-September 1800.

Remaining a fragment was not solely the destiny of *Christabel*. *Kubla Khan* is also fragmentary, while *The Ancient Mariner*'s completeness never satisfied Coleridge. This is how McFarland, in his *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (1981), comments on the fragmentation of Coleridge's supernatural triad. McFarland argues that the very fragmented nature of a masterpiece paradoxically reflects its wholeness 'achieved by its inachievement' (McFarland 1981: 3). In other words, a fragment in itself, in its own, private universe, lives a life of wholeness and unity, and should not be disturbed by the imposition of being completed, which, paradoxically, would not have been possible.

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[49] As to the date of the composition of the first part of *Christabel*, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 158. However, in the preface to *Christabel*, Coleridge wrongly stated that the first part was written in 1797, see Coleridge 2004: 161.

People should be aware of the fragmented nature of everything that surrounds them. We live in a world of 'incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin', a triad to which McFarland ascribes the name 'diasparactive' (*Ibidem*, 4), the term borrowed from Greek, meaning *torn to pieces*. And in reality, everything truly *is* fragmentary, and yet at the same time, paradoxically complete in its incompleteness. This paradox, especially in poetry, allows us to convey the elusiveness, to allude to what generally would be impossible to put into words. Take, for example, this text of ours. The very idea of finishing it is fragmentary and diasparactive, because it would still be less developed than someone else's hypothetical work on the same subject, which in turn would, in itself, be incomplete when compared to the 'ideal thesis on Coleridge' that, unfortunately, is non-existent. Thus, the concentric circles of our diasparactive lives, contained in our diasparactive everyday reality, spread ad infinitum.[50]

Accordingly, this general rule, explained by McFarland, can be applied to Coleridge and his work. Not only some of his major poems and prose texts, but also his personal life and relationships abound in ruins, incompleteness, and fragmentation. The relationships with his mother, siblings, wife, children, and friends show this downfall from the pined-for wholeness towards the inevitable fragmentation. Moreover, the reflection of the Romantic concept of the sense of longing for the unattainable infinity can be detected in all Romantics, including Coleridge. Some of the issues this train of thought raises deal with whether it could be possible to be complete in the world of fragments; whether one could possibly create something complete at all; whether the essence of existence lies in longing for the wholeness which, ironically, can never be reached; whether this longing in itself is sufficient enough; or even, whether the idea of *weltschmertz* is the product of the realisation of this inability.

McFarland continues by observing that in Coleridge's writings, this longing for the absent reality, or the ultimate wholeness, is mirrored in *Kubla Khan*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and in *Christabel*, where the distant land of these stories is moved in time and set in medieval surroundings. *Christabel* in particular, with its medieval background, raises the question of whether or not it could or should have been completed in the first place. This idea has perplexed critics ever since the poem's publication in 1816. However, Coleridge's biographer Richard Holmes notes that Coleridge kept thinking about finishing *Christabel* till the end of his life, and that his correspondence provides us with the evidence of various difficulties he experienced along the way – one of them being his persistent addiction to opium.

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[50] McFarland exemplifies this endless chain of fragmentation like this:

> My taking of books from my shelves to find these illustrations is itself a piece of diasparactive awareness. The books are fragments of my personal library; yet my personal library is in its turn radically fragmented and incomplete when compared to the New York Public Library; which again is radically fragmentary and incomplete when compared to the ideal library – which does not exist.
>
> (McFarland 1981: 5)

Holmes underlines, as well, that due to technical reasons stemming from *Christabel*'s structure, the poem was destined to remain a fragment. Hypothetically speaking, Coleridge would have established his reputation as a great poet as early as 1798 if his *Ancient Mariner* and the first part of *Christabel* had been published then, in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. In this was, the archetypes of the sailor and the maiden would have concluded his investigation into the supernatural by juxtaposing the masculine principle of a guilty sailor and the feminine principle of the innocent maiden, both united in their respective daemonic experiences at merciless sea and in the Gothic castle. It is true that such publication would have caused a complete disparity between Coleridge's mysterious and Wordsworth's rural poems, but, at the same time, it would have undoubtedly presented Coleridge in the light of the uniqueness of his poetic abilities.

The structure of *Christabel* is completely different from that of *The Ancient Mariner*. It is not a traditional ballad with its flowing sequences of narration, where the images would rapidly change while the storyline would progress towards its denouement. It does not have a typical ballad-like four-lined stanza divisions or rhyme schemes. On the contrary, *Christabel*'s structure has a mystical twist to it. Holmes attributes 'chant-like' or 'trance-like' (Holmes 2005a: 287) character to it and asserts that it was exactly the 'haunting suggestiveness of atmosphere, an incantation of psychological symbols and spells' (*Idem*), which resisted any action, that is, dramatic/narrative progress towards the final resolution.

The first part, set at night in the woods and the castle echoing the geography of the Quantocks where it was actually written, is the one that ultimately leads towards the seduction scene in Christabel's chamber, allowing for various readings such as moralistic/Christian, Gothic/vampire-like, or post-Freudian/homoerotic, which make it all the more disturbing and complex to tackle with. The second part takes place during the day, the following morning in the castle, and in itself is the continuation of the previous night's 'witchery', as if a mirror image of the nocturnal ambiguity, introducing elements such as hypnotic possession or allegorical dream instances suspended by and interfering with the inability to speak.

Such structure obviously demanded restricted narrative progress that consequently prevented Coleridge from finishing it. Holmes observes that what *does* progress in *Christabel* is a myriad of themes such as 'the awakening of sexual feelings, the arrival of spring, the demonic forces of the green forest entering the dark, oppressive castle' (Holmes 2005a: 288), crime, loneliness, hospitality, friendship, fratricide, parenthood, and dreams, to name but a few. All these themes embodied in *Christabel*'s structure threatened to disperse that 'willing suspension of disbelief' Coleridge was aiming at, had the poem been directed towards the development of the plot. In other words, Geraldine's spell would have been broken, the dream would have been over, and the poem would have been transformed into yet another Gothic story so fashionable at that time.

Apart from the structure, the poem's character of Geraldine was another big obstacle that prevented Coleridge from completing the poem. Holmes calls her 'mysterious' and claims she is 'perhaps the most extraordinary of all Coleridge's poetic creations' (*Idem*). He compares her sexual ambivalence to an unstable chemical element that keeps escaping definition and fixed formation. Her very existence is dependent on her ambiguity of form. Indeed, we do not know what she is: '[a] damsel in distress, witch, sorceress, lamia-snake, nature goddess, demonic spirit, (and something of a boudoir-vamp)' (*Idem*). Thus, as Holmes concludes, the very development of her character would inevitably bring destruction to the established uncertainty about her. It is possible that Coleridge was well-aware of all these predicaments while he was painfully struggling to finish the poem.

Lastly, the burning question of what inspired Coleridge to write *Christabel* remains unanswered today. There are various suggestions and speculations on the subject. What unifies all the hypotheses is, perhaps, the idea that this might have influenced the poem's incompleteness. The two speculations that follow strike us as the most likely ones Coleridge had on his mind while working on *Christabel*.[51] Firstly, as Coleridge himself later remarked, his reading of Richard Crashaw's (1613? – 1649) *A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the*

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[51] For further suggestions on the subject of different sources that inspired *Christabel*, see Holmes 2005a: 288-89.

Admirable Saint Teresa (1652), her martyrdom, its theme or structure might have provided the initial spark. The theme of innocence betrayed *does* provide a parallel between these two works. Secondly, it is perhaps possible to attribute the poem to Coleridge's life, and consider his own biography as a subtext to it. These biographical references emerge if we take into consideration his difficult relationships with family members, especially with his mother and brother, his recurring nightmares about supernatural-looking women, his sexual behaviour reflecting his ambivalence towards women as innocent and women as temptresses and the traces it left on his psyche, or the peculiar nature of his friendships, primarily with Robert Southey.

The explanation for *Christabel*'s fragmentation may be sought in the fact that, while living in the Lake District in the north of England, his interests evolved and shifted from the supernatural to more confessional themes. It was 1800, Coleridge was working on the second part of *Christabel*, trying to rekindle the atmosphere from 1798, not only in theme but in geography as well. Apart from the fact that the distinction between the Quantocks and the Lake District imageries entered the first and the second parts of the poem respectively, the difficulty to go back to his Quantock, pre-German writing produced nothing but struggle and lamentation. He was trying to go back to his old self, whereas all that time, he was not aware of the new self, reformed and still creative…only in a different way.

This confessional and soul-searching type of writing is evident in the second part of *Christabel* where we encounter the themes of friendship between Christabel's and Geraldine's fathers; parenthood – involving Christabel and Sir Leoline; or even sexuality that can be read into Bard Bracey's dream account of the dove and the snake 'coil'd around its wings and neck' (*Christabel*, l. 538, Coleridge 2004: 176). To develop these themes further would have disrupted the flow of the poem, as well as exposed Coleridge's privacy more than he would have wanted, or more than it would have been safe to do – given the times in which he lived. Coleridge's desperation perhaps stemmed from this realisation. Considering all the possibilities and hypotheses, we reach the conclusion that *Christabel* was doomed to its fragmentation.

2. THE PURE OF HEART BETRAYED

The following two sections will focus on the poem *Christabel*, namely on the difficulty in finding uniform and universal answers to various questions the poem raises, a difficulty reflected in different analytical approaches. The fact that Coleridge never finished it only makes the analysis all the more difficult, so that one finds oneself trapped in the labyrinth of the poet's imagination. We shall provide different approaches and suggestions some of the most prominent critics of the poem have already given, bearing in mind the fact that all of them, in their own logical framework could be valid interpretations, both in including or excluding each other. The linguistic structure, versification, themes, symbolical and biographical references shall be considered, following the chronology of the poem.

What first strikes the reader is the peculiar language Coleridge employs. In her book *The Language of Wordsworth and Coleridge* (1989), Frances Austin, among other things, investigates into the subject of the sounds, words, and syntax Coleridge used in *Christabel*. Therefore, we opted to begin our investigation into the poem before us by calling attention to the peculiarity of Coleridge's language, because we feel the linguistic aspect of *Christabel* would establish a firm basis for further considerations.

Even though both Coleridge and Wordsworth were interested in language, Coleridge's linguistic virtuosity was by far more evident than Wordsworth's. His experimentation and fascination with sounds, Austin tells us, stemmed from the belief that sounds can meaningfully arouse necessary associations in the minds of people. As well as in sound associations, Coleridge was also interested in words and the way they produce associations of meaning, therefore establishing the magical effects evident in his supernatural poems (Austin 1989: 123).

However, Coleridge's language of his supernatural poems is not easy to interpret. It resists any objective rationalisations, which, perhaps, justifies the fact that not much has been written on the subject. When compared with his Conversation poems or to Wordsworth's poetry, the language of Coleridge's supernatural poems strikingly appears to be much more distant from them, as it is closer to the language of the Gothic novels popular in the day. As opposed to the naturalistic associations, the Romantic vocabulary Coleridge used in his supernatural poems builds up the sense of surreal, normally encountered in romances.

Austin observes that, as far as figurative language is concerned, Coleridge largely used metaphor, simile, and personification (Austin 1989: 130). Syntactically, his sentences and phrases tend to be repeated, as if he wanted to be certain the images he had been describing stuck in the minds of his readers, such as, for example, in the scene when Christabel hears a moaning sound behind a tree: ‘It moan’d as near, as near can be’ (*Christabel*, l. 41, Coleridge 2004: 164). By repeating ‘as near’, Coleridge emphasises the closeness of the present sound. Thus, a general conclusion can be drawn, which again distinguishes Wordsworth’s preoccupation with the emotions and events that have their origin in the past[52], from Coleridge’s, which are firmly connected with the present moment.

Another aspect of *Christabel*’s language, according to Austin, is the musicality of each line. She believes that, since it is an integral part of the poem, the music of Coleridge’s language adds to the mysterious and magical feelings the poem excites (Austin 1989: 148).[53] Thus, in the opening scene of the first part of *Christabel*, Coleridge immediately gives us examples of the imagery conveyed through sounds:

> ‘Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
> And the owls have awaken’d the crowing cock;
> Tu — whit! —– Tu — whoo!
> And hark, again! the crowing cock,
> How drowsily it crew.

Christabel, ll. 1-5 (Coleridge 2004: 162)

This opening scene prepares the atmosphere for the ensuing encounter between Christabel and Geraldine. The fact that it is midnight, which is introduced immediately in the first line, anticipates something supernatural. While imagining the scene, the reader can feel the chill, as the poem will tell him later. However, the unsigned review of *Christabel* that appeared in the July 1816 issue of *Scourge and Satirist*, rather wittingly describes this opening stanza as ‘the screaming of an owl, the crowing of a cock, and the howling of a mastiff’ (Jackson 1968, 2: 270). The author of this review adds that ‘[t]he expression of the owlish cry (…) would disgrace the lowest vamper of a farce (…)’ (*Ibidem*, 271).

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[52] This idea is most evident in the following passage from Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

> I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.

(Wordsworth, W. 2005: 307)

[53] John Beer also observes that the originality of Coleridge’s style is constituted by his use of specific rhythm and imagery. For further details of Beer’s discussion on the subject of Coleridgean style, see Beer 1971: 88.

Following this introductory stanza that establishes the Gothic setting suitable for medieval ballads and romances that immediately transport us back in time, we are told that Sir Leoline, a rich Baron, Christabel’s father, has a ‘toothless bitch’ (*Christabel*, l. 7, Coleridge 2004: 162) that howls silently.[54] In addition to the commentary in *British Lady’s Magazine*, October 1816 issue, that their ‘readers will be tempted to smile’ (Jackson 1968, 2: 278) at the opening scene, one of the most malicious reviewers of *Christabel*, William Hazlitt (1778 – 1830), literary and art critic, essayist, lecturer and painter, cynically remarked on the mastiff in the 2 June, 1816 issue of *Examiner* by asking ‘Is she a sort of Cerberus to fright away the critics? But – gentlemen, she is toothless’ (*Ibidem*, 1: 206). Having said that, Hazlitt invites others to openly and freely criticise the poem, assuring everyone there is nothing to be frightened of within its pages.[55]

After establishing the setting, by introducing the castle at midnight as well as Sir Leoline and his mastiff, Coleridge sets the story in April and gives us the following description of the night:

Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly but not dark
The thin grey cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind, and at the full;
And yet she looks both small and dull.

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[54] Reflecting back the idea of mutual influence of Coleridge and the Wordsworths on each other, introduced in the first part herein, we find interesting to note that Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal entry for 27 January 1798 introduces ‘[t]he manufacturer’s dog [which] makes a strange, uncouth howl (…). It howls at the murmur of the village stream’ (Wordsworth, D. 2002: 142-43).

[55] Karen Swann observes that *Christabel* ‘frightened its reviewers, not because it was such a successful tale of terror, but because they couldn’t decide what sort of tale it was’ (Swann 1995: 160).

> The night is chill, the cloud is grey:
> ‘Tis a month before the month of May,
> And the Spring comes slowly up this way.
>
> *Christabel,* ll. 14-22 (Coleridge 2004: 162-63)[56]

There is something ominous that we feel is going to happen when we read a description like this. Coleridge here alludes to the interplay between light and darkness, establishing the tone of ambiguity/ambivalence/strangeness, which persists throughout the poem. He is playing with words here in almost a riddle-like way to convey his vision of the supernatural. The gloomy sensation of the moonlit night is, thus, emphasised by his not simply saying that the night is ‘light’, but that the night is ‘not dark’. The same technique of using negatives can be seen here in the image of the cloud. Not only does Coleridge say that it covers the sky – he adds that it does not hide it, portraying the semi-transparent texture of the grey cloud. By telling us that the spring is late, Coleridge anticipates something eerie, as the normal rejuvenation in nature is postponed, or late.

Here is where Coleridge introduces Christabel[57], and calls her a ‘lovely lady’. We find out that she is adored by her father, and that the narrator is perplexed at first about her being outside the castle walls at this hour of night, suggesting this is not her normal routine, only to provide an explanation, saying she had had ‘Dreams, that made her moan and leap, / As on her bed she lay in sleep’ (*Christabel*, ll. 29-30, Coleridge 2004: 163). These two lines, which directly refer to Christabel's dreaming about her 'betrothed knight', were eliminated by Coleridge after the first publication in 1816, probably because of the possibility of their implicit sexual connotation.[58] Thus, we find out that after the disturbing dream, she steals out into the woods, to pray for her lover that is far away.

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[56] There is another obvious similarity between *Christabel*’s moon activity and Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal entry for 31 January, 1798, where she noted ‘(…) the moon immensely large, the sky scattered over with clouds. These soon closed in, contracting the dimensions of the moon without concealing her’ (Wordsworth, D. 2002: 143). Again, it is not clear whose account influenced who. There is a similar moon activity in Coleridge’s *The Nightingale*, cf. Coleridge 2005: 84-88 *passim*. Dorothy Wordsworth, in March-April 1798 journal entries, repeatedly comments that the ‘spring seemingly very little advanced’; ‘spring continues to advance very slowly’; or ‘Spring still advancing very slowly’ (Wordsworth, D. 2002: 150-51). 25 March entry reads ‘[t]he night [is] cloudy but not dark.’ (*Ibidem*, 150). For this comparison between Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal entries and *Christabel*, see Woof 2002: 278-293 *passim*.

Bate tells us that ‘moon’ is a recurrent symbol of imagination for Coleridge. Its half-light frees the imagination, and since that light is but a reflection, it introduces the idea of reception and response. See, Bate 1969: 62.

[57] The name ‘Christabel’ comes from the ballad *Sir Cauline* in Bishop Thomas Percy’s (1729 – 1811) *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). On further details, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 163n4; Sisman 2006: 228; Holmes 2005a: 182.

The atmosphere is depicted as silent. There is no wind at all in the woods where Christabel kneels beneath a big oak covered in moss and mistletoe. Norman Fruman, in his *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (1972), observes that the image of 'oak tree' frequently occurs in Coleridge, as does the image of 'moss', leading Fruman to speculate that these recurring images have to do with the theme of abandoned child, which had a personal dimension for Coleridge (Fruman 1972: 545n3).[59] On the other hand, Gerald Enscoe, in *Eros and the Romantics* (1967), interprets the oak tree as a phallic symbol, further stating that the mistletoe covering the oak has traditionally been associated with fertility (Enscoe 1967: 43). There, in the woods, while immersed in a silent prayer, she suddenly leaps up upon hearing a moan coming from behind the tree.

In the following description of the woods, Coleridge employs antithesis to contrast the stillness of the chilly night with Christabel's agitated mind:

> 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,

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[58] Fruman also suggests this possible sexual connotation in relation to Christabel's dream. See, Fruman 1972: 557n65.

[59] Fruman observes that orphans, property, and nobility very frequently occur in Coleridge's writing. He shows us the parallel between Coleridge's dream about the two sons of a nobleman and the two female characters from *Christabel*, who both have noble fathers (Fruman 1972: 378-79). If we consider Holmes, who gives the account of Coleridge's 'recurring image [in his poetry] of a lost or rejected child, for ever attempting to return home, or recover the feelings of home, or somehow – marvellously – to reinvent them' (Holmes 2005a: 10), based on Coleridge's experiences from early childhood that made him feel as an orphan, we then, perhaps, understand Christabel and Geraldine as projections of Coleridge himself (Fruman 1972: 379).

> 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*.

Christabel, ll. 14-22 (Coleridge 2004: 162-63, our italics)[60]

Austin observes that Coleridge must have been overwhelmed by his vision of this scene, because in the windless night, the leaf certainly could not dance. Furthermore, she notices that typically Coleridgean feature of repeating phrases – in this case, the existential 'there'-clause: 'There is not enough (…)'; 'dances' and 'dance'; as well as 'hanging so (…)'. Building up the image of the leaf is conveyed through Coleridge's use of alliteration and assonance. Thus we have /l/ in 'lovely lady'; /h/ in 'hanging so high'; and /t/ in 'topmost twig'. These alliterations, together with the repetition of the diphthong /aɪ/ in 'light', 'high' and 'sky', and the four nasal /ŋ/ sounds in 'hanging', as Austin remarks, contribute to the impression of the leaf's swinging movement (Austin 1989: 149-50).

Coleridge repeats in the quoted passage the adjective 'chill', the one used previously, to fix our attention to the chillness of the night. In the parallel 'there is not enough' passages, he establishes the comparison between the lady's ringlet and the leaf. The action verbs Coleridge uses here – 'moan', 'move', 'twirl', 'dance', 'hang', 'look' – are all monosyllabic, suggesting the briefness and delicateness of the night scene. Coleridge asks if perhaps the wind is the common denominator uniting the solitariness of the ringlet and the leaf; and at the same time, he asserts that it is not possible, because, the night is still, and the moaning sound cannot be produced by it. Thus, by negating his original question 'Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?', Coleridge builds up the atmosphere of suspense.

By now, it is clear what kind of language Coleridge aims at. The poem exhibits instances of short clauses, with or without coordinating conjunctions 'and' and 'but' (*Ibidem*, 150). Austin adds that Coleridge's vocabulary can be organised throughout the poem into three lexical sets that frequently overlap, each serving its own purpose, setting the poem away from everyday life immediately from the beginning. They can be divided into: 1. archaic words denoting historical matters; 2. religious set of words; and 3. lexical set denoting or alluding to unpleasant things or the distortion of a natural order.[61] By using archaisms, Coleridge wanted to create the atmosphere of past times, which is suitable for the poem; whereas focusing on the religious vocabulary, both with positive and negative overtones, as well as on the set of unpleasant expressions, he established the contrast between good and evil, virtuous and corrupt, providing the sense of supernatural and heightened anticipation of evil forces.

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[60] There is a similar description of a leaf in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry for 7 March, 1798, prior to Coleridge's writing the first part of *Christabel*: 'One only leaf upon the top of a tree – the sole remaining leaf – danced round and round (…)' (Wordsworth, D. 2002: 149). What is purely Coleridge's is the colour adjective 'red'.

The strong and persisting sense of ambivalence was not only established by Coleridge's masterful use of vocabulary and syntax, but also by metre. *Christabel*'s unique metre was firstly explained by Coleridge in the poem's preface like this:

> [T]he metre of the 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 the 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.
>
> (Coleridge 2004: 162)[62]

However, this experiment did not turn out to be entirely as Coleridge had put it, and upon close analysis of the poem's metre, we can deduce that there are sporadic variations both in the number of syllables and in the number of stresses, although many dictionaries on poetry and/or literary terms *do* refer to the poem's metre as '*Christabel*'s metre', acknowledging Coleridge's idea.

Austin comments on the poem's rhyme scheme by saying that in its irregularity, *Christabel* contains mostly couplets rhyming aabb, although an abab scheme can be encountered, and sometimes, even, the rhyming word would be placed three lines below (Austin 1989: 154). Bate talks about *Christabel*'s metre as well, and supposes that Coleridge deliberately employed a different metrical structure from that in *The Ancient Mariner*, because by experimenting with a freer form, he was able to avoid the inhibiting pentameter of Shakespeare and Milton where the rules were more rigid and restrictive (Bate 1969: 67).

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[61] For full description of each of these lexical sets supported by numerous examples, see Austin 1989: 151-54.

[62] For a detailed account on *Christabel*'s metre, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 162n3. For one of the first critical texts on its metre by Thomas Moore (1779 – 1852), an Irish poet and songwriter, see Jackson 1968, 1: 232-33.

This experimenting with metrics allowed Coleridge to freely emphasise not the technicality of the poem's structure, but the emotions he was hoping to convey. The uniqueness of *Christabel*'s metre is, perhaps, in the fact that, the irregularities of verse and stanza lengths parallel the natural flow of the story. Thus, in descriptive passages, the metre tends to be generally regular. However, when Coleridge opens the poem, or in the instances portraying Christabel's sneaking behind the tree in the woods, in the narrator's intrusions throughout the poem, and finally, in the casting-of-the-spell scene, the metre breaks loose in its irregularity. In this way, Coleridge manages to reinforce the supernatural, gloomy suspense by rapidly shifting from short to long lines.

Returning to the scene in the woods, we find out that Christabel steals to the other side of the oak to discover what the moaning thing, that had been firstly introduced in the line 41 by the personal pronoun 'it', is: 'It moan'd as near, as near can be' (*Christabel*, l. 41, Coleridge 2004: 164). She discovers that 'it' is actually a beautiful 'damsel bright, / Drest in a silken robe of white' (*Christabel*, ll. 60-61, *Idem*). Coleridge now personalises the moaning indefiniteness, but he also revises this stanza in November 1816 by introducing six new lines describing this damsel's appearance.[63] Even though there was no danger at this stage of development of the poem, the narrator intervenes to assert that the overall effect of this scene was frightening, anticipating the rest of the story: 'I guess, 'twas frightful there to see / A lady so richly clad as she – / Beautiful exceedingly!' (*Christabel*, ll. 64-66, *Idem*).

The strange lady now pleads for pity, and explains the reasons for her distress and her being there at midnight. Namely, we find out her name is Geraldine and that she is of noble birth. Unfortunately, five unidentified warriors had abducted her the previous morning, mounted her on the horse, brought and finally left her there, promising to return, and then went away.[64] Christabel takes pity upon the unfortunate damsel and offers her refuge in her father's castle, which Geraldine accepts. Strangely, Geraldine cannot rise without Christabel's helping hand, and while on their way to the castle, Geraldine blesses the stars. At this point, Christabel informs her companion that the entire household is asleep, including her ill father, thereby suggesting that they should sleep in her own room, to where they should creep stealthily.

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[63] As to the lines he inserted, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 164n9.

[64] Camille Paglia, in *Sexual Personae*, sees the irony in Geraldine's account of abduction. She argues that Geraldine was raped, the irony being the fact that Geraldine herself is the rapist in the chamber scene at the end of the first part. See, Paglia 2001: 333.

Coleridge planned to rewrite the lines of the account of Geraldine's abduction but this never happened. In November 1816, he did, however, revise the lines of Christabel's reply and those following the part where Christabel offers her hand to help Geraldine stand up (Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 165nn1-2). In fact, in later revision of 1824, Coleridge added a marginal gloss as well, pointing to Geraldine's peculiar blessing of merely the stars: 'The Strange Lady cannot rise, without the touch of Christabel's Hand: and now she blesses her *Stars*. She will not praise the *Creator* of the Heavens, or name the Saints' (Coleridge 2004: 165n3).

Curiously, Enscoe notices that the encounter between Christabel and Geraldine coincides with the coming of spring. Spring is traditionally associated with rejuvenating forces, rebirth and regeneration (Enscoe 1967: 43). Moreover, the fact that the meeting takes place outside the castle walls plays an important part in understanding the duality between life and death, which would become more poignant as the poem shifts its location to the interior of Sir Leoline's castle. For the time being, we only know that the Baron is ill, which suggests death and decay, and that the spring is at the threshold in nature, suggesting life.

The two ladies have by now reached the castle gate, but when Christabel unlocks it, something unexpected and odd happens to Geraldine:

> The lady sank, belike thro' pain.
> And Christabel with might and main
> Lifted her up, a weary weight,
> Over the threshold of the gate:
> Then the lady rose again,
> And mov'd, as she were not in pain.
>
> *Christabel*, ll. 124-29 (Coleridge 2004: 166)[65]

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[65] Beer interestingly finds parallels between the gates of Sir Leoline's castle and Milton's Hell, see Beer 1971: 81-82. On the other hand, Paglia identifies the castle as Christabel's body, and the door

Coleridge added a marginal gloss to this stanza in 1824 that explains the commonly held superstitious belief according to which evil cannot enter a pure place without having given a helping hand first. If by now the readers are not aware of something mysterious about Geraldine, this incident stands as the first indication of the supernatural character of the damsel. Enscoe, even though stating that why Christabel carries Geraldine over the threshold is not clear, comments on this scene by suggesting the possibility that Geraldine is not merely a representative of evil forces in nature but, perhaps, a representative of erotic ones as well (Enscoe 1967: 44). Thus, ambiguously conceived, the character of Geraldine allows various interpretations.

Bearing in mind the erotic component part of Geraldine, the act of carrying her over the threshold immediately establishes associations reminiscent to a marriage scene where the groom, in this case Christabel, carries his bride, Geraldine, over the threshold into their future abode. Considering what is going to happen in the chamber, the ambiguous role reversal takes place. Here, Christabel is the groom, and in her chamber, she is the bride being seduced by Geraldine. In this way, such gate scene reading plants the seed for the ensuing wedding night. Somehow, perhaps, in the light of this consideration, Geraldine appears to be the lover Christabel went into the woods to pray for.

The next three stanzas provide further evidence suggesting Geraldine's evil nature. After the incident at the gate, once within the castle walls, upon Christabel's suggested prayer to the Virgin who rescued Geraldine from her predicament, the damsel avoids it on account of fatigue: 'Alas, alas! (…), / I cannot speak for weariness' (*Christabel*, ll. 136-37, Coleridge 2004: 166). Then, passing by the sleeping, old mastiff, we witness the dog's 'angry moan', which makes the sight that much stranger since the dog had never behaved like this in front of Christabel before. Finally, while inside the castle, when Geraldine was passing by the dying embers, 'there came / A tongue of light, a fit of flame' (*Christabel*, ll. 153-54, *Idem*), allowing Christabel to see but Geraldine's eyes glowing in the dark.[66]

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to the gate that Christabel unlocks as her chastity. In the same scene, Geraldine is seen as a symbol of a Trojan horse. See, Paglia 2001: 334

[66] For a typically moralistic/Christian reading of these passages, see Jackson 1968, 1: 201-02.

Enscoe interprets these three episodes as warning signs Christabel fails to see. The fact that on the one hand, Geraldine is not capable of praying suggests her evil nature, i.e. if we read the poem in a moralistic/Christian way, yet on the other hand, by emphasising the Virgin, and bearing in mind the erotic aspect of Geraldine, not praying to her is rather an understandable act, since Geraldine, whose task is depriving Christabel of her innocence, sees the Virgin as a weak and fleeting object of devotion (Enscoe 1967: 44-45). Geraldine, as a representative of sexual and life-bestowing forces, is thus warned off by the mastiff and the flame, as described above.

The story now gradually progresses towards Christabel's inevitable doom – her loss of innocence. The theme of inevitability is introduced the first time the two ladies meet. The whole prospect can, as suggested by Enscoe, produce a sense of regret in a conscious reader, because whether we perceive Geraldine as an evil enchantress or a natural force driven by sexuality, her own ambiguity/duality will not prevent her from fulfilling her appointed task (*Ibidem*, 42). Thus we feel for the poor Christabel, as being inevitably wronged in the moralistic/Christian world or as losing her innocence in the world where carnal pleasures threaten to destroy one's safety within the boundaries of protected patriarchal norms. On the other hand, we fear the unstoppable, sheer power of evil/Eros personified in the likes of Geraldine.

After climbing the stairs, tiptoeing past Sir Leoline's room, Christabel and Geraldine finally reach their final destination – Christabel's chamber. We are told that they can see the room's interior even though the light of the moon is dim, which sounds paradoxical, but given the atmosphere and the nature of the poem, completely in place, adding to the general impression of terror. Then, in want of more illumination, immediately after Christabel trims the silver lamp, strategically fixed by Coleridge at the angel's feet, and even conveniently being made out of silver – echoing the known superstitious belief that vampires are afraid of it, the final warning happens – Geraldine 'in wretched plight, / Sank down upon the floor below' (*Christabel*, ll. 182-83, Coleridge 2004: 167).

However, Christabel misses the last opportunity to save herself, and instead, completely openheartedly, beckons Geraldine to drink the wine, suggesting perhaps blood, Christabel's mother had made of 'wild flowers', apparently containing ' virtuous powers', so as to make her feel better. If the wine is symbolically perceived as blood, we are allowed to suspect that, perhaps, Geraldine could represent some sort of a vampire.[67] Christabel's attitude towards Geraldine has from the beginning been abundant in sincere hospitality – the theme Coleridge had likewise been exploring in his previous poem *The Ancient Mariner*, where the mariner slays the albatross, thus sinning against the laws of hospitality, which leads to his punishment. In her father's eyes, Christabel will be sinning against the same laws when, in the second part of the poem, she beckons him to send Geraldine away.

At this point, Geraldine, by asking whether Christabel's mother would pity her, brings back the memory of Sir Leoline's wife who had died giving birth to Christabel. In turn, Christabel tells us that her mother had said on her deathbed that 'she should hear the castle bell / Strike twelve' (*Christabel*, ll. 194-95, Coleridge 2004: 167) on Christabel's wedding day. Overcome by different emotions, Christabel then wishes her mother was there, to which Geraldine replies 'I would (…) she were!' (*Christabel*, ll. 197, *Idem*).

What follows is another ambiguous stanza wherein Geraldine, in an altered voice, addresses the mother-spirit apparently present in the room visible only to Geraldine, commanding her to go away. The narrator is perplexed by the scene, which we realise when he says: 'Why stares she with unsettled eye? / Can she the bodiless dead espy?' (*Christabel*, ll. 202-03, *Ibidem*, 168). Apparently, we do not know why Geraldine banishes the spirit, but feel and suspect that something supernatural is taking place in that chamber, especially when Geraldine firmly declares that this hour was given to her; therefore the mother-spirit should leave. Coleridge leaves the feeling of ambiguity and uncertainty hanging in the air without saying why Geraldine was given this hour, and by whom.

Even Enscoe admits that he is confused by this strange scene, particularly by the fact that Geraldine ambiguously repeats Christabel's wish to have her mother present then and there (Enscoe 1967: 46). The ambiguity, of course, comes to our minds if we acknowledge that Geraldine's intentions were of evil origin; therefore, wishing for something as systematic as that strikes us as being out of place, because we do not normally expect a villain to be compassionate and supportive. Quite the contrary, the fact that Geraldine banishes the mother-spirit by saying: 'Off wandering mother! *Peak and pine!* / I have power to bid thee flee'

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[67] Paglia supports the idea that Geraldine represents a vampire. See, Paglia 2001: 335.

(*Christabel*, ll. 199-200, Coleridge 2004: 168, our italics) portrays Geraldine as some sort of a witch, knowing that this reply echoes Shakespeare's witches' song from *Macbeth*.[68]

Enscoe suggests the explanation through the understanding of Geraldine's act as being a seduction analogous to a wedding night. We have already learnt that Christabel's mother had vowed to hear/appear/be awakened by the twelve strikes of the castle bells on her daughter's wedding day. Now, considering the fact that the two ladies met in the woods at midnight, announced by the castle bells, the chamber scene symbolically represents the wedding night, fulfilling Christabel's mother's prophecy – hence Geraldine's wish for her presence. However, being aware of the implications of this improper union, the mother tries to protect her daughter, but is too powerless to succeed (Enscoe 1967: 46).

Christabel is still trying to calm Geraldine by wiping her sweaty brow, and hushing her, as when a mother tries to calm her child, by faintly saying 'Tis over now'. Geraldine drinks the wine again, and we can assume her strength is back when Coleridge says: 'Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright, / And from the floor whereon she sank, / The lofty lady stood upright' (*Christabel*, ll. 215-17, Coleridge 2004: 168). In all her beauty, Geraldine is ready to strike. By the opposition of the images of innocent Christabel mothering Geraldine, and the beauteous loftiness of Geraldine, whose eyes glitter, as if announcing the approaching danger, Coleridge, we can feel, prepares us for the terror to come.

It is inevitable – Christabel's loss of innocence cannot be prevented now. Nothing can save her. The carnal forces of nature are stronger, and they will prevail. 'All they, who live in the upper sky, / Do love you, holy Christabel!' (*Christabel*, ll. 221-22, Coleridge 2004: 168), says Geraldine in yet another ambiguous/misleading attempt to numb the defences of her victim. But those who live 'in the upper sky', suggests Enscoe, are either helpless or acquiescent to the scheme, and though the loss of innocence may be terrifying, it is nonetheless inevitable (Enscoe 1967: 47-48). Perhaps, Christabel has to suffer, even if she is a pure and virtuous representative of the ordered world of humanity.

The following disrobing scene is not any less ambiguous than the previous one. '[N]ow unrobe yourself', orders Geraldine. Christabel obeys, but is frightened.[69] Her suffering mind is filled with contradictory thoughts of both good and evil, and once in bed, she cannot sleep, but reclines on her elbow to watch Geraldine. We do not know why, and Coleridge does not tell us. The speculations are left hanging in this thick atmosphere. Perhaps this is understandable, for any concrete piece of information would have destroyed Geraldine's ambiguous nature, and perhaps, that is the reason why Coleridge decided to keep these lines open to various interpretations.

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[68] As for Coleridge's annotation to this passage, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 168n7.

[69] Paglia interprets Christabel's unconditional acceptance to disrobe 'so let it be!', as 'I do!', thus reading into the scene the common expression said by the fiancés at their wedding ceremony. In other

Enscoe even suggests that, perhaps, Geraldine is not completely evil, that she does not appear to enjoy her role, and that she also feels pity for Christabel by saying that all heavenly creatures love her (Enscoe 1967: 39). Nevertheless, since this remark follows Geraldine's cruel banishing of the mother-spirit, it can also be interpreted as ironic. On the other hand, Coleridge revised the scene, which we are going to describe next, three times (in November 1816, July 1817, and in 1824), making Geraldine less determined in her actions. Thus, the irony, if we read the revised version, does not work as a possibility. Finally, we come full circle right where we have started – the ambiguous/dual interpretation of Geraldine is inevitable.

The scene in question is the one in which Geraldine bows under the lamp, slowly rolls her eyes, as if allowing some sort of supernatural power to come to surface, loudly inhales as if shuddering, and disrobes herself. The following lines illustrate it:

> Behold! her bosom and half her side —
> A sight to dream of, not to tell!
> And she is to sleep by Christabel.
>
> *Christabel*, ll. 246-48 (Coleridge 2004: 169)[70]

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words, Christabel and Geraldine are married now, and are ready for their wedding night. See, Paglia 2001: 335.

[70] The line 'A sight to dream of, not to tell!' originally ran, and still exists in a manuscript, as 'Are lean and old and foul of hue'. The fact Coleridge changed it for the 1816 edition may indicate that he felt it was too revelatory, therefore by keeping it vague, he prevented the direct witchlike associations. Another hypothesis is that Coleridge may have had the disrobing of Duessa in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590) in his mind, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 169n1; Paglia 2001: 333. The line 'And she is to sleep by Christabel' was replaced by 'O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!' by July 1817, see *Idem*, n2.

Swann objects to the historical reading which sees Geraldine as Duessa. Such readers 'either refuse to hear the woman's story of her own abduction, or assume that her protests are really a come-on' (Swann 2001: 152).

What follows is the climax, when Geraldine casts the spell, and what is the most peculiar and ambiguous thing about it is the fact that Coleridge rewrote the passage by November 1816, making Geraldine even more indefinite and ambivalent a character than in the original draft. In the revised version, she appears to be struggling against some sort of daemonic possession. Due to the perplexing nature of Coleridge's decision, we shall give both versions below:

> She took two paces, and a stride,
> And lay down by the maiden's side
>
> *Christabel*, ll. 249-50 (Coleridge 2004: 169)

The two lines above were deleted and replaced by the following passage:

> She gaz'd upon the maid, she sigh'd!
> Then lay down by the maiden's side:
> Deep from within she seems half-way
> To lift some weight, with sick assay,
> *And eyes the Maid, and seeks delay:*
> Then suddenly as one defied
> Collects herself in scorn and pride
> And lay down by the maiden's side
>
> *Christabel*, ll. 249-56 (*Idem*, n3, our italics)[71]

Everything is ready now for the culmination/enchantment/loss of innocence. In a low voice, pressing Christabel to her chest, Geraldine casts the spell that will prevent Christabel from disclosing the incidents from her chamber the following day: 'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell, / Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!' (*Christabel*, ll. 255-56, Coleridge 2004: 169).[72] The equivocal nature of Geraldine – the agent of Christabel's destruction and the instrument of evil forces, as she refers to her supernatural powers as ‘This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow’ (*Christabel*, l. 258, *Idem*) – is further reinforced by Coleridge’s metrical structure of the seduction scene, as observed by Austin (Austin 1989: 154-55). The whole passage is metrically irregular. The number of syllables ranges from four to fourteen, reflecting the sense of heightened passion and intense terror.

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[71] Paglia warns us not to be misled by 'the attempts of Coleridge the anxious reviser to cover the work of Coleridge the visionary. Vampire and conscience are mutually exclusive' (Paglia 2001: 336).

[72] Paglia suspects that the impossibility to speak comes from the Greek myth of Philomela whose tongue was cut out by her brother-in-law that raped her so as not to relate the story. Coleridge mentions

Yet, as Austin underlines, the terror that can be felt but not seen is that much greater when half-expressed by broken clauses, making Geraldine’s purpose only hinted at, disguised under the veil of secret, and never fully explained (*Ibidem*, 152). It is true that providing us with concrete answers and clarifications Coleridge would disrupt the climax the poem was leading to, therefore creating some sort of an anticlimax which at this stage he certainly did not wish to do (*Ibidem*, 156). According to this idea, it is perhaps possible that, as Austin concludes, *Christabel* remained unfinished precisely because of its peculiar language (*Ibidem*, 162) that provided a unique atmosphere for the poem, serving as a vehicle of conveying the unspeakable, yet at the same time, obliging Coleridge to stick to its laws that did not allow for clarity with which it was itself incompatible. Thus, paradoxically, Coleridge somehow, fell into his own trap.

‘The Conclusion to Part the First’ begins as a brief recapitulation of the story so far. Then, Coleridge tells us that Christabel sleeps with open eyes, and has fearful dreams of sorrow and shame, the exact adjectives Geraldine uses, as given above, to characterise herself when casting the spell:

> With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
> Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
> Fearfully dreaming, yet I wis,
> Dreaming that alone, which is ––
> O sorrow and shame!

Christabel, ll. 280-84 (Coleridge 2004: 170)

Philomela directly in his poem *The Nightingale*. See, Paglia 2001: 343-44. For the account on *The Nightingale*, see Brett, Jones 2005: 321-22. For the Philomela myth, see Ovid 1987: 134-42.

The narrator asks: ‘Can this be she, / The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?’ (*Christabel*, ll. 284-85, Coleridge 2004: 170). Even he cannot recognise the once innocent and pure Christabel. The question of her identity becomes important now. We somehow feel that the spell has turned her into another Geraldine. Moreover, while Christabel is in a sort of a trancelike state, Geraldine sleeps peacefully,[73] holding Christabel in her arms as a mother holds her child. Here, we become aware of the juxtaposition/opposition between the image of a repose following the ecstatic climax and the image of an innocent child lulled by the protecting mother. Perhaps, Coleridge introduced the mother-child image to camouflage the insinuation of the scene’s sexual connotation.

Whatever happened the previous night, it is morning now. The birds are chirruping, symbolising joyful celebration, the birth of a new day. The image perhaps stands for the celebration of Geraldine’s success or even Christabel’s transformed self. Christabel is relaxed and sad. Then, she gathers herself from this lethargic state and starts to cry, yet at the same time has a smile on her face. Her lashes are bright, perhaps suggesting a new kind of experience. The adjective ‘bright’ here establishes the connection between the two ladies, since it was also used to describe Geraldine in the woods the previous night. This way, the suggestion of Christabel’s becoming Geraldine-like, is rendered possible, especially if we consider Christabel’s behaviour in the second part. As she slowly comes to her senses, she realises she had a ‘vision sweet’, but is not sure of what exactly. The only thing she knows is: ‘That saints will aid if men will call: / For the blue sky bends over all!’ (*Christabel*, ll. 318-19, Coleridge 2004: 171). Coleridge hints at religious moral here, suggesting divine help, which is what, perhaps, Christabel longs for.

On the other hand, the conclusion to the first part, according to Enscoe, gives to Geraldine’s seduction of Christabel a sexual turn. He speculates that the unsaid ‘something’ Coleridge only hints at but never directly and explicitly states results in the image we have, namely, of peaceful Geraldine and visibly disturbed Christabel. Moreover, Christabel’s eyes are ‘more bright than clear’ (Enscoe 1967: 49-50). Again, this comparison can, perhaps, be interpreted as the fact that she has changed. She is no longer an innocent girl, symbolically represented by having clear eyes, and has instead entered active womanhood, the state where her eyes are now bright. She has discovered the passage into the world of experience, thus becoming mature. The problem that now arises is how she will cope with this.

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[73] Fruman underlines the connection between *Christabel* and *The Pains of Sleep*, written in 1803. The scene in which innocent Christabel is tormented by disturbing dreams while corrupted Geraldine sleeps peacefully raises the same question of innocent/guilty moral confusion in Coleridge, which can be found in *The Pains of Sleep*, an agonising account of his nightmares caused by withdrawal from opium. For extended account, see Fruman 1972: 369-70.

One possible reason for Coleridge's not exploring the subject in greater detail is, perhaps, the fact that he was secretly aware of the sexual implications of the character of Geraldine, which, if pursued further, could have led to its being banned in the nineteenth-century England.[74] Interestingly enough, the fact that Coleridge never answered these insinuations may imply there could be some truth in it. Enscoe asks: 'Is Geraldine, like the traditional serpent-women of mythology, a malignant being, an evil force operating against the chaste and innocent Christabel' (Enscoe 1967: 38), or perhaps more complex than that?

We can understand Geraldine as the embodiment of sexual forces in nature, and at the same time, we can perceive her as someone struggling with her own daemonic possession, obvious in the way she hesitates to cast the spell. We may, perhaps, find this ambiguity stemming from Coleridge's ambivalent attitude towards sexuality. Fruman tells us that, for Coleridge, sexual practice was merely a satisfaction of animalistic appetites. It was an act of degradation, unless it was redeemed by pure love (Fruman 1972: 373). Sexually charged material is also evident in Coleridge's dreams. In fact, what some critics speculate, including Fruman and Coburn, is that, maybe, the entire scheme behind *Christabel* came from Coleridge's recurring nightmares, thus reflecting his personal experience, which is why, they believe, Coleridge found it difficult to finish the poem (*Ibidem*, 382; 558n66).

Bate, in his reading of *Christabel*, underlines the importance of 'the multi-sidedness of evil, its mercurial ability, when we think we have pinned it down or defined it, to take almost any shape, (…) and above all, to derive its strength, to fulfil itself, only through human cooperation' (Bate 1969: 69), when we consider the character of Geraldine. According to him, she is elusive and ambiguously evil, able to shift her nature, and very much in need of human acceptance so as to justify the reason for her existence – which we see in the fact that Christabel welcomes and, in the chamber scene, embraces her. Thus, as Bate tells us,

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[74] Paglia argues that *only* the first part was what constituted Coleridge's vision. The second one, as well as his plans to finish the poem, stem from his fear at what came out of his vision. '*Christabel* remained unfinished because, try as he might, Coleridge could not turn his daemonic saga into a parable of Christian redemption' (Paglia 2001: 340).

Geraldine embodies two supplementing prototypes: that of a vampire, and of a lamia (Bate 1969: 68).

Further ambiguous elements Bate finds in *Christabel* are those related to sexual identity and to virtue. As for the sexual identity, he imagines Coleridge's alternatives in making either Geraldine or Christabel a male, which would have been impossible (*Idem*). This consideration comes from the fact that 'a male vampire would not only have lost the mythical "lamia" properties that Geraldine can suggest, but, more important, would have put the poem too grossly on the level of the Gothic "shockers" of the day' (*Idem*). Furthermore, if Coleridge had made Christabel a man, obediently 'succumbing to a female vampire', it would have turned him, 'already passive enough, into something so jelly-like as to be dangerously close to farce' (*Idem*).

As for the virtue incorporated into the character of Christabel, Bate thinks that virtuous and innocent Christabel was somehow destined to encounter evil and fallen Geraldine, and be destroyed in that way (Bate 1969: 69-70). Thus, the pure and openhearted who welcomes the evil suffers, whereas the fallen and corrupted does not. Originating from this ambiguity, Christabel becomes a dangerously divided character – a martyr and a dramatic protagonist actively contributing to the narrative. Bate notes that Coleridge preferred to conceive Christabel in her martyrdom, but, on the other hand, he also needed her to be an active participant for the sake of the flow of the poem (*Ibidem*, 70-71). By dramatising her character, Coleridge could turn her into a more credible character, but conversely, the poem would lose the air of mystery, Coleridge was aiming at.

The idea that Christabel's purity and openheartedness was betrayed can be compared to the purity of the albatross, killed by the mariner. The virtuous, or even the naïve, become vulnerable subjects to the evil, malignant forces, embodying martyr-like characteristics. However, having this idea in mind, Bate observes:

> So passive and restricted a character could be allowed to suffer its martyrdom. But then, (…) the action would all be one way, with Christabel on the receiving end; and the tale, unless it were to become tedious, would soon be over. The other alternative (unless he began all over again) was to admit into the character of this demure maiden (…) something other than simple innocence (…)
>
> (Bate 1969: 71)

Thus the poem shows Coleridge’s divided feelings towards the nature of his principal character. He was tortured by trying to solve the problem of Christabel’s motives and actions, as any change in her innocent construct would make the whole idea behind the poem fall apart. Perhaps, realising that the original idea of the story was too large for the scope of the poem he was trying to finish, Coleridge stopped after the second part, leaving it fragmentary. As Bate put it, Christabel ‘remained a thorn in his flesh’ (Bate 1969: 73).

3. THE VERDICT OF IMAGINATION

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:
These words Sir Leoline will say
Many a morn to his dying day.

Christabel, ll. 320-25 (Coleridge 2004: 171)

This is the opening scene of the second part of *Christabel* where we discover that it is morning. After the first part of the poem, which is strangely feminine, as observed by G. W. Knight in *Coleridge's Divine Comedy* (1960), dealing with the mastiff, Christabel, Geraldine, and the mother-spirit as the only protagonists, Coleridge opens the second part with Sir Leoline, who, we find out, orders for the bells to toll each morning as a homage to his dead wife. Indeed, as the bell knells, the opening three stanzas introduce the castle in its gloomy and deathlike atmosphere, reinforced by the knelling sound of the castle bell. Thus, the atmosphere, we realise, does not change as we keep in mind the picture of the castle of the previous night.

The opening scene also suggests that the castle is situated in the northern region of England, and throughout the second part of the poem, the topographical terms reflect the shift in the scenery from that of the first part. Namely, as the second part was written in 1800, after Coleridge had moved to the Lake District, it was only convenient to use that setting rather than evoking the Quantocks of the first part that had been written in 1798. After almost three years, Coleridge was no longer interested in the same subjects, and himself was considerably changed, so that this change in the setting and tone does not seem to be particularly surprising.

Back in the castle, all the images reflect Sir Leoline's immersion in the past. It seems as if his life ceased after his wife had died. As Geoffrey Yarlott observes in *Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid* (1971), by Sir Leoline's decree, the bell's knell, that is to announce each day, symbolically represents the repetition of the ritual of death, as if everyday becomes trapped in the loop of the celebration of his wife's death. This behaviour may suggest Sir Leoline's disturbed mental state, which is why Christabel told Geraldine the previous night that her father was ill, in the first part of the poem: ‘Sir Leoline is weak in health’ (*Christabel*, l. 116, Coleridge 2004: 165). Yarlott accordingly suggests that Sir Leoline is neurotically obsessed with death, therefore, since he apparently cannot let go of the past, is incapable of having a healthy, living relationship (Yarlott 1971: 185).

The air is still, and the morning is misty and cloudy. Again, the description of the atmospheric conditions anticipates something supernatural. Geraldine wakes up refreshed, puts on her silken robe,[75] and awakens Christabel. At this point, Geraldine expresses her thankfulness for Christabel’s hospitality. In doing so, she again appears as innocent as in the woods. Christabel, on the other hand, seems anxious and perplexed. ‘Sure I have sinn’d! (…) / Now heaven be prais’d if all be well!’ (*Christabel*, ll. 369-70, Coleridge 2004: 172), says she, not realising that what happened the previous night was not just a dream. She, however, feels something is not right. After praying to Jesus hoping to ‘wash away her sins unknown’ (*Christabel*, l. 378, Coleridge 2004: 172), she takes Geraldine to meet her father.

Before we move on to Sir Leoline’s presence room, it should be mentioned that Coleridge here employs antimetabole. As in the first part, where he uses this figure of speech when Christabel trimmed the lamp: ‘But Christabel the lamp will trim. / She trimm’d the lamp (…)’ (*Christabel*, ll. 179-80, *Ibidem*, 167), he repeats here the ‘fair’ and ‘yet’ in reversed order, when describing Geraldine’s beauty: ‘Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair! (*Christabel*, l. 362, *Ibidem*, 172). As observed by Chris Koenig-Woodyard in *“Christabel” and the Christabelliads* (1999), Coleridge uses these rhetorical elements to add up to the atmosphere of Gothic intense and mysterious suspense.[76]

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[75] As to the following description of fully dressed Geraldine: ‘(…) [H]er girded vests / Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts’ (*Christabel*, ll. 367-68, Coleridge 2004: 172), Paglia argues that ‘Geraldine must be a classic vampire of great age, her breasts withered only when she hungers’ (Paglia 2001: 336); Let us remember that the removed line from the original draft describing Geraldine’s breasts as horrific during the disrobing scene in the first part of the poem is as follows: ‘Are lean and old and foul of hue’ (*Christabel*, l. 247, Coleridge 2004: 169n1).

[76] Another instance of antimetabole in *Christabel* involves the inversion of ‘rage and pain’ at the end of the second part of the poem: ‘They [Baron’s thoughts] only swell’d his rage and pain, / And did but work confusion there. / His heart was cleft with pain and rage’ (*Christabel*, ll. 626-28, *Ibidem*, 178). Coleridge repeats the original order in the penultimate line of its conclusion: ‘Comes seldom save from rage and pain’ (*Christabel*, l. 664, *Ibidem*, 179). These three instances are used to describe Sir Leoline’s feelings towards his daughter when she, in her father’s words, insults Geraldine and undermines his chivalric code of hospitality.

The ladies are now with Sir Leoline. He greets them both cordially, and Coleridge, curiously, does not indicate anywhere in the following lines his illness mentioned by Christabel. In what appears to be a healthy disposition, he listens to Geraldine's account of the abduction, and when she mentions her father's name – Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine, he realises that she is his former friend's daughter: 'Sir Leoline, a moment's space, / Stood gazing on the damsel's face; / And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine / Came back upon his heart again' (*Christabel*, ll. 415-18, Coleridge 2004: 173).

The stanza containing nineteen lines, from line 396 to line 414, accounts for the lost friendship between Sir Leoline and Lord Roland.[77] Coleridge's contemporaries, who mostly ridiculed the poem, somewhat unanimously praised this passage. For example, Hazlitt, in the *Examiner*'s issue of 2 June 1816, says:

> Mr. Coleridge's style is essentially superficial, pretty, ornamental, and he has forced it into the service of a story which is petrific. In the midst of moon-light, and fluttering ringlets, and fleeting clouds, and enchanting echoes, and airy abstractions of all sorts, there is one genuine burst of humanity, worthy of the author, when no dream oppresses him, no spell binds him.
>
> (Jackson 1968, 1: 207-08)

We observe, as does Yarlott, that similar to the friendship between Leontes and Polixenes in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, the friendship between Sir Leoline and Lord Roland was once very strong, almost brotherly (Yarlott 1971: 186n1). But now, the discord and separation left an open wound that Sir Leoline desperately wants to heal by making up with his old friend through helping his daughter Geraldine.

The passion that Sir Leoline once had was not lost, but only dormant. As Yarlott suggests, he was quite tempestuous and emotionally unpredictable a youth, indicated in the account of his friendship. Thus, the appearance of Geraldine awakes Sir Leoline's hibernating passion so rapidly that he forgets about his old age and instantly becomes enraged upon hearing about her ill fortune. His eyes flashed like lightning bolts as he ordered for the five abductors to be caught and punished for harming Geraldine. Once a deathlike person, Sir Leoline now reacts in a violent and revengeful fashion. It is obvious that Geraldine manages to awaken the catatonic Sir Leoline, thus acting not as an evil force, but as a benevolent one (Yarlott 1971: 186).

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[77] Yarlott, as well as other critics, suggests the possibility that this passage may be Coleridge's allusion to his own split with Southey in 1795. If true, it would be possible to identify Coleridge with Sir Leoline, the fact Coleridge might have had in mind, see Yarlott 1971: 186. Furthermore, Coleridge referred to this passage, in his letter to Poole, as 'the best and sweetest Lines [he] ever wrote' (S. T. Coleridge to T. Poole, 13 February 1813, *in* Coleridge 2000, 3: 435).

At this emotionally charged moment, Sir Leoline starts to cry and embraces Geraldine. Yarlott notices that he welcomes her like a daughter of a friend, whereas she embraces him like a lover. Geraldine is now presented as a sensual and lamia-like being. This notion is powered by the fact that she wears sensual clothes, and has the posture of a bride. Yarlott compares her beauty to that of a courtesan (*Ibidem*, 184-85). And while Geraldine prolongs the embrace by joyfully looking at Sir Leoline, one might even add an erotic overtone to it, Christabel, who was almost excluded from the scene, now suddenly collapses in a shudder. To be exact, her father's embracing Geraldine makes her remember the previous night: '(…) a vision fell / Upon the soul of Christabel, / The vision of fear, the touch and pain!' (*Christabel*, ll. 349-41, Coleridge 2004: 174).[78]

The vision Christabel experiences, of seeing Geraldine's old bosom and feeling its coldness, is so strong that makes her hiss like a snake. However, Sir Leoline does not see this shocking and sudden episode. All he sees is his innocent daughter in a praying position. The experience is of brief duration, and when the sight vanishes, other vision sets in, but this time probably of her mother-spirit, as suggested by Coleridge in his marginal annotation of 1824: 'Christabel for a moment sees her Mother's Spirit' (Coleridge 2004: 174n3), to comfort and soothe her daughter, bringing smile on her face, just as she did the previous night while Christabel was in Geraldine's arms.

When Sir Leoline asks what is wrong with his daughter, for the first time we realise that she is under the spell because she cannot disclose anything to him.[79] We also gather that Geraldine is in fact a sort of a supernatural creature/representative of some evil power.

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[78] Coleridge annotated this passage in 1824: 'Christabel then recollects the whole, and knows that it was not a Dream; but yet cannot disclose the fact, that the strange Lady is a supernatural Being with the stamp of the Evil Ones on her' (Coleridge 2004: 174n2).

[79] Knight directly relates Christabel's muteness to *The Ancient Mariner*. Both Christabel and the mariner are enslaved, but, when he frees himself, the opposite happens – he spends his eternity confessing/talking. See, Knight 1960: 161.

Swann interprets her inability to speak as a sign of hysteria: 'The malady befalls barren or celibate women (…). Catholic noblewomen (…) are particularly susceptible' (Swann 1995: 153).

Moreover, Geraldine acts as if Christabel was offended by the embrace she saw, and so asks to be sent home to her own father straightaway. In a way, Geraldine emerges as a family destroyer because Sir Leoline is completely mesmerised by her seductive act, fully neglecting the investigation into his daughter's state.

Yarlott suggests that Sir Leoline, by his reaction, appears to satisfy only his selfish motives (Yarlott 1971: 187). This idea becomes credible when we consider the next scene in which Sir Leoline almost ecstatically orders Bard Bracy to ride to Lord Roland's, bidding him come to Langdale Hall, Sir Leoline's castle, and take his daughter home. Behind Sir Leoline's magnanimous gesture, there is, perhaps, a self-serving design to make amends with his friend, because, as we learn, he feels unhappy and friendless.

After hearing Sir Leoline's orders, Bard Bracy intervenes and informs his master that he cannot fulfil his wish that day because he has planned to check the woods for the presence of any possible 'thing[s] unblessed'(*Christabel*, l. 517, Coleridge: 2004: 176). Then he explains his decision by retelling the peculiar dream he had the previous night at midnight – when Christabel met Geraldine. In his allegorical dream, Bard Bracy sees a helpless dove – the symbol of innocence – getting crushed by a green serpent – the symbol of daemonic forces in green nature – coiling around its wings and neck.[80] Bard Bracy woke up from this nightmare at midnight, and could not get it out of his mind ever since.

Bracy's dream serves the purpose of warning Sir Leoline of the imminent danger, and of symbolically retelling what had happened the previous night. Bracy even suggests that the dove from his dream *is* Christabel, and that the possible threat is directed towards her: 'That gentle bird, whom thou dost love, / And call'st by thy own daughter's name' (*Christabel*, ll. 520-21, Coleridge 2004: 176). Sir Leoline only half-listens to him, and completely fails to read into the symbolism of the dream. Yarlott suggests that Bracy's dream abounds in sexual connotations (Yarlott 1971: 188). As Coleridge put it, the heads of the dove and the snake are close to each other, while both creatures swell and heave in unison – evoking an instance of sexual intimacy.

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[80] Fruman tells us that the bird and serpent image is recurrent in Coleridge. Although it usually represents a conventional image in literature, its repetition usually indicates deeper autobiographical importance. For further discussion on this, see Fruman 1972: 360-61; Paglia 2001: 342-43.

Unfortunately, Sir Leoline is so blinded by either Geraldine' wicked ways, or his selfish feelings, that he interprets the dove as Geraldine. Then he kisses Geraldine on the forehead, while she secretly looks sideways at Christabel:

> A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy,
> And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,
> Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,
> And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread
> At Christabel she look'd askance! ——
> One moment — and the sight was fled!
>
> *Christabel*, ll. 571-76 (Coleridge 2004: 177)[81]

Interestingly, Coleridge describes Geraldine's eyes, in the first of these lines, as 'small' and 'dull', the very terms he uses to describe the moon the previous night – 'The moon is behind, and at the full; / And yet she looks both small and dull' (*Christabel*, ll. 18-19, *Ibidem*, 162-63) – which, again, serves to convey the sensation of supernatural elements. Christabel hisses again in a dizzy trancelike state, and, again, is not able to speak.

The impression Geraldine's 'shrunken serpent eyes' produce in Christabel is so overpowering that, tortured by this image, Christabel passively imitates 'That look of dull and treacherous hate' (*Christabel*, l. 594, *Idem*). This is the first direct reference Coleridge makes to convey the idea that evil Geraldine has transferred her malicious spell onto innocent Christabel, symbolically turning her into a fallen creature. Coleridge juxtaposes the image of Christabel's innocent, blue eyes and serpent's green ones, thus reinforcing the duality between good and evil.

Christabel falls to her father's feet when the trance finishes and implores: 'By my mother's soul do I entreat / That thou this woman send away!' (*Christabel*, l. 604-05, *Ibidem*, 178). It is the only thing she is able to utter because of the effect Geraldine's spell has on her speech. Enscoe remarks that this is not possible. Geraldine has already taken over the castle, so to speak, firstly by seducing the daughter, who is now in a hypnotic state due to the powerful spell, and secondly by charming the father, who is too blind to see who the real threat to his family is (Enscoe 1967: 57).

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[81] Paglia emphasise Coleridge's insistence on Geraldine having serpent-like eyes throughout the poem, suggesting the possible case of vampirism. Vampires traditionally have a probing, paralysing fixed stare, serving to immobilise the victim – just like snakes do in the animal world before they attack. See, Paglia 2001: 338-39.

Enscoe directs our attention to Geraldine’s ambiguity again. We do not know whether to treat her as a positive or negative character. According to him, moral implications are ambiguous as well, abounding in ambivalent dualities which refuse to be differentiated into a concrete conclusion. Some of them, he underlines, are: daemonic/innocent; changing of Christabel/life in the castle; and civilised, organised, domestic world/natural, primitive, life-bestowing world. As for the change in Christabel, Enscoe compares it to a similar transformation in the wedding guest from *The Ancient Mariner*, underscored by the sense that the loss of innocence brings about the gain of vision, the state of corruption and coping with it in this world if one wants to live, to see things for what they really are (*Ibidem*, 57-58).

That is, perhaps, why Christabel goes out into the woods to pray. In an enclosed world of the castle, the artificially imposed saint-like innocence is being threatened by a possibly corrupting dream, and the tormented maiden symbolically seeks relief in nature. Unfortunately, it is this nature that stands for human, corrupted reality, and it is there that Christabel will face this reality in its vision-giving form – Geraldine. The docile, almost vegetating Christabel will learn this inevitable truth of life in a terrible and shocking way. Unpleasant it may be, but necessary nonetheless if she wants to live in this world where saints do not exist. Only in this way can she break free from the death-like snare her unnatural life in the castle, supported by her over-protecting father, imposes.

The last passage of the second part begins with the narrator asking: ‘Why is thy cheek so wan and wild, / Sir Leoline?’ (*Christabel*, ll. 609-10, Coleridge 2004: 178).[82] Christabel’s father is enraged because his daughter, by asking for Geraldine’s banishment, shows no sense of hospitality.[83] Yarlott notices that Sir Leoline for the second time in the poem exhibits the symptoms of his disturbed mental state (Yarlott 1971: 188), and instead of protecting his suffering child, he turns to the evil-doer, masking his action by the fact that he is ‘Dishonour’d by his only child’ (*Christabel*, l. 631, *Idem*), who has insulted his friend’s daughter. He angrily sends Bard Bracy to his appointed task, and turning his back on his daughter, he leaves with Geraldine.

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[82] Anthony John Harding, in *The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism* (1995), argues that Coleridge uses the technique of ‘freezing’ the action by allowing the narrator to break into the flow of the story. This is one of such examples. We also encounter this effect after Geraldine disrobes: ‘A sight to dream of, not to tell!’ (*Christabel*, l. 247, Coleridge 2004: 169), and after she casts the spell: ‘Can this be she, / The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?’ (*Christabel*, ll. 284-85, *Ibidem*, 170). Thus, the reader is drawn to the story not merely by wanting to reach the end, but by the power of the frozen, shocking images.

[83] Fruman observes that the theme of hospitality bears heavy personal significance for Coleridge, since he experienced a loveless life in his childhood and throughout most of his adult life. The same

This is a hard, horrifying, but nonetheless valid denouement of the poem as an everlasting struggle between good and evil forces in the world. Whether it is just or unjust – is something that can never be definitely determined, because the poem remained incomplete. However, if read as it stands, the poem *does* progress towards a certain closure, no matter how provisory the conclusion may be. As Harding suggests, the embodiment of evil in the character of Geraldine fulfilled its appointed task – with whatever purpose that may have been – skilfully disguised as virtuous, whereas the innocent and pure in the character of Christabel appeared guilty of complicity (Harding 1995: 155). Christabel was warned five times, but failed to read the signs – when Geraldine sank to the ground in front of the gates, her refusal to pray, the mastiff’s moan, the sudden flame, and finally Geraldine’s sinking to the floor of Christabel’s chamber. Therefore she must be punished, for she has sinned, by becoming like the one who did her harm. Imagination has reached the verdict!

Thus, in choosing Geraldine over Christabel, Sir Leoline chooses evil over virtue. By observing this, Yarlott says that Coleridge, shifting his focus from Christabel onto her father, opens the door to complex interpretation, which negates the idea that *Christabel* represents but a simple tale of terror. Dramatically speaking, the main characters now cease to be simple stock-figures of conventional Gothic writings, demanding more complex considerations, thus justifying the sole purpose of Coleridge’s contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*, namely the idea behind his notion of ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (Coleridge 1847: 442), as reflected in his supernatural poems of *annus mirabilis* (Yarlott 1971: 189-90). These more complex considerations, actually, portray Coleridge’s growing interest towards the psychological re-examining of oneself, following his move to the Lake District in 1800. His investigation into the psychology of Sir Leoline in the second part of *Christabel*, inspired by his shifting

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theme is treated in *The Ancient Mariner*. For further discussion on the subject, see Fruman 1972: 361, 547nn22-23.

interests, made the poem less a horror story, when deeper characterisation became more important than the narrative flow.

The last passage of fragmentary *Christabel*, as we have it today, is ‘The Conclusion to Part the Second’, which, in fact, does not exist in any of the surviving manuscripts of the poem. Coleridge drafted it in a letter to Southey of 6 May, 1801 – therefore, a year after the second part had been written. In it, besides expressing his fear of losing his son Hartley, Coleridge gives a metaphysical account of a strange manifestation of fatherly love for a child, which in its excess, the father expresses ‘With words of unmeant bitterness’ (*Christabel*, l. 653, Coleridge 2004: 179).[84] Enscoe observes, as generally do the critics, that the conclusion to the second part of the poem is confusing. Firstly, its syntactical structure underlying its tone is different from the rest of the poem, and secondly, it does not appear to provide any dramatic continuation of the story itself (Enscoe 1967: 58).

The shocking aspect of the conclusion, in Enscoe’s opinion, is almost unacceptable in ethical terms, namely because it deals with the idea that it is necessary to break the charm of a child’s world by expressing love in all the opposite ways – as Coleridge suggests – through bitterness, rage, and pain. As ambiguous and paradoxical as the rest of the poem, the idea behind this conclusion is that the father must destroy his child’s world, his child’s innocence and purity, so as to save him/her (*Ibidem*, 58-59). In other words, we can interpret this notion as a sort of a survival lesson that teaches a child about the coexistence of love, bitterness, rage, and pain. Thus, the sooner a child learns it, the better its chances for survival.

Echoing this idea, we can agree that Christabel cannot exist in this world of corruption being as innocent as she is. She needs to know what corruption is in order to cope with life’s harsh realities; and all the forces trying to protect her from this realisation – her protective and strict father, or the isolation from the outside world expressed in the duality between the castle/death versus outside nature/life, or even the mother-spirit – only deny the possibility of living. What emerges as a consequence of Christabel’s terrible ordeal is the fact that she is awake to reality now, but, as Enscoe suggests, as in the case of the mariner, she has to pay a terrible price – she inevitably loses her innocence (Enscoe 1967: 59). The question remains whether this realisation prevented Coleridge from finishing the poem.

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[84] Yarlott points out that, even though general, the conclusion to the second part describes none other than Coleridge’s son Hartley, ‘a circumstance which at once throws fresh significance on Sir Leoline’s anger with Christabel. (…) [T]here was clearly some connection in Coleridge’s mind between Sir Leoline’s abandonment of Christabel and his own relationship with Hartley’ (Yarlott 1971: 193).

Enscoe believes that Coleridge's failure to finish *Christabel* reflects his ambivalent attitude towards erotica (*Idem*). If a sexual intercourse is justified by its life-bestowing purpose, and at the same time it is presented in the poem as a horrifying realisation, Enscoe's suggestion about Coleridge's ambivalence becomes obvious. Thus, *Christabel* cannot but lose its coherence provoked by Coleridge's diffusing of the poem's moral background. In light of this, Coleridge's plan for the ending of the poem would disintegrate the first part of the poem. According to this plan, recorded by James Gillman (1782 – 1839), the surgeon with whom Coleridge lived from 1816 till his death, Geraldine transforms into Christabel's absent lover, only to be defeated by the real one at the altar, at the moment when she is going to get married.[85] As it stands, Christabel's character has already been rescued by Geraldine's and, as Enscoe puts it, there would be no sense in introducing Christabel's lover, who would defeat evil shape-shifting Geraldine and save the innocent lady, or symbolically put, there would be no sense in throwing one force of Eros against another (Enscoe 1967: 60).

As concluded by Enscoe, Coleridge may want 'to believe in an ordered and rational universe, but he does not operate from a firm assumption that such a universe exists or can exist contrary to the nature of man' (*Idem*). In other words, Coleridge feels that a God-centred world is incompatible with man's sensuous world. Therefore, as reflected in his poems of the supernatural, we encounter his strong ambivalence between the rational and erotic forces. As suitably observed by Enscoe, this erotic principle necessary for our awakening to life's full realisation is in this poem embodied in the character of Geraldine:

> (…) Geraldine cannot be kept from the castle; Christabel, in spite of her piety, her innocence, her faith, must be seduced. And if education of Christabel means the destruction of the castle and the well-ordered but life-in-death atmosphere which permeates it, then so it must be. Geraldine triumphs, not because evil triumphs over good in a distorted Christian vision; she triumphs because of a necessitarian principle. If man is to live as a whole rather than as a divided creature, then what has been thought of as evil must be described and evaluated in some other terms. These terms may not be pleasant; perhaps the entire process of awakening

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[85] For full account of this plan, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 179n7.

> may be painful; but the forces of Eros must prevail. Suppression of them means a death-like sleep for man – a sleep in which he is unaware of his affinity with earth and nature.
>
> (Enscoe 1967: 166-67)

On a more personal note, the last stanza from the second part of *Christabel*, as we have mentioned, represents Coleridge's transferring the focal point from Christabel onto Sir Leoline. Why he almost suddenly decided to do that is explained by Yarlott. Notably, when the second part was written in 1800, in the Lake District, Coleridge had already abandoned his interest in strange and supernatural subjects in favour of more self-confessional writing. What is more, Coleridge's wife gave birth to their son that September, just about the time when Coleridge finished the second part of the poem, awakening Coleridge's parental instincts. Thus, the analogy between Sir Leoline/Christabel and Coleridge/Hartley relationships appears logical and valid given the circumstances (Yarlott 1971:191).

The theme of parenthood, besides the fact that it is obvious in *Christabel*, was oppressing Coleridge's mind even in his private life, which is probably why it managed to emerge in his writings of the time. The reason why Coleridge found the subject so oppressing lies in the fact that from the moment he had met Sara Hutchinson, i.e. Asra,[86] as he referred to her in his writings, who he was desperately in love with, from October 1799 onwards, the idea of the impossibility of their love came to him as a direct consequence of his children. They were obstacles standing in the way to his happiness.

Yarlott points out that Sir Leoline and his reactions towards Christabel evoke the connection between Coleridge's feelings for Asra and his children, which can be established when we consider a verse-letter Coleridge wrote to Asra – later rewritten and published in 1802 as *Dejection: An Ode*. There, Coleridge states in stanza 18, dealing with his children, that he would have preferred not to have them: 'I have half-wished, they never had been born' (*A Letter to —— [Sara Hutchinson]*, l. 281, Coleridge 2004: 153) (Yarlott 1971:196). Perhaps in that case, it would have been easier to leave his wife and start a relationship with Asra. With children involved, it was virtually impossible in the nineteenth century.

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[86] Due to the fact that Coleridge's wife was also named Sara, so as to distinguish between the two Saras, when referring to Sara Hutchinson herein, we shall retain Coleridge's pseudonym Asra.

Guided by the established connections mentioned above, the narrator addresses Sir Leoline[87] to try and understand why he is enraged: 'Why is thy cheek so wan and wild, / Sir Leoline?' (*Christabel*, ll. 609-10, Coleridge 2004: 178). This may be interpreted as a dialogue between Coleridge's conscious rationality and Coleridge the poet. In this way, Coleridge is trying to fathom the root of his selfish choosing of Asra over his children, just as Sir Leoline chooses Geraldine over Christabel. When this reading is taken into consideration, Coleridge's ambiguous feelings merely explain his logical struggle to finish the poem that suddenly revealed so much of his private life.

The outcome of the second part of *Christabel*, in Yarlott's terms, presents some sort of Coleridge's 'wish-fulfilment' (Yarlott 1971:198). In other words, Sir Leoline, as we have already learnt, leaves with Geraldine, as secretly Coleridge would wish to have left with Asra, the former abandoning his daughter, and the latter his wife Sara and children. Both Geraldine and Asra represent forces. Both destroy families, resulting in children's suffering. However, there is one final consideration Yarlott wants to point out – that of the connection between Geraldine and Asra, apart from the symbolical one.

As we know, Coleridge wrote the first part of the poem in 1798, and met Asra in 1799 for the first time. Therefore, he could not have possibly been able to base Geraldine's character on Asra. Nevertheless, six months before writing the second part of *Christabel*, Coleridge had written *Love*[88], in which the character of Genevieve *is* modelled on Asra. Apart from the similarity between the names of Geraldine and Genevieve, Yarlott points to the fact that Coleridge borrowed details from *Love* to finish the second part of *Christabel*.[89] Thus, this parallel establishes the necessary connection between Sir Leoline and Geraldine as projected relationship between Coleridge and Asra, evident in the second part of *Christabel*.

At this stage, we propose yet another possible alternative in reading *Christabel*. This approach to the poem regarding it as a serious criticism of the society and its code of chivalry was elaborated by Tim Fulford in *Slavery and Superstition in the Supernatural Poems*

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[87] See page 83 herein.

[88] On the publication of *Love*, see section two of the first part herein.

[89] For a detailed account on the connection between *Christabel* and *Love* in respect to Coleridge's relationship with Asra, see Yarlott 1971: 198-202; 318-321.

(2002).[90] Even though many critics have dismissed *Christabel*, or regarded it as Coleridge's failure to produce a poem worthy of his name, due to its fragmentary nature, Fulford argues the contrary. In his opinion, the poem deals with the chivalric code, and the sexual identities of people in aristocratic families. The fact that it is set in medieval times allows for the re-evaluation of, or comparison between present and past codes of life. Fulford tells us that the French Revolution marked the end of a chivalric code, where aristocracy governed on the principles of courtly and paternal duty.[91]

In *Christabel*, whose characters are of noble descent, Coleridge was able to safely investigate into 'the power-relations produced by chivalry' (Fulford 2002: 56), confident that such a dangerous enterprise would not result in his imprisonment for political attacks on the monarchy simply because he skilfully disguised it in his historic, medieval, romance setting, where actions are dislodged in time, away from the present period. Fulford adds that apart from medieval setting, another convenient tool Coleridge employed was the Gothic genre, which allowed him to show that superstition and carnal desires were equally present in aristocratic society as they were in lower classes (*Ibidem*, 56).[92]

In this light, Fulford characterises Sir Leoline and Christabel according to their respective chivalric roles, i.e. of the strict father and of the innocent and obedient daughter. Fulford argues that both the father and his daughter repressed their sexual desires. Thus, Christabel appears innocent in his eyes. In the gloomy, Gothic atmosphere of their medieval home, the mother-figure is missing, so Christabel assumes her role. The incestuous connotations of such circumstances makes Sir Leoline repress his sexuality up to the moment when Geraldine appears (*Idem*).

Geraldine is also a representative of aristocracy and the chivalric code of the society represented by the five warriors that raped her. The notion of Geraldine's erotic impulses disturbs Christabel, because she feels similar urges which she is afraid of expressing in the hermetically enclosed castle. The rational notion of guilt, which the chivalric code embosses in her mind, upon her disturbing dream of her lover, prepares the ground for the chamber scene where Christabel finally succumbs to tempting desires, which – innocent as she is/should be – she cannot accept. Hence the feeling of sin and guilt which Christabel experiences the next day (Fulford 2002: 56).

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[90] In *Gender* (2002), Julie Carlson analyses the same problem, but from the feminist perspective, where she stresses the notion of the society's repression of female desires. See, Carlson 2002: 213-15.

[91] Fulford bases this idea on Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797), a polititian and philosopher, and his views on the Revolution, see Fulford 2002: 55-56.

[92] Beer expresses a similar idea: 'What is true of superstition in primitive society is true also, in more civilised societies, of romance: it too keeps the mind open to possibilities which a dominant rationalism might otherwise hide' (Beer 1971: 51-52).

Sir Leoline is enraged because Christabel’s body – not her tongue – reveals her change. She no longer is an innocent and obedient daughter who must be protected by her knightly father. The real problem is, in fact, that Sir Leoline feels the same urges, but cannot express them due to the taboo surrounding them. Therefore, he rejects his daughter and embraces Geraldine. Fulford states that *Christabel* was an example of the nineteenth century’s ‘most profound investigations of the social and sexual relations on which the state was based’ (*Ibidem*, 57). He also underlined that even today *Christabel* is important because it shows ‘the mechanisms by which fear and desire are produced and internalised, the process by which, in response to the culture we live in, we shape ourselves in subservience to and/or in power over others’ (*Idem*).

On a more psychological note, as Fruman observes, we can argue that Coleridge’s most important writings do not have the dimension of his deliberate investigation into human psychology. This was never his purpose. Furthermore, he continues, devoid of any deeper psychological aspect, these works – such as *The Wanderings of Cain*, *Osorio*, *The Ancient Mariner*, *The Three Graves*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan* – abound in unmotivated crimes against nature, God, or family, which remain perplexing to Coleridge’s readers (Fruman 1972: 353). Even though Fruman finds this aspect a fault, he admits that the very defective nature of these mysterious crimes is what makes Coleridge’s work powerful: ‘[A]t several key points in Coleridge’s poems, we find deep and inexplicable confusions, a world in which unmotivated or mysterious crimes are committed, in which the characters of the protagonists scarcely exist’ (*Ibidem*, 358). And, if we consider these faults and their effects on Coleridge’s supernatural poems, we can agree with Fruman when he says that those poems are ‘not only weakened as a consequence of these *supposed* faults, [but they seem] to be strengthened as if by a mysterious power’ (*Idem*, our italics).

Geraldine is a good example of a complex, shadowy, and ambiguous character, whose psychology escapes moulding. We do not know her precise function, nor do we understand what constitutes her crime. It is hidden from us. We only feel it is horrible, and, according to the moralistic reading of the poem, we associate her with the power of evil, as opposed to betrayed, innocent Christabel. In such morally jumbled conditions of the poem, we are not able to determine who the victim and the criminal are. As in the case of the mariner, we wonder if Geraldine is a positive or a negative character. She is described as both good, although demonically possessed, – justified by the fact that Coleridge seems to make her act against her will – and evil – repeatedly compared to a serpent.

We also suspect that Christabel feels isolated and lonely in the world she lives. These loneliness and isolation, as Fruman underlines, stem perhaps from Coleridge's own experience. He had a lonely childhood, when, immersed in his books, he read voraciously. Then, after having been emotionally devastated by his cold and unloving mother, he spent eight years in equally cruel world of Christ's Hospital that scarred his psyche, which eventually surfaced in his subsequent writings. Fruman reminds us that the very idea behind his Conversational poems is philosophical reflection in solitude, as can be seen in *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison*; *Frost at Midnight*; *Fears in Solitude*; or *Dejection: An Ode* (Fruman 1972: 361).

Yet, besides loneliness, in the vastness of themes Coleridge dealt with, the theme of fratricide plays an equally important role in *Christabel*, and connects this poem with other works of his. Fruman notices that in *Osorio*, the protagonist attempts to murder his older brother; whereas *The Wanderings of Cain* explores one of the oldest crimes – that of Cain murdering Abel, and in this prose fragment, Cain spends eternity wandering across the world as does *The Ancient Mariner*'s protagonist. Whether intentionally or not, Christabel in her name epitomises the archetypes of the two most famous Biblical victims – Christ and Abel. Violent impulses were not strange to Coleridge as well. As Fruman reminds us, there is a famous childhood episode in which Coleridge manifested hostile outbursts of anger towards his brother Francis over some cheese [93](*Ibidem*, 362-63).

Therefore, as we have explained so far, Coleridge's writings constitute an enormous bulk of different themes, many of which interlocking and permeating each other. It has also been suggested that, perhaps, some of them make direct reference to Coleridge's private life.

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[93] This episode was recorded by Coleridge in a letter to Poole, in 1797. For its contents, see Coleridge 2000, I: 352; Coleridge 1847: 700.

Consequently, if the personal, psychological aspects of the poems are excluded from their analysis, we will certainly lose much of their meaning and aesthetic value. On the other hand, as Fruman complains, scholars are generally not too keen on considering the authors' personal lives when analysing their works, allowing for comparisons with past works only (Fruman 1972: 363).

Such lines of argument would, for example, definitely disregard the importance of Coleridge's dreams as irrelevant to his poems. Indeed, Fruman warns, we can interpret any piece of work on the basis of dream analysis, regularly with absurd and bizarre outcome, however, 'the interpreter must never cease to remind himself that what may appear reasonable to one reader may be outrageous to another' (*Ibidem*, 394). Bearing this in mind, we shall give some of the most striking examples where Coleridge's dreams perhaps influenced certain aspects of *Christabel*, justifying our decision on the belief that as dreams stem from one's mind, whose creative powers produce works of art, therefore their importance in studying artist's work should not be underestimated.

What first catches our attention, as remarked by Fruman, is that sleep and dreams have an important place in the genesis of *Kubla Khan*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and *Christabel*'s first part – all supernatural, and all written in *annus mirabilis* of 1797 – 1798. Fruman also notices that Coleridge suppressed his dreams because of their extremely disturbing nature, as observed by Coleridge himself in a letter: 'what my dream was, is not to tell' (S. T. Coleridge to R. Southey, 12 March 1804, *in* Coleridge 2000, II: 830). But by not regarding his dreams as important pieces to the puzzle, Fruman concludes, Coleridge eventually failed to fully understand himself.[94]

It is in his dreams that Coleridge's ambiguous self-image is best seen, according to Fruman. There are numerous accounts where Coleridge's dreams show instances of pain, deformation, and mental suffering. Such nightmares frequently dealt with supernatural beings, or strangely deformed and destructive characters – mostly of female sex. Thus, Coleridge, for example, dreams of a ‘university Harlot’[95]; or a witchlike, transfigured woman that wants to pluck his eye out. Here is an excerpt from his notebook entry:

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[94] For the integral passages Fruman dedicated to the ideas mentioned here about the meaning of dreams for Coleridge, see Fruman 1972: 366; 368; 380.

> Friday Night, Nov[ember] 28, 1800, or rather Saturday Morning / a most frightful Dream of a Woman whose features were blended with darkness catching hold of my right eye & attempting to pull it out – I caught hold of her arm first – a horrid feel – Wordsworth cried out aloud to me hearing [my] scream – heard his cry [&] thought it cruel he did not come / but did not wake till his cry was repeated a third time – the Woman’s name Ebn Ebn Thalud – When I woke, my right eyelid swelled –
>
> (Coleridge 2002: 19)

The fact that he was afraid of these female figures, or felt as if pursued by them, may point to his strong sexual anxiety in face of women, as well as his ambivalent attitude to the opposite sex – holding them both as chaste/virtuous and fallen/tempting beings.

All these destructive female figures could stem from Coleridge’s relationship with his mother and/or his feelings towards her. The fact that both in *The Ancient Mariner* – Night-mare Life-In-Death – and in *Christabel* – Geraldine – these female characters constitute daemonic forces, and accompanied by the horrible female figures of his nightmares, may perhaps lead us to realise that Coleridge felt deprived of motherly love throughout his life. Fruman says that ‘[i]n all his subsequent crippled relationships with women, it was not a wife his longing spirit sought, but the sheltering love of the protective mother’ (Fruman 1972: 405).

Bearing this in mind, as Coleridge had a loveless childhood, the need for love and admiration in his later life, as well as his constant pattern of trying to find a strong authoritative figure that was lacking – Southey, Poole, Gillman, and of course, Wordsworth – emerged as underlying themes Coleridge (un)consciously and repeatedly employed in his supernatural poems. Possibly his hatred towards his mother, but also eventual resignation, may have produced the images of Christabel’s dead mother and the dead albatross of *The Ancient Mariner*, which would subsequently reflect in his wish to destroy his own unloving mother. As a counter effect, we have Geraldine and Night-mare Life-In-Death representing the destroyed retaliating mother (*Ibidem*, 406).[96]

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[95] This is the exact expression Coleridge used when describing one of his nightmares involving disfigured women. See Fruman 1972: 381-82, for the full account of the dream.

Finally, even though *Kubla Khan*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and *Christabel* are known as Coleridge's best poems, Fruman sums up, the poet himself was under the impression that, since they were not the products of his philosophical self-reflection evident in the Conversation poems, they were devoid of personal material. It turned out that precisely these supernatural, fragmented poems, together with The *Ancient Mariner*, the only completed supernatural poem, were, as irony would have it, the most revealing ones of Coleridge the poet. Fruman celebrates them as 'being free of that posturing self-consciousness which disfigures so much of the remaining canon' (Fruman 1972: 411).

Given the preceding analyses of Coleridge's poems, accompanied by our careful investigation into his biography, certain implicit circumstances may be perceived about the poet. Namely, as he evolved into a soul-searching, self-reflecting poet/philosopher during the second part of his life, abandoning altogether his earlier inclinations towards the realm of the irrational, Coleridge was under a constant self-imposed oppression to 'confess', to explain himself, to justify the poet within him – the poet who was under a constant attack from the critics of the day. The feeling of being misunderstood led him to release his innermost thoughts into the public through the conscious, deliberate conversational style of his writings so as to correct the misconceptions society constructed about him. Unfortunately, it seems that, during the process, he kept sinking deeper and deeper into the web of criticism.

On the other hand, he was not capable of realising the hidden power his supernatural poems contained. And it is precisely there where he least expected to encounter his mirror-image, where the bulk of what Coleridge was in his essence could be found, for at the same time, while desiring to confess his poetic self, he unconsciously revealed more than he bargained for. It is in the confession rooms of his supernatural poems that we can hear, if listening carefully, the story of a poet and his life. All the anxieties and frustrations he harboured, as we have been discussing so far, lie clandestine and ready to be awakened. Within the verses of his *Kubla Khan*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and especially *Christabel* is where

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[96] In *The Three Graves*, for example, Coleridge deals with a mother jealously cursing her own daughter.

Coleridge (un)consciously uncovered that which, if he had been asked, would have never been brought to light.

On this note we close our consideration of the poem by pointing to the fact that in the courtroom of imagination, the jury has reached a verdict. Sir Leoline's daughter has been punished, and she duly suffers. This universal conclusion may be drawn from whatever reading we choose to consider. Christabel, according to the moralistic interpretation, gets punished because, in failing to see the warning signs, and as a virtuous, pure being, she helps the evil, fallen Geraldine. On the other hand, if we consider the sexual aspects of the poem, Christabel, being an innocent virgin trapped in a decaying and life-denying world of her father's castle, is punished by being stripped of her virginity. She suffers the consequences of becoming experienced, and thus gains the necessary vision if one wants to survive in the real world. Both these readings point to her as a sort of a tragic hero. Whether Coleridge wanted to see her as one will remain a tormenting, perpetual question – unfortunately for us, or not.

CONCLUSION

Having considered the two guiding ideas incorporated in this thesis – the friendship between Coleridge and Wordsworth, and Coleridge's unfinished poem *Christabel* – we reach a conclusion that it was precisely *Christabel*, one of Coleridge's supernatural poems, which directly acted as a nemesis, an arch-enemy, in Coleridge's life on two levels. Firstly, as Wordsworth decided not to include it in his second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, the poem initiated a process of estrangement between the two poets, resulting in the dying out of their prolific friendship that had marked their careers during the period prior to 1800. As we have argued, although Coleridge allegedly acknowledged the reasons behind Wordsworth's sudden decision for the poem's exclusion, he secretly harvested deep frustrations caused by the act, which, among other reasons, he sought to alleviate by indulging in opium-taking.

Bearing in mind the fact that Coleridge saw Wordsworth as the greatest poet of the day, Wordsworth's rather cold and unjust reaction against *Christabel* provoked a self-loathing and self-deprecating effect in Coleridge. This inferiority complex, firmly rooted in Coleridge, persisted during the long period of almost two decades. During these years, Coleridge was beginning to realise, eventually becoming fully convinced, that his and Wordsworth's ideas and concepts on poetry, imagination, and fancy, to name but a few, had in fact been different. Such realisation, triggered by Wordsworth's dismissal of *Christabel* – the crucial point of our investigation – led Coleridge to re-evaluate his position on Wordsworth's theoretical concepts in the background of his friend's poetry. Then, as we have tried to show by investigating into some chapters of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge sought to alleviate his conscience, by putting there into words, all that had been oppressing him throughout the period between 1800 and 1817.

Secondly, on a personal level, *Christabel* was a true nemesis of Coleridge and Wordsworth's friendship, which proved to be the most difficult of his poems to complete – the fact Coleridge understood as proof of his lost poetic powers, triggered by Wordsworth's attitude towards the poem. Actually, due to the peculiar nature of the poem's life, starting from 1798, when the first part was written, until 1816, when the poem was published in its fragmentary form, we have underlined that Coleridge was in the wrong when thinking his poetic powers had deserted him, but have argued that what caused his distress was the fact that he had changed during the process. This evolution, so to speak, in Coleridge's frame of mind, surfaced in the form of a strong anxiety which he associated with the loss of his poetic vision.

As the second part of our thesis has shown, *Christabel*'s first part, written in the Quantocks region in 1798, reflected Coleridge's interest in the supernatural elements in concordance with the demands of the *Lyrical Ballads*' prospect; whereas the second one, written in 1800 in the northern part of England, provided the evidence of Coleridge's shift of interests from the supernatural towards self-analytical. At some point, in his strenuous efforts to finish the poem, Coleridge must have realised the self-revealing aspect within the poem. He became divided between the poem's dramatic flow – demanding his characters to develop by deepening their characterisations – and his original idea from 1798 – demanding his characters to remain ambiguously elusive so as to preserve the irrational aspect of the supernatural theme.

The attempt to psychologically deepen the characters in the second part of the poem, proved discordant to the supernatural ambiguity of the first part. Moreover, it was the same mechanism Coleridge applied to the understanding of his own being, the self-revelation of which proved to be too much to handle, especially when considering the fact that *Christabel* incorporates many aspects of Coleridge's private life, as we tried to demonstrate in our thesis. Thus, his wanting to satisfy both ideas at the same time, while trying to keep his own life out of his work, emerged as a paradox Coleridge never successfully solved. By lamenting over his lost poetic vision, he failed to embrace the fresh and original possibility of raising *Christabel* to a new level, the transformed poet in him could have achieved.

The possibility that Coleridge was aware of the hidden connections between *Christabel* and his own life can be justified by the fact that he did not publish the poem until 1816, and then, only after having been encouraged by Byron's praise of the poem, as well as by his financial and moral support, did *Christabel* appear in print.[97] Even today, it has not been precisely established why Coleridge kept the poem from publication after having been excluded from the *Lyrical Ballads* project. We can only suppose the reasons behind his procrastination: his frustrating concordance with Wordsworth's attitude towards the poem; his realisation that it carried too much of his private life's material, thus being too revealing; or, the paradoxical impossibility of finishing the poem by turning it into something he had not designed in the first place.

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[97] For the complete account on the publication of *Christabel*, see Halmi, Magnuson, Modiano 2004: 158-61.

Therefore, in light of the difficulties involving Coleridge's struggle to finish *Christabel*, and in light of his psychological recovery from the blow – inflicted by Wordsworth's rejection of the poem, as well as by the harsh critical dismissal of it by his contemporaries – the recovery taking effect upon the finishing of *Biographia Literaria*, we conclude that, even though the nemesis destroying his friendship and endangering his psychological frame of mind proved to be of paramount importance in the crucial period of his career, Coleridge, somehow, endured and evolved into a new poet and philosopher. He was now outside Wordsworth's shadow that had been hanging over him for almost two decades. Although the process was long and hard, and although the scars never completely disappeared, Coleridge managed not to succumb to the pressure, providing an example of endurance for generations of writers to come. McFarland even goes farther than this, and calls him a hero of existence:

> Coleridge, I have always felt, is in a special way a hero of existence: though life bore him down, he fought from his knees. He did not take refuge in suicide (…); he did not become mentally unbalanced (…); he did not become misanthropic (…).
>
> On the contrary, he preserved his life, his reason, and his humanity. Querulous and often feline he could be, but he was not twisted or distortedly bitter.
>
> (McFarland 1981: 132-33)

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