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## *Christabel* as Example: S(ubt)ex(t) as (Con)text

J. C. C. Mays

I thought I would take *Christabel* as an example to show how the new *Collected Coleridge* edition of the poems works, together with some of the problems one faces when editing Coleridge and some of the solutions I've adopted.

Coleridge's intentions for *Christabel* are clear from his comments in private. It was to have been a poem about the bringing of different sides of our nature into harmony through vicarious suffering.<sup>1</sup> The theme, familiar from *Lyrical Ballads*, is concerned with the way attunement to the One Life of nature is attained by "wise passiveness," and Coleridge hoped to realize it better on a second attempt than in the *Ancient Mariner*.<sup>2</sup> The poem in its working-out nonetheless struck at deep roots of unconscious emotion which remained problematic; it jammed on the same philosophical and moral problem Coleridge hoped to resolve when he began. The poem thus opened up areas of emotional and moral contradiction which are deeper than the Mariner's guilt, which can be expiated, and its narrative failed to move forward. In particular, in Geraldine's relations with Christabel, something inexplicable happens. As the *Champion* reviewer was moved to ask: "What is it all about? What is the idea? Is *Lady Geraldine* a sorceress? or a vampire? or a man? or what is she, or he, or it?"<sup>3</sup> The sense that something untoward has happened, and the guilt readers come to feel about their imaginings and conjectures about what this might be, attaches a sense of sexual shame to the similar themes explored by Wordsworth, in poems like *Peter Bell* and *The White Doe of Rylstone*. This same aspect of the poem becomes more explicit in Part II, when Leoline's feelings for Geraldine

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<sup>1</sup> Derwent Coleridge, Preface to *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (enlarged ed. London, 1870), xlii-iii. Compare Barclay Fox's *Journal*, ed. R. L. Brett (London, 1979), 118; (Thomas Allsop) *Conversations and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge* (London, 1836), I 194-96.

<sup>2</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, 1983), II 7.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. de J. Jackson (ed.), *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, Volume 2: 1834-1900 (London, 1991), 251 (hereafter referred to as Jackson II). *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1970) is referred to as Jackson I.

complicate his relation with Christabel, though, by becoming more explicit, they become less troubling.

Coleridge's sense that his enterprise was open to misunderstanding heightened his anxiety and delayed publication. His poem remained for many years literally a subtext, circulating among friends and those with enough previous interest to seek it out. When it was eventually published, nearly twenty years after the first part had been written, the reviewers' tone was set by questioning whether it had been worth waiting for.

The poem was the gossip of the moment in 1816, but it was inevitably understood as a product of "querulous sensibility" and misunderstood as "morbid" and "fragmentary."<sup>4</sup> More elaborate metrical forms had become fashionable by that time, and ballad metres had come to seem crude and old-fashioned; Gothic fiction and drama had been tarnished by abuse, and only self-consciously literary versions had a chance of being taken seriously; reviewers of the poem insisted on clearer answers to the questions they posed, since they had been kept waiting so long. "There is something disgusting at the bottom of his subject, which is but ill glossed over by a veil of Della Cruscan sentiment and fine writing," Hazlitt famously wrote, "—like moon-beams playing on a charnel-house, or flowers strewed on a dead body."<sup>5</sup> From one point of view, then, the publication of the poem was a disappointment because delayed, but from another, the delay was enabling. When one looks at the full array of textual evidence, it is evident that the status of the poem as a torso was predictable from the beginning: the poem was never going anywhere beyond the exploration and mapping out of a predicament, even though it took Coleridge a long time to accept this was so. *Christabel* was never a narrative poem: it was always a charm, a meditation; it began — as all lyric does<sup>6</sup> — in subconscious babbling among the sounds of words, out of which rhythm emerges; its thrust was vertical, not horizontal. The eventual recognition and acceptance of this fact was equivalent to Coleridge's discovery of a new, allegoric mode, the quite remarkable poetry of the 1820s.

This is why I buried my theme in the self-reflexive brackets of my title. In one sense, text develops vertically into subtext: Coleridge goes downward, into the foundations, instead of extending his situation laterally in narrative. His awareness of how the sexual connotations and implications of this subtext might be received and misunderstood, in the light of public

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<sup>4</sup> Jackson II, 275, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson I, 207.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Welsh, *Roots of Lyric: Primitive Poetry and Modern Poetics* (Princeton, 1978), 134.

gaze, at the same time provides a limiting context. Sex and text, subtext and context, interact and reconfigure.

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The present standard edition of Coleridge's poems and plays dates from 1912, and is in two volumes. *Christabel* appears in volume 1 along with the other poems his reputation was judged to rest upon. The 1912 text is taken from the last edition published in his lifetime, *Poetical Works 1834*, as for the other poems which appeared here. Variant readings from earlier manuscript and printed versions are provided in notes at the foot of each page, but editorial commentary and notes on particular points are not supplied. (The editor, Ernest Hartley Coleridge [EHC], who was Coleridge's grandson, had done a separate, facsimile edition of one of the *Christabel* manuscripts in 1907, which has a lengthy introduction). To complete the story of the 1912 edition: volume 2 contains Coleridge's plays and translations of Schiller, again from the 1834 text where this is available; and it is rounded out with 150 pages of lesser items (epigrams, jeux d'esprit, fragments) and indexes. The arrangement of the new *Collected Coleridge* differs as follows. It is in three volumes. Volume 2 is the engine-house, and contains the poems in all their different versions. They are in chronological order (not divided into separate canonical and non-canonical sequences), and accompanied by a penumbra of poems which are partly by, or which may not be by, or which have indeed proved not to be by Coleridge. The texts are not geared to the last text published in Coleridge's lifetime (as EHC has them), but are set out in a way which preserves a sense of their evolution and, in more complicated instances, their changing directions. The models for the display have been adapted from German and French models – for instance the edition of your own Conrad Ferdinand Meyer by Hans Zeller and Alfred Zäch.<sup>7</sup> The *Collected Coleridge* adds several hundred titles to those in EHC, and often contain double the number of versions of poems which are shared.

Thus, in volume 2 of the new *Collected Coleridge*, *Christabel* fills eighty-four pages of small type. There is a headnote, which contains two pages concerning the evolution of the poem (under DATE), six pages describing the various manuscript and printed versions (under the heading TEXTS), and two long notes on the circulation of the poem before publication and Coleridge's reported plans for continuing the poem. An

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<sup>7</sup> *Sämtliche Werke* (Bern, 1958-).



editor has to locate these materials and dust them off (make accurate transcriptions), and then arrange them in some sort of order. One has to determine what manuscript was copied from what other, when, and the extent of Coleridge's involvement. If a manuscript was dictated, one has to consider Coleridge's relation to the person he was dictating to; in his annotation of printed texts, his relation to the intended recipients bears on the nature of his emendations. The body of verse-text, consisting of these versions duly arranged, with differences of wording shown within the line, together with a complete (not selective) record of spelling- and punctuation-variants takes up sixty-one pages; and a final section, of ten pages, records typographical oddities like divisional half-titles and broken type, explains how paragraphing-errors developed, describes corrections in annotated copies, etc.

The numbers of pages involved should make evident that much more material has been brought into play to produce the present edition than the earlier one. Ernest Hartley Coleridge recorded three manuscripts which had passed through his hands; I have examined eight and can deduce readings in an absent ninth. EHC knew of one corrected copy of the first, 1816 edition; I have examined seven, differently corrected so that they make up eight different versions of the first edition, along with four other dedication copies. The original of the annotated copy of *Poetical Works* 1828 which EHC knew only from a transcript has come to light, along with fresh material which helps analyse the printed collections in which the poem appears. In this case, the number of texts known to EHC has been more than doubled. We also know more about Coleridge's involvement at every stage, the preferences of those who helped him revise his copy for the press, the house-style of his publishers and so on.

Volume 1 of the new *Collected Coleridge* contains reading texts – or single, “speaking” texts – of the poems in the volume 2 variorum sequence, accompanied by editorial commentary. The reading text and commentary of *Christabel* fill thirty-five pages; the commentary describes personal and literary backgrounds, summarizes the evolution and circulation of the poem, and annotates particular points of interest. Again to complete the story, volume 3 contains the translations from Schiller and Coleridge's own plays. This volume is as different from the 1912 edition as are the others: Schiller's German faces Coleridge's English, the texts are not geared to *Poetical Works* 1834, there is an acting text of *Remorse* showing how it was performed at the time, explanatory notes, music, etc; as well as the usual indexes of names, first-line indexes, etc. I have written about the broad

implications of the arrangements, and indeed was talking about them in Professor McGann's company in New York only a couple of months ago.<sup>8</sup> One of the most interesting questions involves the relation of the reading text to the variorum – which text does one choose as reading text, with what justification? – and I can return to this and talk about it afterwards, if you like. For the moment I want to concentrate on *Christabel*, and on how the poem in the new edition differs from the old one.

The most important thing to note is that, whereas most *Collected Coleridge* reading texts are complete and single – only barely-edited versions from among the several versions making up particular poems –, the present instance is unusual in being an “eclectic text,” produced pretty much according to the Greg-Bowers prescription. It resembles EHC's text in being based on *Poetical Works 1834*, but I have corrected mistakes in paragraphing and given Coleridge's system of capitalisation and punctuation from manuscript, as well as correcting two small errors (in lines 516 and 559). In the matter of wording, then, the *Collected Coleridge* reading text does not much differ from the version which fills the body of the page in EHC (above the variants). But the analysis of texts I have described is not without a bearing. Coleridge was a connoisseur of sound, as Wordsworth and a number of contemporaries acknowledged; *Christabel* is concerned with sound at a level far deeper than that touched on in random fashion in Coleridge's preface; sound registers adjustments of emotional and other values at levels below consciousness. In this sense, Coleridge's interest in metre is at one with his interest in revising Kant's ethics, just as his dispute with Wordsworth over metre involved their different attitudes to duty. I will come back to this apropos of their different attitudes towards love and Sara Hutchinson, and which has to do with the other poems on the table at this colloquium.

EHC preserved the punctuation from *Poetical Works 1834*, which for the most part derives from Murray's printers in 1816 and was compounded by Henry Nelson Coleridge, on behalf of his uncle. This differs from the holograph and the manuscripts, and Coleridge went out of his way to remove part of what the compositor supplied in several copies of the 1816 text he corrected. So a comma should not divide the exclamation “Iesu Maria” in line 54: the comma introduces a pause, lending each name a semblance of weight, making it inevitable that the exclamation should be

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<sup>8</sup> “Reflections on having edited Coleridge's poems” in *Romantic Revisions*, ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge, 1992), 136-53. The New York talk, “Editing Coleridge in the Historicized Present,” will appear in *Text VIII* (1994).

seized upon by parodists. There should not be a comma at the end of line 41, "On the other Side it seems to be." The syntax should flow on, with only the suggestion of a pause: "... it seems to be / Of the huge broad-breasted old Oak Tree." Coleridge is careful with capitals in the holograph, often correcting lower case to upper case, and his different presentation of words in this way lifts them even as his lighter punctuation suspends their relationship. He wrote, for instance, at lines 71-74 (and compare also lines 58, 62, 83, 85, 92, 96, 98, etc):

The Lady strange made [a]Answer meet,  
And her [v]Voice was faint and sweet:  
Have [p]Pity on my sore [d]Distress,  
I scarce can speak for [w]Weariness.

EHC gives the text from *Poetical Works 1834*, which derives in a continuous line of transmission from the edition of 1816, in which all the capitals are lowered. It seems to me that the tone of the lines is also lowered; that Coleridge had something particular in mind when he revised all those letters upwards.

The same adjustment of sense through the organisation of sound – which, I repeat, is what *Christabel* is all about – is made also in Coleridge's paragraphing; and this is another feature the new edition can claim to have restored. Mistakes entered when *Poetical Works 1828* was set up from the volume printed in 1816: the compositor failed to register paragraphs which began at the top of a page. The mistakes were carried forward and added to by the same kind of error happening again in *Poetical Works 1829* and *1834*. In one instance, the mistake was compounded in 1829 by someone (possibly Coleridge himself), who, not recognizing what had happened, seems to have intervened to begin a new paragraph at line 636. EHC's text needed to be corrected at several points: the result of correcting it is that slabs of text are broken into smaller portions and the texture is ventilated thereby. To provide an example from the first occurrence of this compositor's error which EHC reproduces (lines 53-57), Coleridge originally wrote:

Hush, beating Heart of Christabel!  
Iesu Maria, shield her well!  
She folded her Arms beneath her Cloak,  
And stole to the other side of the Oak.  
What sees She there?

The first break sets off the two lines which begin my quotation, so they turn outwards from the context of the poem; they make an appeal which is positioned between the situation described and us, the audience, coming from the imagined teller. And it also balances the following break, after which the lines pick up the action as it refocusses on Christabel's movement. The reader's gaze thereby moves from "The One red Leaf, the last of its Clan," to the supposed speaker, back to the protagonist; and our responses change in the two intervals – in the still pause in which the fate of a leaf mirrors a fate we do not understand, which is relieved by the perfunctory, conventional expression of panic-alarm, as we refocus on the protagonist in expectation.

The tediousness of my demonstration should not obscure the importance of the point I am trying to make. It seems to me that Coleridge's manipulation of narrative point-of-view by means of typographical space in such instances is as calculated and successful as it is in the more celebrated instances of *Tristram Shandy* and Charles Olson's *Maximus*; and the obscuring of it is as reprehensible as playing a record at the wrong speed. I repeat, the paragraphing in *Christabel* organises the pace at which events are unfolded and folded over; it registers moments of transition and development. (For other examples of lost paragraph breaks, see lines 129, 184, 319, 323, 338 – the first and fourth of which are also lost by EHC; and compare 457, 475, 613.) As I said, my texts of *Christabel* do not differ much in wording from EHC's. A curious feature of the extant versions is that, though Coleridge was engaged on it for many years, during which his attitudes changed, what was already written was not recast in any fundamental way; his efforts went into fine-tuning and adjustment. I have described the tuning involving punctuation, capitalisation and paragraphing. There is also an amount of substitution of single words and phrases throughout the poem: for instance he substituted "once" for "twice" in line 88 to bring Part II into line with Part I.

It is noticeable that when Coleridge tinkered with groups of lines they make up transitional or reflexive passages, not passages containing action. An example is the paragraph beginning "There She sees a Damsel bright" (line 58), into which five lines were inserted in annotated copies of 1816 and carried forward to 1828 and after. It contains the first description of Geraldine, as Christabel sees her, and the insertion fixes on her neck and feet. Or take the paragraph beginning "So up she rose and forth they pass'd" (line 112), which was again revised in annotated copies, the revisions being carried forward. As Coleridge noted in one of the annotated copies: the lines

contain "the first suspicious circumstance, of the evil & pr'ternatural character of Geraldine." The same passage also, and significantly, is accompanied by the first of the marginal glosses he added to some versions. These marginal glosses represent his final attempt to ease the transitions which had given him most trouble. In fact, as in the *Ancient Mariner*, they only contain the problem, they do not solve it; they describe transitions which do not quite take place.

What distinguishes the *Christabel* materials I have been describing is that they all date from the second stage of composition. Though we have a great deal, we do not have the original working drafts and manuscripts. I suspect they never existed and that the poem was composed and refined orally in its first stage. It is a feature shared with the *Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* of which we have only a manuscript fair-copy and printed versions. All three poems must have been worked through the preliminary stages in the same way, and such poems engage readers very differently from the near-contemporaneous "conversation poems," for some of which (notably *The Eolian Harp*) there is an almost overwhelming amount of early draft-manuscripts. This is not to say that Coleridge did not compose or at least substantially revise poems in ballad-metre – *The Ballad of the Dark Ladies*, *Love and Alice du Clos* provide contrary examples –, but the feature is odd and I will suggest a reason for it before I am through.

Coleridge said several times that Part I of *Christabel* was written in 1797; but, though there are parallels and anticipations dating from late 1797 and even from the year before, the evidence suggests that work proceeded alongside the *Ancient Mariner* and intensified when the other poem was complete. Part I was finished before Coleridge left Stowey, and a written version was circulating after he came back from Germany. Part II was then begun when he settled in the north of England, in August-October 1800, and the two parts together appear to have been revised at this time (the names Leoline and Geraldine must have entered the poem after 1800).

This is the stage of the poem represented in different ways by the first group of manuscripts. What we have in the case of *Christabel* is the layer which was written down in the summer-early winter of 1801 – by Coleridge himself, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson –, after the poem had solidified. It is evident that Part I was revised after Part II was written, but we have no evidence of what Part I was like before it was revised.

The contradictory and sporadic nature of Coleridge's involvement represented by the textual evidence is, therefore, as interesting for what it reveals of his attitudes towards a finished thing as of his working methods as



he laboured to complete the poem. The amount of material connected with his promises to continue and complete the poem is, in fact, strikingly small; the material for the most part has to do with his consciousness of what he had already written, and how it might be received.

By a curious accident of fate, one of the two versions made in Malta by Sarah Stoddart (the sister of the man who had earlier recited the poem to Walter Scott) passed into Hazlitt's hands after he married her in 1808, and became a weapon in Hazlitt's armoury against the renegade Coleridge in his reviews through the next decade. This is the version Hazlitt misremembered in his *Examiner* review in 1816, when he gave the missing line as "Hideous, deformed, and pale of hue,"<sup>9</sup> compare line 253a – "Are lean and old and foul of hue"), thereby overemphasizing the morbid.

Coleridge's awareness of this hostage to fortune bears on the pattern of his annotation of printed copies, which is quite unlike the pattern elsewhere. He gave away the first copies he had from Murray almost at random, to Highgate neighbours, without correction, as if to get rid of them. After the first reviews, with James Gillman's support, he laboured to revise the passages reviewers had complained of; and, a few years later, when he felt more secure, returned specifically to defend himself against Hazlitt, whom he believed (falsely) to have written the review in the *Edinburgh*, in the few copies he still possessed. The last copy he annotated appears to have been a copy he found in the Ramsgate Public Library – in a way the most interesting copy of all – which he corrected for posterity and cast to the wind.

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*Christabel* was pre-published – in the sense that it began to circulate in the public domain – in 1801. It had previously circulated among a small circle comprising the Wordsworths, the Lambs, the friends Coleridge made in Germany, Southey, Davy. After copies had been made for the Wordsworth circle, they circulated it among their friends. Again, after September and October 1802, when John Stoddart recited it to Walter Scott, it began to circulate among an overlapping but wider circle: Scott repeated it to Lady Beaumont, and also to Jeffrey and Byron, and so on. The way in which the poem became current is illustrated by Henry Crabb Robinson: Mrs Clarkson read him the version Coleridge gave her after he returned from Malta, on 9 October 1811; by 1814, Robinson had his own copy, and read it at the

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<sup>9</sup> Jackson I, 207.



Flaxmans and the Pordens' on 3 December, at Dr Aikin's on 4 December, to the Flaxmans and Miss Vardel on 19 December and to Mrs Pattison and Mr Murray on 28 December, at the Nash's on 14 March 1815.<sup>10</sup> Copies came to be everywhere, and the text in Coleridge's mind was refined as his awareness of this field of auditors grew.

When the poem was published by Murray in 1816 (having been removed from *Sibylline Leaves* at the last moment), it was based on Sara Hutchinson's transcript, made perhaps in 1804 for Lady Beaumont. This is likely to have been selected because it had been the neatest and cleanest manuscript to hand to Byron, even though it contains minor textual irregularities. The conclusion to Part II was added from an earlier letter,<sup>11</sup> prompted, one guesses, by the accidental similarities of phrasing and rhyme in the description of Leoline's speech (lines 636-9) as much as because of the relevance of their content. The poem therefore came into print in an almost haphazard way, more than a decade after the first phase of its influence on other writers. The next phase of its literary influence was quite different (for instance, on Keats, in *The Eve of St Agnes*). It was, by this time, for Coleridge, an almost historic document, and so he presented it in his preface.

This is why I described the textual history of *Christabel* as important not for what it contains of the evolution of the poem, but for what blocked its development. The body of variants and revisions constitutes a record of surrounding awareness into which the poem moved as it seized up. They confirm that it is not going anywhere; they merely provide variations and refinements on what had been done. As Hazlitt observed, Coleridge had forced his style "into the service of a story which is petrific."<sup>12</sup> The sense of entrapment intensified on publication, to be sure, as the peculiar lesson of the annotated copies shows, but it is part of the poem from many years previously. This is also why I said that text is repressed into subtext. I would argue that the text – the story, which begins to unfold in Part II – is already at cross-purposes with the originating idea; that the interest of Part II is primarily that it is irrelevant and because it prompts one to ask why.

The part written at Stowey explores feelings and desires which feed off each other at the edge of consciousness; the part written at Keswick attempts "witchery by daylight," which Coleridge acknowledged was a very different

<sup>10</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley (London, 1938), I 47, 155, 156, 157, 164.

<sup>11</sup> *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford, 1956-71), II 728 (6 May 1801).

<sup>12</sup> Jackson I, 207.

enterprise.<sup>13</sup> Part II possesses interest, to be sure, but it only repeats the exploration attempted in Part I in a social context (in the Leoline-Geraldine-Christabel relationship, instead of in Christabel's mind); and it is consequently unsurprising that no extant manuscript material whatsoever exists for Part III. Part II shows Coleridge backing away from his subject as his poem evolved into narrative, into time, as well as into the ordinary surrounding daylight world. The textual evidence confirms this was his sense of what he had done. His engagement was throughout fitful – he corrected some errors, left others – but it is noticeable that he tinkered very little with Part II. He even ceased to add marginal glosses to the last quarter of the poem (after line 493), as if his interest had ceased.

I said I would come back to the matter of Sara Hutchinson, because Coleridge copied out the poem for her and clearly came to associate it with her. The point I would make is that, though his sense of despair grew as he came to brood over his stifled feelings, this development parallels but is not the cause of his failure to complete the poem. The poem was essentially complete (as Part I) before he left for Germany, and if Sara Hutchinson is to be held responsible for anything, it is for its continuance (into Part II) rather than for its failure to develop into Part III and onwards. Coleridge's thoughts of continuing the poem revived when they met again in 1824, but that seems to prove my point.

The restraints or inhibitions (call them what you will) that prevented the development of the poem are present in poems like *The Eolian Harp*, written before *Christabel*, and are evident from his thinking in other areas – about the nature of love and of evil, for example. All one can say is that thoughts of how the poem would be received outside a circle of friends delayed book-publication and caused him considerable anxiety.

The lesson the *Christabel* texts have to teach is that Coleridge could refine on the situation he had, but not develop it poematically. The poem represents a crisis of the Romantic sublime – if one recalls that sublimity is literally “under the threshold,” and can be concerned with a liminal area of half-formed and forming fears and desires; that it can be concerned with getting down to hear what Beckett calls the “whispering” of subconscious adjustments. One might also recall that Coleridge coined words like “subconsciousness” and “subjectivity,” as well as “under-consciousness” and “underpain.”<sup>14</sup> The fact that the first stage of the poem appears to have

<sup>13</sup> *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring (Princeton, 1990), I 409-10 (1 July 1833).

<sup>14</sup> Coleridge's coinages are conveniently listed by James C. McCusick “‘Living Words’: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Genesis of the OED,” *Modern Philology* 90 (August 1992),

been composed orally is important because Coleridge found the ballad particularly available to explore this area. It was a discovery made when he worked on Wordsworth's *Three Graves*, and which continued in the *Ancient Mariner*, where in Parts V and VI the ballad-stanza is expanded to get down beneath the surface, concentrating, listening, so as to hear the infinitesimal murmur.<sup>15</sup>

The incantatory repetitions of the ballad-stanza provide a framework, a "syntax of weakness,"<sup>16</sup> in which depths of meaning and ambiguities can be tested. When, however, the stanza expanded into the paragraphs of *Christabel*, and the exploration intensified, Coleridge, groping in the dark for shadows, found himself coming face to face with obscenity. His poem was never about vampirism or incest, as rumour had it in 1816, and Geraldine is not a man in disguise; but it does contain the suggestion that innocence can be stained and that evil can usurp good. For a while after he wrote the parts he did, Coleridge continued to hope that we might enjoy acting according to the moral law, but joy eluded him.

Idly we supplicate the Powers above!  
There is no Resurrection for a Love  
That unperturb'd, unshadowed, wanes away  
In the chill'd heart by inward self-decay.<sup>17</sup>

The sound of his later poetry is just as complicated as in these earlier poems, but it rests on a dualistic ethic and a different sense of metrical possibility. The late poetry differs in kind, also, from the "conversational" mode, which represents a different level of incantatory style.

I said at the beginning that Jerome McGann's new anthology<sup>18</sup> provides the context for the point I wanted to make. Indeed it does: it makes up a context of increasing domestication, repression, fear of the feminine as the period developed and came into focus in the rear-view mirror of early Victorianism. McGann gives us the flipside of the internal, privatized lyric turn that has for so long been seen as the discourse and discipline of Romanticism. Wise passiveness no longer seems so wise or so innocent. The drafts of *The Eolian Harp* show that Coleridge was well aware of the sexual

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1-45. His coinages beginning with *pre-* (*precondition*, *preconfigure*, etc) and *up-* (*upbouyance*, *upworking*, etc) are also interesting in this respect.

<sup>15</sup> Compare Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton, 1970), 247.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>17</sup> *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London, 1957- ), IV 5146 (24 April 1824); used as Envoi to "Love's Apparition & Evanishment".

<sup>18</sup> *The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* (Oxford, 1993).

temptations of the One Life; he wrote of sound changing into light in a heady, perfumed mix, while houris proffer the milk of paradise. Julie Carlson<sup>19</sup> and others have written of the sexual allure and conflict involved by the fear of being invaded, possessed, and the forms this took in the Romantic period.

Coleridge's belief in sensibility, intuition, natural feeling (the Della Cruscan, 1790s aspect) is complicated in a very obvious way by his anxiety over the body of women: it is one way of explaining why his poem jammed in the situation he had described. The anthology makes evident the social constraints that inhibited him, even if not their theological and philosophical aspects which pressed on him equally and in which Coleridgeans are equally interested. George Oppen once said: "We simply have an ethical motivation and we must deal with that fact; if we didn't have it, it wouldn't be a problem."<sup>20</sup> The working-out of the collision between desire and responsibility was a problem for Coleridge, and has a different agenda from the current feminist interests. If the literary background of *Christabel* is Gothic and the literature of sensibility, this combines in Coleridge's awareness with a philosophical agenda. He links sensibility to pantheism, even as he acknowledges its panicked Gothic side, and at the same time refuses to abrogate moral responsibility for action. One can therefore ask: who else was interested in the kind of poetry represented by Sir William Jones and Erasmus Darwin, and the implications for it which were discussed in the German *Pantheismusstreit*? Coleridge's ideal of bringing the two sides of our nature into alignment is sustained by an argument against repressiveness, like Schiller's *schöne Seele*, yet the argument insists on allowing the complications and perversity of our desires and feeling.

Coleridge seems to me interesting as a figure who embraces two worlds in another sense also: not just here between literature and philosophy, but within English writing. Who else wrote in a way which connects with both Matthew Lewis and Felicia Hemans, Gothic and Silver Fork fiction, the 1790s and the 1820s of McGann's anthology? Coleridge's embarrassment (the original meaning, of being confined within bars, is relevant here) is the ground from which later poems grow – their quite different sound and meaning. They do not place us in a trance within a trance, like the Mariner; they are not for "chaunting," their texture is thinner, their imagery less

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<sup>19</sup> Julie Carlson "Impositions of Form: Romantic Antitheatricalism and the Case against Particular Women," *ELH* 60 (1993), 149-79.

<sup>20</sup> In an interview with L. S. Dembo, *Contemporary Literature* 10 (Spring 1969), 166.

mobile; but what closed down *Christabel* fertilised *The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-Tree*.

In Coleridge's early poems, words and syntax give experience imbued with and exploring the depth of the One Life: the later poems possess a kind of "mental weightlessness."<sup>21</sup> They explicitly make up allegories, are products of conscious dualism, accepted dividedness;<sup>22</sup> they are not sustained, as Coleridge once argued poems should be, by a modifying undercurrent of feeling which "moves onward from within" ("That makes the ship to go" in the *Ancient Mariner*).<sup>23</sup> Increasingly after *Christabel* Coleridge ceased to try to bring this current into alignment and instead wrote a different kind of poem, which I find interesting more for what it is than for what it is not.

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<sup>21</sup> "Mental weightlessness" is borrowed from Rachel Blau DuPlessis "Oppen and Pound," *Paideuma* 10 (1981), 80.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago, 1983), 96.

<sup>23</sup> Coleridge's marginal comment in what might have been Francis Wrangham's copy of *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), 128.