Chapter Two
GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN COLERIDGE'S WORKS

Coleridge is a major romantic poet – often associated with the Gothic tradition of writing. This is largely due to the popularity of his so-called ‘mystery poems’: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan and Christabel. He also wrote some important critical discussions on supernaturalism and the sublime, which have some relevance to the Gothic tradition.

It was Coleridge, who for all his scornful remarks about the ‘ruined castles, the dungeons, the trap-doors, the skeletons, the flesh-and-blood ghosts, and the perpetual moonshine’ of the popular literature of both England and Germany, represented in his own work the ‘Gothic’ at its selective (aesthetic and psychological) best. The spring of 1798 saw him writing several poems containing Gothic elements. Interestingly, they took a variety of poetic forms: conversation poems such as Frost at Midnight and The Nightingale; ballads of magic and guilt like The Ancient Mariner, the fragmentary Three Graves and Ballad of the Dark Ladie; and public odes and versified sermons such as France: An Ode and Fears in Solitude. There is also a scrap of verse introducing the prose fragment on the theme of guilt and exile, The Wanderings of Cain, which he began as a collaborative venture with Wordsworth.

Coleridge’s fascination for the Gothic is evident from his early years. In a series of letters written to Thomas Poole in October 1797, he gives us a detailed insight into the formative period of his life:

At six years old I remember to have read Belisarius, Robinson Crusoe, and Philemon Quarles; and then I found the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, one tale of which (the tale of a man who was compelled to seek for a pure virgin) made so deep an impression on me (I had read it in the evening when my mother was mending stockings), that I was haunted by spectres, whenever I was in the dark; and I distinctly remember the anxious and fearful eagerness with which I used to watch the window in which the books lay, and whenever the sun lay upon then, I would seize it, carry
it by the wall, and bask and read. My father found out the effect which these books had produced, and burnt them.

However, the young boy’s inclination towards this kind of literature could not be eradicated. In another letter to Poole, Coleridge opined that these works were essential for the full and proper development of a child:

For from my early reading of fairy tales and genii, etc., my mind had been habituated to the Vast, and I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my sight, even at that age. Should children be permitted to read romances, and relations of giants and magicians, and genii? I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. I know no other way of giving the mind a love of the Whole and the Great.

In a lecture on the Gothic, Coleridge half-admitted:

But the Gothic art is sublime. On entering a cathedral I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite, earth and air, nature and art all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible impression left is, that I am nothing.

Coleridge’s remarks on Mrs. Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho, A Romance* were published in the *Critical Review* of August 1794. He began by comparing it with her earlier story, *The Romance of the Forest*, a book which proved that she had the key to “unlock the gates [...] of horror, that and thrilling fears.” Commenting on the new book he wrote:

The same power of description are displayed, the same predilection is discovered for the wonderful and the gloomy—the same mysterious terrors are continually exciting in the mind the idea of a supernatural appearance, keeping us, as it were, upon the very edge and confines of the world of spirits, and yet are ingeniously explained by familiar causes; curiosity is kept upon the stretch from page to page, and from volume to volume, and the secret, which the reader thinks himself every instant upon the point of penetrating, flies like a phantom before him, and eludes his eagerness till the very last moment of protracted explanation.
In June 1798, Coleridge continuing the same critical line of thought in his review of Mrs. Radcliffe’s *The Italian; or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents*. “[...] its constitution was maintained only by the passion of terror, and that excited by trick”. He admitted that it contained a few scenes that “powerfully seize the imagination, and interest the passions”, but called the sensational chapter describing the examination of Vivaldi, the hero, before the Inquisition “so improbable, that we should rather have attributed it to one of Mrs. Radcliffe’s numerous imitators.”

The year 1797 had been spent by Coleridge reviewing Gothic fiction for *Critical Review*. In a letter to William Lisle Bowles he wrote:

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Indeed I am almost weary of the Terrible [...]. I have been lately reviewing *The Monk*, the *Italian*, Hubert de Sevrac &C &C – an all of which dungeons, and old castles, and solitary Houses by the Sea Side, & Caverns, & Woods, & extraordinary characters, & all the tribe of Horror & Mystery, have crowded on me – even to surfeiting.
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In February 1797, while reviewing *The Monk* for *Critical Review*, Coleridge argued that any attempt to import German horrors to Britain would precipitate a decline of its literature:

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The tale is indeed a tale of horror, yet the most painful impression, which the work left on our minds, was that of great acquirements and splendid genius employed to furnish a mormo for children, a poison for youth, and a provocative for the debauchee. Tales of enchantments and witchcraft can never be useful: our author has contrived to make them pernicious, by blending, with an irreverent negligence, all that is most awfully true in religion with all that is most ridiculously absurd in superstition.
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In his review (1816) of Charles Robert Maturin’s Gothic drama, *Bertram*, Coleridge pointed out “the so-called German drama is English in its origin, English in its materials, and English by re-adoption.” He named Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* and Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* as obvious examples of English works, which had influenced the younger generation of German authors, whose works in turn affected English writers and audiences in the 1790s and beyond.
In light of these reviews by S.T. Coleridge, it becomes easy to understand why he was at first so reticent and even embarrassed about his poem *Christabel*. For it is obvious that he was himself composing what was essentially a "romance". The chief perceptible difference was that his romance was in verse, whereas the stories of Lewis, Radcliffe were in prose. He too was commandeering old castles, woods, serpents, and dreams full of hell, extraordinary and incomprehensible characters, mysterious terrors, and weaving them into the very fabric of his poem.

In 1817 Coleridge prepared the prospectus for his course of lectures, which he was to give the next year. According to Gillman, the eleventh and the twelfth sections were to deal with as follows:

XI. On the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, and on the romantic use of the supernatural in poetry and in works of fiction not poetical. On the conditions and regulations under which such Books may be employed advantageously in the earlier Periods of Education. XII. On tales of witches, apparitions, & C. as distinguished from the magic and magicians of Asiatic origin [...] Lastly, the causes of the terror and interest which stories of ghosts and witches inspire, in early life at least, whether believed or not.⁹

It was this Coleridge, the magician - poet of the dark recesses of human experience, whose influence on the next generation was to be extraordinary. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the culminating work of Romantic Gothic narrative, was conceived after the young author, with her husband and Byron, had indulged in a late-night reading of *Christabel*. *Frankenstein* itself rings with echoes - direct quotations, half-quotations, and near quotations of *The Ancient Mariner*.

*Dura Navis* was written in 1787 and first published in 1893, Coleridge's schoolboy poem addresses his brother Frank facing. "The horrors of a Naval Fight, / When thundering cannons spread a sea of Gore" (26-27):

What dreadful scenes appear before my eyes!
Ah! See how each with frequent slaughter red,
Regardless of his dying fellows' cries
O'er their fresh wounds with impious order tread!

(33-36)
There is more to come should the younger sailor survive the battle. Coleridge conjures up for him "A fate more cruel still" (42) – to eat or be eaten when the desperate crew resorts to cannibalism in order to survive:

    On its own flesh hath fix’d deadly tooth?
    Dubious and fluttering’ twixt hope and fear
    With trembling hands the lot I see thee draw.
    [.................................]
    Or, deep thy dagger in the friendly heart,
    Whilst each strong passion agitates thy breast,
    Though oft with Horror back I see thee start,
    Lo! Hunger drives thee to th’ inhuman feast.

(48-56)

In November 1794 Coleridge’s reading of the English translation of Schiller’s Robbers, a play about the adventures of a noble rebel Karl Moor so enthused him that he wanted to tell Southey all about it:

’Tis past one O’clock in the morning – I sat down at twelve O’clock to read the Robbers of Schiller – I had read chill and trembling until I came to the part where Moor fires a pistol over the Robbers who are asleep – I could read no more – My God! Southey! Who is this Schiller? This convulser of the Heart? Did he write this Tragedy amid the yelling of Fiends? – I should not like to be able to describe such characters – I tremble like an Aspen Leaf – Upon my Soul, I write to you because I am frightened – I had better go to Bed. Why have we ever called Milton sublime?^{10}

The reading of Schiller’s play marked a beginning for Coleridge. It crystallized the elements from which he was to create his best poetry. The immediate poetic result was a fine sonnet addressed to the German author. To the Author of the Robbers (1796), it conveys all the fear and excitement so breathlessly described in the letter to Southey:

    SCHILLER! That hour I would have wish’d to die
    If thro’ the shuddering midnight I had sent
    From the dark dungeon of the Tower time-rent
    That fearful voice, a famish’d Father’s cry –
    Lest in some after moment aught more mean
    Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
    Black Horror scream’d, and all her goblin rout
    Dimenish’d’d shrunk from the more withering scene!
    Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
    Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood
With its strong rhythms, its striking opening line, it resorts to certain Gothic clichés about dungeons, towers, and black horror.

Coleridge's nervousness necessitated a resort to the laudanum bottle, the effects of which may perhaps be traced in the *Ode on the Departing Year* (1796), which he wrote hastily for the *Cambridge Intelligencer* in the last week of December 1796. It was like all but one of his political verses, a brittle composition echoing the ghostly violence of Burgher's *Leonore*, which he had been reading, and in a hollow fashion Milton's *Nativity Ode*. Doubtless his own recent nightmares dictated the passage:

> Yet still I gasp'd and reel'd with dread.
> And ever, when the dream of night
> Renews the phantom to my sight,
> Cold sweat-drops gather on my limbs;
> My ears throb hot; my eye-balls start;
> My brain with horrid tumult swims;
> Wild is the tempest of my heart;
> And my thick and struggling breath
> Imitates the toil of death!

(VI. 104-112)

The agony that the poet experiences at the remembrance of that vision is comparable to the agony of a soldier dying on a battlefield:

> The soldier on the war-field spread,
> When all fore done with toil and wounds,
> Death – like he dozes among heaps of dead!

......................

See! The starting wretch's head
Lies pillow'd on a brother's corse! [sic]

(VI. 114-120)

The Gothic elements of fear, death, fiends, and ghosts find their way into the third stanza of the poem. The ghosts of those for whose deaths the Empress of Russia was responsible are now seen dancing round her tomb:

> Rush around her narrow dwelling!
> The exterminating Fiend is Fled-
(Foul her life, and dark her doom)
Mighty armies of the dead
Dance, like death-fires, round her tomb!

(III. 55-59)

In *The Nightingale* (1798) Coleridge introduces a description of a deserted castle, a gentle maid and a wild grove where many nightingales have made their home. The landscape he describes is curiously Gothic:

And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,
Which the great lord inhabits not; and so
This grove is wild with tangling underwood
[..............................]
But never elsewhere in one place I knew
So many nightingales; and far and near,
In wood and thicket, over the wide grove
[..............................]

A most gentle Maid,
Who dwelleth in her hospitable home
Hard by the castle, and at latest eve
(Even like a Lady vowed and dedicate
To something more than Nature in the grove)

(49-52, 55-57, 69-73)

The *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) was planned by Wordsworth and Coleridge on the afternoon of 20 November 1797, when they were walking in the Quantok Hills.\(^{11}\) The first idea came from Mr. John Cruikshank, who, according to Wordsworth, had a dream about "a person suffering from a dire curse for the commission of some crime" and "a skeleton ship with figures in it."\(^{12}\) It was begun jointly with Wordsworth, who contributed not only one or two phrases but the part played by the albatross and the navigation of the ship by dead men.\(^{13}\) The rest is the work of Coleridge, and on 23 March 1798, he finished the poem. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge reveals that in the course of discussions between Wordsworth and himself on the subject of poetry, they had decided to write two kinds of poetry:

[...] my endeavours should be directed to person and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from out inward nature a human interest and as 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 analogues 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.\textsuperscript{14}

(Ch. XIV)

In accordance with this division of labour, the creative responsibility for this poem naturally fell upon Coleridge.

*The Ancient Mariner* is regarded as a masterpiece of supernatural poetry. The marvels, the supernatural eeriness and the atmosphere of terror and superstition in the poem link it with the great ballad tradition of the late Middle Ages. Omen and weather lore, which play a prominent part in many ballads, are used with great effect by Coleridge. Enthusiasm for ballad poetry was only one aspect of a more general interest in everything medieval – the 'Gothic cult'. References to Mary mother, to angelic spirits, to the guardian saint and the hermit are clear enough testimony to the medievalism of the poem. The poem is full of the colour and glamour of the Middle Ages. From the mention of the merry music "Nodding their heads before her goes / The merry minstrelsy" (1. 35-36) to the Catholic idea of penance which lies at the bottom of the poem "O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!" (VII. 574), everywhere we see the medieval touch – the fateful cross-bow, the vesper bell, the hermit, the prayer to Mary "To Mary Queen the praise be given!" (V. 294).

Southey's review of the poem in October 1798 of *Critical Review*, had inaugurated the first wave of criticism directed at *Lyrical Ballads*. It had taken the volume's predilection for tales of haunting to task and aligned it with 'German' writing and with 'superstition':

\begin{quote}
We do not sufficiently understand the story of the Mariner to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity [...]. The story of a man who suffers the perpetual pain of cold, because an old woman prayed that he never might be warm, is perhaps a good story for a ballad, because it is a well-known tale: but is the author certain that it is 'well authenticated?' and does not such an assertion promote the popular superstition of witchcraft?\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}
In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge went beyond the common place, thrills of horror. Of course, he evokes these, and his opening verses (in which the Mariner stays the Wedding-Guest), suggest that at first Coleridge followed familiar precedents in appealing to a kind of horrified fear. But as he worked at his poem, he widened its scope and created something much richer and more human. The weird adventures of his Mariner take place not in the Gothic setting of a medieval castle (as in *Christabel*) but on a boundless sea with days of pitiless sun and soft nights lit by a moon and attendant stars. The 'machining persons' are spirits of another sort, transformed by Coleridge into powers, who watch over the good and evil actions of men and requite them with appropriate rewards and punishments. In the hands of Coleridge the supernatural acquires a new scope and character. Instead of confining himself to an outworn dread of spectres and phantoms, he moves over a wide range of emotions and touches equally on guilt and remorse, suffering and relief, hate and forgiveness, grief and joy.

The poem in the hands of Samuel Coleridge tells an exiting tale of a man's sin against nature and his repentance and reconciliation. He describes the nature of each phase of the Mariner's sin and the tale goes through many different atmospheres, as it tells about the Mariner's crime and punishment.

At first everything seemed to be very normal and pleasant. The ship was cheered as it set assay from the harbour and out to sea. It sailed with good wind and fair weather and everything seemed perfect. But then a storm drives the ship towards the South Pole:

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With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled
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(I. 45-50)

They ended up in a land of ice, where no living thing was seen. There was ice everywhere surrounding the ship. It looked as if there was little chance for
survival. Then a great seabird — the Albatross appeared through the fog, and brought the seamen hope:

At length did cross and Albatross
Through the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul
We hailed it in God’s name.

(I. 63-66)

The Albatross proved to be a good omen and followed the ship as it turned course northward through the fog and ice. However, the shooting down of the Albatross by the Mariner with his crossbow so infuriate the shipmates that they cry out against the ancient Mariner, for killing the bird of good omen and they hang the dead Albatross around the Mariner’s neck and blame everything on him:

Ah! Well a-day! What evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

(II. 139-142)

By now the atmosphere has turned evil for the seafarers. The seamen begin to die from dehydration and as they lay dying they curse the Ancient Mariner:

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye

(III. 212-215)

As the souls departed from the bodies of the seamen, the Life-in-Death began her work on the accursed ancient Mariner. The Mariner did not pray for help, but prayed for God to take him also:

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

(IV. 236-239)

After seven days and seven nights of torture, the Mariner begins to realize and recognize the true beauty and happiness of the water snakes. He blesses them in his heart and the spell begins to break. The bodies of the ship’s crew come back
to life and the ship moves on by angelic spirits sent by a guardian saint. While the Mariner is lying unconscious, knocked out by a sudden movement of the ship; two spirits decide that the Mariner had penance long and heavy. On awakening, the Mariner finds himself sailing in gentle weather, but the dead men all stand together and glare at him once more with their stony eyes.

All stood together on deck.
For a charnel — dungeon fitter:
All fixed on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.

(VI. 434-437)

The Mariner realizes that the curse was still there. A breeze carries the ship to the Ancient Mariner’s native country, the angelic spirits leave the dead bodies and become a guiding light, the ship sinks, but the ancient Mariner is saved by the pilot’s boat. The poem ends with the Mariner traveling from land to land to teach his tale. Taught by his own example to love and revere all things God made.

Coleridge’s poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is full of strange and macabre happenings. The strange weather, the albatross as a bird of good omen, the skeleton ship of Death and Life-in-Death, the spirit from the land of mist and snow, the two spirits the Mariner hears in his trance, the angelic spirits which move the bodies of the dead men, the madness of the pilot and his boy, and the Mariner’s strange power of speech, all are examples of the uncanny and the Gothic. Nature plays an active and powerful role and cannot be manipulated. For those who try to control it, must be subject to an inevitable punishment. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* the scene of the Mariner’s punishment is plunged in a Gothic atmosphere, where nature has a threatening presence:

The western wave was all a-flame.
The day was well nigh done!
[..........................]
And straight the sun was flecked with bars,
[..........................]
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face
[..........................]
The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
[……………………………………………]
The stars were dim, and thick the night.

(III. 171-172, 177, 179-180, 199-200, 206)

Coleridge has beautifully wrought in the uncommon and remote aspects of nature, for example:

All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon

(II. 111-114)

In the poem the infinite has a sublime connotation, it expresses the power of nature and it represents a test for the Mariner. The first natural test is the ice: it is all around the ship and the crew can't see its end, it is infinite. The sea appears as an unlimited presence through the punishment of the Mariner. This underlines the Mariner and man's inferiority in front of the infinite, omnipotent nature:

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink

(II. 119-122)

The first situation that strikes terror in the heart of the Mariner is the appearance of the skeleton-ship. When it is sighted in the distance, the sailors feel happy to think that they will get water to quench their burning thirst. But in a few moments they discover the reality of this ship. The description of the ship with its "ribs" (III.185) and "her sails that glance in the Sun,.Like restless gossamers?" (III. 183-184) fill us with terror. The feeling of terror is heightened when a reference is made to the crew of this ship. The crew consists of Death and Life-in-Death: "The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she, / Who thicks man's blood with cold" (III. 193-194). Indeed, this spectre-bark with its strange crew is among the principle ingredients in the creation of the atmosphere of mystery and horror. It is a strange mystery that this ship should
sail on the sea without a wind and without a tide, while the Mariner’s ship stands still “as a painted ship upon a painted ocean” (II. 117-118). Obviously it is a supernatural force which drives this ship, and the crew also consists of supernatural characters.

The stationary ship unable to move is a symbol of calm and desolation:

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean

(II. 115-118)

In the following lines Coleridge depicts an unusual picture of death-fires dancing and of water burning green, blue, and white:

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch’s oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white

(II. 127-130)

Another strange picture is that of lightning: “Like water shot from some high crag, / The lightning fell with never a jag / A river steep and wide” (V. 324-326). Innumerable ugly and filthy creatures were seen crawling on the surface of the stagnant water; Coleridge describes the horrid picture thus: “Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea” (II. 125-126).

One of the strange incidents in the poem is the Mariner’s strange power of speech. At the beginning of the poem we read that an Ancient Mariner stops one of the three wedding-guests in order to speak to him. The Mariner, mesmeric in his power, mysterious and awe-inspiring in appearance, with his glittering eye and his skinny hand, at once arouses our curiosity. The wedding-guest is unable to resist the strange power that he perceives in the Mariner’s eye:

He holds him with his glittering eye
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.

(I. 13-16)
We shudder with fear to think of the Mariner who is left alone after seeing “Four times fifty living men” (III. 216) dropping down one by one, “With heavy thump, a lifeless lump” (III.219). It is at this stage that the Wedding-Guest begins to suspect that the Mariner who is talking to him may be a ghost and so he says:

I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
[..............................]
I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand, so brown;

(IV. 224-229)

The agony and spiritual torture of the lonely Ancient Mariner on a wide sea when he could not pray or die are, perhaps, the most terrifying elements in the story. The following stanzas may be quoted to convey some of the horror of the Mariner’s state:

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.
I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gushed,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.
I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

(IV. 240-252)

What makes the situation still more horrifying is that the curse in the dead men’s eyes had never passed away:

The look with which they looked on me
Had never passed away.
[........................................]
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

(IV. 255-256, 261-262)

The feeling of mystery in the poem is deepened by various situations. For instance, the dead body of the Albatross, which had been hung round the
Mariner's neck, fell down into the sea automatically the moment he blessed the
water-snakes.

The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

(IV. 288-291)

The function of the elements (earth, air, fire, water) and heavenly bodies is not
merely to image the Mariner's spiritual states, but also to provide the link
between the Mariner as an ordinary man, and the Mariner as one acquainted
with the invisible world, which has its own set of values. This link is first
suggested in the idea that the Albatross has a power of control over the
elements: it is continued in the idea “Of the spirit that plagued us so; / Nine
fathom deep he had followed us/From the land of mist and snow” (II. 132-134).

The horrible incident of the groaning, stirring, and coming back to life
of the dead crew is a scene of macabre intensity:

The dead men gave a groan,
They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes
[-----------------------------]
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools
We were a ghastly crew

(V. 330-332, 339-340)

A terrifying experience for the Mariner till he discovers that the bodies of the
dead crew move not by the souls of the men, nor by demons of earth or middle
air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits sent down by the invocation of the
 guardian saint:

But a troop of spirits blest:
For when it dawned – they dropped their arms,
And clustered round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And their bodies passed.

(V. 349-353)

Another supernatural event is of the polar spirit's fellow- demons, (the
invisible inhabitants of the element), who take part in his wrong; two of them
relate, that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner has been accorded
to the polar spirit, who has returned southward. The Mariner has been cast into a trance; for the angelic power causes the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure.

The troop of angelic spirits standing over the dead bodies in shapes of crimson light further heightens the atmosphere of mystery in the poem:

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light;

(VI. 492-405)

Again, towards the close of the poem, the poet wishes to convey to us the toll that the horrific experiences have taken on the Mariner. When rescued by the Pilot, “the Pilot shrieked / And fell down in a fit” (VII. 560-561). The effect on the Pilot’s boy was that he went crazy with fear:

I took the oars: the Pilot’s boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.

(VII. 564-567)

Even the holy Hermit was badly shaken and on stepping forth from the boat, could scarcely stand because of fear. The Mariner’s face had so changed with his agonizing experiences that to the pilot he appeared not a human being but some horrible spectre, to the Pilot’s boy the devil himself “The Devil knows how to row” (VII. 569). The Ancient mariner deals with the supernatural, on a large scale and in a generous sense. It presents many situations involving spirits, phantoms, spectres, skeletons and angels in the tale of the crime, the punishment, the fortune, the relief, and the partial forgiveness.

Coleridge’s poem Dejection: An Ode (1802) gives expression to a poignant mood of pessimism and disillusionment. The poem seems to be enveloped in a Gothic mood as illustrated from the following instances of the poem. In it the poet laments the loss of his poetic faculty and gives expression to the grief from which he is suffering. It is such a dark and dismal sorrow that it finds no expression in words, tears or sighs:
A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassionate grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear

(II. 21-24)

In Stanza VII the poet dismisses the depressing thoughts that have been haunting his mind, and turns his attention to the storm that has been raging outside. He feels that it is like the prolonged scream of a human being who is being tortured and who cries in his agony "[...] and listen to the wind, / Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream / Of agony by torture lengthened out" (VII. 96-98). He thinks that it would have been much better if the wind, instead of playing upon the lute, were to blow against a bare rock, a mountain lake, a lightning-struck tree, a high pine-grove, or a lonely house haunted by evil spirits:

[...] Thou, Wind, that rav'st without,
Bare crag, or mountain-train, or blasted tree,
Or pine-grove wither woodman never climb,
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home

(VII. 99-102)

It seems to him that the wind is celebrating a devil's Christmas "Makst Devil's yele" (VII. 106). More vigorous and forceful are the lines where the sounds of the storm are compared first to the rushing of a defeated army, with groans of trampled and wounded men:

What tell'st thou now about?
'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
With groans of trampled men, with smarting wounds
At once thy groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!

(VII. 110-113)

and then to the alternate moaning and screaming of a frightened child who has lost its way home:

'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way;
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear

(VII. 121-125)
The Three Graves (1809), a ballad begun by Wordsworth in 1796, adds a further dimension on the thematic interests shared by the two poets—namely the laying on of a curse. In the case of The Three Grave, the plot centres around the curse of a mother on her own daughter. The story as it is contained in the first and second parts is as follows: Edward a young farmer, at the house of Ellen, meets her friend Mary, and falls in love with her. With her consent, and by the advice of their common friend Ellen, he seeks the blessings of Mary’s mother. The mother, a widow-woman, approves the match. However, she becomes herself enamoured of her future son-in-law, and practices every art, both of endearment and of calumny, to transfer his affections from her daughter to herself. Edward, though perplexed by her strange detractions, mistakes her increasing fondness for motherly affections. At length overcome by her miserable passion, she exclaims with violent emotion “Oh Edward! Indeed, indeed, she is not fit for you; she has not a heart to love you as you deserve, it is I that love you! Marry me, Edward! And I will settle all my property on you.” Thus taken by surprise (whether from the effect of the horror which he felt, or the feeling of its strangeness and absurdity), Edward flung her from him, and bursts into a fit of laughter. Irritated almost to frenzy, the woman prays for a curse both on him and on her own child. Mary who happened to be in the room directly above them, heard Edward’s laugh, and her mother’s blasphemous prayer, and fainted away. Edward carries her off to Ellen’s home. All attempts for reconciliation with the mother go futile; at the end Mary is married to him. The third part of the tale begins from here.

Coleridge steeped in the literature of curses (from his reading and reviewing of Gothic romances) was much attracted by the subject of The Three Graves. As a result, Wordsworth turned over the completion of the poem to him in June or July of 1797.

Wordsworth’s comment (recorded by Barron Field in 1839), about Coleridge’s handling of The Three Graves is as follows:
I gave him the subject of *The Three Graves*; but he made it too shocking and painful, and not sufficiently sweetened by any heading views. Not being able to dwell on or sanctify natural woes, he took to the supernatural, and hence his *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, in which he shows great poetical power; but these things have not the hold on the heart which Nature gives and will never be popular like Goldsmith's and Burns's.  

In the opening two parts of *The Three Graves* which Wordsworth had drafted before he passed the work over to Coleridge, there is an effort to invest a blossoming thorn-tree with some sort of moral significance; according anything supernatural to it, is merely of a convenient simile:

> Fast rooted to the spot, you guess,  
> The wretched maiden stood,  
> As pale as any ghost of night  
> That wanteth flesh and blood

(II. 82-85)

However, in Parts III and IV of the poem written by Coleridge in the spring of 1809, the supernatural elements emerge more prominently. The effect of the mother's curse on her daughter Mary as she went to the church with Edward for their wedding is described thus:

> As soon as she stepp'd into the sun,  
> Her heart - it died away  
> And when the vicar join'd their hands,  
> Her limbs did creep and freeze

(III. 238-241)

If the sun had the effect of saddening her heart:

> The shade o'erflush'd her limbs with heat,  
> Then came a chill-like death:  
> And when the merry bells rang out,  
> They seem'd to stop her breath

(III. 252-255)

The following lines are eminently calculated to feed the amiable superstitions of the vulgar:

> Beneath the foulest mother's curse,  
> No child could ever thrive:  
> A mother is a mother still;  
> The holiest thing alive.

(III. 256-259)
Mary who does not believe that her mother’s curse has affected her, regards her dullness and sadness as a result of the “gloomy season” (III.272) and being “not well in health” (III.271). But as the poem progresses the atmosphere becomes surcharged with Gothic gloom:

The wind was wild; against the glass,
The rain did beat and bicker;
The church-tower singing over head –
You could not hear the vicar

(III. 306-309)

The mother practises her curse not only on her daughter but her daughter’s friend Ellen too:

O curse this woman, at whose house
Young Edward wo’d his wife
By night and day, in bed and bower,
O let her cursed be!

(IV. 518-521)

The effect of the mother’s curse on Ellen is described thus:

I saw poor Ellen kneeling still,
So pale! I guess’d not why:
When she stood up, there plainly was
A trouble in her eye.

(III.324-327)

Saddened by Ellen’s situation Mary cries out in agony: “O Ellen, Ellen! She curs’d me, / And now she has curs’d you!” (III. 354-355). Coleridge describes the effect of this curse upon the three persons as of ‘grief’, ‘frenzy’, and ‘terror’:

He reach’d his home, and by his looks
They saw his inward strife;
And they clung round him with their arms,
Both Ellen and his wife.
And Mary could not check her tears,
So on his breast she bow’d;
Then phrenzy melted into grief,
And Edward wept aloud.
Dear Ellen did not weep at all,
But closelier she did cling;
And turn’d her face, and look’d as if
She saw some frightful thing!

(III. 377-388)

The third part of the tale ends on this note of obscurity.
The closing lines of part IV, describing Edward's dream of murdering his evil mother-in-law evoke the chill of Gothic horror:

So they sat chatting, while bad thoughts
   Were troubling Edward's rest;
But soon they heard his hard quick parts,
   And the thumping in his breast,
'A mother too!' these selfsame words
Did Edward mutter plain;

[..........................]
When he wak'd up, and star'd like one
   That hath been just struck blind.
He sat upright; and ere the dream
   Had had time to depart,
'O God, forgive me!' he exclain'd.
   'I have torn out her heart!'
Then Ellen shriek'd and forwith burst
   Into ungentle laughter:
And Mary shiver'd where she sat,
   And never she smil'd after.

(IV. 518-537)

Osorio which was written in 1797 and published in (1873) is a tale of crime, punishment and repentance. In the preface of his dramatic poem Osorio, Coleridge writes:

In the character of Osorio I wished to represent a man, who, from his childhood had mistaken constitutional abstinence from vices, for strength of character - thro' his pride duped into guilt, and then endeavouring to shield himself from the reproaches of his own mind by misanthropy.

Shakespeare and Schiller (and Godwin, too) are visible influences on Osorio, on which Coleridge worked during the two weeks he spent at Racedown. The plot turns on the relationship between a good and a wicked brother and their love for the same woman. Coleridge sets the dramatic poem in Spain in the reign of Philip II, deriving some of the complications of the plot from the persecution of the Moors by the Spanish Inquisition. There is cruelty, disguise, secrecy, a hidden cave, and a dungeon into which the good brother, Albert, is thrown. The heroine, Maria has remained faithful to Albert even though his brother Osorio reported him dead and is courting her himself. Finally, Albert a character who embodies the Godwinian ideal of an
enlightened man, forgives his brother. Osorio himself, having originally plotted
to have his brother murdered and having killed a noble Moorish chieftain in the
course of the play, finally feels the bitterness of remorse:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{I have stood silent like a slave before thee,} \\
& \text{That I might taste the wormwood and the gall,} \\
& \text{And satiate this self-accusing spirit} \\
& \text{With bitter agonies than death can give}
\end{align*}
\]

(V. 303-306)

The play is interesting for what it reveals of Coleridge’s thinking about the
individual and society, about justice and mercy, and about the growth of evil in
a man.

Coleridge’s tragedy Remorse (1813) is a recast of Osorio. He had
revised the play in such away as to make the complicated plot less opaque. The
two brothers are renamed: Osorio becomes Ordonio, and the good brother
Albert becomes Alvar. The heroine Maria is renamed as Teresa. Some of the
lengthier speeches as well as impossible stage directions are also reduced.

Remorse contains in its central scene an elaborate supernatural spectacle
so full of Shakespearean references that the Theatrical Inquisitor and the
Critical Review mocked Coleridge for having the arrogance to compare himself
to “our Bard”. Other periodicals, however, praised Coleridge’s “ardent
admiration for the father of English drama”, so that the audience and viewers
should not miss Remorse as a veneration for Shakespeare.

However, Michael Gamer points out:

Yet even while Coleridge sought to ally himself with the
legitimating authority of Shakespeare, Remorse’s central
scene strongly resembles the most famous supernatural scene
of Lewis’s Castle Spectre. In both plays, the heroine through
supernatural intervention learns of a murder. Both also
employ incantations to demons in language reminiscent of
Macbeth, provide elaborate stage directions with an
exactness and minuteness of detail that smack of pantomime,
and take particular care to manage music, song, and ritual so
that they progress in volume and pace to a spectacular pitch.
The only difference between the two scenes is that
Coleridge’s is presented as mere trickery, a show put on by
his protagonist as away of exposing the treachery of his
brother.
ALVAR: The spell is mutter'd – come, thou wandering shape,  
Who own'st no masters in a human eye,  
Whate'er be this man's doom, fair be it, or foul,  
If he be dead, O come! And bring with thee  
That which he grasp'd in death! But if he live,  
Some taken on his obscure perilous life.  
(The whole Music clashes into a Chorus)

CHORUS
Wandering demons, hear the spell!  
Lest a blacker charm compel –  
(The incense of the altar takes fire suddenly, and an illuminated picture of Alvar's assassination is discovered, and having remained a few seconds is then hidden by ascending flames)

ORDONIO: (Starting): Duped! Duped! Duped! The traitor Isidore!  
(At this instant the doors are forced open, Monviedro and the Familiars of the Inquisition, Servants, & C enter and fill the stage.)

MONVIEDRO: First seize the sorcerer! Suffer him not to speak.

(III.i, 128-137)

Michal Gamer adds:

In combining the Inquisition, religious rituals and symbols, magic, and Satanic incantations, Coleridge’s scene combines all that is most awfully true in religion with all that is ridiculously absurd in superstition, the exact criticism he had levelled at the Monk in 1797. His scene, then, possesses all the incantation and spectacle of Lewis’s.

The Gothic elements of fear, blood, curse are all evident in Alhadra’s dialogue with Teresa when she sees Ordonio:

Alhadra: Hah! He goes! A bitter curse go with him,  
A scathing curse!  
You hate him, don’t you, lady?  
Teresa: Oh fear not me! My heart is sad for you.  
Alhadra: These fell inquisitors! These sons of blood!

(I.iii, 182-186)
Alhadra’s description of her miseries in prison, when first she fell under the censure of the Inquisition, again reflects Coleridge’s interest in Gothic conventions:

They cast me, then a young and nursing mother,
Into a dungeon of their prison house,
Where was no bed, no fire, no ray of light,
No touch, no sound of comfort! The black air,
It was a toil to breathe it!

(I.i, 206-210)

At the end of Act IV, the cavern scene (in which the murder of Isidore is perpetrated), contains some very powerful description of terrifying intensity:

Alhadra: I stood listening,
   Impatient for the footsteps of my husband!
Naomi: Thou called’st him?
Alhadra: I crept into the cavern –
   ’Twas dark and very silent.
   What said’st thou?
No! no! I did not dare call, Isidore,
[.................................]
O Heaven! I heard a groan, and followed it:
And yet another groan, which guided me
Into a strange recess – and there was light,
A hideous light! His torch lay on the ground;
Its flame burnt dimly o’er a chasm’s brink:
I spake; and whilst I spake, a feeble groan
Came from that chasm! It was his last! His death-groan!

(IV.iii, 62-76)

In the following passage the exposition of the effects of solitary confinement is most horrifying and Gothic in description:

Each pore and natural outlet shrivelled up,
By ignorance and parching poverty,
His energies roll back upon his heart,
And stagnate and corrupt, till, chang’d to poison,
They break out on him like a loathsome plague spot
[...] So he lies
Circled with evil till his very soul
Unmoulds its essence, hopelessly deform’d
By sights of evermore deformity

(V.i, 6-10, 16-19)

Coleridge’s poem The Pain of Sleep (1816) is a record of the misery that the poet experienced during certain nights. It describes the horrid dreams that
he dreamt on those nights. It was only later he realized that the cause of those frightening dreams was the opium, which he had been taking in order to obtain relief from his rheumatic pains.

The poet speaks of the painful experience, which he had during one particular night. He struggled to keep awake, he prayed, he walked long distances hoping to outdistance the demons that pursued him, but still they came. The poem describes the hallucinations experienced by Coleridge in his dreams. In his sleep he saw a “fiendish crowd / Of shapes and thoughts” (16-17). He felt a desire for wild or hateful objects, though this desire was strangely mixed with loathing: “Desire with loathing strangely mixed / On wild or hateful objects fixed” (23-24). He experienced “fantastic passions, maddening brawl!” (25). Along with this was a sense of guilt and remorse.

The poet experiences the horror of similar dreams in the course of his sleep during the following night. What was more, the effect of the horrid dreams saddened him during the day also “So two nights passed: the night’s dismay/Saddened and stunned the coming day” (33-34). When on the third night the experience was repeated, he woke up with a loud scream and, feeling overwhelmed by this strange suffering, he wept like a child.

*The Pain of Sleep* reflects Coleridge’s interest in Gothic convention; it is a lament, a cry of grief. It is written in a mood of profound distress and sorrow. The words “anguish”, “agony”, “torture”, “woe”, “dismay”, “calamity”, “scream”, “horror” used by the poet to describe his strange experience, create an atmosphere of unrelieved suffering.

Coleridge’s poem *Christabel* (1816) is a narrative with a Gothic setting, a supernatural aspect, and an unsolved mystery. The poet is exploring the human psyche via the Gothic and dealing with his fear of evil which can overpower innocence. The poem exhibits a conflict between some kind of embodied evil in the shape of a beautiful woman named Geraldine, and the natural grace and innocence of a young girl called Christabel. The poet’s depiction of evil is fascinating, mysterious, and ultimately terrifying. Coleridge
adopts a tone of Gothic horror to comment on the effect of evil on innocence. The Gothic imagery employed in the poem reveals the immediacy and fear of the approaching encounter between innocence and evil, and later its horrifying results.

Much in accordance to the Gothic convention, the poem opens on the scene of the night chilling, foreboding and ominous in tone:

Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly, but not dark.
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind, and at the full;

(1. 14-18)

Coleridge carefully creates an air of chilling suspense as the gentle Christabel makes her way to the woods, to pray for her distant lover, for “She had dreams all yester night / Of her own betrothed knight” (I. 27-28). Amidst the oak trees she is startled by a moan. Though terrified, she nevertheless moves around the oak and discovers a lovely damsel dressed in white silk, with jewels entangled in her hair and a breathless prayer to the Virgin. “Mary mother save me now! / [...] and who art thou?” (I.69-70) asks Christabel who personifies the limitations of innocence in her unawareness to the presence of evil and in her being powerless to its effects. The lady answers in a voice, which Coleridge twice insists as “faint and sweet” (I.72, 77). “Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear!” (I.75) beseeches the stranger; “I scarce can speak for weariness” (I.74). But when Christabel presses her further, she gives a patently fabricated story about being kidnapped by marauders: “My sire is of a noble line, / And my name is Geraldine / Five warriors seized me yestermorn” (I. 79-81).

Christabel in her innocence promises the hospitality and protection of her father Sir Leoline. At the postern gate, however, Geraldine is unable to pass the entrance to the house alone:

The lady sank, belike through pain,
And Christabel with might and main
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate

(I. 129-132)
This incident is indicative of Geraldine being a malignant creature and exemplifies the common folk theme that evil beings cannot enter a sanctified place unaided. Another strange incident is that of the old watchdog in her sleep "an angry moan did make" (I.149) as the pair moving stealthily (so as not to disturb Sir Leoline), pass her kennel. That Geraldine is evil is signified by not only these two incidents but many more to come. The dying fire in the hall spurts up as the girls go softly by:

The brands were flat, the brands were dying,
Amid their own white ashes lying;
But when the lady passed, there came
A tongue of light, a fit of flame

(I. 156-159)

As they come to the bedchamber lighted by a lamp fastened with a silver chain to an angel’s feet, the shadows from the angel on the lamp sap Geraldine’s strength so that she almost faints. When Christabel offers a cordial made of wild flowers by her mother and piously exclaims, “that thou wert here!” (I.202), thinking of the mother she has never known “I would, […]]. She were!” (I. 203) replies Geraldine – but then her voice alters, and she cries: “Off woman, off! This hour is mine / Though thou her guardian spirit be / Off woman, off! tis given to me” (I. 211-213). A bewildered, Christabel attributes the fit to her guest’s “ghastly ride” (I. 216) and administers the cordial, whereupon Geraldine’s “fair large eyes ’gan glitter bright” (I.221) and she rises refreshed to her full stature. Again she speaks soothingly and reassuringly, almost as if with divine authority: “All they, who live in the upper sky, / Do love you, holy Christabel” (I. 227-228) and for their sake and her own she vows that she will try to reward her new friend.

Geraldine then requests Christabel to disrobe and retire to bed, while she herself will pray. But Christabel, unable to sleep opens her eyes and watches Geraldine:

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

(I. 245-254)

The above well-known lines are said to have caused Shelley to scream and influence Keats in the dream scenes of both Lamia and The Eve of St. Agnes.

Lying down by Christabel, Geraldine murmurs to her:

In the touch of my bosom there worketh a spell,  
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know tomorrow,  
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;

(I. 267-270)

As Christabel tries to sleep, she is imprisoned in a nightmare of sorrow and shame: "But this she knows, in joys and woes, / Than saints will aid if men will call, / For the blue sky bends over all" (I. 329-331). As her limbs relax and her face grows soft and sad, she often smiles in her sleep perhaps she knows that the guardian spirit of her mother is near.

In the second part as the echoes of the ringing bells come pealing back from the hills, Geraldine rises lightly, and confidently awakens her companion. Christabel realizes that the coming of the day has not wiped out the horror of the previous night. Ironically, in the morning Geraldine seems to be infused with physical strength. Just like a vampire, she has sucked the life out of Christabel:

Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair!  
For she belike hath drunken deep  
Of all the blessedness of sleep!  
And while she spake her looks, her air  
Such gentle thankfulness declare  
That (so it seemed) her girded vests  
Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts

(II. 374-380)

Contrite, and puzzled by the dreams, Christabel leads the lady to her father. For the first time, Geraldine announces that she is the daughter of Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine. The name arouses in Sir Leoline sad memories of his youth, for he and Lord Roland had once been close friends, but “whispering
tongues can poison truth” (II. 409), and the two had parted with insults and hatred. Sir Leoline in the ecstasy of his remorse clasps Geraldine in his arms and at this moment Geraldine practices her wiles “And fondly in his arms he took / Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace, / Prolonging it with joyous look” (II. 448-450). This sight swiftly calls up the nausea of the previous night in Christabel’s memory and makes her cry out wildly. She recalls:

The vision of fear, the touch and pain!
She shrank and shuddered, and saw again
(Ah, woe is me! Was it for thee
Thou gentle maid! Such sights to see?)

(II. 453-456)

When the memory of her delirium returns to her, she “drew in her breath with a hissing sound” (II.459), which so startles her father that he wheels wildly about – to see nothing but his daughter with her eyes raised heavenward as if in prayer, for now:

The touch, the sight, had passed away,
And in its stead that vision blest,
Which comforted her after, rest,
While in the lady’s arms she lay,
Had put a rapture in her breast

(II. 463-467)

The spell proves to be so potent that Christabel has no power to tell the truth.

So deep is Sir Leoline’s contrition for his youthful behaviour that he refuses Geraldine’s request to be sent home without delay. He wants the lady to be returned with appropriate ceremony. Thus he plans to dispatch his bard Bracey, with a boy harp-bearer, to inform Lord Roland of his daughter’s safety and to arrange a mutual excursion in which both parties will meet each other halfway. Yet Bracey hesitates. For has had a dream so ominous that he has vowed to cleanse the wood with his music from some “thing unblest” (II. 529). He has seen a favourite dove of Sir Leoline’s, called by the very name of Christabel struggling with a bright-green snake, which has thrown its coils around the bird’s wings and neck:

Green as the herbs on which it couched,
Close by the dove’s its head it crouched;
And with the dove it heaves and stirs,
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!

(II. 551-554)

However, Sir Leoline turns to Geraldine with wonder and love in his eyes, addresses her as “Lord Roland’s beauteous dove” (II. 569), and promises that he and her father will crush any threatening snake with force more powerful than music. Thereupon, blushing, Geraldine turns so that only Christabel can see her face:

Couched her head upon her breast,
And looked askance at Christabel –
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!
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 looked askance!

(II. 580-587)

Although the sight lasts only an instant, it is too much for the victim. Christabel in a “dizzy trance” (II. 589), stumbles and shudders aloud once more “with a hissing sound” (II. 591). Geraldine “like a thing, that sought relief” (II. 593), turns back to Sir Leoline, but Christabel so deeply has she drunk in the look of those sunken serpent eyes, unconsciously imitates in her own features “that look of dull and treacherous hate” (II. 606). When at length she recovers from the trance, she begs her father (by her mother’s soul), to send Geraldine away. But instead the old knight is driven to a mad anger, feeling dishonoured in his generosity and hospitality by “more than woman’s jealousy” (II. 646). Sternly and sharply he commands Bracey to depart and turning his face from Christabel leads forth the lady Geraldine away.

The conclusion of Part II written in 1801, is little more than an expression of Coleridge’s paternal sentiment toward his young son Hartley, and adds nothing to help solve the mystery which he left incomplete to baffle posterity.

Coleridge’s Christabel is an unfinished poem belonging to the triad of mystery poems (The Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan and Christabel). Amidst its
Gothic setting (Sir Leoline’s Castle) the poem has in abundance supernatural and gloomy elements – the evil Geraldine, the screeching owls, the crowing cock, the mastiff bitch, the midnight excursion, the ghost of Christabel’s mother, leaping of the dying fire, Bracey’s dream, the spell – all which are used by Coleridge to intensify and enrich the Gothic and the mysterious appeal of the poem. The whole scheme of the poem is based on the supernatural. The evil spirit who haunts the body of Geraldine and tries to ruin the innocent happiness of Christabel is in the true tradition of vampires, and Coleridge infuses a mysterious dread into her. In her we see an embodiment of evil powers from another world and realize how helpless ordinary human beings are against them. It is indeed a triumph of the ‘Gothic’ taste for the phantoms bred by darkness and fear, and it succeeds because Coleridge has related the subject to life and to living experiences.

*Kubla Khan* (1816) is regarded as one of the greatest compositions in the field of supernatural poetry. Coleridge describes this poem as the fragment of a dream vision – perhaps an opium-dream-which he saw when he had fallen asleep after reading a few lines in *Purchase his Pilgrimage*:

In Xandu did Cublai Can build a stately palace, encompassing sixteen miles of plain ground with a wall, wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant springs, delightful streams, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the middest thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure.

The poem is surrounded by mystery, and an important element in the mystery is Coleridge’s own reticence on the subject. He never refers to it in any of his letters or published works, except on the occasion when he wrote the preface for it, on its first publication in 1816. The account which he then gave of its origin is as follows:

The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things […]. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and
taking his pen, ink and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, [...] all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast.  

Coleridge had read plenty of material related to the famous travellers and voyagers of the Middle Ages like Marco Polo, Purchas and others. Thus his imagination had been coloured by the supernatural tales, which they narrated of their voyages and the strange lands they visited.

The atmosphere of supernatural mystery in *Kubla Khan* is created by the description of the pleasure-dome and the surroundings in which it stood, for instance, the river Alph flowing "through caverns measureless to man, / Down to a sunless sea" (4-5). The immeasurable abysses and the sunless sea stir in our minds a feeling of mystery and even fear. This is the spirit which haunts the second stanza, and the note of fear which attends it, makes us hesitate before saying that the stanza is simply a vivid presentation of Gothic splendours. It is often read in this sense. Humphry House speaks of the "sense of inexhaustible energy, now falling now rising, but persisting through its own pulse, which is conveyed by the description of the "mighty fountain" (19)." These lines he takes to be symbolic of the poet's creative energy at its most sublime.

There are many of the images in the second stanza, which had appeared elsewhere in Coleridge's poetry in contexts of disaster and ruin. In *Religious Musings* (1796) for example, the Scarlet Woman of Babylon is identified with "the union of Religion with Power and Wealth, wherever it is found" (Footnote to line 320, 1997, to line 322, 1803), "she that worked whoredom with the Daemon Power" (332). One of her children: "Pale Fear / Haunted by ghastlier shapings than surround / Moon-blasted Madness when he yells at midnight!" (336-338). In the same poem the terrors of the French Revolution are described as letting loose the Giant Frenzy, who:

Uprooting empires with his whirlwind arm  
Mocketh high Heaven; burst hideous from the cell
Where the old Hag, unconquerable, huge
Creation's eyeless drudge, black Ruin, sits
Nursing the impatient earthquake.

(318-322)

The importance of these instances is heightened by the specific resemblances in imagery and even wordings to *Kubla Khan*. In the second stanza there may not be actual disaster, but there is strong threat of it reinforced by the "ancestral voices prophesying war" (30). This contrast between the tremendous powers of Nature and man's puny efforts to control and shape them to his purposes is a constant theme with Coleridge. Just as the sun and the demonic are ambivalent, including both terror and fascination, so is the 'sublime' scenery of this stanza. Because as it recalls the lost paradise it awakens opposing emotions in the human mind. It is at once attractive and terrifying, holy and haunted. The wailing woman is closely linked with the scene and her emotions too are ambivalent. She is woman after the fall. She fears her demon-lover and yet is attracted by him — she is 'wailing' and yet 'wailing for' him.

From the deep romantic gorge which lay across a wood of cedar trees was momentarily forced a mighty fountain (the source of river Alph) and the manner in which the water intermittently gushed forth from the spring, throwing up huge pieces of rock, staggers the reader's imagination:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick parts were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentally was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail

(17 - 21)

The atmosphere of mystery and fear is further emphasized when another reference is made to the "sunless sea" or "the lifeless ocean" into which the waters of Alph fell with a loud roar:

And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:

(23 – 28)

The whole of this description is awe-inspiring, if not horrifying.

It should be noted that suggestiveness is a very important ingredient of Coleridge’s supernaturalism. This suggestiveness adds a touch of subtlety to the poem and enhances both the mystery of the poem and its vague and subdued horror. Here are lines whose power for sheer suggestiveness and mystery are perhaps unsurpassed: “A savage place! As holy and enchanted / As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted / By woman wailing for her demon-lover” (14 – 16). A complete story of love’s tragedy can be built upon these three lines – a story comparable to La Belle Dame Sans Merci of Keats. A woman searching in distress for her demon-lover! And then the following two lines: “And ’mid this tumult Kubla heard from far / Ancestral voices prophesying war!” (29 – 30).

The new feature which is introduced in the line “A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!” is the ‘caves of ice,’ which can be traced at least in part to Maurice’s History of Hindustan. Coleridge had copied out of this book some lines describing a strange phenomenon:

In a cave in the mountains of Cashmere an image of ice, which makes it’s appearance thus – two days before the new moon there appears a bubble of ice: which increases in size every day till the 15th day, at which it is an ell or more in height: then, as the moon decreases, the image does also till it vanishes.\(^{36}\)

In the closing lines we have a strange blending of the natural and the supernatural. A poet’s inspiration is one of the well-known and natural facts of human life but there is something supernatural about the way in which this poetic inspiration and the creative powers of a poet are depicted:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey—dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

(48 – 54)

The Wanderings of Cain (1828) was to have been a study in criminal psychology, on the subject of the archetypal crime against man – Cain’s murder of his innocent brother Abel. Cain is cursed by God for his evil deed and doomed to a life of eternal wandering. Cain struggles with the spirit within him and is consumed by an agony of remorse. The action takes place in a moonlit wilderness.

This prose-poem deals with the theme of transgression, punishment, and redemption. The nature of the transgression is clearly stated in what E.H. Coleridge identifies as “a rough draft of a continuation or alternative version of The Wanderings of Cain was found among Coleridge’s papers.”27 Cain is punished “because he neglected to make a proper use of his senses, etc.”28 And so in punishment he wanders among surroundings which in Coleridge’s usual symbolic terminology are most conducive to ‘Joy’, in wind and moon-light, and yet he says “the spirit within me is withered, and burnt up with extreme agony.”29 “The Mighty One […] pursueth my soul like the wind, like the sand-blast he passeth through me; he is around me even as the air! O that I might be utterly no more! I desire to die.”30 Just as the sailors were guilty in part by their association with the Mariner, so Cain’s son is subjected to the consequences of his father’s guilt.

The prose fragment deals with Cain bowed down with guilt after killing his brother, and wandering in the moonlight led by his child Eros. The landscape corresponds to the barrenness of his spirit: “There was no spring, no summer, no autumn; and the winter’s snow, that would have been lovely, fell not on these hot rocks and scorching sands.”31 Cain is parched and has a dreadful look: “his countenance told in a strange and terrible language of agonies that had been, and were, and were still to continue to be.”32 The guilty man wishes to die; his punishment is that he cannot, but must forever as
Genesis has it, "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, bearing a mark put on him by God explicitly to stop others from killing him."\(^{33}\)

The most striking incident of the supernatural in *The Wanderings of Cain* occurs where Cain and his son encounter the ghost of his murdered brother, Abel:

> But ere they reached the rock they beheld a human shape: his back was towards them, and they were advancing unperceived, when they heard him smite his breast and cry aloud, ‘Woe is me! Woe is me! I must never die again, and yet I am perishing with thirst and hunger.’

> Pallid, as the reflection of the sheeted lightning on the heavy-sailing night-cloud, became the face of Cain; but the child Eros took hold of the shaggy skin, his father’s robe, and raised his eyes to his father, and listening whispered, ‘Ere yet I could speak, I am sure, O my father, that I heard that voice. Have not I often said that I remembered a sweet voice? O my father! This is it’: and Cain trembled exceedingly [...]. And the Shape shrieked, and turned round, and Cain beheld him, that his limbs and his face were those of his brother Abel whom he had killed! And Cain stood like one who struggles in his sleep because of the exceeding terribleness of a dream.\(^{34}\)

There is a striking situation in *The Ballad of the Dark Ladie* (1834) where the lady appeals to the knight to shield and shelter her, since she has given him her all, and he replies after promising her the fairest of nine castles:

> Wait only till the hand of eve
> Hath wholly closed yon western bars,
> And through the dark we two will steal
> Beneath the twinkling stars!

(41 – 44)

Her reaction is abrupt and terrified:

> The dark? The dark? No! not the dark?
> The twinkling stars? How, Henry? How?
> O God! ‘twas in the eye of noon
> He pledged his sacred vow!

(45 – 48)

The above analysis brings into focus the influence of the Gothic on Coleridge as a writer. As the study reveals, Coleridge’s fascination for the Gothic can be well traced to his early years. The presence of supernaturalism,
elements of mystery, suspense, dream representation, medievalism in his poetry, unitedly proclaims his use of the Gothic conventions. Unlike the writers of the Gothic school (Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis) his use of the Gothic elements is subtle. Though he employs the familiar precedents of the Gothic, to invoke a kind of horrified fear of the strange and the uncanny, yet they in his hands acquire a new scope and character. Instead of confining himself to an outworn dread of the uncanny aspects (specters and phantoms), he moves over a wide range of emotions to touch equally on feelings of guilt-remorse, suffering-relief, grief-joy, hate-forgiveness. Through the Gothic he explores the human psyche and brings out the psychological responses of the human character as a comment on the effect of evil, of curses, of pain, of anguish, and of remorse.
Notes:


2. Ibid. p. 16.


22. Ibid. p. 137.


28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid. p. 288.
31. Ibid. p. 290.
32. Ibid. p. 289.