Wordsworth believed in Nature being the healer and moral benefactor of mankind. So did Coleridge when he composed 'The dungeon' in 1797 for publication in Lyrical Ballads. Several lines in this poem link up the Mariner’s moral retribution in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner with a typically Wordsworthian pantheism.

With other ministrations thou Nature!
Healest thy wandering and distemper’d child
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,
Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,
Till he relent, and can no more endure
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing,
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy,
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
His angry spirit heal’d and harmoniz’d
By the benignant touch of love and beauty

(PW 185 ll 20-30)

The Mariner ‘wandering and distempered’ is redeemed only when he learns from his experience, can no more endure dissonance with the crawling water snakes and blesses them unawares in a feeling of empathy. Nature’s ‘soft influence’ pours on the mariner as rains of salvation. And yet, The Rime does not conform entirely to the
pantheistic creed. If the Mariner is redeemed, it is only partial redemption, for, as we observe, his experience does not have a becalming and sobering effect on him—rather, the nightmares keep haunting him and takes him almost to the brink of lunacy. The pantheistic doctrine fails to give an adequate explanation for Nature’s behavior immediately after the Mariner kills the bird.

Nor dim nor red, like God’s own head
The glorious sun uprisht.
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist
’T’ was right, said they, such birds to slay
That bring the fog and mist
The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free.

( PW 190 ll 97-104)
Neither does it aid our understanding of the ‘agony’ that returns to the Mariner “at an uncertain hour”.

And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

( PW 208 ll 584-85)
All these point to the fact the Coleridge believed in the incomprehensibility of the ministrations of nature. Perhaps, Coleridge’s idealization of Wordsworth in those days
went to such an extent that he lacked the confidence to unobtrusively declare the questions rankling in his mind regarding such easy generalization of the infinite Nature.

An elderly Coleridge's would look back in The Rime ands find the chief besetting fault, to make such on open moral statement ' in a work of such pure imagination.'

It ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Night’s tale of the merchant 's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he must kill the aforesaid merchant, because one of the date shells had, it seemed, put out the eye of the genie'.

( Table Talk 30)

This fault of on open obtrusion of moral sentiment in a work of pure imagination also characterizes Coleridge’s other poetic work of the same period, Christabel. It seems the poem was well begun with no such intention of moralizing. The first part of Chistabel begins in a setting close to that of the Arabian Night’s tale, or medieval oriental terror tales.

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

(PW 215 ll 01-05)

The eerie sound of the cock and the hooting of owls suggests at once some threatening evil lurking around to pounce upon the good. The mariner in The Rime was more acted upon by the agents of Nature; in contrast, Nature as described in Christabel is passive and
uncooperative. The night is 'chilly, but not dark,' the thin gray cloud is spread on high/ It covers but not hides the sky, the small and dull moon, the toothless mastiff bitch who answers the clock (with sixteen short howls, not overloud; some say, she sees my lady's shroud,) all suggest Nature in a state of negation. In such an ominous night the lovely lady, Christabel, the Baron's beloved daughter, goes to the wood to pray 'for the weal of her lover that's far away.' Such is the diseased condition of her surroundings that we have grave doubts regarding her safety and well-being as 'she kneels beneath the huge oak tree/And in silence prayeth she.' Even her devout prayers are unable to save her from the inevitability of her encounter with Evil. The ominous portent is intensified by the bleak moaning of wind in the chilly night and bare forest.

There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek-
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

( PW 217 ll 45-52 )

When the world is thus pre-disposed towards Evil, even the active agents of Nature who ordinarily act as Guardian spirits are barred and constrained. Thus, the sky is partially visible through the cloud which is ominously 'gray'; the moon is dull; the wind is devoid of force and vigour. Even the mastiff who keeps watch at night is 'toothless.' - in fact,
all the protective agents of the good are rendered powerless and static. In The Rime, the becalming of the ship in the Line, the stasis and immobility ('We stuck, nor breath nor motion') of the elements marked the beginning of the mariner's distress. The picture of Nature at such a low ebb is depicted once again in Christabel to prepare us for the betrayal of Christabel's divine innocence as she encounters Evil in the persona of Geraldine who sprang up suddenly on the other side of the oak tree where Christabel knelt and prayed

Jesu, Maria, shield her well!

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

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

There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone.
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
Her blue veined feet unsandal'd were,
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled in her hair.

( PW 217 ll 54 & 58 – 65 )
Perhaps, Christabel was taken aback to see ‘a lady so richly clad as she/ Beautiful exceedingly!’ at such an hour and in such a place. She shivers in fright and invokes the blessings of ‘Mary mother’ as she questions the stranger. Geraldine pleads for help and tells the story of her abduction by five warriors in unconvincing verse deliberately meant to sound false. When evil comes to destroy innocence, it comes guised in richness, grace and beauty. Geraldine has already hooked Christabel with her outward grace, and when she concocts her tale of woe and suffering, the credulous Christabel fails to hear the ring of deception in it. So, she readily responds to Geraldine’s appeal, touches her hand and promises her help and friendship. Here, Christabel, seems to be near to Coleridge himself, who had the same credulousness and accepted as undisputable whatever he happened to be acquainted with in the very first instant.

It is Christabel’s innate nobility that she offers her arm to aid the woman in ‘distress’, but it is also her lack of worldly wisdom (quiet natural for her immature age) that makes her incapable of discerning truth from pretensions. The sweet, ringing voice of the serpentine beauty entices her into total faith. So too Coleridge, with his mind habituated to the vast, had a faith in the affirmative and a believing temper.

It is interesting to note that evil in Christabel comes draped in the guise of dazzling beauty. A reference to the serpent’s beauty is noted in Coleridge’s notebook entry of 1799 that includes a quotation from Paradise Lost:

The Serpent by which the ancients emblem’d the Inventive faculty appears to me, in its mode of motion most exactly to emblem a writer of Genius.

He varies his course yet still glides onwards – all lines of motion are his – all beautiful, and all prospective – (N I 609 4.25)
Geraldine too is beautiful and glamorous at the beginning of *Christabel*.

Perhaps, Coleridge had in mind the mythical Eve’s divine innocence perverted by the injected design of the satanic serpent. Since Coleridge was a believer in the Original Sin, he was apprehensive of angelic virtue corrupted by Evil. Christabel, the lovely, charitable and hospitable lady is the emblem of such angelic virtues as infants possess. There is no dispute that Christabel is drawn in the image of Coleridge’s own children, especially Hartley. The child-like innocence of Hartley is suggested in the imagery:

And oft the while she seems to smile

As infants at a sudden light!

( *PW* 226 ll 317-18 )

Another notebook entry establishes Christabel’s relation to infantine innocence

Infancy and Infants-

1. The first smile – what kind of reason it displays – the first smile after sickness. ( *NI* 330 21.32 )

The child Hartley moved even Wordsworth to depict divine glory around childhood in *Intimations of Immortality*: ‘trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God, who is our home’. But, shades of prison house of earthly existence close in upon the child’s innocence and the angelic virtue wanes with the lapse of time. The way sin enters a human soul fascinated and haunted Coleridge. and therefore in *Christabel*, he goes out to dwell upon the mystery of evil, a subject which continued to haunt him:
......... the existence of Evil-evil essentially such, not by accident or outward circumstances, not derived from its physical consequences, nor from its physical consequences, nor from any cause out of itself...there is nothing, the absolute ground of which is not a Mystery.”

(Aids to Reflection 91)

The mystery is heightened in the description of the stranger's behavior as they (Christabel and Geraldine) cross the moat and enter the castle gate.

The lady sank, belike through pain
And Christabel with might and main
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate:
Then the lady rose again,
And moved, as she were not in pain.

(PW 220 ll 129-34)

The frequent references to ‘death’ and the occasional spurting out in activity of the paralyzed and powerless seem to suggest some uncanny, sinister possibility:

Outside her kennel, the mastiff old
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.
The mastiff old did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make!
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?
Never till now she uttered yell
Beneath the eye of Christabel.

Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:

For what can ail the mastiff bitch?

They passed the hall, that echoes still,

Pass as lightly as you will!

The brands were flat, the brands were dying,

Amid their own white ashes lying;

But when the lady passed, there came

A tongue of light, a fit of flame,

And Christabel saw the lady's eye,

And nothing else saw she thereby,

Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,

Which hung in a murky old niche is the wall.

( PW 223 ll 145 – 63 )

When offered the cordial wine Christabel's mother had made, Geraldine, who earlier refused to pray to the Virgin, espies the spirit of Christabel's mother hovering protectively around her child

But soon with altered voice, said she

'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!

I have power to bid thee flee.'

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

Off woman, off! This hour is mine-

Though thou her guardian spirit be,
Off, woman off! 'Tis given to me.'

( PW 223 ll 204 - 13 )

As Christabel lies down beside Geraldine, and with troubled mind watches the latter undress, she encounters a vision of crude physical horror. The manuscript versions of the poem depicted such crudity that Coleridge toned it down in the published version to make the appeal more suggestive and therefore, subtle. The lines in the manuscript ( 'Behold her bosom and half her side / Are lean and old and foul of hue') was altered and the bosom merely becomes

A sight to dream of not to tell!

O shield her! Shield sweet Christabel.

( PW 224 ll 252-54 )

Then taking the maid Christabel in her arms, Geraldine, 'with low voice and doleful look', binds Christabel in an evil spell:

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

(PW 225 ll 271-78)

The conclusion to the first part of Christabel describes Christabel’s miserable state 'in sleep under the evil spell that Geraldine had cast upon her:

And see! The lady Christabel
Gathers herself from out her trance,
Her limbs relax, her countenance
Grows sad and soft, the smooth thin lid
Close o'er her eyes, and tears she sheds-
Large tears that leave the lashes bright
And oft the while she seems to smile
As infants at a sudden light!
Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
Like a youthful hermitess,
Beauteous in a wilderness,
Who, praying always, prays in sleep.

No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.
What if she knew her mother near?
But this she knows, in joys and woes,
That saints will aid if men will call:
For the blue sky bends over all! (PW 226 ll 311-31)
The first section concludes with establishing Coleridge’s belief that Christabel, the holy soul, will ultimately overcome all trials and tribulations and finally Evil has to succumb to the power of good:

...............saints will aid if men will call:

For the blue sky bends over all! (PW 226 ll 330-31)

Christabel’s encounter with Geraldine in the latter’s terrible embrace can be interpreted in terms of psychology. Geraldine may be taken to typify malignant thoughts that lie dormant in our subconsciousness. By exercising our conscious will, we try to ward off the sinful thoughts that crop up in the subliminal level of our mind. But, there are moments, especially during sleep, in the absence of the conscious will when Evil thoughts surface from the dark dungeon of consciousness, to invade innocence and faith.

In one of his notebook entries, Coleridge, gives an account of one of the terrifying visions which so often haunted his sleep, and this closely recalls Christabel’s ghastly encounter with Geraldine:

............... Dreams interfused with struggle and fear tho’ till the very last not Victors- and the very last which awoke me, and which was a completed Night- mair, as it gave the idea and sensation of actual grasp or touch contrary to my will and in apparent consequence of the malignant will of the external Form, actually appearing or ( as sometimes happens ) believed to exist/ in which latter case tho’ I have two or three times felt a horrid touch of Hatred, a grasp or a weight ,of Hate and Horror abstracted from all ( Conscious) form or supposal of Form/an abstract touch/an abstract grasp an abstract weight! ........The last that awoke me, I was
saying, tho a true Night-mair was however a mild one. I cried out early, like a scarcely hurt child who knows himself within hearing of his Mother.

(N II 2468 17.42)

During the years of the composition of The Rime, the first part of Christabel and “Kubla khan” Coleridge was occasionally given to nightmares and visions of malignant forms of hate and horror. But there were sweet dreams too which would enable the port to recreate a paradisial world like that of “Kubla Khan”. Interspersed in life’s woes and miseries, failures and frustrations, were moments of joy and bliss, especially in the company of the Wordsworths and his beloved children. Sleep was still a relief and had not yet turned to pain. Induced by narcotics, sleep would ease the pains of existence by ensuring a flight into the idyllic world. A few years later, however, the horrors of reality would invade even the hours of sleep, turning dreams into nightmares. Hence, the first part of Christabel concludes in an optimistic note that, in the war between good and evil, the former will ultimately triumph over the latter.

Moreover, intended to be published in the Lyrical Ballads which purported to familiarize the unfamiliar to the readers, Christabel, Coleridge felt, would fail its purpose if it was concluded on the same somber and bizarre note as it began with. Over and above, was the mighty spell cast by Wordsworth during this period. Coleridge, Southey complained, suffered the fault of prostrating himself entirely in his eulogy of his intellectual friend. During this phase of Coleridge’s creativity, Wordsworth seemed to control Coleridge’s utterances, if not his thoughts. Their mental make-ups were entirely at variance. Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge could not turn his back to the brute facts of
the world. It is with this awareness that he chose the realm of the supernatural that would enable him to convey to his readers a reverence for the incomprehensible and the inexpressible in Nature. Christabel began with such a suggestion giving vivid intensity of effect, but trailed off with an ‘over-generalised’ theological statement that sounds more Wordsworthian than Colerigean. Why did Coleridge recoil from voicing confidently the thoughts that arose in his deepest consciousness? The answer lies in Coleridge’s own assessment of his nature in one of his notebook entries of 1803:

My nature requires another nature for its support, and reposes only in another from the necessary indigence of its being.

(Anima Poetae 139)

Therefore, the first part of Christabel, though aesthetically satisfying, falls short of poetic height because its conclusion did not organically evolve from ‘a principle within’. To any perceptive modern reader, the intervention of the saints coming to aid the pure and innocent would sound false, because he had been led by the poetic images into a mysterious world which it is impossible for a finite being to gauge and comprehend in its entirety. Had it not been for the tail-piece, the first part of Christabel would have given its creator a perfect score. But its forced conclusion constricts our appreciation of the poem:

One character, belongs to all true poets, that they write from a principle within not originating in anything without.

(Lectures of 1818 228)

It took Coleridge several years, when he resumed composition of the second part of Christabel, to realize the need for looking within for the Truth that forever exists.
Only, he had lost the Midas touch that alone could transform Truth into a thing of Beauty that is Joy forever.

II

It is necessary to look into the years between the composition of the two parts of 'Christabel' and the experiences that profoundly overshadowed Coleridge's theoretical ideas and poetic utterances. A biographical study is relevant to our understanding of the shift in Coleridge's thought perspectives from the first to the second part of Christabel. He had been in the habit of taking opium as laudanum to relieve his rheumatic pains and induce his senses into sleep. The visions in such opium-induced sleep could aid the poet to 'build a blue dome in air' by a sheer magical power of verse. But by 1800, Coleridge had been completely bowed down by physical affliction and subsequently, laudanum had become more of an addiction than relief. In May 1801, his letter to Poole gives such an account of the deterioration of his rheumatism and the ominous power of laudanum over him:

"... but o dear Poole! The attacks on my stomach, and the nephritic pains in my back which almost alternated with the stomach fits—they were terrible! The disgust, the Loathing, that followed those fits and no doubt in part too the use of the Brandy and Laudanum which they rendered necessary—this disgust, despondency, and utter prostration of strength...

.......... (L II 731)
The pleasant domestic scenario of "The Eolian Harp" had also undergone significant changes. Sara had never been an intellectually compatible partner, and the gulf between them had widened to a great extent, the reference to which is clearly made in a letter to Southey in October 1801

...............Sara-alas! we are not suited to each other.......I will go believing that it will end happily if not, if our mutual unsuitableness continues, and (as it assuredly will do, if it continues) increases and strengthens, why then, it is better for her and my children, that I should live apart.................. (L II 767)

On the one hand was his growing estrangement with his wife, and on the other an overwhelming surge of anxious affection for his children, especially Hartley. In another letter to Southey in November 1801, he reveals his misgivings that the blissful innocence of Hartley will be tainted by the breach between his parents:

...............O bless him! Bless him! Bless him! If my wife loved me, and I my wife, half as well as we both love our Children, I should be the Happiest man alive—but this is not—will not be!

(L II 774)

The domestic situation was worsened by Coleridge's affair with Sara Hutchinson, who seemed to possess those qualities which might have made him happy. Sara and his children were victims of a tragic situation for which they were not responsible. These provide the background of the Second Part of Christabel; it is no
wonder that it opens on a somber note. We were introduced to a paralyzed world is the opening of the first part of *Christabel*; the second part opens with the sound of the heavy bell knelling us "back to a world of death". Geraldine rouses Christabel from sleep; she appears beautiful and guileless, and yet, Christabel greets the "lofty lady" with such perplexity of mind /As dreams too lively leave behind." (PW 228 II 385 86)

When Christabel slept in Geraldine’s arms, Coleridge raised our expectation that her hermitess-like quality would give her the strength to overcome the spell cast upon her. It sounded obvious that she would be blessed with a sweet vision and rise the next morn, the same virtuous maid of unblemished innocence. “Pains of Sleep” composed in 1803, begins with lines which closely recall Christabel’s expected bliss in sleep.

Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,

It hath not been my use to pray

With moving lips or bended knees,

But silently, by slow degrees,

My spirit I to love compose,

In humble trust mine eyelids close.

With reverential resignation,

No wish conceived, no thought exprest,

Only a sense of supplication;

A sense o’er all my soul imprest

That I am weak, yet not unblest,

Since in me, round me, everywhere

Eternal Strength and Wisdom are.
Contrary to our expectation, Christabel wakes with a perplexed and troubled mind

- The vision of Evil has cast its shade on her divine innocence. The experience is much
like Coleridge’s own as recorded in “The Pains of Sleep”-

    But yester night I prayed aloud
    In anguish and in agony,
    Up starting from the fiendish crowd
    Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:
    A lurid light, a trampling throng,
    Sense of intolerable wrong,
    And when I scorned, those only strong!
    Thirst of revenge, the powerless will
    Still baffled, and yet burning still!
    Desire with loathing strangely mixed
    On wild or hateful objects fixed.
    Fantastic passions! maddening brawl!
    And shame and terror over all!
    Deeds to be hid which were not hid,
    Which all confused I could not know
    Whether I suffered, or I did;
    For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe
    My own or others still the same
    Life- stifling fear, soul- stifling shame.
Despite her doubts and uncertainties, Christabel performs her duty as the host; she leads Geraldine to meet Sir Leoline who welcomes her with courtesy. It is revealed that the Baron and Geraldine's father had been friends in youth, unspecified occasions of generated vehement passion that snapped the friendship. The Baron now welcomes the opportunity of reconciliation with his former friend through the daughter. He vows to avenge Geraldine's sufferings, slay her captors.

As Geraldine is greeted with the Baron's embrace, Christabel, for a brief spell, is reminded of the 'vision of fear, the touch and pain she experienced the previous night in Geraldine's arm:

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

( P W 230 ll 457 - 59 )

But the shuddering vision disappears in a moment, and when asked by her father 'What ails then my beloved child?' She is unable to communicate her horror. All she is able to utter is 'All will yet be well!' -so mighty is Geraldine's spell! Even the bard Bracy demurs to be an emissary to Geraldine's father because he too has been troubled by a dream concerning the well-being of Christabel.

For in my sleep I saw that dove,
That gentle bird, whom thou dost love,
And call'st by thy own daughter's name
Sir Leoline! I saw the same
Fluttering, and uttering fearful moan,
Among the green herbs in the forest alone

When lo! I saw a bright green snake
Coiled around its wing and neck.
Green as the herbs on which it crouched,
Close by the dove's its head it crouched;
And with the dove it heaves and stirs,
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!

(PW 232 ll 531 – 34)

The Serpent image that Coleridge employs here is of Satanic significance - a deceptive, treacherous and silent killer. The snakes in The Rime were 'God's creatures of the great calm', while the snake in 'Christabel' is anti-god, threatening to stifle surreptitiously whatever is divine and holy on earth. The mariner's sufferings began to cease after he felt a gushing surge of love for the water snakes; Christabel's sufferings ensue when she takes pity on the serpent woman and shares her couch with her. But then, the water snakes in The Rime were natural snakes with no deception. The serpent is Christabel is guised as an exceedingly beautiful lady. When Evil comes in such disguise, Innocence is most likely to be hooked and trapped.

Even the elderly Baron, who is supposedly a worldly wise and experienced man, is enticed by the false charm of Geraldine. In his distorted interpretation of Bracy's dream
'the beauteous love' is none other than Geraldine; he vows to 'crush the snake' 'with arms more strong than harp or song'.

Geraldine's conquest of the Baron is complete. She now casts a victorious glance at Christabel, wherefore, the vision of horror returns yet again. Geraldine's full malice is turned upon Christabel, compelling her to take on the Evil identity.

A snake's small eye blinks dull & shy;
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,
Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,
And with somewhat of malice, & more of dread,
At Christabel she looked askance!-
One moment -and the sight was fled!
But Christabel is dizzy trance
Stumbling on the unsteady ground
Shuddered aloud, with a hissing sound

The maid, devoid of guile and sin,
I knew not how, in fearful wise,
So deeply had she drunken in
That look, those shrunk serpent eyes,
That all her features were resigned
To this sole image is her mind:
And passively did imitate
That look of dull and treacherous hate!
In one last desperate effort, Christabel appeals to her father to send Geraldine away. Her appeals fall on deaf ears, as her father, angered by his daughter's inhospitality, walks away with Geraldine, turning his back upon his 'dearly loved' daughter.

Christabel's problem of communication is opposed to the mariner's 'strange powers of speech'. The ancient mariner's encounter with the Spirit world gave him such knowledge that he could narrate his experiences with vigour and enthusiasm to anyone he seized upon. Christabel's spirit world had such a devastating effect on her speech that she lost all her power to communicate the agonies of her heart. Christabel's betrayal and isolation is therefore more terrible than the mariner's.

III

The conclusion of the second part of Chisubel was included in a letter to Southey of May 1801 in the middle of an anxiously affectionate account of Hartley.

- Dear Hartley!- we are at times alarmed by the state of his health-But at present he is well— if I were to lose him, I am afraid, it would exceedingly deaden my affection for any other children I may have-

- A little child, a limber Elf

Singing, dancing to itself . . . etc. (L II 728 )

The conclusion apparently seems to be an irrelevant post script, but on close analysis, it would strike us as continuation of the theme of the innocent being cut off and
alienated from the guardian spirit. The theme of Christabel's isolation and desolation was drawn intimately from Coleridge's own feeling of guilt at having made his children suffer in a debasing domestic situation. When the guardian spirit in Nature are held back in abeyance, Innocence easily falls a prey to Guilt and Sin. If parents war with each other, children who are least responsible for it, suffer the most. In a letter to Thomas Wedgewood of October 1802 Cobridge describes such a domestic situation that must have had a devastating effect on a sensitive child like Hartley:

Ill tempered Speeches sent after me when I went out of the House, ill-tempered Speeches on my return, my friends received with freezing looks, the least opposition or contradiction occasioning screams of passion, and the sentiments, which I held most base, ostentatiously avowed – all this added to the utter negation of all, which a husband expects from a wife –especially, living in retirement- and the consciousness that I was myself growing a worse man.

( L II 876 )

It is quite likely that the child Hartley would suffer inwardly for the fits of 'pain and rage' his parents indulged in. Like Christabel, he could never verbally expose his hurt sensibility – rather, he would allow the Evil passions his parents exhibited to corrode his latent innocence. A child takes after his parents, and it seemed obvious that Hartley, exposed to his parents' frequent tantrums and angry outbursts, might soon begin to imitate his elders in all their gross and base passions.
And what, if is a world of sin
( O sorrow and shame should this be true!)
Such giddiness of heart and brain
Comes seldom save from rage and pain
So talks as it's most used to do.

(PW 236 ll 673-77)

Coleridge was fully aware that, torn with a pang of divided duty to his children and his newly found love Sara, he was doing justice to none. Had Coleridge been as strong-willed a person as Wordsworth was, he could have struck a happy balance between the two and made both happy. But his will was diseased and Coleridge could never fulfill his responsibility towards his loved ones. At the same time, he could not shrug off the guilty conscience of failing his duties as father and lover. Conscious though he was of his shortcomings he lacked the will to correct himself

..................if this Reality were a dream, if I were asleep, what agonies had I suffered! What screams! – When the reason and the will are away, what remain to us but Darkness and Dimness and a bewildering Shame....

(Aids to Reflection 91)

It appears that when Coleridge probed into his own consciousness he found the same incomprehensibility and mystery that he found in the world around him, In Christabel he therefore attempts to reveal the riddling complexity of human nature, the war between the Good and Evil for human soul, and the circumstances, when for no conscious fault of Mar, Evil overthrow Good to take possession of his soul. In Christabel’s suffering we find a record of Coleridge’s own disintegration of personality.
IV

It is now established that the tonal quality of the first and the second parts of Christabel are widely divergent. The first section is general in significance while the second is particular. No explicit nomination is found in the first section, but places and persons have been given particular names in the second section. Even the identity of Christabel, which is more symbolic in the first part, has been intended to mean Hartley in particular, in the second part. While the first section touches upon the theme of the vulnerability of the Good and the Innocent, the second section shows Innocence to be entirely ravaged by the touch of Evil.

As to the diverse interpretation of Christabel - Geraldine relationship we may first consider A.H. Nethercot’s argument in The Road To Tryermaine that Christabel was to exemplify the ‘Preternatural’. Geraldine, he contends, is the agency, the transient Evil, through whom Christabel is brought to martyrdom at her father’s castle. The theme of martyrdom, if not central to Christabel, cannot be altogether ruled out. The verses of the second part of Christabel, Coleridge confessed, were based on Crashaw’s lines on Saint Theresa. Judging on such grounds, critics contend that Christabel, the maiden version of Christ, bears the burden of the sin of the entire humanity and suffers accordingly. However, it would be more reasonable to say that this theme could only have been in Coleridge’s mind originally, but could not have been pursued through its entire length.

Considered on aesthetic grounds, Christabel may be taken to symbolize Imagination and Geraldine to symbolize life’s bitter realities which in the absence of the spirit of joy, threaten to throttle and kill the power of imagination. The imagery of
serpent coiling round the beauteous dove employed in Christabel to emphasize Geraldine stifling Christabel’s holiness in her deadly embrace, recurs again in Dejection. An Ode. (Composed in 1802) where Coleridge laments the loss of his shaping spirit of Imagination.

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind
Reality’s dark dream! (PW 367 ll 94-95)

Harold Bloom discerns some other aesthetic significance in the thematic pattern of the poem.

This poem, like The Ancient Mariner, is a ballad of the Imagination’s Revenge, in this case, upon a repressive atmosphere that has impeded its free and autonomous functioning. The night world rebels against the evasions of consciousness, and to the frightened consciousness, it takes on the appearance of the demonic. (Bloom 207)

Jean Pierre Mileur, in his Vision and Revision: Coleridge’s Art of Immanence comments that though originally intended to depict the division of one’s own self, the Christabel–Geraldine symbolism gained, with the progress of the narrative, a more riddling and baffling significance.

As a poem, Christabel seeks to naturalize psychic conflict by imposing a progressive, resolvable narrative pattern on a fundamental opposition. But even this is misleading, for the poem’s failure questions whether psychic conflict has any form proper to it.
Christabel and Geraldine are so radically divided, so heavily implicated in the circumstances with which the narrative encumbers them, that there is no way they can be brought together in the context of the poem's psycho romance. (Mileur 66)

This difficulty of bringing together the diverse patterns into a single unified significance came in his way as he struggled to complete the second part of Christabel.

Every line has been produced by me with labor pangs. (LI 623)

Lines which come to the poet's pen with 'labor' and not spontaneously, cannot give the poem the merit of poetic excellence.

Again, in a letter of November 1800 to Josiah Wedgewood, he speaks of his difficulty in pursuing in poetry so intensely complex a theme:

I tried and tried, and nothing would come of it. I desisted with a deeper dejection than I am willing to remember. (LI 643)

In a letter to Robert Southey (in 1799), Coleridge comments that 'were it finished and finished as spiritedly it commences', it would still be an 'improper opening poem'.

My reason is it cannot be expected to please all. Those who dislike it will deem it extravagant Ravings and go on thro' the rest of the collection with the feeling of Disgust and it is not impossible that were it liked by any -- it would still not harmonize with the real-life poems that follow. (LI 545)

It becomes quite evident that Coleridge was in pains to harmonize in Christabel his concept of the problem of Evil with the simple, elemental, yet lofty and dignified
passions of mankind. Coleridge’s inability to arrive at a solution to the paradox of Evil inherent in human nature is plainly revealed in a notebook entry of December 1803:

I will at least make the attempt to explain to myself the Origin of moral Evil from the streamy Nature of association, which Thinking = Reason, curbs and rudders/ how this comes to be so difficult/do not the bad Passions in Dreams throw Light and shew of proof

Upon this Hypothesis ?......But take in the blessedness Of innocent Children, the blessedness of sweet Sleep, Etc.etc.etc: are these or are they not contradictions to the evil from streamy association?

( N I 1770 16. 156 )

Coleridge’s failure to finish Christabel is the failure of a troubled mind to execute poetically an idea, ‘ an extremely subtle and difficult one’. ( Table Talk 51 )

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WORKS CITED


