"A star hath set, a star hath risen": Vampiric Transgression and the Fin-de-Siècle Conflicts in Coleridge's *Christabel*

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THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE MOTIF HAS TYPICALLY BEEN APPLIED to the end of the nineteenth century, where a society weary of the morally constrained and globally imperialist sensibility that dominated the century gave way to more disreputable interests. As Diane Fourny explains, this exhaustion prompted artists' attempts to illustrate the corruption and hypocrisy endemic in their era.[1] However, despite its primary association with the nineteenth century, the origins of the fin-de-siècle as a motif stem from the turn of the previous century and the radical revolutionary fervor that swept through Europe and America. It is during this moment where a mixture of the redemptive potential of revolution and frustrated hopes still lingered in progressive minds that Coleridge produced his greatest gothic works, among them *Christabel*, a poem rife with exuberant violations of normative roles counterposed with anxiety about controlling illicit forces.

This duality of revolution and anxiety inherent in the poem reiterates the fin-de-siècle as a field both fertile and fraught for creative expression. Coleridge and other early Romantics capitalized on a zeitgeist of skepticism and optimism, suspicion of past institutions and traditions coupled with a radical vision of the future. Simultaneously, fin-de-siècle narratives feature an acute anxiety embedded in this desire to sever ties with the past, the anxiety concerning how to implement such upheaval of institutions and whether this upheaval will produce the desired improvements or instead retard or even reverse progress.[2] The simplistic assumption of the inescapable benevolence of progress runs aground on the rocks of reality, or worse, portends monstrosities of different and even worse natures. Both tenets of the fin-de siècle expressions, the energetic upheaval springing from revolution and the anxiety about violating established boundaries, find expression in the two women Christabel and Geraldine.

In *Christabel* Coleridge, fueled by the revolutionary energy of his present, infuses controversial erotic and gothic themes while simultaneously weaving in pagan and folkloric supernatural elements. Both Geraldine and Christabel evince inversions of class, gender roles, sexuality, and political order, creating a sumptuously uncanny text that captivates the reader. However, the full disclosure of Geraldine's vampiric nature enthralls and silences Christabel's prior explorations of unconventional sexuality and the uncanny. Coleridge's anxiety over such overwhelming unnaturalness in his creation leads to what some scholars identify as an aesthetic decline between Part I and Part II of the

[1] Diane Fourny, "The Eighteenth Century or Fin-de-Siècle Beginnings," *L'Esprit Créateur* 32, no. 4 (1992): 10.

[2] Fourny defines fin-de siècle desire "to rejoin sacred time, the time of violent social upheavals and of new foundations. At the same time, it refuses to fulfill such a desire, out of fear or perhaps fatigue, that new foundations remain merely repetitions of the same" (8).

poem, and ultimately to Coleridge's inability to execute his original vision. The very energy of violating social norms that animates the poem's first part suppresses Coleridge's imagination because of his desire to both surrender to and control his illicit muse.

Erotic Dreams: Christabel's Geraldine Transgressive Energy

In order to demonstrate the impetus for a revolutionary project, Coleridge depicts the current status quo in fin-de-siècle tropes regarding the instability of regressive and moribund hierarchy. Building on the burgeoning genre of Gothic novels Coleridge brilliantly takes a conventional setting of nostalgia and romance and subverts it to heighten the uncanniness of his poem. Like a mist rising over the moors a sense of torpor and decay emanates from descriptions of the medieval setting. The castle, noblemen, the mastiff bitch, the drawbridge, and various other allusions evoke a medieval English era, but the image of the court betrays its deterioration as many scholars have observed.[3] The Baron slumbers in poor health and must not be disturbed (*PW* I.1 487), and the mastiff bitch is toothless, at turns howling mechanically in echo of the clock (*PW* I.1 483) and moaning uneasily in her sleep at Geraldine's incursion (*PW* I.1 488). Furthermore, despite all the protections and barriers erected to defend the center of medieval society from danger, the threat that will imperil everyone in the district is literally carried over the threshold of the front gate (*PW* I.1 487). Lastly, since Leoline's wife died giving birth to Christabel his name will die with him even if his blood lives on through Christabel. Far from portraying a glamorous and lively tableau of nobles and vassals, heroes and fair maidens, hearth fires and bardic tales, the impotent elements in this tour through the castle paint a revolutionary's picture of the decrepitude of the past and the institutions upon which it was founded. Against this backdrop emerge two female figures that come in and out of focus, at times similar to the point of doppelgängers[4] but at other times oppositional. Gothic narratives employ such a trope to convey the *unheimlich* of a recognizable figure mirrored by a monster. Both Christabel and Geraldine apparently conform to tropes from medieval romances and gothic tales for female protagonists, yet both also violate and resist normative gender roles. Neither Geraldine or Christabel represent the true Coleridge in a perfect allegorical corollary; both women reflect Coleridgean aesthetic and ideological stances, but also shift to antitypes to illuminate the other.

In Christabel's erotic journey the initial exciting thrust of questioning gender and sexual norms that gives the poem its striking quality emerges. Her

[3] Andrea Henderson, "Revolution, Response, and 'Christabel,'" *ELH* 57, no. 4 (1990): 882.

[4] Critics like Perdita Davidson, Gregory Leadbetter and James Mulvhill have established the similitude of the two women. Graham Davidson and Perdita Davidson. "Transformation or Transgression?" *Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* 50 (2017): 31–51. Gregory Leadbetter, "The 'true wild weird spirit' of 'Christabel,'" *Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* 50: 15–29. James Mulvihill contends that "Geraldine may be nothing more than a kind of ideological doppelgänger. Since her discovery by Christabel in Part 1, she has acted—if act is even the right term for it—in symbiotic relation to the castle's inhabitants" (269). James Mulvihill, "'Like a Lady of a Far Countrée': Coleridge's 'Christabel' and Fear of Invasion," *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 44, no. 3 (2008): 250–75.

furtive exit from the confines of the castle discards domestic familiarity, normally associated with patriarchal and Christian institutions, in favor of the woods that in the medieval period betokened chaos, danger, and the illicit.[5] In this moonlit excursion Christabel rejects the security of her nobility and social convention in order to access power and potency uncontained in civilized settings. In an early draft of the poem the impetus for her aberrant quest suggests a sexual awakening that occurs as she dreams of her betrothed, absent knight: "Dreams that made her moan and leap / As on her bed she lay in sleep" (*PW* II.1 627). The dreams' ambiguity allows for the assumption that they portend some danger her fiancé. However, her moaning and thrashing in bed and her furtive escape from the safe confines of her family home suggest an illicit aspect consistent with sexual desire; her prayer for his speedy and safe return seeks the satisfaction of these impulses. Sleep and the susceptibility to mysterious and transgressive influence become explicitly sexual in the bedchamber scene with Geraldine later, but even at this point Coleridge hints at the tabooed subject of sexual awakening, though his subsequent excision of the passage also betrays his own conflict about such content.

This subconscious rejection of conventional mores defines gothic and vampiric narratives, which continues in the poem's emphasis on the preternatural and mystical as Coleridge delves into druidic tropes to infuse his poem with numinous mystery. As Gregory Leadbetter has noted,[6] Christabel's midnight vigil at the oak true introduces pagan imagery even while she prays. The imagery of moss and mistletoe (*PW* I.1 484) associated with this site of prayer increases the ambiguity that infuses the poem; on the one hand, oaks have associations with quintessential Englishness and even Christian traditions.[7] However, Elizabeth Liggins notices folklore and pagan elements associated with the scene: "It is not surprising that she should make her way to the wood, for folklore is rich in tree superstitions, which go back to ancient forms of tree worship. At the same time, the forest is a dwelling place of fairies and of enchanted mortals and there are hints in the ballads that it is the realm of departed spirits. It is sometimes a tabooed place; if mortals enter it, they are likely to summon an enchanted person or a supernatural spirit."[8] The woods resisted social boundaries in medieval culture; not only were they the province of highwaymen and villains, they also housed unnatural threats. In her prayer beneath the oak Christabel apparently courts forces of pagan druidic rites and

[5] Camille Paglia asserts that "Christabel's maiden voyage into archaic night is foolish and possibly provocative. She summons the very evil she hopes to quell". Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990): 332.

[6] Leadbetter, "The 'true wild weird spirit'", 18.

[7] Perdita Davidson observes the connection between mistletoe and fertility (44). Mulvihill explicates the sinister connotation of the oak and its correlation with Geraldine: "If here it exists outside the castle's safety—it may, like Geraldine, stand outside Christian providence, given its pagan associations—at this time the oak was also a wholly domesticated symbol of English security" (259).

[8] Elizabeth Liggins, "Folklore and the Supernatural in 'Christabel,'" *Folklore* 88 (1977): 94.

sexual expression instead of Christian orthodoxy.[9]

At this point Geraldine's entrance links pagan rituals and social disruption. Geraldine's role in catalyzing challenges to dominant gender and sexual paradigms enables Christabel's violation of gender norms. The mysterious lady appears as if summoned by Christabel's prayer; Leadbetter posits that she is an emanation of Christabel's repressed, unutterable desires.[10] Geraldine affords Christabel a means of agency and change, that could resonate with an artist deeply fascinated with connections between inspiration and defiance of poetic conventional as his participation in composing the *Lyrical Ballads* suggests. Coleridge deploys romantic tropes of the gallant knight encountering a damsel apparently in need of rescue but ultimately revealed as an enchantress with evil intent. Initially Geraldine falls comfortably within these romantic conventions as the damsel who turns out to be a seductress [11] like Duessa from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* [12] or Matthew Lewis' *femme fatale* Matilda from his 1796 Gothic novel *The Monk*, which Coleridge praised in his review of the novel the year it was published.[13] Here Christabel redefines romantic tropes by assuming the knight's mantle of the guarantor of her family honor and *noblesse oblige*.[14] Coleridge's gender inversion comes into sharper focus as Christabel guides her mysterious guest back to the castle and eventually to her room. Approaching the castle Geraldine swoons at the threshold, and Christabel "with might and main/ Lifted her up, a weary weight, / Over the threshold of the gate" (PW I.1 487). Liggins traces this motif to folkloric origins and notes the association with malevolent supernatural entities: "Geraldine's stumbling there acknowledges the protective power of the threshold against spirits; it is also of itself an inauspicious sign."[15] This incident deepens the mystery surrounding Geraldine by injecting a possibly sinister aspect to her, but also reinforces the sexual undercurrent first begun with Christabel's "rescue" of Geraldine. Christabel in a parody of the wedding night bodily carries her vampire bride across the threshold,[16] both embodying and undermining the conventions of traditional masculinity inherent in medieval tales while exploring non-normative gender roles. This parodic inversion of typical romances allows for

[9] Leadbetter details: "The tension between the naming of the act and the act itself evokes the transgressive quality of Christabel's spiritual and sexual disturbance: her 'prayer' does not take the form of Christian piety, but an eroticized secret brought to the living totem of a moonlit oak." Gregory Leadbetter, *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 206-7.

[10] Leadbetter, "The 'true wild weird spirit'" 19.

[11] Jerrold Hogle explains the dualistic dynamic inherent in gothic narratives: "By being so manifestly cross-generic and oxymoronic to an unusual degree, Gothic could both enact these fears of intermingled opposite and floating signifiers and be the locus in which those potentials could by housed—and for , Coleridge and others condemned—as outside of the desired cultural norm". Jerrold Hogle, "'Christabel' as Gothic: The Abjection of Instability." *Gothic Studies* 7.1 (2005): 22.

[12] Hogle observes the close association between Geraldine's deformed body and Duessa's misshapen parts in Book I of the *FQ* (18).

[13] Louis Peck relates that Coleridge called Matilda "exquisitely imagined" and hence "the author's masterpiece." Louis Peck, *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961): 25.

[14] Leadbetter, "The 'wild weird spirit'", 20.

[15] Liggins 97.

[16] Graham Davidson connects the epithalamium form of wedding poems to *Christabel* in his article dialoguing with Perdita Davidson. Graham Davidson, "Transformation or Transgression? Transformation: Christabel as an Epithalamium." Paglia notes the nuptial inversion of gender as well (323).

the uncanny recognition of familiar themes represented in unfamiliar terms that provokes interest and anxiety in Coleridge's readers.

One particular incident during Christabel's rescue of Geraldine both illuminates the fin-de-siècle revolutionary spirit and foreshadows the hypnotic powers of this radicalism. The two women pass by the hearth fire during their clandestine passage through the castle where "The brands were flat, the brands were dying, / Amid their own white ashes lying" (PW I.1 488). The hearth fire, central in medieval society, has burned itself out and lies in ashes like the monoculture that characterized much of European history. Geraldine's incendiary influence on the hearth fire creates a clear contrast between expiring archaisms and the vitality of subversive energy that Geraldine exudes like an aura. The hearth fire lies in dying ashes,

> [b]ut when the lady passed, there came
> A tongue of light, a fit of flame,
> And Christabel saw the lady's eye,
> And nothing else she saw thereby,
> Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall
> Which hung in a murky old nitch in the wall. (PW I.1 488)

Geraldine's presence incites the dying embers to spring into a "fit of flame", eliciting an energy that can be both destructive and regenerative. Liggins notes the folkloric conventions Coleridge draws on to foreshadow Geraldine's inflammatory nature and the conflict between traditional and radical forces: "the sudden flaring of a fire is widely held to signify the presence of a stranger; people in league with the supernatural are believed to inflict evil on others by a glance from their eyes; there is a tradition that weapons have a protective power and also an old belief that they can give out a more or less supernatural light."[17] The shield, an instrument of protection, should guard against Geraldine's inflammatory presence, but its ceremonial stasis confirms it as mere ornamentation, testament of exhausted impotency. As Liggins affirms, Coleridge constructs a momentary confrontation between old-world authority and the invading cataclysmic reversal, and in a masterstroke of Gothic subversion, the radical force ultimately prevails.

This moment in the poem illuminates a Coleridgean motif in his dark trilogy of poems: the ability to enchant and mesmerize through vision or the eyes. Geraldine's radical energy proves mesmerizing to Christabel, perhaps allowing her to view the ossified old world with altered perception as she sees the emblematic shield "in a murky old nitch in the wall," commemorative of glories past but impotent in its decline. This ocular invasion establishes tropes of mesmerism and enthrallment that Geraldine will use other means to cast her spell over Christabel, the visual capacity for entrancing and hypnotizing an audience hearkens back to mythological and folkloric accounts of the eye's vulnerability to spiritual and aesthetic influence. Paglia explicitly connects this

[17] Liggins 98.

ocular vulnerability to vampiric infiltration: "Geraldine's daemonic aggression resides in her eye. Vampires have a phallic eye, probing, penetrating, riveting" (338). Like the *Rime*'s Mariner and *Kubla Khan*'s narrator, enchanters dominate their victims through visual and aural means; Coleridge creates a through-line of artists and storytellers who transfix audiences and seem capable of transforming them as well, a prospect that carries uncertain and disturbing capabilities.

In Christabel's excursion of sexual exploration and Geraldine's incursion of inflammatory perturbation, Coleridge's original creative project appears in striking colors; the explorative heroine motivated by mysterious inner forces rejects gender conventions to experiment with the numinous and uncanny. Through this experiment she encounters a deeper mystery, a figure who enables Christabel's subversion of cultural norm and who herself exudes an aura of vulnerability and radical energy that disrupts the torpor of the imagination. As Perdita Davidson astutely observes, "From the beginning there is a sense that the figures of Christabel and Geraldine are hard to disentangle from each other, that they seem almost to be different aspects of one being" (45). The potential for vampiric narratives to productively present a distorted mirror of cultural and sexual norms in compelling and mystical avenues paves the way for nineteenth-century writers to adapt this provocative dynamic for gothic works. However, having invited the creature into the inner sanctum, Christabel discovers too late that radical energy cannot easily be contained.

Geraldine Unbound: Enchantment and Suppression

Considering the unsettling intrusion of revolutionary energy, Christabel's behavior suggests her complicity in and desire for her own enthrallment, reflecting Coleridge's pursuit of such boundary-breaking vitality. After Christabel safely ushers Geraldine into her bedchamber, she nurses Geraldine back to a reinvigorated state, climbs into bed, "And lay down in her loveliness" (*PW* I.1 490). In an echo of the erotic dream that motivated Christabel's nighttime excursion, her mind is surging and tumultuous, unable to rest: "brain of weal and woe /So many thoughts moved to and fro,/ That vain it were her lids to close" (*PW* I.1 490). Whereas the dream of her male lover made her leap and moan in her sleep, here she is so excited that sleep entirely eludes her, and she becomes an eager voyeur of Geraldine's nakedness. Critics have read this entire scene in homosexual terms, though the emphasis tends to focus on Geraldine's assertive embrace as the source of homoeroticism.[18] This passage suggests that women's sexual desire itself, whether homo- or heterosexual,

[18] The critical consensus concerning Coleridge's attitude toward this transgressive sexuality is mixed; Paula Palmer accuses him of homophobia in depicting lesbians as rapacious and malevolent seductresses, while Camille Paglia contends that Coleridge is celebrating the radical enthusiasm of cultural and religious violation. Paul Magnusson calls Geraldine "a shadow figure whose uncertain sexuality left Coleridge with qualms about the public's reception of the obscure references to improper sexual relations between Geraldine and Christabel." Paulina Palmer, "The Lesbian Vampire: Transgressive Sexuality" in *Horrifying Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature*, ed. Ruth Bienstock Anolik (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007): 204. Paul Magnusson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1974): 100.

elicits disruptive forces whether she dreams of her male betrothed or contemplates a female tryst. Furthermore, this moment creates another allusion to the wedding imagery that haunts both this poem and the other Gothic work *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, as Paglia notes in her study.[19] Intoxicated by her violation of prescribed sexual and gender roles, Christabel not only participates in her downfall, but actively courts it like a lover seeking sexual release.[20] Christabel resists the role of a chaste Christian maiden as her sexual awakening expands beyond societal mores of Coleridge's day.

The final sequence of events that occur in Christabel's boudoir in Part I reveals the clearest image of Coleridge's own enthrallment to fin-de-siècle revolutionary energy as well as its inevitable drawbacks. Geraldine's vampiric nature and the sexual enchantment that removes Christabel's volition and voice represent the revolutionary rejection of ancient cultures and norms. In a perversion of familial gender roles, maternal protection becomes a vampiric embrace that inverts the dynamic between the two women; Geraldine gains ascendency over the passive Christabel who becomes as helpless as a child. Geraldine removes the last vestiges of Christabel's protection through her defeat of Christabel's mother in a spellbinding invocation (PW II.1 633). Geraldine performs a reverse exorcism, driving away a benevolent guardian spirit to enable her own malevolent possession of Christabel, but also replacing Christabel's mother with "a vampiric embrace" as Gina Wisker explains.[21] Substitutionary violation of gender, familial, and sexual norms dominate this scene, culminating in the moment of Geraldine's enchantment of Christabel, which involves the "vampiric embrace" but begins with an invocation. Similar to the *Rime* and *Kubla Khan*, the image of an enchantment spoken by a narrator exerts enormous influence on Coleridge's psychological and aesthetic imagination, a potent energy that promises limitless creative possibilities but may be too powerful to control.

Geraldine's domination of Christabel takes two forms, the first of which staggers poetic production and reiterates Geraldine's uncontrollable energy. The physical disfigurement of Geraldine reveals her true horrific nature, a nature that enslaves rather than liberates. Geraldine's quelling impact begins even before her enchantment of Christabel, in the infamous revealing of her monstrous body. She disrobes as Christabel watches, but here the poet's words fail: "Behold! her bosom and half her Side—/ A Sight to dream of, not to tell!" (*PW* I.1 491). The deformity that marks her uncanny and fallen destructiveness not only reifies typical gothic tropes of outwardly beautiful women hiding

[19] Paglia 323ff.

[20] Leadbetter reiterates Christabel's complicity in this enchantment: "Throughout Part I, then, Christabel's fascination by Geraldine correlates to her own self-election; she has placed herself in Geraldine's transnatural embrace. With psychological dynamics typical of Coleridge's writing, an act of will has enabled the subject to be acted upon by forces beyond the will, uniting the process of knowing and becoming" (*Demonic Imagination* 210).

[21] "Fear of the mother is as central to these evocations as sexual lusts and terrors. Geraldine and Christabel indulge in an exorcism of Chris' protective mother, replacing her with a vampiric embrace." Gina Wisker, "Love Bites: Contemporary Women's Vampire Fiction" in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter, (Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture:79, Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 227.

inner corruption,[22] but in fact never receives description, leaving readers with the traumatizing task of envisioning her repulsive disfigurements. Though this gesture could be construed as an invitation for imaginative engagement, Coleridge's inability to complete the poem's original design suggests less of a participatory tactic and more of a creative failure. Geraldine's radical conflagration smothers Christabel's lesser flame of experimental deviations and expands to envelop Coleridge himself. Geraldine, as Paul Magnusson observed, represents the principle Coleridge himself used to describe the witches from *Macbeth*, "imagination disconnected from the good… the shadowy obscure and fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the lawless of human nature,--elemental avengers without sex or kin" (100). The true reason behind Coleridge's inability to control the creative vitality of radical defiance, such vitality is "a force that turns against its creator who can no longer command its powers" (100). As Mary Shelley vividly portrayed in *Frankenstein*, the creator suffers at the hands of his creation; in stifling Christabel Geraldine arrests Coleridge's poetic voice.

The incantation by which Geraldine casts her thrall on her victim illuminates the tension between exuberant liberation and aesthetic production that finally suppresses Coleridge's poem. Her mesmerizing enchantment begins with these words: "In the Touch of this Bosom there worketh a Spell, / Which is Lord of thy Utterance, Christabel!/ Thou knowest to-night and wilt know to-morrow, / This Mark of my Shame, this Seal of my Sorrow" (*PW* I.1 491). At the point the poem seems poised to explode with possibility; the image of sorcery and incantation resonates throughout Coleridge's dark trilogy of *The Rime*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*, rendering poetic invention as mystical, uncanny and thrilling. In *The Rime* the Mariner is both sorcerer and storyteller, infecting his audience with the tale, whereas *Kubla Khan*'s structure describes the uncanny but transcendent capacity of the poet's frenzied and euphoric invocation of mystic energies. In *Christabel*, however, unnatural and chaotic enchantment becomes a tool not of poetic contagion or supernatural inspiration, but rather of silence and enthrallment, the first indication that Geraldine fails to conform to the poet-mystic archetype that attracted Coleridge's imagination during the fin-de-siècle.

However, Coleridge cannot help inflecting Geraldine's fallenness and evil with a hint of sympathy and ambivalence for her, whose disfigurement evokes "shame" and "sorrow" in herself; she is not the unambiguously evil vampire in *Dracula* or the caricatured gothic villains of eighteenth-century novels by Walpole, Lewis or Radcliffe. She displays gratitude and regret before casting her enchantment, indicative perhaps of her own compulsion and helpless enchantment. When Christabel provides wine to refresh her, Geraldine bestows a kind of blessing: "All they who live in the upper Sky/ Do love you, holy Christabel! / And you love them, and for their sake, / And for the Good which me befell, / Even I, in my Degree will try / Fair Maiden, to requite you

[22] Liggins 99.

well" (*PW* I.1 490). Her beneficence and acknowledgement of her dreadful nature complicate the vampiric convention that pervades much of gothic literature, but this complexity concerning her sinister nature fades in Part II. The final triumph of revolutionary energy over established culture requires the complete occlusion of staid traditions by radical liberation. Geraldine will bewitch Baron Leoline in Part II mostly by inhabiting the enchantress / seductress trope to exploit masculine expressions of strength, violence, and control; her compelling ambiguity (born of violating gender and sexual norms) vanishes with the morning mist. Yet the unfortunate fall of the poem into a conventional and incomplete story begins with Geraldine's suppression of Christabel. By enthralling Christabel, Geraldine illustrates the anxiety inherent in radical upheaval and liberation regarding whether the energies of revolution may redound with suffocating effects. In her analysis of the later revisions and marginal notes Paglia claims that "the Christian Coleridge [tries] to soften the daemonic Coleridge, exactly as the older, Urizenic Wordsworth 'corrected' his early nature poetry. By rationalization and moralization, Coleridge strove to put out the daemonic fires of his own imagination."[23] Yet the vibrant and provocative defiance that energizes the first section of the poem vitiates the second before Coleridge's failure to accomplish his poetic vision. The revolutionary fires burned themselves out long before Coleridge began stirring the ashes.

Revolutionary Ashes and the Rise of the Vampire

Geraldine's enthrallment of Christabel paradoxically reveals the success and failure of the revolutionary hour, and with it the destiny of all involved. The conclusion to Part I announces: "A Star hath set, a Star hath risen, / O Geraldine! since Arms of thine /Have been the lovely Lady's Prison" (*PW* I.1 492). Her spell disrupts the workings of nature and specifically natural forms of creative expression, birdsong. Coleridge cleverly juxtaposes a natural progression—one star giving way to another—with the unnatural enchantment, though even the naturalistic image of stars were often equated with fate or destiny during the medieval period.[24] Such imagery signals that a foundational shift has occurred, albeit at a price. In this climactic finale to Part I, the domination of revolutionary transgression reaches its zenith; the revolution is successful, and the symbols of the past lie helpless before the newly risen star.

However, though Geraldine's radical liberation attracted Coleridge's desire to seek inspiration from subversive exuberance, the nature of this upheaval produced by illicit energy has revealed itself to be inherently corrupt and parasitic, and ironically produced the suppression of creativity. Charles

[23] Paglia (327) and Leadbetter ("The 'true wild weird spirit'" 17-18) comment on this point.

[24] Liggins expands on the interaction of the stars as a transition or transformative image: "'A star hath set, a star hath risen' …may also draw on the idea that every man has a star in heaven, whose changes of position and of brightness symbolize the changes in his fortune. Symbolically, there have been a death and a re-birth during that hour when the natural order was disturbed, and when even the birds of night were stilled" (100).

Patterson sums up the conflicting sides of Coleridge as expressed in *Kubla Khan*, though the same conflict applies to *Christabel*:

> Neither the religious and moral side of Coleridge *nor* the Coleridge who affirmed the unifying, synthesizing, balance-giving, truth-perceiving power of the imaginative mind could seriously advocate the creating of poetry that would bring such dire results; but the pleasure-seeking, opium taking side of Coleridge could certainly *toy* with the idea of creating it *up to a point*- the point at which his moral, spiritual, and metaphysical side would call into question the wisdom of the endeavor and the extent of its opposition to the main tenets of his literary theory considered in its entirety.[25]

"*Up to a point*" is the key phrase in Patterson's discussion, since Coleridge found inspiration in the dueling subversiveness of both women in his poem until one gains ascendency over the other. As Patterson asserts, Coleridge's adventuresome, radical tendencies are what drew him to violations of conventionality and how his fecund imagination compellingly depicted both Geraldine and Christabel. Yet this tendency ran afoul of the pull toward order and religious sensibilities deeply instilled in Coleridge that precluded his full embrace of the radically unconforming vampire. The tension produced by these warring forces infuses the text with the ambiguity and uncanniness that enchants readers; therefore, the triumph of the transgressive and eclipse of the normative disrupts the dynamic that defined Part I. Geraldine's occlusion of tradition and morality results in Coleridge's discovery of the unmanageable and suffocating effects that revolutionary energies entail.

In *Christabel* Coleridge's attraction to the revolutionary fin de siècle energy conjures his heroine Christabel whose journey mirrors his quest to infuse his own poetic output with the radical exuberance he saw in overthrowing slumberous and decaying institutions. Christabel's erotic journey confounding conventional gender and sexual norms mirrors his imaginative exploration beyond the confines of traditional morality by experimenting in uncanny and subversive energies. The vampiric figure of Geraldine facilitates Christabel's gender nonconformity and provides a cleansing and redeeming fire of renewal, against which the institutions of yesteryear prove impotent. However, Christabel discovers the spellbinding nature of unbridled revolution as Geraldine's true corruption is revealed. For Coleridge, surrender to pure transgression silences inspiration and reduces the poem's vitality, ultimately preventing the completion of his vision. *Christabel* serves as both the rising and setting of stars; the setting of Coleridge's application to radical transgression for creative energy, but ironically the rising of radical character tropes like vampires as figures of challenges to convention that inspires and continues to resonate to this day.

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[25] Charles Patterson, "The Daemonic in Kubla Khan: Toward Interpretation," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 89, no. 5 (1974): 1039 (emphasis in original).