'We Do Not Know the Laws of that Country': Lamb and Coleridge at the Threshold of Faerie

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'THERE IS NO LAW TO JUDGE OF THE LAWLESS, or canon by which a dream may be criticised'.[1] This is how Charles Lamb closes the introduction to his *Elia* essay 'Witches, and Other Night Fears'. In this brief piece, he relates how he was a child plagued by night terrors. These were brought on by a collection of Old Testament stories—specifically, an illustration of the Witch of Endor raising the ghost of the prophet Samuel. Monstrous creatures, evil spirits, and unknown magic, he muses, seem to reflect something primal in the human psyche. This 'something', however, faded in adulthood, as he writes that 'My night-fancies have long ceased to be afflictive'.[2] They have been replaced by dreams that are embarrassingly prosaic. He contrasts himself with his friend, Coleridge, who can 'conjure up icy domes, and pleasure-houses for Kubla Khan'.[3] It is difficult to tell how regretful Lamb is, though. After all, Coleridge may be a true poet, but Lamb now enjoys a good night's sleep, his imagination safely tucked into its 'proper element of prose'.[4]

What is this terrible dream world that Lamb touched as a child, and Coleridge seemed haunted by throughout his life? Both men maintained an ambiguous relationship to it—to its relationship to childhood, to the poetic life, and the possibility of its objective reality. At times, Lamb advised a reverential distance, indicating a belief that it was something real and 'out there'. He once warned Coleridge away from exploring 'a certain air of mysticism, more consonant to the conceits of pagan philosophy, than consistent with the humanity of genuine piety'.[5] Coleridge, after all, was known for pressing into the uncanny. He was the one assigned to depict 'incidents and agents [who] were to be, in part at least, supernatural' in the *Lyrical Ballads* (*BL* II 6). Elsewhere, such as in 'Witches', Lamb seemed regretful that he had lost the poetic imagination of his childhood. After laying out his own dreams, both in childhood terror and mundane adulthood, he tells the story of a boy who was 'brought up with the most scrupulous exclusion of every taint of

[1] Charles Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, vol. 2 (London: Methuen, 1903), 65. This paper is a revision of that which was presented at the annual Friends of Coleridge conference at Kilve Court in July 2022. I am grateful to the Friends of Coleridge for the generous travel bursary which made it possible for me to journey from Canada to the UK, and for the additional gift of the John Beer Bursary. I wish to thank all of those scholars who attended the conference—for their sharpening questions, helpful insights, and curious spirits. It was a joy to spend the week together. My thanks as well to the referee who reviewed my initial draft, whose encouraging and incisive comments improved the final copy, and sharpened my own thinking and writing on the topic.

[2] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 68.

[3] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 69.

[4] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 70.

[5] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr., vol. 1 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975–78), 56; cited in Gregory Leadbetter, *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 24.

superstition—who was never allowed to hear of goblin or apparition'. This restriction did not result in a fear-free childhood, however. Rather, according to Lamb, the child now 'finds all this world of fear'.[6] The fear of invisible realities is natural to children, Lamb argues. It is unavoidable. Faerie stories, what I will denominate the sorts of stories Lamb, Coleridge, and others in their circle and legacy discuss on this point, give shape and focus to this fear.

Throughout this essay, I use Faerie to stand in for what has been named diversely the supernatural, the preternatural, the uncanny, the daemonic, and the Vast, among other not-quite-synonymous terms. I chose Faerie as it connects Coleridge to a number of his literary descendants. The connection with (and fascination for) childhood imagination, dreams, and otherworldly stories has been carried on by the likes of Sara Coleridge, George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Madeleine L'Engle, and Ursula K. Le Guin. In *Risking Enchantment*, Jeannie Watson makes many of these same connections, drawing together Coleridge, Tolkien, Carl Jung, Le Guin, among others, to define stories from Faerie as 'strange and wonderful and, to a large extent, inexplicable'.[7] These stories are places where 'the truth and significance of the concrete world can be revealed'.[8] Watson also observes that Coleridge uses the term Faerie himself, when he praises Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* for its 'true imaginative absence of all particular place & time' as 'it is neither in the domains of History or Geography, is ignorant of all artificial boundary—truly in the Land of Faery—i.e. in mental space' (*CN* III 4501).[9]

Coleridge's Encounters with Faerie

Coleridge's categorisation of Faerie as 'mental space' may lead one to conclude that he saw it in purely psychological terms. Mental space for Coleridge, however, does not necessarily mean unreal or a 'figment of the imagination'. The body, for instance, played a role in imagination and dreaming, as Jennifer Ford argues when she claims that 'the Coleridgean imagination also partook of a corporeal, physiological and often diseased existence'.[10] There are also many instances where Coleridge pursued encounters with externally existing preternatural beings. There is the childhood episode in which he explores the Pixies' Parlour, as recorded by Richard Holmes, referring to the sandstone cave as 'a place of folklore—goblins, ghosts'.[11] There is the hike to the Brocken in search of a witch's circle. There is the epigraph to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', in which Thomas Burnet speculates that 'there are more Invisible than Visible Beings in the Universe', and asks, 'who will declare to us the Family of all of these?' (*PW* I.1 371). In the biographical letters to Thomas Poole, Coleridge connected his childhood reading of fairy tales to his mind's

[6] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 68.
[7] Jeanie Watson, *Risking Enchantment: Coleridge's Symbolic World of Faery* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1990), 53.
[8] Watson, *Risking Enchantment*, 58.
[9] Watson, *Risking Enchantment*, 55.
[10] Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.
[11] Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (New York: Viking, 1990), 12.

habituation 'to *the Vast*' and 'love of "the Great", & "the Whole"' (*CL* I 355)—in other words, something beyond himself and his senses. Finally, the evidence is in the quote about 'mental space' itself, in which Faerie is the place that the *artificial* boundaries of time and space disappear. Faerie, perhaps, is a place truer than the sensory world.

There is a vast spectrum of possible beings in this pursuit: pixies, witches, nature spirits, up to something 'great' and 'whole' that binds together the cosmos. Their possibility fascinated a disturbed Coleridge throughout his life, and sometimes intersected with his musings on the will, physical and mental affliction, and how much of the world was constituted by our mental state and how much existed on its own. Ford touches on this when she writes of Coleridge's belief that his nightmares 'could never originate from his own consciousness' and that 'they must be caused by some external form, a kind of spirit that could act on his consciousness and memory'.[12] In a letter to James Gillman, he calls these 'dream-devils or damned Souls that play pranks with me' (*CL* V 392).[13] Although the realm of the demonic and Faerie are different categories—one denoting irredeemable evil and the other morally ambiguous, even helpful preternatural creatures—there are parallels to the nature of their possible existence in Coleridge's thought.

A notebook entry from 1823 is illustrative of how Coleridge works through the problem of spiritual beings. He turns, first, to discover what the Christian scriptures said on the matter. Here, Coleridge could not find any satisfactory evidence that the Hebrew Bible revealed the existence of 'A Clan of Devils' (*CN* IV 5078). As for the New Testament, there are multiple accounts of demonic possession throughout the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. However, 'The passages, in which the Devil and Devils are spoken of anthropomorphously, are all subordinate to some other doctrine or purpose which would remain <in> the same strength, whether the Devils are understood literally or figuratively' (*CN* IV 5078). Real demonic existence, he argues, cannot be definitively proven from scriptural revelation.

And yet, Coleridge also doubts that when Christ prays against the demonic, that we are meant to interpret this only as healing from 'nervous derangements, or wicked Thoughts & Impulses from men's own corrupt Hearts' (*CN* IV 5078). Some foreign agent is implied, he continues,

> Something *more* than the Will, mind, life of the Individuals themselves is clearly meant, warned against, prayed against: and this more is *the* evil *Spirit*, *an* evil Spirit, and evil Spirits. But is the Spirit of Evil, ~~are~~ is an evil Spirit of necessity a *Soul*? or an intelligent Person? Is it a self-subsisting self-conscious Agent, and not an Accident, or Potence? The burthen of the Proof lies on him who asserts this! (*CN* IV 5078)

[12] Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 142.
[13] Cf. Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 149–50.

The issue Coleridge raises is one of freedom and a definition of personhood. If demons possess free will, then do they also have agency to do good? This would go against the nature or definition of being a demon. Then what are these other spirits that are so wholly evil? Coleridge does not settle the matter for himself. He leaves the door open to their existence without committing:

> I dare not deny the possibility of a finite Person *willing* evil irrevocably and beyond the power of Repentance, & Reformation—nay, the *Idea* is indispensable in Morality—or that this Finite Person, or Race of Persons, may have been invested with larger intellectual faculties, & more enduring and subtle Bodies, than the Human Race.—But *what* or *whence*, we are not informed by Revelation, which alone could inform us . . . I dare not decide— (*CN* IV 5078)

On the topic of Faerie, it is notable in this speculative passage where Coleridge draws out certain problems and where he does not. His issue with the demonic is not scepticism concerning a race of non-human persons who are nearly immortal and invisible to us. It is an issue of *how* the demonic is characterised, as a race of beings irredeemably evil and yet free-willed, assumed to be fully revealed by Christian scripture and doctrine. He cautioned against doctrinal certainty regarding the demonic, which claimed to be derived from scriptural revelation. This does not preclude the reality of spiritual beings, though. Coleridge allows that 'Persons . . . with larger intellectual faculties, & more enduring and subtle Bodies, than the Human Race' may exist. What interested Coleridge on this topic—much more than doctrine—was the nature of possible human encounters with these beings. These encounters seemed to happen primarily in dreams and imagination, not in theological revelation.

In distinguishing the demonic from the more morally ambiguous Faerie, we may consider a brief example from 'Christabel'. Many interpreters of that poem read Geraldine as a demonic being, usually a vampire or a witch. One recent case is Malcolm Guite, who writes that 'Geraldine's apparent beauty and innocence conceal a great evil'.[14] There are others who see her as a liberating figure, who inducts Christabel into womanhood, or who grants the young woman a special vision. Jeannie Watson is one such critic, who calls Geraldine 'the primary agent of Spirit, or Faery' in the poem.[15] Whatever her nature is, Geraldine appears to be an ambiguous agent, as evidenced by a quote attributed to Derwent Coleridge: she is 'no witch or goblin, or malignant being of any kind, but a spirit, executing her appointed task with the best good will'.[16] This is evidenced in the poem itself, with the lines spoken by Geraldine,

> All they, who live in th' upper Sky,
> Do love you, holy Christabel!

[14] Malcolm Guite, *Mariner: A Voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), 226.
[15] Watson, *Risking Enchantment*, 181; see also, Leadbetter, *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination*, 201–17.
[16] Cf. Watson, *Risking Enchantment*, 179.

And you love them, and for their sake
And for the Good which me befel,
Even I in my Degree will try,
Fair Maiden, to requite you well. (*PW* I.1 490)

As the poem is unfinished, we cannot know the final outcome of Geraldine's encounter with Christabel. It does seem to be both enrapturing and dangerous—but this is also true of the Mariner's encounter with the polar spirit. That force of nature is dangerous, even as it upholds a larger order of love that encompasses spirit, sea, bird, and man. Even the poem itself could be a source of danger. Kiran Toor records how Coleridge struggled to complete 'Christabel' because it brought up a deep sense dejection. As Toor writes, 'This poetic confrontation with an internal, deep, dark, rejected, and repressed part of the mind is also extended by Coleridge into the specific creative realm of dreams'.[17] These beings, confronted in poetry and dreams, may not be demonic—but nor are they safe.

Lamb's Dreams and Monsters

In 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', Charles Lamb approaches the preternatural with perhaps more reverence than Coleridge—or, at least, a respectful distance. The essay first appeared in the October 1821 edition of the *London Magazine*. David Higgins points out that the essay was published alongside the second part of Thomas De Quincey's 'Confessions of an Opium Eater',[18] and connects both pieces of prose with 'the relationship between the imagination and the exotic'.[19] Lamb's 'Witches' also appeared immediately after 'Imperfect Sympathies', in which he confesses that he feels 'the differences of mankind, national or individual, to an unhealthy excess'.[20] 'Imperfect Sympathies' is a problematic essay, in which Lamb admits his lack of hospitality towards, among others, Jews, Scots, and people of colour. It draws firm othering lines between himself and those he considers to be outside of his preferred circles. In this way, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', draws thematic parallels to 'Imperfect Sympathies'. If that latter essay is Lamb imperfectly grappling with his relationship to the human other, 'Witches' deals with his relationship to the inhuman other.

As summarised in my introduction, Lamb begins drawing the reader into empathy with those human ancestors who lived in ongoing fear of the preternatural. His opening touches on themes that the philosopher Charles Taylor would later describe as the pre-modern self as inevitably 'porous' to outside spiritual forces. The modern self, in contrast, has been 'buffered' from

[17] Kiran Toor, 'Dream Weaver: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the prefiguring of Jungian Dream Theory', *The Coleridge Bulletin* 24 (n.s.) (2004): 86.
[18] David Higgins, 'Imagining the Exotic: De Quincey and Lamb in the London Magazine', *Romanticism* 17.3 (2011): 289.
[19] Higgins, 'Imagining the Exotic', 289.
[20] Charles Lamb, 'Imperfect Sympathies', in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, vol. 2 (London: Methuen & Co, 1903), 58.

such things.[21] The adult Lamb is 'almost ashamed' by his prosaic dreams of 'architecture and of building—cities abroad, which I have never seen . . . Rome, Amsterdam, Paris, Lisbon—their churches, palaces, squares, marketplaces, shops, suburbs, ruins'.[22] These are the sites of everyday life, of daily commerce, religion, government, and domesticity. Moreover, they are unpopulated. No monsters haunt these sites of everyday life. This is in contrast to the recurring nightmare of Lamb's childhood, in which the Witch of Endor 'nightly sate upon my pillow', a single visitor who terrorised the child in his own home with her constant gaze.

Although the Witch of Endor was the shape of the young Lamb's nightmares, she is a clever literary figure for him to bring into this essay. After all, the encounter between King Saul and the Witch, as told in 2 Samuel, is of a man violating the law so that he can contact the dead. Saul wishes to raise the ghost of the prophet Samuel. The Witch is wary; the King has enacted a ban on witchcraft, and she suspects a trap. Nevertheless, she acts as the King orders and raises Samuel's ghost. As with some of the interpretations of Geraldine mentioned above, she is not an avatar of evil. She does, however, possess uncanny powers and executes 'her appointed task with the best good will'. In the end, it is Saul, not the Witch, who is scolded for disturbing the order of life and death. Saul shows his irreverence in violating these boundaries. As for the Witch, she is an agent of power, a connection to the preternatural, but—in the original story—not a monster herself.

Where does Lamb think these dreams come from? He speculates that 'Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimaeras . . . may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition—but they were there before. They are transcripts, types—the archetypes are in us, and eternal'.[23] This fear that comes instinctually to children is 'a peep at least into the shadow-land of pre-existence'. This could be a clue as to why Lamb warned Coleridge away from 'a certain air of mysticism'. Lamb may have been more certain that something real existed behind childhood nightmares, such that remaining porous to such forces was not wise. As he declares in his essay, 'we do not know the laws of that country'.[24] Coleridge, by contrast thoroughly explored his dreams throughout his notebooks. His speculation ranged widely: that dreams arose as an imaginative manifestation of bodily states, or as Mind acting on the sleep-subsumed ego, or, as John Beer records, as 'a benevolent curb against the incursive power of

[21] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 35–38. At one point, Taylor approaches this topic from the opposite angle as Lamb. While Lamb imagines himself in sympathy with the pre-modern self, Taylor imagines their incredulity at our own activities, writing of how 'today many people look back to the world of the porous self with nostalgia. As though the creation of a thick emotional boundary between us and the cosmos were now lived as a loss. The aim is to try to recover some measure of this lost feeling. So people go to movies about the uncanny in order to experience a frission. Our peasant ancestors would have thought us insane. You can't get a frission from what is really in fact terrifying to you' (38).

[22] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 69.

[23] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 68.

[24] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 66.

total imagination',[25] which could be 'a total incursion of terror' on the finite mind.[26]

The idea that nightmares may be a benevolent force, a protection against something much worse, provides a tantalizing clue as to why Coleridge and Lamb endorsed the childhood reading of Faerie stories. At first, given Coleridge's terrors following his reading of *Arabian Nights* and Lamb's following the Old Testament picture book, one might think these men would warn children away from such things. Instead, they took the opposite approach. Not surprisingly, Sara Coleridge, who also experienced terrible childhood nightmares, later continued this trend. She considered Faerie stories to be 'wholesome food . . . for the childish mind'. She admitted that 'it is curious that on this point Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Lamb, my father, my Uncle Southey, and Mr Wordsworth were all agreed'.[27]

Lamb's story of the boy in 'Witches', the child brought up without fairy tales who now 'finds all this world of fear', provides one clue as to why this was so.[28] All of the men listed by Sara Coleridge, and Sara herself, believed that fairy tales helped 'body forth' things that were too great and mysterious for simple moral lessons. As Jeffrey Barbeau explains, she 'believed that works of fantasy uniquely convey truth to minds otherwise unable to grasp higher mysteries'.[29] The fear of invisible realities is natural to children, Lamb argues, just as it was natural to the pre-modern self. It is unavoidable. Faerie stories give shape and focus to this fear. Without them, an instinctual terror may permeate all of life, rather than find its outlet in a particular monster to be seen and named.[30]

A Legacy of Faerie Stories

The justification for Faerie stories as a means of giving shape to childhood fears continued beyond Coleridge and Lamb's circles into the twentieth century. G. K. Chesterton, for one, later made a similar argument in his essay, 'The Red Angel' (1909), writing,

> Fairy tales, then, are not responsible for producing in children fear, or any of the shapes of fear; fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an

[25] John Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (Bristol: MacMillan, 1977), 83.
[26] Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 80.
[27] Sara Coleridge, *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, ed. Edith Coleridge (London: Henry S. King, 1873), 175.
[28] Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', 68.
[29] Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Sara Coleridge: Her Life and Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 60.
[30] For further on Sara Coleridge in particular, see also Barbeau's chapter on 'Dreams', in which he outlines how her work of fantasy, *Phantasmion*, plays with dreams as a negative state: 'While imagination and faith require the active participation of the human will, dreams [in *Phantasmion*] most often reveal a passive mind and the distortion of reason' (Barbeau, 66). Sara Coleridge's act of writing the novel is itself a product of imagination, reshaping the terrible dreams of that period of her life, and her childhood memories.

> imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.[31]

Chesterton, like Lamb, argues that children naturally fear unseen monsters. He takes on a different focus, however, by emphasising the monster's defeat in Faerie stories. This is a move that gains ground in Chesterton's thought and that of his successors, but it does not exist in either Coleridge's or Lamb's own speculations. Coleridge's mystery poems, such as the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel', show the inbreaking of preternatural forces, but there is no victory against these forces. Some aid the Mariner in his return home, others pursue him for their own motives. The lawless, dream-like quality of these works is their driving feature. A Faerie story, as it is defined by Chesterton and his successors, includes some sort of victory. In his seminal essay, 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien called this turn a eucatastrophe. He defined his coinage as 'the sudden joyous "turn"' that 'denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat . . . giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief'.[32] Douglas Hedley shows where Tolkien and Coleridge share a common view regarding the strangeness of Faerie stories, to the point where some have thought that 'they confuse fantasy and dreaming with mental disorders'.[33] Even so, Coleridge's use of Faerie also has its differences from Tolkien's—it transcends the boundaries of time and space to give a shape and name to that which is beyond us, that which is Vaster than human comprehension, but does not necessarily end on a sudden turn to joy.

To explore this point further, it is worth looking to another of Coleridge's (and Chesterton's) literary descendants: C. S. Lewis. In *The Discarded Image* (1964), a study of the medieval cosmological imagination, Lewis outlines a vision of the heavenly spheres and earth working in harmony. Every piece seems to fit and have its place in a divinely ordered hierarchy. One chapter, however, details the part that does not fit and refuses an explanatory place. This is the chapter on what Lewis calls the *longaevi*, or long-livers. He describes them, in the medieval conception, as,

> marginal, fugitive creatures. They are perhaps the only creatures to whom the Model does not assign, as it were, an official status. Herein lies their imaginative value. They soften the classic severity of the huge design. They intrude a welcome hint of wildness and uncertainty into a universe that is in danger of being a little too self explanatory, too luminous.[34]

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[31] G. K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (Baton Rouge, LA: Mud House Art and Literature, 2016), 96.

[32] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), 68.

[33] Douglas Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 178. In the chapter cited, Hedley touches on many of the same themes as my own essay from the perspective of a philosophy of religion, connecting Coleridge, Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Taylor, Faerie stories, and the significance of dreams.

[34] C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 122.

The *longaevi* are, in other words, Faeries. In a system that could exist in perfect harmony, according to Lewis, there is still a part that does not need to be there, that does not make sense, that resists too much luminosity. Some of these Faerie-creatures may appear with an otherworldly beauty, while others may be mistaken for monsters. Lewis makes room for both, and in doing so illuminates the speculations of both Coleridge and Lamb. If Faerie does exist in this sense, it is no wonder Coleridge—that lover of byways and rabbit trails—would pursue it, even if it was an unsafe and lawless thing to do. And it is understandable that Lamb, who ultimately found comfort in his depopulated dreams, would shy away from this wildness.

I am not the first to connect Lewis's writing on the *longaevi* and Coleridge. Adam Roberts has done so in relation to the 'Ancient Mariner', in which he notes that the poem is teaming with these creatures: polar spirits, Death and Life-in-Death, reanimated corpses, angelic beings, and eventually the immortal Mariner himself.[35] The sea itself is such a creature in the poem's cosmos, as it is 'not the large quantity of brine sloshing around the declivities of our material planet that science studies', but 'something mysterious and magical, something in a sense alive'.[36] There is a way that these poetic devices 'body forth' a more enchanted means of seeing the world. But Coleridge was also concerned with unveiling what is already there in the reader's world, 'lifting the film of familiarity' (*BL* II 7). His inclusion of Burnet in his epigraph points at this as well, that the world may be teeming with invisible life. It is not science that brings it forth, however, but our dreams and stories that teach the imagination to see.

Neither Coleridge nor Lamb settled on an exact definition of Faerie. It is not clear how strongly either man held to its existence. But this is beside the point. Faerie is the word for what is beyond understanding and utility. It stands for what confounds human reason and law. Perhaps this realm only exists inside the depths of the human self—what Coleridge referred to as the mysterious 'somewhat that cannot be accounted or even described intelligibly because it has its source in that which is deeper than Intelligence' (*SWF* II 1336). But there is room, in Coleridge, Lamb, and their literary descendants for a Faerie that is truly preternatural. It is a 'somewhat' in nature that refuses explanation at every turn. Lamb, maintaining a respectful distance, might have said that Coleridge paid too steep a price for attempting to plunge imaginatively across its threshold. But, maybe, as Roberts observes, Coleridge's encounter with Faerie resulted in poetry 'that deliciously and evocatively baffles our understanding, that . . . always outflanks attempts . . . to comprehend its strangeness'.[37] Perhaps the mystery poems themselves are remnants of Faerie, brought back to us over a threshold.

[35] Adam Roberts, 'Coleridge's Longaevi', *Samuel Taylor Bloggeridge* (blog), 1 October 2018, https://samueltaylorbloggeridge.blogspot.com/2018/10/coleridges-longaevi.html.
[36] Roberts, 'Coleridge's Longaevi'.
[37] Roberts, 'Coleridge's Longaevi'.