

for a wallack.
The shades of evening were growing thicker around us as my conductor finished his long narrative with this moral—"Ye see, birkie,¹ it is nae chancy thing to tak a stranger traveller for a guide, when ye are in an uncouth² land."

1824

1. Clever young man.

2. Strange.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

1772-1834

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth, recording his gratitude to the mountains, lakes, and winds "that dwell among the hills where I was born," commiserates with Coleridge because "thou, my Friend! wert reared / In the great City, 'mid far other scenes." Samuel Taylor Coleridge had in fact been born in the small town of Ottery St. Mary, in rural Devonshire, but on the death of his father he had been sent to school at Christ's Hospital in London. He was a dreamy, enthusiastic, and extraordinarily precocious schoolboy. Charles Lamb, his schoolmate and lifelong friend, in an essay on Christ's Hospital gave a vivid sketch of Coleridge's loneliness, his learning, and his eloquence. When in 1791 Coleridge entered Jesus College, Cambridge, he was an accomplished scholar; but he found little intellectual stimulation at the university, fell into idleness, dissoluteness, and debt, then in despair fled to London and enlisted in the Light Dragoons under the alias of Silas Tomkyn Comberbach—one of the most inept cavalymen in the long history of the British army. Although rescued by his brothers and sent back to Cambridge, he left in 1794 without a degree.

In June 1794 Coleridge met Robert Southey, then a student at Oxford who, like himself, had poetic aspirations, was a radical in religion and politics, and sympathized with the republican experiment in France. Together the two young men planned to establish an ideal democratic community in America for which Coleridge coined the name "Pantisocracy," signifying an equal rule by all. A plausible American real-estate agent persuaded them that the ideal location would be on the banks of the Susquehanna in Pennsylvania. Twelve men undertook to go; and because perpetuation of the scheme required offspring, hence wives, Coleridge dutifully became engaged to Sara Fricker, conveniently at hand as the sister of Southey's fiancée. The Pantisocracy scheme collapsed, but at Southey's insistence Coleridge went through with the marriage, "resolved," as he said, "but wretched." Later Coleridge's radicalism waned, and he became a conservative in politics—a highly philosophical one—and a staunch Anglican in religion.

In 1795 Coleridge met Wordsworth and at once judged him to be "the best poet of the age." When in 1797 Wordsworth brought his sister, Dorothy, to settle at Alfoxden, only three miles from the Coleridges at Nether Stowey, the period of intimate communication and poetic collaboration began that was the golden time of Coleridge's life.

An annual allowance of £150, granted to Coleridge by Thomas and Josiah Wedgwood, sons of the founder of the famous pottery firm, came just in time to deflect him from assuming a post as a Unitarian minister. After their joint publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, Coleridge and the Wordsworths spent a winter in Germany, where Coleridge attended the University of Göttingen and began the lifelong study of German philosophers and critics—Kant, Schiller, Schelling, and Fichte—that helped alter profoundly his thinking about philosophy, religion, and aesthetics.

Back in England, Coleridge in 1800 followed the Wordsworths to the Lake District, settling at Greta Hall, Keswick. He had become gradually disaffected from his wife, and now he fell helplessly and hopelessly in love with Sara Hutchinson, whose sister, Mary, Wordsworth married in 1802. In accord with the medical prescription of that time, Coleridge had been taking laudanum (opium dissolved in alcohol) to ease the painful physical ailments from which he had suffered from an early age. In 1800–1801 heavy dosages during attacks of rheumatism made opium a necessity to him, and Coleridge soon recognized that the drug was a greater evil than the diseases it did not cure. “Dejection: An Ode,” published in 1802, was Coleridge’s despairing farewell to health, happiness, and poetic creativity. A two-year sojourn on the Mediterranean island of Malta, intended to restore his health, instead completed his decline. When he returned to England in the late summer of 1806, he was a broken man, a drug addict, estranged from his wife, suffering from agonies of remorse, and subject to terrifying nightmares of guilt and despair from which his own shrieks awakened him. By 1810, when he and Wordsworth quarreled bitterly, it must have seemed that he could not fall any lower.

Under these conditions Coleridge’s literary efforts, however sporadic and fragmentary, were little short of heroic. In 1808 he debuted as a speaker at one of the new lecturing institutions that sprang up in British cities in the early nineteenth century. His lectures on poetry, like his later series on Shakespeare, became part of the social calendar for fashionable Londoners—women, excluded still from universities, particularly. He wrote for newspapers and single-handedly undertook to write, publish, and distribute a periodical, *The Friend*, which lasted for some ten months beginning in June 1809. A tragedy, *Remorse*, had in 1813 a successful run of twenty performances at the Drury Lane theater. In 1816 he took up residence at Highgate, a northern suburb of London, under the supervision of the excellent and endlessly forbearing physician James Gillman, who managed to control, although not to eliminate, Coleridge’s consumption of opium. The next three years were Coleridge’s most sustained period of literary activity. While continuing to lecture and to write for the newspapers on a variety of subjects, he published *Biographia Literaria*, *Zapolya* (a drama), a book consisting of the essays in *The Friend* (revised and greatly enlarged), two collections of poems, and several important treatises on philosophical and religious subjects. In these treatises and those that followed over the next fifteen years, he emerged as the heir to the conservatism of Edmund Burke, an opponent to secularism and a defender of the Anglican Church, and an unapologetic intellectual elitist with an ambitious account of the role elites might play in modern states, outlined in his discussions of national culture and of the “clerisy” who would take responsibility for preserving it.

The remaining years of his life, which he spent with Dr. and Mrs. Gillman, were quieter and happier than any he had known since the turn of the century. He came to a peaceful understanding with his wife and was reconciled with Wordsworth, with whom he toured the Rhineland in 1828. His rooms at Highgate became a center for friends, for the London literati, and for a steady stream of pilgrims from England and America. They came to hear one of the wonders of the age, the Sage of Highgate’s conversation—or monologue—for even in his decline, Coleridge’s talk never lost the almost hypnotic power that Hazlitt has immortalized in “My First Acquaintance with Poets.” Mary Shelley appears to have been haunted by the memory of the evening when, a small child, she hid behind a sofa to listen to Coleridge, one of her father’s visitors, recite *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and a stanza from that poem of dark mystery found its way into *Frankenstein*, just as her recollections of that visitor’s voice contributed to her depictions of the irresistible hold her

novel's storytellers have over their auditors. When he died, Coleridge left his friends with the sense that an incomparable intellect had vanished from the world.

Coleridge's friends, however, abetted by his own merciless self-judgments, set current the opinion, still common, that he was great in promise but not in performance. Even in his buoyant youth he described his own character as "indolence capable of energies"; and it is true that while his mind was incessantly active and fertile, he lacked application and staying power. He also manifested early in life a profound sense of guilt and a need for public expiation. After drug addiction sapped his strength and will, he often adapted (or simply adopted) passages from other writers, with little or no acknowledgment, and sometimes in a context that seems designed to reveal that he relies on sources that he does not credit. Whatever the tangled motives for his procedure, Coleridge has repeatedly been charged with gross plagiarism, from his day to ours. After *The Ancient Mariner*, most of the poems he completed were written, like the first version of "Dejection: An Ode," in a spasm of intense effort. Writings that required sustained planning and application were either left unfinished or, like *Biographia Literaria*, made up of brilliant sections padded out with filler, sometimes lifted from other writers, in a desperate effort to meet a deadline. Many of his speculations Coleridge merely confided to his notebooks and the ears of his friends, incorporated in letters, and poured out in the margins of his own and other people's books.

Even so, it is only when measured against his own potentialities that Coleridge's achievements appear limited. In an 1838 essay the philosopher John Stuart Mill hailed the recently deceased Coleridge as one of "the two great seminal minds of England": according to Mill, Coleridge's conservatism had, along with the very different utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (the other seminal mind identified in Mill's essay), revolutionized the political thought of the day. Coleridge was also one of the important and influential literary theorists of the nineteenth century. One of his major legacies is the notion that culture, the nation's artistic and spiritual heritage, represents a force with the power to combat the fragmentation of a modern, market-driven society and to restore a common, collective life. This was an idea that he worked out largely in opposition to Bentham's utilitarianism, the newly prestigious discipline of political economy, and the impoverished, soulless account of human nature that these systems of thought offered. And in *Biographia Literaria* and elsewhere, Coleridge raised the stakes for literary criticism, making it into a kind of writing that could address the most difficult and abstract questions—questions about, for instance, the relations between literary language and ordinary language, or between poetry and philosophy, or between perception and imagination. Above all, Coleridge's writings in verse—whether we consider the poetry of Gothic demonism in *Christabel* or the meditative conversation poems like "Frost at Midnight" or "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison"—are the achievements of a remarkably innovative poet.

The Eolian Harp¹

Composed at Clevedon, Somersetshire

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown

1. Named for Aeolus, god of the winds, the harp has strings stretched over a rectangular sounding box. When placed in an opened window, the harp (also called "Eolian lute," "Eolian lyre," "wind harp") responds to the altering wind by sequences of musical chords. This instrument, which seems to voice nature's own music, was a favorite household furnishing in the period and was repeatedly alluded to in Romantic poetry. It

served also as one of the recurrent Romantic images for the mind—either the mind in poetic inspiration, as in the last stanza of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (p. 791), or else the mind in perception, responding to an intellectual breeze by trembling into consciousness, as in this poem, lines 44–48.

Coleridge wrote this poem to Sara Fricker, whom he married on October 4, 1795, and took

And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.⁹

ca. 1797–98

1816

Christabel¹

Preface

The first part of the following poem was written in the year 1797, at Stowey, in the county of Somerset. The second part, after my return from Germany, in the year 1800, at Keswick, Cumberland. It is probable, that if the poem had been finished at either of the former periods, or if even the first and second part had been published in the year 1800, the impression of its originality would have been much greater than I dare at present expect. But for this, I have only my own indolence to blame. The dates are mentioned for the exclusive purpose of precluding charges of plagiarism or servile imitation from myself. For there is amongst us a set of critics, who seem to hold, that every possible thought and image is traditional; who have no notion that there are such things as fountains in the world, small as well as great; and who would therefore charitably derive every rill they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man's tank. I am confident, however, that as far as the present poem is concerned, the celebrated poets² whose writings I might be suspected of having imitated, either in particular passages, or in the tone and the spirit of the whole, would be among the first to vindicate me from the charge, and who, on any striking coincidence, would permit me to address them in this doggerel version of two monkish Latin hexameters.

Tis mine and it is likewise yours;
But an if this will not do;
Let it be mine, good friend! for I
Am the poorer of the two.

I have only to add, that the metre of the *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables.³ Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless this occasional variation in number of

9. Lines 50ff. echo in part the description, in Plato's *Ion* 533–34, of inspired poets, who are “like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind.”

1. Coleridge had planned to publish *Christabel* in the 2nd edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) but had not been able to complete the poem. When *Christabel* was finally published in 1816 in its present fragmentary state, he still hoped to finish it, for the Preface contained this sentence (deleted in the edition of 1834): “But as, in my very first conception of the tale, I had the whole present to my mind, with the wholeness, no less than with the liveliness of a vision; I trust that I shall be able to embody in verse the three parts yet to

come, in the course of the present year.”

2. Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, who had read and admired *Christabel* while it circulated in manuscript. Coleridge has in mind Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) and Byron's *Siege of Corinth* (1816), which showed the influence of *Christabel*, especially in their meter.

3. Much of the older English versification, following the example of Anglo-Saxon poetry, had been based on stress, or “accent,” and some of it shows as much freedom in varying the number of syllables as does *Christabel*. The poem, however, is a radical departure from the theory and practice of versification in the 18th century, which had been based on a recurrent number of syllables in each line.

syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition, in the nature of the imagery or passion.

Part 1

'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,
 5 How drowsily it crew.

Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,
 Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;
 From her kennel beneath the rock
 She maketh answer to the clock,
 10 Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour;
 Ever and aye,^o by shine and shower,
 Sixteen short howls, not over loud;
 Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.

always

Is the night chilly and dark?
 15 The night is chilly, but not dark.
 The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
 It covers but not hides the sky.
 The moon is behind, and at the full;
 And yet she looks both small and dull.
 20 The night is chill, the cloud is gray:
 'Tis a month before the month of May,
 And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

The lovely lady, Christabel,
 Whom her father loves so well,
 25 What makes her in the wood so late,
 A furlong from the castle gate?
 She had dreams all yesternight
 Of her own betrothed knight;
 And she in the midnight wood will pray
 30 For the weal^o of her lover that's far away.

well-being

She stole along, she nothing spoke,
 The sighs she heaved were soft and low,
 And naught was green upon the oak,
 But moss and rarest mistletoe:⁴
 35 She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,
 And in silence prayeth she.

The lady sprang up suddenly,
 The lovely lady, Christabel!
 It moaned as near, as near can be,

4. In Celtic Britain the mistletoe (a parasitic plant) had been held in veneration when it was found growing—as it rarely does—on an oak tree. (Its usual host is the apple tree.)

40 But what it is, she cannot tell.—
 On the other side it seems to be,
 Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.

The night is chill; the forest bare;
 Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
 45 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,
 50 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.

Hush, beating heart of Christabel!
 Jesu, Maria, shield her well!
 55 She folded her arms beneath her cloak,
 And stole to the other side of the oak.
 What sees she there?

There she sees a damsel bright,
 Drest in a silken robe of white,
 60 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
 65 The gems entangled in her hair.
 I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
 A lady so richly clad as she—
 Beautiful exceedingly!

"Mary mother, save me now!"
 70 (Said Christabel,) "And who art thou?"

The lady strange made answer meet,^o
 And her voice was faint and sweet:—
 "Have pity on my sore distress,
 I scarce can speak for weariness:
 75 Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear!"
 Said Christabel, "How earnest thou here?"
 And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet,
 Did thus pursue her answer meet:—

appropriate

"My sire is of a noble line,
 80 And my name is Geraldine:
 Five warriors seized me yesternorn,
 Me, even me, a maid forlorn:
 They choked my cries with force and fright,
 And tied me on a palfrey white.
 85 The palfrey was as fleet as wind,
 And they rode furiously behind.

They spurred amain,⁵ their steeds were white: *at top speed*
 And once we crossed the shade of night.
 As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,
 90 I have no thought what men they be;
 Nor do I know how long it is
 (For I have lain entranced I wis⁵)
 Since one, the tallest of the five,
 Took me from the palfrey's back,
 95 A weary woman, scarce alive.
 Some muttered words his comrades spoke:
 He placed me underneath this oak;
 He swore they would return with haste;
 Whither they went I cannot tell—
 100 I thought I heard, some minutes past,
 Sounds as of a castle bell.
 Stretch forth thy hand" (thus ended she),
 "And help a wretched maid to flee."

Then Christabel stretched forth her hand
 105 And comforted fair Geraldine:
 "O well, bright dame! may you command
 The service of Sir Leoline;
 And gladly our stout chivalry
 Will he send forth and friends withal
 110 To guide and guard you safe and free
 Home to your noble father's hall."

She rose: and forth with steps they passed
 That strove to be, and were not, fast.
 Her gracious stars the lady blest,
 115 And thus spake on sweet Christabel:
 "All our household are at rest,
 The hall as silent as the cell;⁶ *of a monastery*
 Sir Leoline is weak in health,
 And may not well awakened be,
 120 But we will move as if in stealth,
 And I beseech your courtesy,
 This night, to share your couch with me."

They crossed the moat, and Christabel
 Took the key that fitted well;
 125 A little door she opened straight,
 All in the middle of the gate;
 The gate that was ironed within and without,
 Where an army in battle array had marched out.
 The lady sank, belike through pain,
 130 And Christabel with might and main
 Lifted her up, a weary weight,
 Over the threshold of the gate:⁶

5. I believe (Coleridge's misinterpretation of the Middle English adverb *ywis*, meaning "certainly").

6. According to legend, a witch cannot cross the threshold by her own power because it has been blessed against evil spirits.

Then the lady rose again,
And moved, as she were not in pain.

135 So free from danger, free from fear,
They crossed the court: right glad they were.
And Christabel devoutly cried
To the Lady by her side;
"Praise we the Virgin all divine
140 Who hath rescued thee from thy distress!"
"Alas, alas!" said Geraldine,
"I cannot speak for weariness."
So free from danger, free from fear,
They crossed the court: right glad they were.

145 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?
150 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,
155 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;
160 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 in the wall.
"O softly tread," said Christabel,
165 "My father seldom sleepeth well."

Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,
And, jealous of the listening air,
They steal their way from stair to stair,
Now in glimmer, and now in gloom,
170 And now they pass the Baron's room,
As still as death with stifled breath!
And now have reached her chamber door;
And now doth Geraldine press down
The rushes⁷ of the chamber floor.

175 The moon shines dim in the open air,
And not a moonbeam enters here.
But they without its light can see
The chamber carved so curiously,

180 Carved with figures strange and sweet,
All made out of the carver's brain,
For a lady's chamber meet:
The lamp with twofold silver chain
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

185 The silver lamp burns dead and dim;
But Christabel the lamp will trim.
She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,
And left it swinging to and fro,
While Geraldine, in wretched plight,
Sank down upon the floor below.

190 "O weary lady, Geraldine,
I pray you, drink this cordial wine!
It is a wine of virtuous powers;
My mother made it of wild flowers."

195 "And will your mother pity me,
Who am a maiden most forlorn?"
Christabel answered—"Woe is me!
She died the hour that I was born.
I have heard the grey-haired friar tell,
How on her death-bed she did say,
200 That she should hear the castle-bell
Strike twelve upon my wedding day.
O mother dear! that thou wert here!"
"I would," said Geraldine, "she were!"

But soon with altered voice, said she—
205 "Off, wandering mother!⁸ Peak and pine!
I have power to bid thee flee."
Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?
Why stares she with unsettled eye?
Can she the bodiless dead espy?
210 And why with hollow voice cries she,
"Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—
Though thou her guardian spirit be,
Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me."

Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,
215 And raised to heaven her eyes so blue—
"Alas!" said she, "this ghastly ride—
Dear lady! it hath wildered you!"
The lady wiped her moist cold brow,
And faintly said, "'tis over now!"

220 Again the wild-flower wine she drank:
Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright,
And from the floor whereon she sank,
The lofty lady stood upright;

8. A term that could designate a fit of hysteria. "Peak and pine": Shakespeare's *Macbeth* 1.3.22.

225 She was most beautiful to see,
Like a lady of a far countrée.

And thus the lofty lady spake—
"All they who live in the upper sky,
Do love you, holy Christabel!
And you love them, and for their sake
230 And for the good which me befell,
Even I in my degree will try,
Fair maiden, to requite you well.
But now unrobe yourself; for I
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie."

235 Quoth Christabel, "So let it be!"
And as the lady bade, did she.
Her gentle limbs did she undress,
And lay down in her loveliness.

But through her brain of weal and woe
240 So many thoughts moved to and fro,
That vain it were her lids to close;
So half-way from the bed she rose,
And on her elbow did recline
To look at the lady Geraldine.

245 Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,
And slowly rolled her eyes around;
Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture^o from beneath her breast:
250 Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side——
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!⁹

belt

255 Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs;
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!
Deep from within she seems half-way
To lift some weight with sick assay,^o
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;
260 Then suddenly as one defied
Collects herself in scorn and pride,
And lay down by the maiden's side!—
And in her arms the maid she took,
Ah well-a-day!
265 And with low voice and doleful look
These words did say:
"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

attempt

9. In several manuscripts and the first printing, this line reads "And she is to sleep by [or with] Christabel."

270 This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;
But vainly thou warrest,
For this is alone in
Thy power to declare,
That in the dim forest
275 Thou heard'st a low moaning,
And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair:
And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air."

The Conclusion to Part 1

280 It was a lovely sight to see
 The lady Christabel, when she
 Was praying at the old oak tree.
 Amid the jagged shadows
 Of mossy leafless boughs,
 Kneeling in the moonlight,
 285 To make her gentle vows;
 Her slender palms together prest,
 Heaving sometimes on her breast;
 Her face resigned to bliss or bale—
 Her face, oh call it fair not pale,
 290 And both blue eyes more bright than clear,
 Each about to have a tear.

evil, sorrow

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
Fearfully dreaming, yet I wis,
295 Dreaming that alone, which is—
O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?
And lo! the worker of these harms,
That holds the maiden in her arms,
300 Seems to slumber still and mild,
As a mother with her child.

A star hath set, a star hath risen,
O Geraldine! since arms of thine
Have been the lovely lady's prison.
305 O Geraldine! one hour was thine—
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn¹ and rill,
The night-birds all that hour were still.
But now they are jubilant anew,
From cliff and tower, tu—whoo! tu—whoo!
310 Tu—whoo! tu—whoo! from wood and fell!²

And see! the lady Christabel
Gathers herself from out her trance;
Her limbs relax, her countenance
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids

1. Tarn, a mountain pool.

2. Elevated moor, or hill.

- 315 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,
 320 Like a youthful hermitess,
 Beauteous in a wilderness,
 Who, praying always, prays in sleep.
 And, if she move unquietly,
 Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free,
 325 Comes back and tingles in her feet.
 No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.
 What if her guardian spirit 'twere?
 What if she knew her mother near?
 But this she knows, in joys and woes,
 330 That saints will aid if men will call:
 For the blue sky bends over all!

Part 2

- "Each matin bell," the Baron saith,
 "Knells us back to a world of death."
 These words Sir Leoline first said,
 335 When he rose and found his lady dead:
 These words Sir Leoline will say,
 Many a morn to his dying day!

- And hence the custom and law began,
 That still at dawn the sacristan,³
 340 Who duly pulls the heavy bell,
 Five and forty beads must tell⁴
 Between each stroke—a warning knell,
 Which not a soul can choose but hear
 From Bratha Head to Wyndermere.⁵

- 345 Saith Bracy the bard, "So let it knell!
 And let the drowsy sacristan
 Still count as slowly as he can!
 There is no lack of such, I ween,^o
 As well fill up the space between.
 350 In Langdale Pike^o and Witch's Lair,
 And Dungeon-ghyll⁶ so foully rent,
 With ropes of rock and bells of air
 Three sinful sextons' ghosts are pent,
 Who all give back, one after t'other,
 355 The death-note to their living brother;
 And oft too, by the knell offended,
 Just as their one! two! three! is ended,

believe

Peak

3. Church officer who digs the graves and rings the bells.

4. Pray while "telling" (keeping count on) the beads of a rosary.

5. These and the following names are of localities in the English Lake District.

6. Ravine forming the bed of a stream.

The devil mocks the doleful tale
With a merry peal from Borodale."

360 The air is still! through mist and cloud
That merry peal comes ringing loud;
And Geraldine shakes off her dread,
And rises lightly from the bed;
Puts on her silken vestments white,
365 And tricks her hair in lovely plight,^o
And nothing doubting of her spell
Awakens the lady Christabel.
"Sleep you, sweet lady Christabel?
I trust that you have rested well."

plait

370 And Christabel awoke and spied
The same who lay down by her side—
O rather say, the same whom she
Raised up beneath the old oak tree!
Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair!
375 For she belike hath drunken deep
Of all the blessedness of sleep!
And while she spake, her looks, her air
Such gentle thankfulness declare,
That (so it seemed) her girded vests
380 Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts.
"Sure I have sinned!" said Christabel,
"Now heaven be praised if all be well!"
And in low faltering tones, yet sweet,
Did she the lofty lady greet
385 With such perplexity of mind
As dreams too lively leave behind.

So quickly she rose, and quickly arrayed
Her maiden limbs, and having prayed
That He, who on the cross did groan,
390 Might wash away her sins unknown,
She forthwith led fair Geraldine
To meet her sire, Sir Leoline.

The lovely maid and the lady tall
Are pacing both into the hall,
395 And pacing on through page and groom,
Enter the Baron's presence room.

The Baron rose, and while he prest
His gentle daughter to his breast,
With cheerful wonder in his eyes
400 The lady Geraldine espies,
And gave such welcome to the same,
As might beseem so bright a dame!

But when he heard the lady's tale,
And when she told her father's name,

405 Why waxed Sir Leoline so pale,
Murmuring o'er the name again,
Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine?

Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
410 And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.
And thus it chanced, as I divine,
415 With Roland and Sir Leoline.
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother:
They parted—ne'er to meet again!
But never either found another
420 To free the hollow heart from paining—
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;
A dreary sea now flows between;—
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
425 Shall wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline, a moment's space,
Stood gazing on the damsel's face:
And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine
430 Came back upon his heart again.

O then the Baron forgot his age,
His noble heart swelled high with rage;
He swore by the wounds in Jesu's side,
He would proclaim it far and wide
435 With trump and solemn heraldry,
That they who thus had wronged the dame,
Were base as spotted infamy!
"And if they dare deny the same,
My herald shall appoint a week,
440 And let the recreant traitors seek
My tourney court⁷—that there and then
I may dislodge their reptile souls
From the bodies and forms of men!"
He spake: his eye in lightning rolls!
445 For the lady was ruthlessly seized; and he kenned
In the beautiful lady the child of his friend!

And now the tears were on his face,
And fondly in his arms he took
Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace,
450 Prolonging it with joyous look.
Which when she viewed, a vision fell

7. Arena for tournaments.

Upon the soul of Christabel,
 The vision of fear, the touch and pain!
 She shrunk and shuddered, and saw again—
 455 (Ah, woe is me! Was it for thee,
 Thou gentle maid! such sights to see?)
 Again she saw that bosom old,
 Again she felt that bosom cold,
 And drew in her breath with a hissing sound:
 460 Whereat the Knight turned wildly round,
 And nothing saw, but his own sweet maid
 With eyes upraised, as one that prayed.

The touch, the sight, had passed away,
 And in its stead that vision blest,
 465 Which comforted her after-rest,
 While in the lady's arms she lay,
 Had put a rapture in her breast,
 And on her lips and o'er her eyes
 Spread smiles like light!
 With new surprise,
 470 "What ails then my beloved child?"
 The Baron said—His daughter mild
 Made answer, "All will yet be well!"
 I ween, she had no power to tell
 Aught else: so mighty was the spell.

475 Yet he, who saw this Geraldine,
 Had deemed her sure a thing divine.
 Such sorrow with such grace she blended,
 As if she feared, she had offended
 Sweet Christabel, that gentle maid!
 480 And with such lowly tones she prayed,
 She might be sent without delay
 Home to her father's mansion.

"Nay!
 Nay, by my soul!" said Leoline.
 "Ho! Bracy, the bard, the charge be thine!
 485 Go thou, with music sweet and loud,
 And take two steeds with trappings proud,
 And take the youth whom thou lov'st best
 To bear thy harp, and learn thy song,
 And clothe you both in solemn vest,
 490 And over the mountains haste along,
 Lest wandering folk, that are abroad,
 Detain you on the valley road.
 And when he has crossed the Irthing flood,
 My merry bard! he hastes, he hastes
 495 Up Knorren Moor, through Halegarth Wood,
 And reaches soon that castle good
 Which stands and threatens Scotland's wastes.

"Bard Bracy! bard Bracy! your horses are fleet,
 Ye must ride up the hall, your music so sweet,

500 More loud than your horses' echoing feet!
 And loud and loud to Lord Roland call,
 Thy daughter is safe in Langdale hall!
 Thy beautiful daughter is safe and free—
 Sir Leoline greets thee thus through me.
 505 He bids thee come without delay
 With all thy numerous array;
 And take thy lovely daughter home:
 And he will meet thee on the way
 With all his numerous array
 510 White with their panting palfreys' foam:
 And by mine honour! I will say,
 That I repent me of the day
 When I spake words of fierce disdain
 To Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine!—
 515 —For since that evil hour hath flown,
 Many a summer's sun hath shone;
 Yet ne'er found I a friend again
 Like Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine."

The lady fell, and clasped his knees,
 520 Her face upraised, her eyes o'erflowing;
 And Bracy replied, with faltering voice,
 His gracious hail on all bestowing!—
 "Thy words, thou sire of Christabel,
 Are sweeter than my harp can tell;
 525 Yet might I gain a boon of thee,
 This day my journey should not be,
 So strange a dream hath come to me;
 That I had vowed with music loud
 To clear yon wood from thing unblest,
 530 Warned by a vision in my rest!
 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
 535 Fluttering, and uttering fearful moan,
 Among the green herbs in the forest alone.
 Which when I saw and when I heard,
 I wonder'd what might ail the bird;
 For nothing near it could I see,
 540 Save the grass and green herbs underneath the old tree.

"And in my dream methought I went
 To search out what might there be found;
 And what the sweet bird's trouble meant,
 That thus lay fluttering on the ground.
 545 I went and peered, and could descry
 No cause for her distressful cry;
 But yet for her dear lady's sake
 I stooped, methought, the dove to take,
 When lo! I saw a bright green snake
 550 Coiled around its wings and neck,

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

555 I woke; it was the midnight hour,
 The clock was echoing in the tower;
 But though my slumber was gone by,
 This dream it would not pass away—
 It seems to live upon my eye!
 560 And thence I vowed this self-same day,
 With music strong and saintly song
 To wander through the forest bare,
 Lest aught unholy loiter there."

Thus Bracy said: the Baron, the while,
 565 Half-listening heard him with a smile;
 Then turned to Lady Geraldine,
 His eyes made up of wonder and love;
 And said in courtly accents fine,
 "Sweet maid, Lord Roland's beauteous dove,
 570 With arms more strong than harp or song,
 Thy sire and I will crush the snake!"
 He kissed her forehead as he spake,
 And Geraldine, in maiden wise,
 Casting down her large bright eyes,
 575 With blushing cheek and courtesy fine
 She turned her from Sir Leoline;
 Softly gathering up her train,
 That o'er her right arm fell again;
 And folded her arms across her chest,
 580 And couched her head upon her breast,
 And looked askance at Christabel—
 Jesu Maria, shield her well!

manner

A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy,
 And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,
 585 Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,
 And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,
 At Christabel she looked askance!—
 One moment—and the sight was fled!
 But Christabel in dizzy trance
 590 Stumbling on the unsteady ground
 Shuddered aloud, with a hissing sound;
 And Geraldine again turned round,
 And like a thing, that sought relief,
 Full of wonder and full of grief,
 595 She rolled her large bright eyes divine
 Wildly on Sir Leoline.

The maid, alas! her thoughts are gone,
 She nothing sees—no sight but one!
 The maid, devoid of guile and sin,
 600 I know not how, in fearful wise

So deeply had she drunken in
 That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
 That all her features were resigned
 To this sole image in her mind;
 605 And passively did imitate
 That look of dull and treacherous hate!
 And thus she stood, in dizzy trance,
 Still picturing that look askance
 With forced unconscious sympathy
 610 Full before her father's view——
 As far as such a look could be,
 In eyes so innocent and blue!
 And when the trance was o'er, the maid
 Paused awhile, and inly prayed:
 615 Then falling at the Baron's feet,
 "By my mother's soul do I entreat
 That thou this woman send away!"
 She said: and more she could not say:
 For what she knew she could not tell,
 620 O'er-mastered by the mighty spell.

Why is thy cheek so wan and wild,
 Sir Leoline? Thy only child
 Lies at thy feet, thy joy, thy pride,
 So fair, so innocent, so mild;
 625 The same, for whom thy lady died!
 O by the pangs of her dear mother
 Think thou no evil of thy child!
 For her, and thee, and for no other,
 She prayed the moment ere she died:
 630 Prayed that the babe for whom she died,
 Might prove her dear lord's joy and pride!
 That prayer her deadly pangs beguiled,
 Sir Leoline!
 And wouldst thou wrong thy only child,
 635 Her child and thine?

Within the Baron's heart and brain
 If thoughts, like these, had any share,
 They only swelled his rage and pain,
 And did but work confusion there.
 640 His heart was cleft with pain and rage,
 His cheeks they quivered, his eyes were wild,
 Dishonoured thus in his old age;
 Dishonoured by his only child,
 And all his hospitality
 645 To the wrong'd daughter of his friend
 By more than woman's jealousy
 Brought thus to a disgraceful end——
 He rolled his eye with stern regard
 Upon the gentle minstrel bard,
 650 And said in tones abrupt, austere——
 "Why, Bracy! dost thou loiter here?

I bade thee hence!" The bard obeyed;
 And turning from his own sweet maid,
 The aged knight, Sir Leoline,
 655 Led forth the lady Geraldine!

The Conclusion to Part 2

A little child, a limber elf,
 Singing, dancing to itself,
 A fairy thing with red round cheeks,
 That always finds, and never seeks,
 660 Makes such a vision to the sight
 As fills a father's eyes with light;
 And pleasures flow in so thick and fast
 Upon his heart, that he at last
 Must needs express his love's excess
 665 With words of unmeant bitterness.
 Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together
 Thoughts so all unlike each other;
 To mutter and mock a broken charm,
 To dally with wrong that does no harm.
 670 Perhaps 'tis tender too and pretty
 At each wild word to feel within
 A sweet recoil of love and pity.
 And what, if in a world of sin
 (O sorrow and shame should this be true!)
 675 Such giddiness of heart and brain
 Comes seldom save from rage and pain,
 So talks as it's most used to do.

1798–1800

1816

*Frost at Midnight*¹

The frost performs its secret ministry,
 Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry
 Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.
 The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
 5 Have left me to that solitude, which suits
 Abstruser musings: save that at my side
 My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
 'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
 And vexes meditation with its strange
 10 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
 This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
 With all the numberless goings on of life,
 Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
 Lies on my low burnt fire, and quivers not;

1. The scene is Coleridge's cottage at Nether Stowey; the infant in line 7 is his son Hartley, then aged seventeen months.