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Christabel and the Origin of Evil

In a 1796 notebook entry, Samuel Taylor Coleridge envisioned writing “The Origin of Evil, an Epic Poem” and at some point enthusiastically discussed the project with Charles Lamb, who reminded him in 1797 “that when in town you were talking of the Origin of Evil as a most prolific subject for a Long Poem.”¹ George Whalley famously speculated that Coleridge never wrote this poem “because as time went on he came to realize that he had already embodied his epic theme in *The Ancient Mariner*,” and Peter Kitson has suggested similarly that “perhaps this project became ‘Religious Musings.’”² My alternate suggestion is that *Christabel* embodies Coleridge’s long-considered poem on the origin of evil. My related suggestion is that the text’s ruminations on evil presuppose the Unitarian Christianity that Coleridge still professed in 1798–1800. In fact, *Christabel* dramatizes Coleridge’s Unitarian understanding of Original Sin as a state of guiltless corruption, an innate and mysterious ambivalence of the moral will. The poem makes its way to associating Original Sin with the divided will by considering the dependence of identity on a mediating other—the dependence of Christabel on Geraldine, of course, and on Geraldine in her roles as a figure of libido, the mother, and the delusory image. What Geraldine retains throughout these metamorphoses is her power to block and frustrate the impulse to love. At times *Christabel* has been regarded as an

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erotic affirmation in which the protagonist readies herself for mature passion by confronting and embracing her sexuality.³ My interpretation concurs with J. Robert Barth's, conversely, that the poem sketches "a whole world of unfulfilled love—love either failed, or frustrated, or at best ambiguous."⁴ The miscarriage of love in this world produces Christabel's undeserved brutalization, an image of suffering with which Coleridge seems never to have known exactly what to do, certainly not in 1800 when he left the poem unfinished. By then he had become humbly responsive to the weight and complexity of human pain but less confident about Unitarian rationalizations of mundane evils. We can consequently read *Christabel* for its prophetic explanation of Coleridge's abandonment of Unitarianism, one of the pivotal events of his intellectual career. But we can also invoke Coleridge's mounting sense of the theological problems of Unitarianism in 1800–1802 to explain his inability to complete *Christabel*.

Christabel and Original Sin

Most readings of *Christabel* assume that Christabel herself personifies moral innocence. It is an understandable assumption—the girl appears well-intentioned, virginal, and naive—that can seem quite innocent in its own right. References to Christabel's innocence typically arise in passing amid interpretations not really concerned with innocence or in moral analyses that would differ little if they avoided the term entirely. Indeed, the innocence ascribed to Coleridge's heroine almost never acquires theological specification, remaining one of the least interrogated but also, consequently, most obstructive assumptions in *Christabel* criticism. An easily summoned idea of innocence has clearly encouraged moral idealizations of Coleridge's heroine. Reviewing the secondary literature, one encounters not merely repeated characterizations of Christabel as a sinless child or Romantic Eve but statements, for instance, that "Christabel suffers innocently, like Christ," or that her "beauty has a particular innocence about it, being associated with the beauty of Christ," and so on.⁵ In its power of orienting critical discourse, this ideal of innocence has impressively survived attempts to temper it. Even when criticism acknowledges Christabel's complicity in her own corruption, allowing only that the girl "is relatively innocent,"⁶ qualification ultimately reconfirms the heroine's innocence by lending it just enough realism to shore up its credibility. The notion of innocence ends up similarly recuperated when psychoanalytic critics stipulate that *Christabel* dramatizes "a conflict not between helpless innocence and supernatural evil but between two of Christabel's attitudes toward her own sexual being."⁷ From their revised, psycho-sexual perspective, such formulations concede the centrality of some idea of innocence as a premise for reading Coleridge's text and end usually

by stressing the heroine's purity all over again. For some readers, the fate of innocence has always signified *the* moral problem of Coleridge's fable. No less a Coleridgean than John Beer surmises that *Christabel* remained unfinished precisely because in it "Coleridge had set himself [that] insoluble problem . . . which is involved as soon as we ask how innocence can ever redeem experience."⁸

The critic who calls the representation of moral innocence in *Christabel* into question most effectively is Andrew M. Cooper in his discussion of "Gothic Parody and Original Sin" in Coleridge's poem. By insisting on the heroine's "ordinary human fallibility" as a legacy of Original Sin, Cooper establishes Original Sin as the motivating assumption of Coleridge's story and argues that *Christabel* in truth exposes the moral dangers of believing in innocence. The difficulties that eventually arise with this reading for me, my obligations to it notwithstanding, involve Cooper's privileging of intention. His argument begins with Coleridge's objections to gothic stories about human beings victimized by ostensibly irresistible supernatural powers; extrapolating from this objection to *Christabel* itself, Cooper contends that "physical evil, no matter how supernatural its source, cannot touch Christabel's soul unless she consents to it." Sensible enough in its way, this assertion unfortunately shifts attention from the fundamental nature of the human will to a particular act of will—an act whereby assent is given or withheld—in seeking the origins of evil. When the question of evil defers to the issue of consent, Christabel's sinfulness can fall into separate stages, with her opening reception of Geraldine dramatically distinguished in guilt from her later efforts at denial.

"What makes Geraldine's spell insidious," for Cooper,

is that, in part at least, it is *not* supernatural but merely a lie or threat which Christabel embraces in order to keep believing in her own infallibility. . . . Geraldine, who is not evil incarnate, only provides the opportunity for sinning; Christabel is free to stand or fall. But Christabel's fugitive and cloistered virtue is oblivious of the fine Miltonic distinction between feeling tempted and actually succumbing. She ignores her actual deception by Geraldine, thereby conniving at it. . . . Unwilling to incur the heavy guilt which she deludedly believes she has incurred through a moment's inattention, the girl thus rejects all responsibility whatsoever for Geraldine's presence in the castle.

In effect, this reading makes Christabel crucially guilty from the start—a figure of Original Sin—but then restricts her "heavy guilt" to the latter phases of her behavior. Coleridge's vision of evil emerges in the cover-up Christabel

supposedly stages, an intentionally hurtful exercise in deception which makes part 2, in Cooper's opinion, by far the more horrific section of the poem. I cannot see the Christabel of part 2 as so villainous a schemer any more than I can see evidence in part 1 that the girl herself has constructed a myth of her own infallibility. Above all, I cannot agree that "Christabel's lugging the suddenly limp Geraldine across the castle threshold, a patent allegory of sin gaining entrance to the soul, dramatizes Coleridge's hardheaded point here that the evils of fallen life, although unpleasant and saddening, are not irresistible."⁹

For me, *Christabel* traces the origins of evil to problems of the will that precede and condition the possibilities of choice, and it underscores the unavoidable ramifications of sin throughout a fallen life. Cooper deserves enormous credit, however, for challenging the consensus that has crystallized around the idea of Christabel's innocence—and certainly Coleridge's poem works assiduously to identify its protagonist with Original Sin. At several points Coleridge likens the girl to fallen figures from *Paradise Lost*. When she twice hisses in part 2 (447 and 579), she reenacts the "dismal universal hiss" with which the fallen angels greet the returned Satan¹⁰ and through which Milton explicitly declares their complicity: "for now were all transform'd / Alike, to Serpents all as accessories / To his bold Riot" (*PL*, 10.509 and 519–21). We can similarly compare Geraldine's request—"Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she), / And help a wretched maid to flee"—and Christabel's immediate response—"Then Christabel stretch'd forth her hand" (100–102)—to the actual moment of Eve's fall in Milton's epic: "her rash hand in evil hour / Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat" (*PL*, 9.780–81). Christabel's encounter with Geraldine thus reenacts the Fall, with the complicities of that encounter signifying the girl's subjection to Original Sin. Yet Coleridge's most powerful summoning of Miltonic precedent for *Christabel* may lie in the way his heroine's very birth recalls the famous first lines of *Paradise Lost*. In her responsibility for both her mother's death and father's perpetual mourning, Christabel duplicates Adam's sin merely by living, for she literally "Brought Death into the World, and all our woe" (*PL*, 1.3). In the character and behavior of his heroine, then, Coleridge continually invokes the state of Original Sin—Original Sin as conceived by Joseph Priestley, the chief theologian of the Unitarianism to which Coleridge had converted during his Cambridge years.

Most eighteenth-century Unitarians scorned the notion of Original Sin. Priestley himself questioned not only the occurrence of the Fall but the justification of the orthodox doctrine of Original Sin as well. In Priestley's view, when St. Paul said that "*all have sinned*" through the sin of Adam, he meant only

that all are involved in that *death* which was the consequence of his sin. If, indeed, [his statement] be interpreted literally, it will imply

that all are involved in his *guilt* as well as in his sufferings. But this is so unnatural an interpretation, and so evidently contrary to sense and reason, (sin being in its own nature a personal thing, and not transferable,) that the text was never understood in this sense till the system, the history of which I am writing, was so far advanced as to require it, and to have prepared the minds of men for it:¹¹

Priestley's rationalist denial of vicarious sin and guilt colors some of the more blithely optimistic statements of Coleridge's early days: "*Guilt* is out of the Question," John Thelwall was informed in 1796; "I am a Necessarian, and of course deny the possibility of it" (*CL*, 1.213). But Priestley also lies behind the rhetorical jockeying of Coleridge's well-known March 1798 letter to his brother George, a letter virtually contemporaneous with his first work on *Christabel*:

Of GUILT I say nothing; but I believe most stedfastly in original Sin; that from our mothers' wombs our understandings are darkened; and even where our understandings are in the Light, that our organization is depraved, & our volitions imperfect; and we sometimes see the good without *wishing* to attain it, and oftener *wish* it without the energy that wills & performs—And for this inherent depravity, I believe, that the *Spirit* of the Gospel is the sole cure. (*CL*, 1.396)

These comments reveal a chastened sense of moral dependency that looks ahead to Coleridge's Anglican conversion in some ways, and they certainly differ in emphasis from Priestleyan rational theology.¹² Still, by distinguishing an "inherent depravity" from an inadmissible "GUILT," Coleridge endorses Priestley's Unitarian refusal of Anglican moral vicariousness: that is the point of his conceding "depravity" while declining "GUILT." Through this position he attempts to wed a conventional Unitarian moral optimism about the continual availability of conversion and salvation with his own moral realism about the self-victimizing propensities of the human will. What results is a notion of Original Sin in which we incur no guilt by being human; we inherit no postlapsarian moral debt we are obligated to discharge. Blamelessness does not forestall our power of doing harm, however, or keep us from suffering. We remain grievously flawed, grievously unfitted for fulfillment, simply because of our basic human nature. Coleridge's early letters and essays recurrently show him characterizing Man as "a vicious and discontented *Animal*," in the language of *The Watchman* (*Watchman*, 132). We may ultimately be perfectible, as Coleridge tacitly concedes in the name he awards his heroine: Christabel,

as James McCartney Ewing notes, “is Christ-able, i.e. necessarily fallen, but ultimately perfectible, perfect ‘even as our Father in heaven is perfect.’”¹³ Yet that virtual saintliness is a goal, not a *donné*, and its accomplishment demands a renunciation of “Innocence.” Ordinarily Coleridge’s Unitarian references to “Innocence” are at least faintly derogatory: “Innocence implies the Absence of Vice from the absence of Temptation,” he remarked in the *Lectures on Revealed Religion*; “Virtue the Absence of Vice from the knowledge of its Consequences” (*LPR*, 108). What Coleridge terms “Innocence” is naiveté, a sheltered virtue untested and unreliable. Christabel’s progress to heroic “Virtue” demands that she undergo sufferings which arise not merely from existential circumstance but also from her own flawed human nature.

In no way do Coleridge’s religious attitudes shape *Christabel* more decisively, I think, than in his acknowledgment of Original Sin. His heterodox notion of Original Sin expressly accounts for the guiltless fallibility at the heart of Christabel’s character and actions in the poem. But further, by denying that virtue is inherent or innate, by acknowledging it as *produced*, Coleridge can focus his narrative on the process of its production—on the system of psychic relocations through which a virtuous personality, in this case Christabel’s conflicted saintliness, gets itself constructed. Coleridge announces his interest in the construction of virtue and in the related issue of the creation and emergence of Geraldine in the comparatively little-discussed but brilliant passage which begins part 2 of the text. There, ringing bells associated with prayer, order, patriarchy, custom, and law set off a succession of antithetical echoes:

In Langdale Pike and Witch’s Lair,
And Dungeon-ghyll 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,
The death-note to their living brother;
(338–43)

By subsequently mentioning the devil’s merry mockery, Bracy frames these lines comically, making their litany of death-notes a lighthearted joke. But Bracy remains an ineffectual figure in the poem, a poet able to experience revelatory dreams but unable to seize on their significance even when Geraldine stands before him in the morning light. Coleridge’s more considerable powers of insight lie behind this passage, a passage that serves as a paradigm of the relationship of Christabel and Geraldine. Leoline’s ringing bells—church bells dedicated to prayer and the memory of his wife—are punning images of the other “bell” in his life, his daughter Christabel. In their religious

and disciplinary associations, the bells testify to the moral regimen which has fashioned Christabel's identity on the beauty of Christ. Yet these bells produce echoes that antithetically transform what they imitate, disfiguring prayerful music as sounds reminiscent of constraint, violence, and witchcraft. The echoes are at once aural doublings and transposed denials, as well as complements, of the ordering gestures that produced them: so is Geraldine, critics agree, the sinister alter ego of Christabel.

As these lines intimate, Coleridge's insights into moral psychology extended apparently into an appreciation of sublimation, displacement, projection, and especially repression. Coleridge has occasionally been denied credit for psychoanalytic understanding—as in Norman Fruman's account of his misinterpretations of his own dreams¹⁴—but the linkages between identity formation and sexual denial in *Christabel* certainly seem like Coleridgean anticipations of the return of the repressed. Coleridge's grasp of repression provides one explanation for his interest in Saint Theresa as a model for Christabel. Coleridge compared the two figures, remarking once that Crashaw's verses on St. Theresa “were ever present to my mind whilst writing the second part of *Christabel*; if, indeed, by some subtle process of the mind they did not suggest the first thought of the whole poem.”¹⁵ The lines Coleridge emphasizes, from the “Hymn to Saint Theresa,” recount Theresa's willingness to “travell to a martyrdom.” What appears most striking about the Saint Theresa poems, however, is less the motif of spiritual pilgrim—age than Crashaw's heightening of the traditional use of sexual imagery to describe union with God—as in the piercing arrow of “The Flaming Heart” and such erotically suggestive lines such as these:

Shee never undertooke to know,
 What death with love should have to doe
 Nor hath shee ere yet understood
 Why to show love shee should shed blood.
 (19–22)

Christabel's predicament may have reminded Coleridge of Saint Theresa, in short, because his early conception of Theresa anticipated his later analysis of her in the *Philosophical Lectures*—as Paul Magnuson has brilliantly speculated.¹⁶ There Coleridge casts Theresa's spiritual raptures as the sublimated reflexes of bodily denials. Theresa's father, Coleridge reports, opposed her retreat to a nunnery, for he could

perceive how utterly unfit such a nursery of inward fancies and outward privations were to a brain, heart, and bodily constitution like those of innocent, loving, and high-impassioned Theresa.

What could come of it but a despairing anguish-stricken sinner or a mad saint? This frame of such exquisite sensibility by nature and by education shaken and ruined by the violence done to her nature; but her obstinate resolve to become a nun against her own wishes, and against her fears, arose out of a resolve of duty, finishing in a burning fever which ended in madness for many months. . . . Combine these causes only and you will see how almost impossible it was that a maiden so innocent and so susceptible, of an imagination so lively by nature, and so fever-kindled by disease and its occasions . . . should not mistake, and often, the less painful and in such a frame the sometimes pleasurable approaches to bodily deliquium, and her imperfect fainting-fits for divine transports, and momentary union with God—especially if with a thoughtful yet pure psychology you join the force of suppressed instincts stirring in the heart and bodily frame, of a mind unconscious of their nature and these in the keenly-sensitive body, in the innocent and loving soul of Theresa, with “all her thirsts, and lives, and deaths of love,” and what remains unsolved, for which the credulity of the many and the knavery of a few will not furnish ample explanation?¹⁷

It is easy enough to associate this commentary with Coleridge’s account of a loving girl moved to prayer, in the language of the 1816 text, by dreams of her lover “that made her moan and leap, / As on her bed she lay in sleep” (29–30). Here the body’s restless tossing—Christabel is almost twitching—obliquely discloses banished desires the conscience will not own.

When we trace Coleridge’s explorations of the origins of evil to the issue of the embattled construction of virtue and from there to the dynamics of repression and projection, it is not Theresa, however, but Geraldine to whom we are finally led. In a recent article, Christian La Cassagnère has provided an account of Geraldine as the uncanny “double of Christabel” especially pertinent for its reminder, *pace* Freud and Rank, that the double embodies “drives or desires that have been repressed because they are at odds with the subject’s ethical or social standards.”¹⁸ In her role as specular other, Geraldine by her very presence testifies to the tensions and denials underlying Christabel’s virtuous self-image—and to her unavoidable contact with evil. For me, the most curious aspect of scholarly belief in Christabel’s innocence, finally, is its coexistence with an almost equally widespread belief in Geraldine as Christabel’s dark double—to the end that critics identify Geraldine as the emissary of sin and leave Christabel morally vindicated, while simultaneously interpreting Geraldine *as* Christabel’s displaced persona. In any event, nothing contests the fiction of Christabel’s freedom from sin more effectively

than the psychomachic allegory underlying Coleridge's text. The doubling of Christabel and Geraldine in effect deconstructs the possibility of innocence by demonstrating how "the differences *between* entities"—in this case good and evil—"are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself."¹⁹ When Christabel's act of stretching forth her hand to Geraldine glances at Milton's Eve, Coleridge stages a Fall conceived as self-violation, a closed transference of corruption to one aspect of the human personality from another in which that corruption was already present all along. So in *Christabel* Coleridge associates Original Sin with an inner division, an estrangement of the moral will from itself: that much seems paradigmatic for the narrative, its real reason for featuring Christabel *and* Geraldine. Next I simply want to consider what else Geraldine conveys about Coleridge's sense of evil.

Geraldine and the Problem of Mediation

Any inquiry into the moral vision of *Christabel* must come to terms with Geraldine in her three principle roles: as a personification of sexuality, as a surrogate mother, and as an untrustworthy image—a simulacrum or mirage. About the first of these roles there can be little doubt. From the time of Roy P. Basler and Gerald Enscoe, if not from the time of the poem's first reviews, Coleridge criticism has discerned the power of eros in Geraldine²⁰—and indeed, a seductress before all else, she moves through the poem virtually as an allegorical figure of sexual desire. What cannot be emphasized enough is that she is also a predator. As I noted earlier, accomplished critics applaud her as an agent of erotic liberation and psychic wholeness, but such defenses slight both the darkness of Coleridge's poem and his own profoundly troubled attitude towards sex. Celebrations of Geraldine as an avatar of the Great Mother and champion of erotic jouissance would have struck Coleridge himself, I believe, as moral liberalism at its most sentimental and self-deceived. With her appearance signifying a return of the repressed, Geraldine represents not merely libido but the motives of repression, the harrowing guilt and fear that accompany desire for Christabel and for the poet as well. By integrating the motifs of sexual initiation, dream, and especially touch—"In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell" (255)—the white-robed Geraldine seems like a revenant from some of Coleridge's own sexually charged nightmares. Coleridge scholars will be familiar with these examples, culled from the poet's notebooks:

a most frightful Dream of a Woman whose features were blended with darkness catching hold of my right eye & attempting to pull it out—I caught hold of her arm fast—a horrid feel. . . . (CN, 1.848)

I was followed up & down by a frightful pale woman who, I thought, wanted to kiss me, & had the property of giving a shameful Disease by breathing in the face. . . . (CN, 1.1250)

out rushes a university Harlot, who insists on my going with her / offer her a shilling—seem to get away a moment / when she overtakes me again / I am not to go to another while she is “biting”—these were her words /—this will not satisfy her / . . . a little weak contemptible wretch offering his Services, & I (as before afraid to refuse them) literally & distinctly remembered a former Dream, in which I had suffered most severely, this wretch leaping on me, & grasping my Scrotum. (CN, 1.1726)

Here are the matrices of Geraldine: she is, as Kathleen Coburn suggested years ago, “a malignity out of Coleridge’s own dreams.”²¹

Now, there is a careful evenhandedness to Coleridge’s presentation of her. Geraldine’s defenders emphasize that she hesitates in the seduction scene and refers to her apparent disfiguration as “This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow” (258), so she has not fully acquiesced to her own depravity—and rightly so, for she signifies not absolute evil but evil bearing a human face, evil divested of any comforting otherness. She must be divided within, moreover, to qualify as Christabel’s double. Coleridge cannot confine the psychic divisions of his text to Christabel’s projection of Geraldine as an independent character: that would display goodness triumphantly exorcising evil, separating itself from evil, when what we have of the text insists on the complex entanglement of good and evil. So Christabel’s moral state of predominant virtue tainted by sin *should* produce its symmetrical obverse in Geraldine’s state of predominant evil qualified by a residual good. Yet, emphatically it is a merely residual good. Sexuality become Iago-like, Geraldine signifies a calculating malevolence with the shape-changing ability to exploit the vulnerabilities at hand. She is the deceiver, the thing in the darkness, lurking on “the other side” (43) whose name is an anagram of “Dire Angel,” a Satanic epithet.²² She is the nightmare-bringer, a conveyer of guilt, abjection, and violation. Like the vampire, or the mistletoe of Coleridge’s opening sequence, she parasitically lives off others. The supernatural occurrences marking her entry into the castle—the need to be carried, the suddenly flaring torches, the dog troubled in its sleep—associate her with witchcraft because witches traditionally figured in the night fears of Coleridge’s culture. “However lenient we are to Geraldine,” Robert H. Siegel insists, “it is obvious that she still ‘represents’ the power of evil.”²³ So she does: the poet’s Christian faith and personal psychological history left him deeply convinced of the existence of

evil *as* evil, and Geraldine embodies that conviction. The leniency occasionally shown her by readers merely testifies to Coleridge's Miltonic success in rendering sin charismatic.

Geraldine's role as a figure of libido by no means establishes her ultimate benevolence. Rather, it illustrates one of the most palpable aspects of *Christabel's* moral purview, its association of evil with sexuality. That association was traditional enough—the poet would certainly have met with it in Boehme, Beer reminds us²⁴—and *Christabel* links it to an equally traditional association of sexual desire and death. The connection of Eros to Thanatos emerged in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* when Coleridge paired his whorish Life-in-Death with Death himself. It emerges in *Christabel* through the death of the heroine's mother in childbirth, a death which Charles J. Rzepka regards as the principle motive for Christabel's fears of sex.²⁵ Yet, while the mortality of the body invariably conditions the problem of bodily desire, Christabel's thwarted efforts to love seem to originate from the particular ways in which her sexual awakening activates the latent tensions of certain family relationships. The family problems which *Christabel* emphasizes culminate in Geraldine's appropriation of the maternal, but they do not originate with her appearance. They originate for Christabel with Sir Leoline, the only parent she has known.

Coleridge's criticism tends to handle Leoline roughly, accusing him of crimes ranging from a stultifying asceticism to outright incest.²⁶ He plainly seems emotionally authoritarian and life-denying. As his matin-bells custom reveals, Leoline is a religious man who has sought consolation from heaven for the loss of his wife and who has idealized his surviving daughter in similar terms. If the name he assigns her conjures Christ and Abel as archetypal victims, it also connotes the beauty of Christ. Christabel's belief in her mother as a guardian angel is a story presumably first told to her by Leoline. By making Leoline's daughter the object and rationale of the mother's ghostly presence, the story conveys his efforts to retain some connection to his wife through his daughter. But those efforts, if natural enough, create a ripple effect of emotional ambivalence. They place Christabel in a compensatory role. The poem suggests that she has tried to minister emotionally to her father to make up for the absence of his wife—all the more so since her birth occasioned her mother's death, as Christabel knows well. So her father's emotional needs on the one hand encourage her identification with the mother as does the process of her sexual maturation. On the other hand, Leoline's idealization of Christabel and need to keep her has conversely tended to infantilize his daughter, encouraging her to remain, as Rzepka comments, "the little girl [he] wants her to be."²⁷ The conflicting demands made on Christabel by her relationship with her father result in an analogous ambivalence in her attitudes toward her mother. It would

be plausible for Christabel to feel guilt about her mother's death. Given a child's emotional needs and incomprehension of death, however, her most probable early reaction was to feel abandoned. If the fiction of the mother as "guardian spirit" (206) serves to vicariously reconnect Leoline to his dead wife, it more powerfully ensures Christabel's connection to the maternal. It allows the girl to believe in herself as loved. At the same time, predictably, the mother's ghostly presence keeps the fact of her death constantly in mind. The cost of this comforting fiction is continual reconfirmation of the mother's mortality, of Christabel's implication in her death, and of her daughterly obligation to make amends for the mother's absence by taking on her role—a role she cannot perform, of course, without on some level replacing and thus betraying the mother.

From this complex of identification, substitution, and resistance springs Geraldine, precipitated by Christabel's growing sense of identity crisis and, as Spatz argued, her fears of sexual experience in light of her planned marriage.²⁸ Figuring Christabel's unconscious as the site where her banished desires have gathered and intensified, Geraldine becomes the dutiful daughter's ominous double. Yet in what can appear the single most brilliant move of Coleridge's poem, Geraldine also becomes the mother's double.²⁹ For Geraldine can acquire power only by vanquishing the mother and assuming her prerogatives. It is Geraldine, tellingly, who can actually see the hovering spirit of the mother in Christabel's bedroom, and Geraldine who dismisses the spirit:

"Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!

"I have power to bid thee flee."

.....

"Off woman, off! this hour is mine—

"Though thou her guardian spirit be,

"Off woman, off! 'tis given to me."

(199–201 and 205–7)

Geraldine seizes her hour by then drinking "the wild-flower wine," described previously by Christabel as "a wine of virtuous powers; / My mother made it of wild flowers" (214, 186–87). When this wine restores her, we witness Geraldine retrieving her powers of action only *as* she appropriates the role of the mother. That reappropriation will leave her on the arm of Sir Leoline in a scene where he often strikes readers as sexually infatuated: it will leave her in the place of the mother, in short. Before that comes her violation of Christabel and its pieta-like aftermath:

And lo! the worker of these harms,

That holds the maiden in her arms,

Seems to slumber still and mild,
 As a mother with her child.
 (286–89)

Here the serenity of Geraldine's own sleep reflects her success in securing the role of the mother for herself. As a consequence of that triumph—it is an important measure of her insidiousness and power to corrupt—Geraldine acts as the double of Christabel herself *and* the double of the mother.

The ultimate import of these paired doublings seems plain enough: in Coleridge's poem the heroine can access her own sexuality (Geraldine as Christabel's unconscious, the site of libidinal energy) *only through* her mother (Geraldine as maternal icon). As to why that sexual logic should impose itself in *Christabel*, psychoanalytic readings of the text differ almost luxuriantly. The poem conjures the mother amid its sexually charged bedroom scene because, the scholarship speculates, Christabel's yearning for the mother motivates the two women's lesbian encounter; or because Geraldine enacts Christabel's oedipal desire to commandeer her mother's relationship with Leoline; or because desire, in its effort to circumvent patriarchal regulation, seeks "to obey the law of 'the mother'"; or, again, because Christabel's wariness of sexual initiation arises from the reflection that pregnancy killed her mother.³⁰ Underlying these dissimilar formulations, however, lies a common insistence on emotional and psychological ambivalence. As Christabel and Geraldine both appear in the poem because the conflicted Christabel feels two ways at once about her daughterly sexuality, so are there two mothers, the angelic guardian and her sinister double. The familial circumstances in which Christabel has formed her identity have left her oscillating between love and hate, abjection and aggression, in her self-image and her attitudes towards the lost mother in whom that self-image remains so poignantly invested.

Christabel scholarship has often explained the ambivalence of the poem's character relationships by looking to the author. This scholarship takes Christabel as a feminine persona for the poet, noting that Coleridge sometimes identified himself with birds, even as the text depicts Christabel as a dove, and invoking his references to himself as an orphan.³¹ Christabel's situation is displaced autobiography, then, with the girl's ambivalence toward her mother acting as an occluded reference to Coleridge's own troubled relations with his mother, Ann, following his father's death. Ann Coleridge was by all accounts an emotionally cold woman who inspired a sense of duty more than love in her sons. She was also socially ambitious for her family, valuing worldly success and pressuring her sons to achieve it. The financial reversals occasioned by her husband John's unexpected death in 1781 devastated her. And her humiliation ended up exacerbated, ironically, by her decision to

send Samuel to Christ's Hospital in London. The school had been founded specifically for the sons of impoverished clergymen—the standard petition for admission requested the applicant “there to be Educated and brought up among other poor Children”—and Coleridge's older brothers, Rosemary Ashton remarks, “were ashamed to have him visit them in his school uniform.”³² Ann Coleridge apparently never once visited her youngest son during his Christ's Hospital years. Having established him there, she seems to have washed her hands of him emotionally: by conceding “the right of the Governors of Christ's Hospital to apprentice her son, if Sam did not prove academically promising.” Richard Holmes writes, Ann “effectively put Sam's destiny in the hands of the Christ's Hospital authorities, and did indeed make him the child of an institution.” These events explain why Coleridge could tell Tom Poole that Tom's mother “was the only Being whom I ever *felt* in the relation of Mother” (*CL*, 2.758). Clearly Coleridge construed his own mother's behavior to him as abandonment. If that construction may be partly Coleridge's retrospective projection, as Holmes allows, the fact remains that “he felt this rejection as deeply as anything in his life.”³³ He internalized it as a sense of inadequacy accompanied, David Beres first surmised, by an unconscious hostility toward his mother. Just so, the death of Christabel's mother at once replays the experience of abandonment and represents the child's unconscious aggressions toward the mother. This ambivalence recurs in Geraldine, in whom, Beres contends, we witness “the mother, . . . killed by the child in the act of birth, returning to seek vengeance.”³⁴

Yet *Christabel* seems to restage the psychological conflicts of Coleridge's life, especially his sense of the traumatizing power of parental rejection, in even more specific ways. This restaging can be seen in the relationship between the final events of part 2 of the poem and the “little child” “Conclusion to Part the Second” (644–65). Part 2 ends with Leoline's dismissal of Christabel. Feeling “Dishonour'd by his only child” for her ostensible inhospitality to Geraldine, Sir Leoline “[turns] from his own sweet maid” (631, 641). At that point, Christabel's situation mirrors Coleridge's own unhappy childhood: both have one dead parent and a disapproving second parent who withholds love and casts the child away. The gender identities are symmetrically transposed: for the female Christabel the mother dies and the father disowns, whereas for the male Coleridge matters arrange themselves the other way around. But those defensive reversals, arguably, were what freed Coleridge imaginatively to project a version of “his own experience . . . screened through a female figure.”³⁵ So in his heroine's plight Coleridge obliquely—and no doubt unconsciously—figures himself as an abandoned child. In the lines which immediately follow, interestingly, he figures himself as an irrationally scolding father. For, since the unjustly reprimanded child in the “Conclusion

to Part the Second” of *Christabel* is a portrait of Coleridge’s son Hartley, as the poet’s letters show (*CL*, 2:728–29), then the father who upbraids him should analogously be a portrait of Coleridge himself. The “Conclusion” consequently depicts a second-generation tragedy. Turning from Christabel’s abandonment to Hartley’s chastisement, we move from an image of Coleridge as abused child to a mirroring image of Coleridge as an abusive father who abuses his son just as he was abused as a child: traumatizing rejection acquires a family pedigree. Here Coleridge provides a genealogy for the pain and frustration born of the will’s inherent ambivalence. The poet’s initial account of a father reacting to a young boy’s spontaneous happiness with seemingly unmotivated rage and his subsequent speculation that such “rage and pain” are reflexes of “love’s excess” (664 and 652) invokes a world where “the energies of wrath and the energies of love,” John Beer remarks, “are in necessary connection” to the point of “springing from the same source.”³⁶

When the text identifies this ambivalence as the defining signature of “a world of sin” (661), it tacitly defines the ambivalence of the will as Original Sin. That implication also follows directly from Geraldine’s usurpation of the role of the mother. When Geraldine acts as both the double of Christabel and the double of the mother, Coleridge creates a situation in which Christabel can reclaim her own unconscious and become present-to-herself as a person only through the mediation of a (m)other—and only through the introjection of otherness. As in Lacan’s mirror-stage theory of identity formation, what constitutes the self also alienates it, inscribing it with a fundamental sense of lack.³⁷ Versions of these ideas were of course wholly traditional in the Romantic period. Percy Bysshe Shelley too ascribed the origins of love to finding “within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void,” to the end that we “seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves.”³⁸ Coleridge derived the impulse to love from an “instinctive Sense of Self-insufficingness” and acknowledged similarly that the “first lesson, that innocent Childhood affords me, is—that it is an instinct of my nature to pass out of myself, and to exist in the form of others” (*CN*, 4:4730 and 5:6487). Unfortunately, while it honors humanity’s impulse to love, this last 1830 notebook entry also reads like a retrospective gloss on the defining activities of Geraldine. Geraldine means many things, but she always figures Christabel’s desires in the alienating form of the other. As she passes from symbolic role to symbolic role in the course of the story, Geraldine shows us the inner emptiness that determines what Christabel wants: she wants her mother, she wants her own womanhood, she wants her father’s acceptance. She wants them because they have been experienced as withheld, and their absence, real or fantasized, has produced the tangled sense of inadequacy, guilt, compensation, and aggression discussed above. What

Coleridge's coda suggests is that Christabel's familial experience of love as partly given and partly withdrawn has reflexively divided her own ability to love, bequeathing the moral will a fundamental and unavoidable ambivalence. Geraldine's disfigurement leaves her divided above all—"Behold! her bosom and *half* her side—" (246, my emphasis)—and it is that dividedness that her touch transmits. Coleridge described the same inner division mentioned earlier in telling his brother George, again, that "our organization is depraved, & our volitions imperfect; and we sometimes see the good without *wishing* to attain it, and oftener *wish* it without the energy that wills & performs—" (*CL*, 1.396). Christabel advances beyond these claims by dramatizing how the human capacity to love is implicated in the corruption of the will, how the intention to love can be diverted, contrary to the subject's intentions and dignity, in ways that breed misunderstanding and loneliness.

So in *Christabel*, in sum, the association of Original Sin with the ambivalence of the will to love follows from Geraldine's role as the estranging double of both Christabel's libido and her mother. In developing its theology of desire, however, Coleridge's poem traces the moral problem of love to origins which extend beyond the sexual and family matrices that Geraldine (in part) represents. Geraldine's promiscuity suffuses her very doubling, which does not restrict itself to playing Christabel's erotic alter ego or to impersonating the mother. Geraldine also lurks in Bracy's unconscious, appearing in his dream as a green snake embracing/strangling the white dove. When she appears the next morning, her presence induces him to remark, "This dream it would not pass away—/ It seems to live upon my eye" (546–47)—and rightly so, for the woman before him epitomizes and replicates the dream. When Leoline meets Geraldine, he not only "kenn'd / In the beautiful lady the child of his friend" (433–34) but recognizes the beautiful child's resemblance to her supposed father:

Sir Leoline, a moment's space,
 Stood gazing on the damsel's face;
 And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine
 Came back upon his heart again.
 (415–18)

In Dr. James Gillman's version of the poem's projected conclusion, of course, Geraldine "changes her appearance to that of the accepted though absent lover of Christabel."³⁹ Of what character, one might then fairly ask, is Geraldine *not* in some way the double? Criticism of Coleridge's poem appropriately reads her first as a libidinal projection and maternal figure. But Geraldine is Coleridge's Romantic Duessa. Beyond her roles

as a personification of sexuality and a surrogate mother, she discloses the dependence of all human desire on a mediating image and, for Coleridge as Christian moralist, an always shifting, treacherous image.⁴⁰

The emphasis on Geraldine as a simulacrum in *Christabel* provides her powers of corruption and seduction with a conventional Christian genealogy. Even before his Anglican conversion, Coleridge understood human love in conventionally Christian terms, associating its essence, Barth shows, with the operation of the Divine Will as the ultimate principle of causality.⁴¹ Later Coleridge professed to “adore the living and personal God, whose Power indeed is the *Ground* of all *Being*, even as his Will is the efficient, his Wisdom the instrumental, and his Love the final, Cause of all *Existence*” (*CL*, 4.894). Love constitutes the energy by which God as Origin draws the human soul back to his fulfilling plenitude: for Coleridge there existed “a capaciousness in every *living* Heart, which retains an aching Vacuum . . . God only can *fill* it” (*CL*, 4.607). But this traditionally Christian theology of desire runs into the equally traditional problem of the Creator’s mysterious relation to his Creation. For Coleridge, people are “driven, by a desire of Self-completion with a restless & inextinguishable Love”—love for God—yet inhabit a world in which “God is not all things, for in this case he would be indigent of all; but all things are God, & eternally indigent of God” (*CN*, 1:1680)—a world, in other words, in which things refer to God without being fully coincident with him. Worldly objects of desire, considered theologically, are metaphors. They mix resemblance with difference in their flawed evocation of a God whose unmediated presence can alone fill the heart’s “Vacuum.” From the theological perspective embedded in *Christabel*, Geraldine is a liar and deceiver simply because she is a projected image, a false semblance. She confronts the other characters of the poem like a mirror designed to show them their deepest longings, but in the process she reveals their deepest existential wounds and then binds them to that pain by diverting them from the one adequate object of their “restless & inextinguishable Love.” As a perpetually self-recuperating principle of accommodation, she will pass from guise to guise—from Christabel to her mother to her absent knight—before confessing herself the lie she is.

As a visitant from Coleridge’s dreams and an entrancing image, Geraldine above all discloses the power of the dreaming mind to create a succession of rationally uncontrolled images. Pondering the moral implications of his dreams, the poet at one point decides,

I will at least make the attempt to explain to myself the Origin of
moral Evil from the *streamy* Nature of Association, which Thinking =
Reason, curbs & rudders / how this comes to be so difficult / Do not

the bad Passions in Dreams throw light & shew of proof upon this Hypothesis? . . . But take in the blessedness of Innocent Children, the blessedness of sweet Sleep, &c &c &c: are these or are they not contradictions to the evil from *streamy* association?—I hope not. (CN, 1.1770)

It is precisely “the blessedness of sweet Sleep” that has been ruined in *Christabel*, as the heroine’s dreams make her “moan and leap” (29) and lead her toward a temptress who materializes as if conjured from dream. Disallowing the power of childhood innocence to contain “bad Passions,” the poem endorses the notebook entry’s attribution of “the Origin of moral Evil” to the flood of images in a mind unruddered by reason. *Christabel* locates evil at a nexus where sexuality, family romance, and the theological problem of mediation become densely entangled. Despite the text’s sexual and familial genealogies, it is the problem of mediating images which Coleridge’s religious faith moves him to emphasize. In presupposing a Christian antithesis of body and soul, reason and desire, *Christabel* becomes, as Barth has written, “a Coleridgean analogue of the Pauline ‘war of the members.’”⁴² The moral and emotional ambivalence characterizing Coleridge’s notion of Original Sin derives from this ontological warfare. The apparitional aspect of Geraldine suggests, then, how easily the human need to desire *through* images becomes a spiritually corrupt desire *for* images. The figure of Geraldine also suggests how worldly objects of desire—as images that both are and are not what they represent—implicate the moral will in ambivalence and prevent the heart hungering for wholeness from wholly desiring what it desires.

For this dilemma there exists just one solution for Coleridge, and he glances at it in the final role his poem bestows on Geraldine. Several critics have detected in Geraldine a faint, twisted palimpsest of Christ. Rhonda Johnson Ray reads Geraldine as a “Usurper of Christ,” for instance, while Jane Chambers sees Geraldine’s actions as a “perversion of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ.”⁴³ Denials prefaced by a crowing cock, the apparently sacramental wine of the bedroom scene (reminiscent of the Last Supper, with a traitor present who will later kiss to betray), the motif of the soul as the bride of Christ, Geraldine’s comment “‘Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—” (205), an allusion to Christ’s comment to those who arrest him, “this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53): all these motifs inform the text like so many lost fragments of the life of Christ. The poem marshals none of them into coherent allegory, but, like Dante’s three-faced, cruciform Satan, they reassure readers that evil can only parody good, remaining parasitically dependent on it. For Coleridge, redemption lies in Christ,

and Geraldine cannot at last conceal that truth. Disfigured into parody amid her false enticements survives an image of the sole object of desire and imitation through whom, Coleridge the Unitarian told a shattered Charles Lamb (*CL*, 1.239), human love can transcend its pain and find completion. Here, though, the image is distressingly faint, motivated but also undermined by the heroine's anguish. Throughout the Mariner's ordeals he retains powers of endurance that leave *The Rime*, in my experience, far less disturbing than the story of Christabel. In *Christabel*, Coleridge depicts a human being emptied out, divested of her personality and reduced to dehumanized instrumentality, at the pleasure of another. Christabel's situation qualifies as archetypal victimization—and no comfort arises when Coleridge traces the girl's baffled abjection to her earliest childhood memories, her "childhood of terror" as Anya Taylor calls it,⁴⁴ or when he associates her plight with an existentially irreducible state of guilt, or when the text's psychological allegory refigures events as instances of the self preying upon the self. The poem is Coleridge's darkest account of a human soul's powerlessness to resist the forces arrayed against it.

Beyond Unitarianism

The situations and concerns of *Christabel* recur in other poems Coleridge wrote, or tried to write, in 1797–1800. In "Love," apparently conceived as an introduction to "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie," the knight suffers when his devotion is cruelly scorned, as Christabel does when her father rejects her, but that devotion also saves "from outrage worse than death / The lady of the Land" (*PW*, 1.604.55–56), much as Christabel saved Geraldine. When his singing of this tale wins the speaker his Genevieve, "Love" makes the knight's rejection the vicarious means of the speaker's acceptance, as if Coleridge were fantasizing a happy ending for Christabel's predicament. "The Three Graves" is even more closely engaged with issues central to *Christabel* (*PW*, 1.336). In "The Three Graves," Coleridge domesticates the powers of guilt and suggestion that he had been reading about, he tells us in his prefatory comments on the poem, in an "account of the effect of the *Oby* witchcraft on the Negroes in the West-Indies."⁴⁵ *Christabel* not only uses witchcraft as a metaphor for psychological fixation and control but recalls the malevolent, sexually aggressive mother of "The Three Graves" when Geraldine appropriates that role in winning the affections of Sir Leoline. "The Wanderings of Cain" shares with *Christabel* its interest in Original Sin and the double (*PW*, 1.358). The shape that appears to Cain in the wilderness in the likeness of Abel, tempting him both to blind himself and to sacrifice his son, is a false semblance of Abel assumed by the evil spirit in order to ruin Cain. Yet the shape is surely also, as Beer surmises, "an apparition

conjured up by Cain's own faulty consciousness,"⁴⁶ and, as such, a projection in which his guilt over the death of Abel returns in the punitive form of the other. As they ramify through variant formulations in related texts, the problems of *Christabel* come to seem like signs of a developmental impasse. By 1800 Coleridge appears increasingly unable to sustain, and certainly to resolve, the moral dialectic on which his more ambitious work depended. And that inability reflects in part the waning hold of Unitarian Optimism on his moral imagination.

The imaginative crisis occasioned by Coleridge's changing religious views centered on "the Origin of Evil" and the providential purpose of human misery. In *Christabel* the question of why evil exists, posed through the representation of the heroine's sufferings, acquires particular urgency because her sufferings seem so unmerited and devastating. Readings of *Christabel* that offer a moral rationale for the heroine's tribulations usually argue that she suffers so as to redeem others—such as Sir Leoline or her missing knight.⁴⁷ Christabel's knight remains the preferred candidate for redemption, generally, because critics take their cue from Coleridge's own recollections about the poem. Gillman famously reported Coleridge telling him that

The story of Christabel is partly founded on the notion, that the virtuous of this world save the wicked. The pious and good Christabel suffers and prays for

"the weal of her lover that is far away,"

exposed to various temptations in a foreign land; and she thus defeats the power of evil represented in the person of Geraldine.

This is one main object of the tale. (*The Life*, 283)

This reminiscence has often seemed impressive due to its consistency with other statements Coleridge made, as when he informed his son Derwent that the "sufferings of Christabel were to have been represented as vicarious, endured for 'her lover far away.'"⁴⁸ Here the connection of *Christabel* with St. Theresa has seemed similarly to provide important secondary corroboration. Humphry House, for instance, argued that "since the central theme of the Crashaw poem is the desire for martyrdom, and since the traditional view of martyrdom, and of the virtue in the blood of martyrs, includes the idea of the value to others of vicarious suffering, this one remark of Coleridge's tends strongly to reinforce the evidence of Derwent Coleridge and the shorter account given by Gillman."⁴⁹ By undergoing "martyrdom at her father's castle," House added, "Christabel would make atonement for the wrongs committed by her absent lover."⁵⁰ As House's phrasing implies, the notion of Christabel expiating the sins of her knight in his absence invokes

the doctrine of the Atonement, and other critics lend the implication even greater emphasis. Siegel remarks that, while “nearly all of Coleridge’s narrative poems and fragments of narratives reflect his interest in the theme of vicarious suffering, . . . it is in ‘Christabel’ that the theme of vicarious atonement . . . finds the most complete expression.” David Perkins concurs, flatly stating that Coleridge conceived *Christabel* to “be based ultimately on the Christian doctrine of the Atonement.”⁵¹

Finally, I cannot accept the pivotal importance granted Christabel’s missing knight in readings depending on Gillman and Derwent Coleridge,⁵² or agree that the logic of the Atonement organizes the representation of suffering in *Christabel*. Justifications of Christabel’s suffering even tacitly linked to the Atonement lose their aura of authorial sanction the moment we look beyond the Gillman and Derwent Coleridge reports of the poet’s conversation to his own accounts of his religious beliefs. During the years which spanned the composition of *Christabel*, Coleridge continued to regard the Atonement as “perhaps the most irrational and gloomy Superstition that ever degraded the human mind” (*LLR* 204). In dismissing the orthodox Atonement, Coleridge once more accepted Priestley’s critique of moral vicariousness. If, he asked,

Sin be of so heinous a nature that God cannot pardon it without adequate satisfaction—if each man must have expiated his individual Sins by eternal Torture, how is it consistent with this dreadful Equity, this Tartarean justice, that the sufferings of one Being for a few hours should prove an adequate Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World—Did this Being miraculously suffer in that brief Day as much as all mankind would have suffered through all Eternity? . . . But however mysteriously yet a full and adequate Satisfaction has, it seems, been thus made to the divine justice. . . . How then does it happen, that Repentance and good works are necessary? (*LPR*, 205–6)

Repentance and good works are necessary because people must save their own souls. The Crucifixion was not an act of sacrificial appeasement that vicariously redeemed others or that created the possibility of salvation where it did not exist previously. As a Unitarian, Coleridge believed in a human, exemplary Jesus whose Crucifixion and consequent Resurrection illustrated saving truths and pointed the way that others must take on their own, with Christ “voluntarily submitting to a cruel death,” Coleridge wrote, only “in order that he might confirm the Faith or awaken the Gratitude of Men” (*LPR* 203–4). Coleridge of course realized that virtuous actions could

inspire a change of heart and behavior in other persons. Yet such changes are a matter of individual moral influence rather than vicarious atonement. Coleridge's Highgate description of his heroine's sufferings "as vicarious, endured for 'her lover far away'" seems like an exaggeration designed to provide the conventionally orthodox Gillman with a denouement he could find understandable and satisfying on his own terms.⁵³

If Coleridge saw a way of resolving the problem of evil in *Christabel* in 1798–1800, that resolution would have invoked not the Anglican Atonement but the doctrine of philosophical necessity. Necessity was an integral element of the Priestleyan Unitarianism to which Coleridge converted at Cambridge: he happily announced himself a "Necessarian" as early as 1796 (*CL*, 1.213) and insisted on the necessitarian aspect of Unitarian theology throughout his intellectual career. For Coleridge, necessity had both metaphysical and psychological aspects, designating a causal principle of the universe internalized in human consciousness. For the form of its internalization, he was, like Priestley before him, indebted to David Hartley's explanations of cognitive association. Yet Hartley's psychological exposition had also demonstrated that "the Doctrine of Necessity," as Hartley admitted in his Preface, "followed from that of Association."⁵⁴ So necessity emerged as the direct metaphysical corollary of Hartley's theory of the mind. The second part of *Observations on Man* reconciled that metaphysics with traditional Christianity; Priestley's discussions of necessity, especially *Illustrations of Philosophical Necessity*, then reconciled Hartley's Christian necessitarianism with Unitarian theology—to the end that necessity was conceived as an encompassing principle of orderly causation. For defenders of necessity, the will was irresistibly obligated to laws of motivation that, originating ultimately in God, assimilate all events to a providential benevolence. Experiences of human suffering follow from humanity's self-centered inability to understand the cosmic scheme and are indispensable if people are to attain the moral wisdom which will alone secure their happiness. Coleridge echoed Priestley in declaring it "necessary that Man should run through the Course of Vice & Mischief since by Experience alone his Virtue and Happiness can acquire Permanence & Security" (*LPR*, 108). The sufferings imparted by evil are morally educative, allowing for inner growth from a false "Innocence" based on inexperience to a genuine "Virtue" based on an understanding of vice and its consequences (*ibid.*)—the very development that Coleridge may have initially intended for *Christabel*.

For Coleridge the Unitarian, *Christabel's* sufferings become morally purposive only insofar as they contribute crucially to her own progress to virtue. Any narrative continuation that presented her anguish as the requisite

means of another's salvation, in effect instrumentally sacrificing her, would invariably reconfirm the theology of Atonement. Geraldine remains the one character whose redemption by Christabel would be morally conceivable in the world of the poem, but only because Geraldine-as-double is finally not a character independent of Christabel at all. Christabel's salvation of Geraldine would allegorize Christabel healing herself. Healing of that sort is the telos proposed by rite-of-passage readings such as Spatz's essay on sexual initiation in *Christabel*. For Spatz, the heroine's tribulations allow her growth into psychologically integral adulthood, an achievement which redeems the pain they occasioned, even as Christabel redeems Geraldine by incorporating libidinal energy in her own conscious personality: had Coleridge finished the poem, Spatz believes, he would have revealed Geraldine symbolically "merging with the adolescent Christabel to form a loving and virtuous wife."⁵⁵ This too may be a developmental model Coleridge initially intended for his heroine. But when the hissing Christabel of part 2 begins to imitate the lamia-like aspects of Geraldine—when Geraldine begins to incorporate Christabel, in short, rather than the other way around—any redemptive plan envisioned by Coleridge threatens to turn itself inside out. Unfortunately, *Christabel* lacks any sense of a spiritually ordained moral progress. What lingers in memory as the poem ends is Christabel as a virtually helpless victim, with Geraldine as her suave despoiler: that imbalance determines the affective power of the poem, undermining its occasional gestures at developmental or providential order. Derwent Coleridge's assurances that Geraldine is "no witch or goblin, or malignant being of any kind, but a spirit, executing her appointed task with the best good will" seem simply unaccountable.⁵⁶ The mother as sentimentalized guardian angel, Geraldine's hesitation in the bedroom scene, her statement that "All they, who live in the upper sky, / Do love you, holy Christabel," and Christabel's own reflection "That saints will aid if men will call: / For the blue sky bends over all!" (221–22 and 318–19)—all of these flickerings of psychological and supernatural benevolence obtrude in the narrative-like remnants of a once-structural optimism fallen into ruin.

So if what *Christabel* needs, amid the philosophical resources available to Coleridge at this point in his development, is a credible representation of necessity, that is nonetheless exactly what the text lacks, and there is a logic to its absence. For Coleridge's renunciation of Unitarianism followed directly from his growing dissatisfaction with the doctrine of philosophical necessity. That dissatisfaction appears to have begun as early as 1799–1800. Mann concluded that "by 1799 [Coleridge's] disenchantment with the doctrine of necessity was virtually complete"⁵⁷ and adduced in support of that claim the 1799 letter in which Coleridge reflected on the death of his infant son Berkeley:

I will not believe that it [human life] ceases—in this moving stirring and harmonious Universe I *cannot* believe it!—Can cold and darkness come from the Sun? where the Sun is not—there is cold and darkness!—But the living God is every where, & works every where—and where is there room for Death? . . . That God works by *general* laws are to me words without meaning or worse than meaningless—Ignorance and Imbecillity, and Limitation must wish in generals—What and who are these horrible shadows necessity and general law, to which God himself must offer sacrifices—hecatombs of Sacrifices? . . . God works in each for all—most true—but more comprehensively true is it, that he works in all for each.—I confess that the more I think, the more I am discontented with the doctrines of Priestley. (*CL*, 1.481–82)

If necessitarians in the Unitarian community reject a sacrificial atonement, they nonetheless endorse an implicit sacrificial logic, Coleridge scathingly observes, in avowing the benevolence of necessity on general grounds. The closing reference to Priestley occasions little surprise: Coleridge's condemnation of "necessity and general Law" glances specifically at Priestley's vindication of evil in *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*:

Where could there be clemency, fortitude, elevation of soul, and deep resignation to the will of God, which form the most glorious and excellent of characters, but in struggling with the difficulties that arise from injustice, ingratitude, and vice, of all other kinds, as well as from outward *adversity* and distress; so that even the supposition of there being no *general laws of nature* (which would, probably, be the greatest of all evils) but of God doing every thing *singly*, and in a manner independent of every thing else, would not be of any advantage in this case. (*PN*, 514)

The supposition would offer no advantage, that is, for a faith in benevolence willing to overlook instances of individual misery in celebrating the glorious pattern God establishes through "*general laws of nature*." By 1799 Coleridge believed, conversely, that the Deity "works in all for each," that the fate of every individual person remained centrally implicated in the question of cosmic justice. He grew dissatisfied with necessity, in short, as its optimism came to seem morally inhumane.

As suspect as overly neat solutions can appear, it is difficult not to read the problems of *Christabel* as a variation on this exact moral crisis: a heightened awareness of human anguish and corresponding inability to affirm any

kind of providential necessity. The torments of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are contextualized by the One Life. Arguments that *The Rime* dramatizes not salvation but nightmare may call the effectiveness of Coleridge's One Life frame into question, but the frame remains present as an element of the text, one capable of inspiring a love-as-prayer homily in which at least the Mariner himself seems sincerely to believe. And certainly the moral dialectic that energizes Coleridge's greatest poetry requires *some* compelling conception of goodness. Coleridge began *Christabel*, I suggest, interested in Original Sin but satisfied that his heroine's well-intentioned openness to others could anchor his plot in the requisite image of goodness. His story ended up as beguiled by Geraldine as Christabel herself became. The girl's personal character could not effectively counterbalance so potent a representation of evil in the absence of a complementary representation of transcendent goodness. That inability, signifying Coleridge's enhanced sense of human fallenness, stands as the narrative analogue of his moral conviction that people cannot simply save themselves with the readiness envisioned by Priestleyan rational theology. Nor, of course, would the Lochinvar-like arrival of Christabel's wandering knight avail: Magnuson is right to say that Christabel's "restoration must come from within."⁵⁸ She cannot be redeemed by her lover's active gallantry any more than he can be saved by her passive suffering. So as part 2 of *Christabel* reaches its term, Coleridge manages to paint himself into a corner: the poem can imagine moral corruption but not moral redemption.

We do not lack explanations of Coleridge's inability to finish *Christabel*. One need only summon the poet's disintegrating personal life and medical condition or point to Wordsworth's crippling decision to remove the poem from *Lyrical Ballads* (see *CL*, 1.623) to account for the text's fragmentariness. If we look to the plot of *Christabel*, however, an additional reason suggests itself: the poem outgrew the Unitarian optimism inherent in its conception. Through its failure to place human loneliness and anguish within a convincing moral teleology, *Christabel* anticipates Coleridge's 1805 conversion to Anglicanism: "it burst upon me at once as an awful Truth," he confided to his notebook, "No Christ, No God! . . . Unitarianism in all its Forms is Idolatry" (*CN*, 2.2448). "No Christ, no God" indeed: central to Coleridge's conversion experience was his longstanding need—and newfound ability—to bring human suffering and spiritual transcendence together in a single image.

NOTES

1. Coleridge's entry is number 161 f21 [c] from vol. 1 of *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, M. Christensen, and A. J. Harding, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957–2002), hereafter abbreviated *CN*; for Lamb's reminiscence, see *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin

W. Marris, Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975–78), 1:97 (boldface in original). Coleridge's correspondence is cited from the *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), hereafter abbreviated *CL*. For Coleridge's prose, I use *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen. ed. Coburn, 16 vols., Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971–2002): individual vols. cited include vol. 1, *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (1971), hereafter abbreviated *LPR*; vol. 2, *The Watchman*, ed. Patton (1970); vol. 6, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White (1972); vol. 8, *Lectures 1818–1818: On the History of Philosophy*, ed. J. R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols. (2000); vol. 14, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (1990); vol. 16, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 3 vols. (2001), hereafter abbreviated *PW*. For convenience, however, I cite *Christabel* from *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 2004), hereafter *CPP*, which prints a reading text of the first published version of the poem. All future references to the above works will be cited parenthetically within the text. *Christabel* will be cited by line number only. The problem of evil was one of Coleridge's long-standing philosophical interests: the "origin of evil" (*LPR*, 89) was among the topics of the first Unitarian lecture he delivered in Bristol in 1795 (see *LPR*, 103–11).

2. Whalley, "Coleridge and Southey in Bristol, 1795," *Review of English Books*, n.s., 1 (1950) 334–35 n. 3; Kitson, "Coleridge, Milton and the Millennium," *The Wordsworth Circle* 18 (1987): 64.

3. See, for instance, Jonas Spatz, "The Mystery of Eros: Sexual Initiation in Coleridge's 'Christabel,'" *PMLA* 90 (1975): 107–16. Spatz accommodates Christabel's disorientation and anguish to an affirmative reading by seeing them as elements of a necessary rite of passage, with Geraldine representing "the part of itself that innocence must finally encounter on the way to knowledge" ("The Mystery of Eros," 111). While "erotic affirmation" readings of *Christabel* abound, three others to which I am particularly indebted are Harold Bloom's *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, rev. and enlarged ed. (1961; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 212–17; Gerald Enscoc's *Eros and the Romantics: Sexual Love as a Theme in Coleridge, Shelley and Keats* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), and Michael Holstein's "Coleridge's *Christabel* as Psychodrama: Five Perspectives on the Intruder," *The Wordsworth Circle* 7 (1976):119–28. Readings in this sort are related to another common approach—often dependent on Jung or Lévi-Strauss, and also opposed to my own approach—which sees *Christabel* as oriented toward a redemptive mythic wholeness: see Anthony John Harding, "Mythopoesis: The Unity of *Christabel*," in *Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Honor of Peter Laver*, ed. Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn, and Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 207–17; Jane A. Nelson, "Entelechy and Structure in 'Christabel,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 19 (1980): 375–93; and Edward Strickland, "Metamorphoses of the Muse in Romantic Poesis: *Christabel*," *ELH* 44 (1978) 641–58.

4. Barth, "In the Midnight Wood: The Power and Limits of Prayer in *Christabel*," *The Wordsworth Circle* 32 (2001): 81. I am also indebted to Barth's *Coleridge and the Power of Love* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988) and *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); and to Anya Taylor, "Coleridge's 'Christabel' and the Phantom Soul," *Studies in English Literature, 1800–1900* 42 (2002): 707–30, a reading energetically opposed to "the joy and sexual rapture that many critics have seen in the poem" (711). Above all my essay seeks to develop Virginia Radley's claim, made forty years ago, that *Christabel* is "a

study in ambivalent love-relationships" (*Christabel: Directions Old and New*, *Studies in English Literature, 1800–1900* 4 [1964]: 537).

5. Robert H. Siegel, "The Serpent and the Dove: 'Christabel' and the Problem of Evil," in *Imagination and the Spirit: Essays in Literature and the Christian Faith*, ed. Charles Huttar (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 159; and Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, 213.

6. Carl Woodring, "Christabel of Cumberland," *Review of English Literature* 7 (1966): 47. Pointing to such evidence as Christabel's protectiveness toward Geraldine in the forest and interest in seeing Geraldine's body in the bedroom, many critics qualify their affirmations of Christabel's innocence. My contention is simply that such qualifications, their theological import to Coleridge recognized, significantly alter the stakes for any moral interpretation of his poem.

7. Spatz, "The Mystery of Eros," 112.

8. Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary* (1959; repr., New York: Collier Books, 1962), 206.

9. Cooper, "Who's Afraid of the Mastiff Bitch? Gothic Parody and Original Sin in *Christabel*," reprinted in *Critical Essays on Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Leonard Orr (New York: G. K. Hall, 1994), 89, 88, 88–89, and 93.

10. As Harding suggests in "Mythopoesis" (215). I cite *Paradise Lost* from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), abbreviated *PL*. Biblical passages are cited from the King James Version. For Coleridge's borrowings from *Paradise Lost* in *Christabel*, also see Siegel, "The Serpent and the Dove," 175–76; Beverly Fields, *Reality's Dark Dream: Dejection in Coleridge* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1967), 76–78; and Stuart Peterfreund, "The Way of Immanence, Coleridge, and the Problem of Evil," *ELH* 55 (1988): 125–58, especially 141–48.

11. Priestley, *The History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, in *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, ed. John Towill Ruff, 25 vols. in 26 (London, 1817–32), 5158–59. I also cite Priestley's *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, from vol. 3 of this edition, abbreviated *PN*.

12. Coleridge's Unitarianism was closely modeled on Priestley's theology: that much is clear from his tendency, evident as late as the *Lay Sermons* of 1817, to identify Unitarianism with belief in necessity (see *Lay Sermons*, 182 nn. 1 and 2 [Coleridge's notes]). The connection is actually closer than is sometimes claimed: while Coleridge's early willingness to "deny the existence of any Evil" (*LLR*, 105) is thoroughly Priestleyan, Priestley's moral theory in truth conceded the reality of earthly evils and could therefore accommodate Coleridge's less-optimistic later acknowledgements of pain and injustice. Yet as the 1798 "original Sin" letter shows, Coleridge did not follow Priestley unflinchingly. In a 1796 letter to Thelwall summarizing the essential tenets of Christianity as he understood them, Coleridge departs from Priestley even more significantly in affirming the existence of an immortal soul that, upon the death of the body, entered a state either of enjoyment or suffering—apparently Heaven or Hell since Coleridge could assure a grieving Lamb, "your mother is in heaven" (*CL*, 1.280 and 239). My discussions of Coleridge's understanding of "original Sin" and of necessity—a concept to which my essay returns in concluding—depend upon the more detailed analyses in my "Virtue of Necessity: Coleridge's Unitarian Moral Theory," *Modern Philology* 102 (2005): 372–404.

13. Ewing, *Coleridge's Moral Philosophy, 1795–1800, and the Symbolism of "Christabel"* (PhD diss., Texas A&M University, 1977), 9. Ewing's phrase recalls

Coleridge alluding to Scripture in the same 1796 letter to Thelwall mentioned above (CL, 1.283).

14. Fruman, *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (New York: George Braziller, 1971), 386.

15. As Coleridge told Thomas Allsop (*Table Talk*, ed. Woodring, 2:369). I cite Crashaw's poems from *The Poems of Richard Crashaw*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927): "Hymn to St. Theresa," 131, lines 44, 19–22; "The Flaming Heart," 324. For Coleridge's familiarity with the tradition that St. Theresa represented, see Thomas R. Preston, "Christabel and the Mystical Tradition," in *Essays and Studies in Language and Literature*, ed. Herbert H. Petit, Duquesne Studies Philological Series 5 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1964), 138–57.

16. Magnuson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1974) 97.

17. *Lectures 1818–1819*, 2.464–66. Jackson's edition of the *Lectures* includes brackets indicating where omissions in Coleridge's manuscript are supplied with material from his Notebooks.

18. La Cassagnère, "The Strangeness of *Christabel*," *Wordsworth Circle* 32 (2001): 86.

19. These quotations are from Barbara Johnson's comments on deconstruction in *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), x.

20. Basler, "Christabel," *Sewanee Review* 51 (1943): 73–95; Enscoe, *Eros and the Romantics*. Naturally, early commentators, Walter Scott and William Hazlitt among them, also noted the sexual ambience of Coleridge's poem. The most perceptive discussion of contemporary reactions to *Christabel* is Karen Swann's "Literary Gentlemen and Lovely Ladies: The Debate on the Character of *Christabel*," *ELH* 52 (1985): 397–418.

21. Coburn, "Coleridge and Wordsworth and 'the Supernatural,'" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 25 (1956): 130.

22. Peterfreund, "The Way of Immanence," 143–44.

23. Siegel, "The Serpent and the Dove," 176.

24. Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, 134–35.

25. Rzepka, "Christabel's 'Wandering Mother' and the Discourse of the Self: A Lacanian Reading of Repressed Narration," *Romanticism Past and Present* 10 (1986): 27–30.

26. Dennis Welch made the incest accusation initially in "Coleridge's *Christabel*: Aversion of a Family Romance," *Women's Studies* 21 (1992): 163–84; and then later in his "*Christabel*, *King Lear*, and the Cinderella Folktale," *Papers on Language and Literature* 32 (1996) 291–314.

27. Rzepka, "Christabel's 'Wandering Mother,'" 35.

28. Spatz, "The Mystery of Eros," 112, 115.

29. My understanding of Geraldine as a figure of the mother depends especially on the discussions of Rzepka, "Christabel's 'Wandering Mother,'" 17–43; Karen Swann, "'Christabel': The Wandering Mother and the Enigma of Form," *Studies in Romanticism* 23 (1984) 533–53; and Barbara A. Schapiro, *The Romantic Mother: Narcissistic Patterns in Romantic Poetry* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 61–85.

30. For a lesbian reading of the interaction between Christabel and Geraldine, see Benjamin Scott Grossberg's "Making Christabel: Sexual Transgression and Its

Implications in Coleridge's 'Christabel,'" *Journal of Homosexuality* 41 (2001): 145–65. Other critics acknowledge the text's lesbianism in passing: Cooper mentions "the implicit lesbianism of the poem's bedchamber scene" ("Who's Afraid," 85), for instance, and William Keach associates "the central erotic aspect of the poem" with "its inescapable suggestion of lesbian sexuality" in his edition, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Complete Poems* ([London: Penguin Books, 1997], 507). For a reading of the Christabel/Geraldine relationship as a revelation of Christabel's (transposed) oedipal desire for her father, see Spatz, "The Mystery of Eros," 113. For Swann, "the law of 'the mother'" becomes implicated in the text's reflections on gender and genre when *Christabel* "invites us to speculate that the 'law' of gender, which legislates the systematic exclusion of feminine forms, is connected to the experience of maternal attention" (Swann, "The Wandering Mother," 548 and 551). Earlier I mentioned Rzepka's reading of the mother as a sign of Christabel's fears of sexual experience for its potential deathliness ("Christabel's 'Wandering Mother,'" 27–30).

31. Fruman remarks that "we find Coleridge again and again, almost compulsively, referring to himself or to personal problems in bird images" (*Damaged Archangel*, 360). For Coleridge's tendency to see himself as an orphan, see *CL*, 3.103.

32. Ashton cites the Christ's Hospital admission petition and comments on Coleridge's brothers in *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography*, Blackwell Critical Biographies (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 19, 18. For Coleridge's biography I also depend on Fruman (*Damaged Archangel*) and Richard Holmes (*Coleridge: Early Visions* [New York: Viking, 1989]).

33. Holmes, *Early Visions*, 22 and 9.

34. Beres offered his suggestion in his respected "A Dream, a Vision, and a Poem: A Psycho-Analytic Study of the Origins of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 32 (1951): 97–116, 107.

35. Coburn, "Coleridge and Wordsworth," 128.

36. Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1977), 236. Beer anticipates the direction of my argument in remarking further that for Coleridge "all such energies were related to the desire which should unite the human being with God, but which, through failure of connection, turn back to ravage it under forms of wrathful destruction" (*Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 236).

37. Rzepka summarizes many Lacanian doctrines in his essay on *Christabel*, but there is an especially lucid discussion of Lacan's mirror stage theory—the key doctrine for my reading—in Ellie Ragland-Sullivan's *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 16–30.

38. Shelley, "On Love," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed., Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 503.

39. Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1838), 301–2. Coleridge scholars will identify my quotation as part of the longer of two accounts of the poet's plans for completing *Christabel* furnished by Gillman; the other brief version is quoted in its entirety later in this essay.

40. For Geraldine as a figure of the problem of representation, see Richard A. Rand ("Geraldine," reprinted in *Untying the Text: A Post Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young [Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981], 281–315) and Susan Eilenberg (*Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Literary Possession* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992]), to whose rhetorical analysis of Geraldine I am particularly indebted. Calling Geraldine "a vampire of the semiotic variety,"

Eilenberg declares her “evil because she enforces the condition of allegory, turning those around her into signifiers of the identity she depends upon them to supply and depriving them of the power to make known the truth about themselves. She makes intolerably clear what representation implies: not self-evidence . . . but the subversion of identity” (*Strange Power of Speech*, 103 and 105).

41. Barth, *Coleridge and the Power of Love*, 18–19. For God as the final cause of love, see also Harding, *Coleridge and the Idea of Love: Aspects of Relationship in Coleridge's Thought and Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 96–101. The traditional Christian theology of love is admirably summarized in Kenelm Foster, “The Mind in Love: Dante's Philosophy,” reprinted in *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Freccero, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 43–60.

42. Barth, *Coleridge and the Power of Love*, 85.

43. Ray, “Geraldine as Usurper of Christ: An Un-Mystical Union,” *Philological Quarterly* 63 (1984): 511; Jane Chambers, “Geraldine's Real Obscenity: The Perverted Passion and Resurrection in *Christabel*,” *Essays in Literature* 12 (1985): 61.

44. Taylor, “Coleridge's ‘Christabel,’” 718.

45. *PW*, 1.1.338.

46. Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 114.

47. Harding declares, for instance, that “there is a reason for Christabel's suffering . . . but it is not to be found in any sin or inadequacy of her own,” but rather “she is made to expiate not her own guilt but her father's” (*Coleridge and the Idea of Love*, 69–70). Basler speculates that “Geraldine might derive a kind of salvation from Christabel” (“Christabel,” 81), and Spatz, as I will discuss subsequently, offers a variation on this possibility (“The Mystery of Eros”).

48. From Derwent Coleridge's “Introductory Essay” in his 1870 edition of Coleridge's *Poems*, as cited by Humphry House, *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures, 1951–52* (1953; repr., London: Rupert Hart-David, 1969), 127.

49. House, *The Clark Lectures*, 128–29.

50. *Ibid.*, 129.

51. Siegel, “The Serpent and the Dove,” 159 and 160; Perkins, from his headnote to *Christabel* in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995) 529. Mays calls attention to additional comments by Derwent Coleridge recorded by Barclay Fox in his *Journal*: “He considers it [*Christabel*] to be founded on the Roman Catholic notion of expiation for others' sins” (*PW*, 1.1.479), a statement which, in its reference to Catholicism, actually underscores the unlikelihood of Coleridge basing *Christabel* on the Atonement, particularly prior to his return to orthodoxy.

52. Magnuson is especially acute on the problems of the longer Gillman conclusion: “the difficulty in accepting such a plot continuance is that it does not grow naturally out of the sections already written. Christabel has been rendered utterly passive, and in Gillman's account she is saved only by the return of her former lover, who produces the ring. She is saved by an intercession when the restoration must come from within; for any conclusion to be convincing she must cope with her own evil. Furthermore, Gillman's account does not support the moral that he himself gives. . . . [since] Christabel's passive suffering has little effect upon the knight's exploits and spiritual state” (*Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*, 96).

53. Magnuson suggests that the Gillman continuation “is probably a fabrication produced for Gillman” (*Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*, 96) even as W. J. Bate

observed that Coleridge provided the Gillman summary (along with other conflicting versions) because he was “teased to say how the poem would have ended” (*Coleridge, Masters of World Literature* [New York: Collier Books, 1968], 74). It is a commonplace of Coleridge scholarship that, as a letter writer, Coleridge needed to please, which often led him to adopt the values of his correspondents.

54. Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749), ed. with introduction by Theodore L. Huguelet, 2 vols. in 1 (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), 1:vi.

55. Spatz, “The Mystery of Eros,” 115.

56. House, *The Clark Lectures*, 127.

57. Mann, *LPR*, lxvi.

58. Magnuson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry*, 96.