**Supernatural elements in Christabel**

(For B.A. 2nd Semester, General)

Coleridge’s “Christabel’ is a long narrative ballad in two parts. The setting of the poem is a medieval castle owned by Sir Leoline, an old widower baron. The story of the poem is about Sir Leoline’s loving and obedient daughter named Christabel and her encounter with a wicked stranger called Geraldine. The poem strongly centers round the concept of Good versus evil, religiosity versus sin, sexuality versus purity.

Coleridge, like other Romantic poets, frequently drew upon supernatural themes in his poetry. His most famous poems, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, and the hallucinatory fragment ‘Kubla Khan’, incorporate strange signs, visions and events; and Christabel also falls into this category. Coleridge sets the supernatural, witch-like figure of Geraldine against the innocence of titular character Christabel to highlight the battle between good and evil.

In the poem some ominous signs herald Geraldine’s appearance; the cock crows at midnight, the dog howls dismally, the wind moans in the lonely forest, and so on. Coleridge thus establishes a suitably gothic setting for the poem, leading up to Christabel’s first sight of Geraldine. This lady is clothed in white, traditionally the colour of chastity and purity appears gracious, stately, but there are also hints of a darker side to in this description; her dress is shadowy, her jewels shine wildly. Chritabel is completely duped by her and takes her home, only to fall under her wicked spell. A strange thing happened when both the ladies crossed the castle gate and passed by the old howl and Christabel was surprised because the bitch had never howled like this before. While they were crossing the hall, another strange thing happened. The fire which had burnt low suddenly leapt into a flame. Finally when both of them reached Christabel’s room, Geraldine faints and so she is given some wine by Christabel which was made by her mother. Geraldine got disturbed on the mention of the mother. Then in a strange voice, she challenged the spirit of Christabel’s dead mother and told the spirit to go away because this hour belonged to her. Christabel could not understand what was happening. She told Geraldine that she had lost her mother at the time of her birth. They undressed and Geraldine, revealing her magic and mystery showed signs of horror visible on her chest and side. Innocently Christabel slept with her. The wicked Geraldine put a magic spell on Christabel because of which Chritabel could not tell anyone what had happened that night. Christabel later on found about her dishonesty and false story but is forced into silence by black magic.

Thus Christabel is full of spooky stuff, from witches to ghosts to prophetic dreams. The intention of all the weirdness is to keep the reader feeling a bit of out of balance. These supernatural elements seek to infuse the poem with an atmosphere of mystery and the sense of a dream world.

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