

CC-4 English Honours

Study Materials on Christabel part 1

Salient Features of Romanticism

Romanticism is a movement in art and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in revolt against the neo-classicism of the previous centuries. It is the direct outcome of French Revolution. The French Revolution directly inspired by Rousseauism, had its influence on the Romantic Poets, both in its revolutionary ideals and in its excess of terror.

Romanticism is a contrary to the neo-classicism. Neo-classicism can be characterized by emotional resistant, order and logic while romanticism gives emphasis over imagination. The romantics write what they get from their imagination. The romantics tried to see life with new sensibilities and fresh visions.

Romanticism started its journey in English Literature with the publication of Lyrical Ballads, a joint work of Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798. Its communion with nature, interest in simple human life, profound impulsiveness, imaginative propensity and lyrical subjectivity etc. are its salient features.

Romantic age is essentially an age of verse. The spirit of romanticism is found primarily struck in poetry in the liberation of poetic inspiration and impulses. This dominant of poetry is found echoed in Wordsworth's famous saying, "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge."

Romantic poets had a strong power of imagination. All the poets of this period possess this imaginative power which made their works different from their predecessors. We see the use of this imagination in "Kubla Khan" and "The Ancient Mariner" of Coleridge.

The imaginative power of the romantic poets leads them to mysticism. The poets of romantic age found interested in the mysticism. The poets of romantic age found interested in the mysterious unknown world that lives on the other side of life.

Love for beauty and nature is another feature of romanticism. All the romantic poets had a deep interest in nature not as a center of beautiful science but as an informing and spiritual influence on life. The common elements of nature i.e. the rising sun, the blooming flower and deep blue sky are like living soul-mighty and gigantic to the romantic poets.

The romantic poets are found to deal with human life in its essential traits, in liberty, simplicity and purity, childhood and primitive simplicity are idealized by Wordsworth whereas Byron and Shelly remain the assertive poets of humanity. Other poets and prose writers also deal with humanity.

Hellenism is finely incorporated and echoed in the poetry of romantic age, mainly in the poems of Shelley and Keats. The romantic poets looked upon Greek Literature. They did not borrow the elements but the content of Greek Literature and shaped it with their own genius as like as Shelley did in “Prometheus Unbound”

The romantic poets gave emphasis upon content rather than form and structure. The content of a literary work is the measure by which the romantics measured a literary work. The romantic poets deny the notion that poetry has its own exceptional word stock. They used simple diction rather than elevated diction. They used the word of rustic and daily life in their poetry. Wordsworth, in the later editions of Lyrical Ballads said that the Language of poetry ought to be the same as the language of a simple farm-worker.

Every literary period is sharply inspired by the social and political condition of its own time. But romanticism is free from this kind of inspiration. It criticizes the growth of industry and town though it took birth in the golden period of industrious revolution. The romantic poets turning to nature for protection also criticize the traditional religious belief of the time.

The romantic literature was marked, and is always marked, by a strange reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom in science and theology, as well as literature, generally tent to fetter the free human spirit. Romantic poets are essentially subjective self-revelation a creed with them. In their poetry may be found much of their mind and spirit. They seem to take their readers into confidence and pour into their ears all their passions and pains, all their dreams and desires. It's a cardinal element in all romantic poets.

A Short note on Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets. He also shared volumes and collaborated with Charles Lamb, Robert Southey, and Charles Lloyd. He wrote the poems The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Kubla Khan, as well as the major prose work Biographia Literaria. His critical work, especially on William Shakespeare, was highly influential, and he helped introduce German idealist philosophy to English-speaking culture. Coleridge coined many familiar words and phrases, including suspension of disbelief. He had a major influence on Ralph Waldo Emerson and American transcendentalism.

Christabel (poem)

Christabel is a long narrative ballad by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in two parts. The first part was reputedly written in 1797, and the second in 1800. Coleridge planned three additional parts, but these were never completed. Coleridge prepared for the first two parts to be published in the

1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads, but on the advice of William Wordsworth it was left out; the exclusion of the poem, coupled with his inability to finish it, left Coleridge in doubt about his poetical power. It was published in a pamphlet in 1816, alongside Kubla Khan and The Pains of Sleep.

Characters from the poem Christabel part 1

Christabel:

Christabel, the main character in the poem "Christabel," is an innocent and devout young woman who rescues Geraldine. She represents purity at risk in the face of deceitful beauty and sinful lust.

Christabel is actually able to resist Geraldine briefly when she prays and momentarily breaks the spell of silence the evil woman has placed upon her.

Geraldine:

In "Christabel," Geraldine is the young woman who is rescued and cared for by Christabel. Geraldine is one of the earliest literary depictions of the female vampire, although she also follows in the tradition of the "white woman" ghost stories.

Geraldine represents carnal desire and the darker side of human nature. She portrays herself as a victim of male violence, but in fact performs her own acts of violence against the innocent soul of Christabel.

Sir Leoline:

In "Christabel," Sir Leoline is the ailing father of Christabel. His impotence is paralleled in the "toothless mastiff" which guards his home. He is depicted as the loving father who betrays his love and trust of his child in favor of a dangerous and beautiful woman.

Summary of Christabel *Part I*

The poem begins in the middle of the night in April. The female mastiff of the rich baron Sir Leoline howls at the sound of the clock striking twelve. The unnamed speaker of the poem predicts that the dog is howling because she somehow sees the shroud of Christabel, the baron's only daughter, in the woods. On the previous night, Christabel dreamed about the knight she is supposed to marry. She has gone to the woods on this night to pray for him. While she is praying at an oak tree, Christabel suddenly springs up because she hears a moaning noise, but she can't tell from where or from whom the noise comes. Christabel realizes that the noise comes from a

strange woman who is on the other side of the oak tree. The beautiful woman is a “damsel bright” and is dressed in a white robe. Christabel asks the woman who she is, and the woman asks Christabel to have pity on her because she is nearly too weary to speak. The woman extends her hand to Christabel and asks her to have no fear. The woman says that her name is Geraldine and that she is the daughter of a noble man. Geraldine says that on the previous morning, five warriors kidnapped her and tied her to a white palfrey. The five warriors, none of whom Geraldine recognized, rode behind the palfrey on white horses. After one night passed, one of the warriors untied Geraldine from the palfrey, muttered something to the other warriors, and then placed Geraldine underneath the oak by which Christabel was praying. Geraldine says that she has no idea how long she has been by the oak since she is extremely weary and scarcely alive. Geraldine says that the warrior who untied her said that he and the other warriors would soon return to the oak. The castle bell’s striking of the midnight hour led Geraldine to fear that the warriors would come soon to retrieve her. Geraldine asks Christabel to protect her from the warriors. Christabel takes Geraldine’s hand and comforts the weary woman by telling her that Sir Leoline will provide Geraldine with the necessary means to help her return safely to her father’s home.

When Christabel and Geraldine reach Christabel’s home, Christabel asks Geraldine to sleep in Christabel’s room for the night so as to not awaken the sleeping household. Christabel especially does not wish to disturb her father, since he is very ill. When the two women cross the castle’s moat and Christabel opens her home’s iron gate, Geraldine falls as if in great pain. Christabel picks Geraldine up and carries her over the gate’s threshold. Once they are over the threshold, Geraldine rises and moves as if she is no longer in pain.

When the two women cross the hall’s court, Christabel praises the Virgin Mary for rescuing Geraldine from danger. Geraldine says that she is too weary to speak and share Christabel’s praises. After the two women cross the court, they pass by Sir Leoline’s female mastiff. The sleeping dog does not wake up, but she does angrily moan in her sleep as Christabel and Geraldine pass by. The poem’s speaker notes that the mastiff has never previously made any angry noises while in the presence of Christabel.

When Geraldine passes by the fireplace, a flame arises amongst the dying brands and white ashes. Christabel once again asks Geraldine to walk as softly and quietly as possible, especially as they pass by the Baron’s room before getting to Christabel’s room.

The two women finally enter Christabel’s bedroom. The poem’s speaker describes Christabel’s room as furnished with “strange and sweet” carved figures, such as a lamp fastened to an angel’s feet. Although the room is dimly lit by the moon, the carved furniture can be clearly seen. When Christabel brightens the lamp, Geraldine sinks to the floor. Christabel tells Geraldine to drink a cordial wine that Christabel’s mother made from wild flowers and which contains “virtuous

powers.” Geraldine then asks if she would be pitied by Christabel’s mother. Christabel says that her mother died at Christabel’s birth. Christabel says that according to the friar, her mother said on her death bed that she would hear the castle bell strike twelve o’clock on Christabel’s wedding day. Christabel exclaims how she wishes that her mother were here now. Geraldine echoes that she wishes that Christabel’s mother were here as well. An unsettling look then appears in Geraldine’s eyes and Geraldine cries in a strange, hollow voice for Christabel’s mother to leave because this hour belongs to Geraldine. Christabel kneels by Geraldine’s side and looks up to heaven and claims that Geraldine’s kidnapping must be the cause of this strange behavior. Geraldine then wipes her brow and faintly states that the strange spell that came over her has now passed.

Geraldine drinks the wine, her eyes begin to brightly glitter, and she rises from the floor and stands upright. Geraldine says that the gods and angels love Christabel and for the sake of this love and because of the way that Christabel has taken care of her, Geraldine will try as best as she can to repay Christabel. Geraldine then says that she has to pray and that Christabel can go ahead and get undressed. Christabel undresses herself and lies down to sleep. Yet Christabel is so worried about Geraldine that she cannot sleep and instead sits up in bed and watches Geraldine praying. While praying, Geraldine suddenly shudders and undoes the belt around her waist, causing half of her body to be exposed. At first, Geraldine does not move or say anything when her dress falls. Then she opens her eyes and sees Christabel looking at her. Geraldine hurriedly and shamefully lies down in the bed next to Christabel and takes Christabel in her arms. Geraldine says that a spell is working in her and that this spell is in control of Christabel. Geraldine says that Christabel still has the power to fight against this spell because of her attempt to save Geraldine.

Conclusion to Part I*

This is an aside by the poem’s speaker on the beauty of Christabel in prayer. The speaker remarks on how beautiful Christabel looked when she was praying by the oak tree in the woods and how she looks just as beautiful as she prays in her sleep tonight. He also notes that Christabel is once again “fearfully” dreaming tonight. The speaker also observes how calmly Geraldine sleeps as she holds Christabel in her arms. Christabel eventually awakens from her dreaming “trance” and her body and face appear to relax and she begins to smile and cry at the same time. The speaker assumes that Christabel must have had a good dream or a “vision sweet.”

Gothic Elements In Coleridge's Christabel Part 1

During the era in which Romantic literature thrived, society was conflicted by the age of reason. England in particular was plagued with economical and societal collapse. As a result, many

writers attempted to escape their troubles by writing about fantastic, supernatural, and unexplainable tales. Though Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a Romantic writer, he participated in the gothic genre. His poem "Christabel" is a prime example of his supernatural work. It contains quintessential gothic characteristics, such as dark scenery, damsels in distress, and a hint of the supernatural. These Gothic elements make "Christabel" a Gothic poem hidden beneath a Romantic mask.

In order to pinpoint the Gothic characteristics of "Christabel," it is critical to understand what Gothic literature is. Gothic settings commonly include dark and desolate areas, such as haunted castles, unknown regions, and the recesses of the human mind. These settings are often accompanied by ominous sounds, such as screeching animals, ticking noises, and other specific sound effects. "Christabel" uses many of these tactics. Scenes take place in darkened areas, while readers imagine the sounds of screeching owls, howling dogs, and ticking clocks.

The Gothic nature of "Christabel" is evident throughout the poem. Gothic undertones are first noted as the poem begins with, "Tis the middle of night by the castle clock, / And the owls have awakened the crowing cock"(part 1, 1-2). These lines prepare the reader for the negative things that are to come. The ominous tone of the poem continues while Coleridge writes of dark clouds, a full moon, and chilly air. The negative connotation of these descriptions makes the reader feel uneasy. The feeling of dread increases while Coleridge describes Christabel's reaction to the noise she heard. He writes, "Hush, beating heart of Christabel! / Jesu, Maria, shield her well!"(54-53). At this point, the reader expects the worst. Thus it is surprising to see that the terror came from Geraldine, the "damsel bright" who was "dressed in a silken robe of white". The contrast of the darkness of the woods and the light innocence of Geraldine makes the reader think she must be pure.

The progression of the poem indicates that Geraldine is not what she first appeared to be. Though she gives off light, she is the dark element for whom the reader waited in the woods. Her words are contradictory, and she acts as a damsel in distress to mask who she really is. Geraldine is first introduced as a victim who was kidnapped by five men. Once Christabel offers her assistance, Geraldine acts strangely. When they get to the gate, Geraldine "sank, belike through pain". Christabel physically drags her over the threshold. Upon first reading the poem, Geraldine's inability to enter on her own may seem innocent. She has already informed the reader that she is tired, so it may not be noticeable that her fatigue only sets in at convenient moments. As the poem progresses, it becomes obvious that evil requires the assistance of innocence to gain entry into any area, including the human mind.

When the two ladies get to Christabel's room, Geraldine learns that Christabel's mother is dead. Geraldine first agrees that she wishes Christabel's mother was there. However, her opinion promptly changes. Geraldine says:

‘Off, wandering mother! Peak

and pine!

I have the power to bid thee flee.’

Once Geraldine rids the room of the mother’s spirit, she is free to take over Christabel; so long as Christabel allows it. Geraldine’s inability to initiate evil is apparent again when she warns Christabel of the consequences of her actions. Geraldine warns, “‘In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell, / Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!’”(267-268) .Unaware of the truth in Geraldine’s words, Christabel heeds her warning. As a result, she is unable to warn her father of Geraldine’s evil. Instead, she must sit by and watch the evil Geraldine win over her father. By the time Christabel breaks free of her trance, it is too late. Her father is already smitten by Geraldine, and he chooses her in favor of his only daughter.

The events of “Christabel” are tragic and scary, but they are even more horrifying because Coleridge does not explain them. There is no way to determine if Geraldine is an evil being, or if she is only influenced by an evil being. As Coleridge never finished his poem, there is no way to be certain. Supernatural powers are certainly involved, but there is no way to know their full extent. It is this element of the unknown that makes “Christabel,” and Gothic literature in general, so horrifying.

A Critical Note on Medievalism in Christabel by Coleridge

Christabel is one of the remarkable supernatural poems of Coleridge, revealing medievalism features. The poem is medieval as far as its setting, background, theme, and atmosphere are concerned.

The setting of the poem is essentially medieval in outlook. It deals with the story of a snake-like woman, an incarnation of evil, who casts an evil spell on Christabel on an embodiment of beauty, virtue, and innocence. In presenting this supernatural tale, Coleridge has successfully procured from his readers. “Willing suspension of disbelief” by giving it a medieval background. He has also made us believe in the authenticity of the narrative by this device. In the Middle Ages, people were suspicious and they believed in ghosts, magic, and witchcraft. Had the poet presented Christabel in the contemporary setting the readers would not have accepted the tale as true since they never believed in demons and its evil spell. Again, the atmosphere and characters also contributed to the medieval setting. Christabel lives in an old castle which is surrounded by forests on all sides. Her father Sir Leoline was a rich Baron and he had an old toothless mastiff that was in the habit of uttering short howls in answer to the castle clock. There is feudal accompaniment of heralds and pages. Sir Leoline has kept the bard Barag in his court to entertain him following the tradition of medieval courts. Christabel is engaged to a knight who is away

from her. She dreamt of him in the preceding night and like a true lover, she goes into the nearby forest at midnight to pray for the welfare of her betrothed knight. The poem has a lot of references to the medieval aristocracy. Even Geraldine claims that her father belongs to a noble life.

There are frequent references to the piety of the Middle Ages in the poem. There are references to Jesus and Virgin Mary: 'Jesu, Maria, should her well', 'Praise me the virgin all divine'; 'He sware by the wound in Jesu's side' etc. Christabel is a pious woman (maiden); her dead mother's spirit acts as her guardian angel to lead her to the path of virtue. The reference to the friar, Bracy's desire to expel the evil spirit from the forest with music and 'saintly' song- all these suggest medieval piety. Another striking feature of the Middle Ages is chivalry. Chivalry refers to the spirit of adventure and the spirit of service to women. In response to Geraldine appeal for help in her misfortune, Christabel offers all the chivalry of her father's horse. When the Baron hears of the wrong done of Geraldine, he ignores his old age and declares that he will punish the offenders:

"O then the Baron forgot his age,
His noble heart swelled with rage."

The occasional reference to medieval art and architecture also contribute to the medieval atmosphere. Sir Leoline's castle with its massive gates has courts, halls and chambers Shields and weapons are also preserved in the castle. The walls of Christabel's chamber are decorated with carved figures of angels. A silver lamp hangs from the feet of an angel with a double silver chain, while the floor is decorated with carpets.

A further medieval note is added to the poem by the use of archaic words and phrases in the tradition of chances like Sire, naught, belike, yestermorn, yesternight, wildered drest, quoth etc. Old spellings commonly found in medieval poetry are also used in Christabel like 'countree' for country.

Thus an analysis of Christabel reveals its medieval qualities.