

“CHRISTABEL” AND THE POLITICS OF FRAGMENTATION

by

CALIN THOMAS GRAJKO

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Dr. Shanyyn Fiske

and approved by

Dr. Ellen Ledoux

Calin T. Grajko

Dr. Shanyyn Fiske

Dr. Ellen Ledoux

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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By Calin Thomas Grajko

Thesis Director
Dr. Shanyn Fiske

This thesis attempts to situate Coleridge's “Christabel” as a text that exists at the intersection of 19th century Queer discourse and post-structural theory. By looking at “Christabel” as both a queer text and a fragment poem, this thesis makes the case that one type of discourse informs the other and the fragmentary nature of the poem echoes and supports analysis of “Christabel” as a queer text. It relies on the work of prominent writers on Romantic Fragment Poems as well as Derridean post-structural discourse as a theoretical model to understand Christabel's relationship with Geraldine and the fragmentary nature of the poem that obfuscates their relationship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Fragmentation and Desire.....	1
II. The Text as Fragment.....	4
III. Absence as Presence.....	14
IV. Conclusion.....	20

I. Fragmentation and Desire

The relationship between Christabel and Geraldine is at the forefront of discussions about “Christabel” as a queer poem and merits further discussion not only because of its position as a text rich with queer implications in the early nineteenth century but also as an unfinished fragment poem that offers no answers as to the resolution of its plot or the nature of the relationship between Christabel and Geraldine.

The sexual attitudes in early 19th century England towards homosexuality are at times difficult to pin down, given that the language used to discuss homosexuality is cloaked in euphemism and, as Foucault famously notes, the term “homosexual” itself was not used until the latter half of the 19th century (43). The best barometer of attitudes towards the poem and the sexual content of the poem comes from critical reviews, which were largely negative and many critics, including Moore and Hazlitt, took offense to the insinuation of a relationship between Christabel and Geraldine (Holmes 438-39). Despite the protests of a few critics, the relationship between Christabel and Geraldine has been largely overlooked by critics historically, and the first major piece of scholarship on this aspect of the poem is not published until 1948 and, even then, this line of discussion is not continued until 1986 (Grossberg 146-47). The relationship between Geraldine and Christabel seems to be something that is often noticed but rarely discussed unless it is discussed as a sign of the immorality of “Christabel.” This phenomenon is not unlike Foucault's assertion that prior to 1870, homosexuality was viewed as an aberration, but once the term itself gained status so too did negative attitudes increase and solidify towards the people who were defined by these new linguistic terms and concepts (42-44).

A further complexity inherent to the poem is its structure. Much like “Kubla

Kahn,” a poem to which “Christabel” is frequently compared given that both are fragments and were written around the same time, “Christabel” is both formed by an ambiguous fragmentary structure and, in turn, readers are informed by the structure. The poem does not have any thematic or narrative closure, as the final two cantos were never written, and the two existing cantos have several moments at which it seems content is missing or phrased as to be ambiguous. “Christabel” reads as an almost dreamlike experience, cutting from one scene to the next and changing location and theme throughout the course of its two cantos. The relationship between Christabel and Geraldine is framed ambiguously throughout these two cantos as a result of the structure of the poem, and the ambiguity of their relationship is in large part defined by the fragmented structure.

The structural complexities inherent in a fragment poem and the cultural complexities inherent in discussing the sexual implications (and the implication of desire) in an early nineteenth century poem coalesce in such a manner that one informs the other. In a culture in which homosexual desire is conceived of and portrayed as simultaneously an aberration and an unspoken facet of culture, there necessarily exists a schism in the language used to discuss this desire. The relationship between Christabel and Geraldine is only possible as a homosexual relationship in a culture without the word to regard it as such as a series of moments that obliquely alludes to such a relationship. “Christabel” is not a straightforward celebration of Christabel's desire for Geraldine, because such a perspective would be anachronistic. As a result, it is necessary to look at the poem both outside of the scope of intentionality and subjectivity (Derrida 278-80) as well as as a cultural product in which desire can be politicized and tied to notions of power (Foucault

81). In the case of “Christabel,” a post-structural approach to the text acts as a nexus between the previously disparate ideas of “Christabel” as a fragment poem and “Christabel” as a queer poem. By viewing “Christabel” as a fragment poem, that is, one in which the reader must “first ascertain the spatial logic or generative principle that organizes the fragment's discourse” in the absence a completed structure, it allows a reading of the poem that suggests the disruption of the sexual mores of nineteenth century England (Levinson 25-6). In essence, the silences, the moments of absence within the text as a part of its fragmentary nature, serve to echo the unspeakable nature of homosexuality in early 19th century Britain.

Furthermore, the fragmented structure of the poem can also lead to a reading of the sexual content of the poem that cuts the other way as well. The absence of a structure allows more “play” within the existing structure while a lack of fragmentation and thus the presence of a more definitive structure serves only to limit and contain queer readings of the poem both by imposing a new narrative and by culturally constraining the existing narrative to relate in a more heteronormative fashion. Readings of “Christabel” that focus on the homoerotic suggestions in the relationship between Christabel and Geraldine can only be accepted without the imposition of a broader biographical narrative provided in James Gillman's 1838 biography of Coleridge, which reveals a heteronormative and patriarchal structure that would be imposed in the final two cantos of the poem. While it is useless to speculate on authorial intent and hypotheticals, the proposed ending is important to note as it displays how thoroughly any implication of queer desire could be negated with additional structural components that would serve to limit meaning that is fostered as a fragment.

Given both a post-structural approach that holds together the fragmented poem and its queer implications as well as Coleridge's proposed ending, I intend to explore "Christabel" via a discussion of fragmentation as generator of queer meaning, and I will focus my discussion on its place as a queer text in light of Coleridge's proposed ending. The proposed ending makes one thing clear: "Christabel" is only possible as a blatantly queer and transgressive text inasmuch as it is a fragment. The proposed ending asserts and demands heteronormativity of Christabel, which the original two cantos do not.

II. The Text as Fragment

The relationship between Christabel and Geraldine that dominates the bulk of the poem is one that exists largely within the framework of a sexual relationship. The initial meeting between Christabel and Geraldine has Christabel already pondering her world in an erotic context. Christabel first encounters Geraldine while walking at night, and she is drawn to the sound of moaning. The environment in this passage is subject to erotic description in which Coleridge describes an oak tree as "broad-breasted" (42) and the wind as inadequate to "move away the ringlet curl/ From the lovely lady's cheek" (46-7). Finally, Geraldine, the source of the moaning, is described as "a damsel bright [...] beautiful exceedingly" (58-68). Once Christabel speaks with Geraldine, the poem sets up a dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual interactions. Geraldine recounts a story in which she describes being forcefully abducted and taken prisoner by five men who leave her under the aforementioned oak tree (79-103). As Benjamin Scott Grossberg notes in "Making Christabel," there is a strong implication that Geraldine is sexually assaulted, something that serves to further widen the gap between homosexual and heterosexual interactions in the poem, as Geraldine is made to suffer at the hands of men

but is given compassion by Christabel (Grossberg 150-51).

Christabel is also at odds with the men in her life, and the patriarchy working to control and manipulate Christabel's actions are on display early in the poem. Christabel's presence outside the walls of her father's castle at night is described as transgressive and troubling (23-26). Furthermore, at all points in the beginning of the poem, she is described as being under the control of the men in her life, both her father and the knight to whom she is betrothed (24,28). She is out at night intending to pray for the knight to whom she is betrothed, Sir Leoline, when she is interrupted by Geraldine. Just as Christabel provides a safe, comforting space for Geraldine, so too does Geraldine provide a space for Christabel to escape her father, Sir Leoline, because it is at this point in the text when she is distracted from her concerns by Geraldine. Immediately following Christabel giving her hand to Geraldine, Christabel mentions that Sir Leoline will keep Geraldine safe until she can be returned to her home, but this thought is immediately undercut by the following stanza wherein Christabel takes an active role in comforting Geraldine rather than relying on the men in her life to do so (104-22). In fact, this is the last mention of Sir Leoline by Christabel, as Christabel's interactions with him in the second part of the poem all occur within the framework of a third person narrator. At this point in the poem, the sense of control and patriarchy seems greatly diminished. Shortly after, the poem escapes to a domestic sphere in which Christabel seems to be in charge of the interactions between herself and Geraldine, and while the threat of patriarchal order is subverted by their location, so too are the demands of heterosexuality created and enforced by that patriarchy. .

The two women are careful not to disturb Sir Leoline on their way to Christabel's

room, and the threatening external factors such as the dog mentioned in the first lines of the poem are all pacified and quiet (135-53). There is still a reference to Sir Leoline in the form of his shield hanging on the wall, but Christabel notes they should tread carefully to avoid disturbing him, and the threat of waking him from his sleep quickly passes once they are together in Christabel's room (162-81). The threat of control and being forced to explain themselves diminishes the closer they get to reaching Christabel's room. The two women appear to have journeyed not just from the forest to Christabel's room but from a place of fear to a place of security, completing a metaphorical movement from the heterosexual sphere to the homosexual. "Christabel" in many ways functions as a reversal of expectations, largely as a result of the fragmentary form of the poem. Geraldine and Christabel appear happier and safer when intimately connected in the safety of Christabel's chamber, a notion that was transgressive at the time and likely accounts for negative critical reviews following its publication. In "Christabel" the traditional Romantic paradigm of finding safety and beauty in the rural has been inverted, and it is Christabel's personal domestic sphere that offers the warmth and security they desire.

It is at this point the poem gestures towards a more straightforward seduction, but, despite what critics have made of characterizing Geraldine as a temptress and a demonic force, it is not clear who is the seductress. After all, upon entering her room, Christabel immediately tends to the lighting and offers Geraldine a drink of wine, which is described as possessing "virtuous powers" (192).

As Elfenbein notes in *Romantic Genius*, "Christabel" subverts historical understandings of homosexual relationships between women by removing the male gaze

and male figures within the poem who would desire erotic pleasure from Christabel and Geraldine (189-90). In fact, the poem turns the representation of lesbian sex as an object of male desire on its head by focusing on Christabel's gaze. Coleridge writes

But through her brain of weal and woe
 So many thoughts move to and fro,
 That vain it were her lids to close;
 So halfway from the bed she rose,
 And on her elbow did recline
 To look at the lady Geraldine.
 Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,
 And slowly rolled her eyes around;
 Then drawing in her breath aloud,
 Like one that shuddered, she unbound
 The cincture from beneath her breast:
 Her silken robe, and inner vest,
 Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
 Behold! Her bosom and half her side –
 A sight to dream of, not to tell!
 O shield her! Shield her sweet Christabel! (239-53)

Instead of a male interloper the poem focuses on Geraldine as the subject of Christabel's gaze and desire. The notion of “shield[ing]” Christabel is repeated throughout the poem and has a notable continuation two stanzas later:

'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,

Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
 Thou knowest tonight, and wilt know tomorrow,
 This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;
 But vainly thou warrest,
 For this is alone in
 Thy power to declare,
 That in the dim forest
 Thou heard'st a low moaning,
 And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;
 And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
 To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.' (267-78)

These two passages taken together describe Christabel and Geraldine's romantic encounter as described by the majority of critics looking at homosexuality in the poem, and the reasons for this are multiple. The language that is used is erotically charged in both passages and functions as a buildup and a climax to the encounter. In the first quoted passage, Christabel admires Geraldine's body and focuses on the sensory aspect of both Geraldine's appearance and mannerisms. Geraldine "draw[s] her breath aloud/like one that shuddered" as she undoes her dress (247-48). Christabel is also described as admiring Geraldine's breast and side as "a sight to dream of" (252). At this point in the text, Christabel appears to be thoroughly enamored of Geraldine and shares her bed with Geraldine. The insinuation of sex is clear even if it is not explicitly stated, and these passages taken in aggregate strongly suggest that by the next morning Christabel and Geraldine are lovers.

There is an interesting formal element at work at the beginning of Part II that serves to complicate this reading of “Christabel.” As Christabel recounts the previous evening in the passage quoted above, she does so wedged between two male narratives. Part II opens not only with the voice of a patriarchy, but also with reference to the actual laws and customs of patriarchy. The baron, who makes reference to Sir Leoline, ushers in the morning with a reference to the matin bell, which “Between each stroke – a warning knell,/ Which not a soul can choose but hear” (342-43). This reference presupposes and invalidates Christabel's exclamation three stanzas later in which she admits to having sinned the night before. Once again, the transition from the safe space of Christabel's chamber to the outside world (and vice versa) serves to underscore the male characters in the poem attempting to control and manipulate Christabel's sexuality.

Many critics (Elfenbein, Brinks, et al.) have noted the shift in the tone between the first part and the second as a shift from a feminine space to a more masculine one. They have read this as a way to ground the ephemeral darkness that occupies the first part, and it seems that way in the argument as it is presented. The end of the first part, as mentioned previously, strongly suggests a romantic relationship between Geraldine and Christabel, further evidenced by this passage

And Christabel awoke and spied
 The same who lay down by her side
 O rather say, the same whom she
 Raised up benath the old oak tree!
 Nay, fairer yet! And yet more fair!
 For she blike hath drunken deep

Of all the blessedness of sleep!
 And while she spake, her looks, her air
 Such gentle thankfulness declare,
 That (so it seemed) her girded vests
 Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts,
 'Sure I have sinn'd!' said Christabel,
 'Now heaven be praised if all be well!'

And in low faltering tones, yet sweet,
 Did she the lofty lady greet
 With such perplexity of mind
 As dreams too lively leave behind. (370-86)

Following Christabel's exclamation is a similarly telling passage in which she notes a desire to wash her sins away (389-90). The previously celebratory tone which permeates the first part of the poem is notably turned on its head as Christabel must navigate her relationship with Sir Leoline and the mores of her society. The second half of this unfinished poem illustrates and begins what would have been the major thematic point of interest if Coleridge had finished the poem.

As James Gillman's 1838 biography of Coleridge, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, illustrates, the final two cantos of the poem would result in a reconciliation between Christabel, Sir Leoline, and the knight to whom Christabel is betrothed. Gillman's account of Coleridge's proposed ending revolves around the nature of Geraldine and the actions she takes that lead to her departure from Christabel's life. Gillman reports that Coleridge intended, in the third and fourth Canto of the poem, to

have Geraldine vanish and reappear as Christabel's knight. All the while, Geraldine is attempting to manipulate Christabel's father with some type of "wily arts" that will encourage his jealousy, a vice to which he is particularly susceptible. Christabel begins to court Geraldine who is disguised as the knight that she loves, but Christabel begins to feel disgust towards him for reasons she does not realize. Christabel's father does not realize Geraldine has transformed herself to appear as Christabel's knight and is distressed by the Christabel's unhappiness during their courtship. As the two are to be married, the actual knight to whom Christabel is engaged appears with a ring Christabel gave him, thus vanquishing Geraldine. Following this, Christabel and her knight are married, and Christabel and her father reconcile (Gillman 301-02).

Gillman's account notably removes and obviates many of the complications that modern critics struggle with. The poem has been transformed from a text full of sexual possibilities to a text in which heterosexuality is thrust upon Christabel and the readers. Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, Geraldine's intentions are fully exposed and exploded. Coleridge's proposed ending also precludes and eliminates the madness that Swann notes functions in a transgressive capacity. With Geraldine out of the picture, Christabel can return to the comfort prescribed by a "rightful marriage" (Gillman 302). Taylor notes in *Erotic Coleridge* that Geraldine makes Christabel "anxious and ungrounded" (60). Concluding the poem with Christabel's marriage to her "real lover" grounds the poem and makes it clear that there was nothing to be anxious about: the problem of the poem is effectively "straightened out." This ending to the poem removes most of the ambiguity in the poem not only by adding additional material but also by altering the structure that fosters a queer reading of the poem. As Taylor

notes, “‘Christabel’ is a germ of future thought; it initiates Coleridge’s continuing work on the development of the human person, on how selves are made and lost [...] its segments – written at different times – circle backwards to address questions that have been left unanswered” (60). Thus, the charm and success of “Christabel” is dependent on having unanswered questions. As a fragment, the poem succeeds admirably in nurturing the type of discourse that I outlined earlier, but it fails to do so as a completed poem. Christine Coffman offers an interpretation of “Christabel” that is along these lines. She writes, “rather than heralding the collapse of the paternal domain or promising an alternate world, the lesbian seduction chronicled in ‘Christabel’ ultimately is a wrong that does no harm to the regime of the father” (169). By providing the ending that Coleridge intended, the poem loses the ambiguity and the fragmentation that allows it to function as a queer text.

An interesting aspect of Coleridge's proposed ending, however, is that Christabel feels uneasy around Geraldine when she presents herself as Christabel's knight. In the framework of the proposed ending, this detail seems to foreshadow Christabel's reconciliation with her true knight and provide her with the “proper” marriage the narrative demands at her, but I would like to look a little closer at this detail. Gillman's account of this passage is as follows: “next ensues a courtship most distressing to Christabel, who feels--she knows not why--great disgust for her once favoured knight. This coldness is very painful to the Baron, who has no more conception than herself of the supernatural transformation. She at last yields to her father's entreaties, and consents to approach the altar with this hated suitor” (301). The account of the proposed ending notes that a reconciliation between Christabel and her father is, in fact, the final part of

the ending to the poem, and Christabel's love life seems to be a footnote in the quest to fulfill her father's desires.

Thus, the possibility exists that “Christabel” contains elements, a “rupture” to return to the post-structuralist theory noted in the introduction, that provides textual support for the poem to be read as a queer text. While the proposed ending does result in Christabel's marriage to a man (and with her father's approval), it is difficult to say that the new ending completely invalidates all of the feelings that Christabel has in the first two cantos. In fact, in Coleridge's proposed ending, just as it is in the bulk of Part II, Christabel is not given a voice with which to voice her own desires and thoughts at all. The only concrete detail about Christabel's thought process during the proposed ending is that she feels coldly towards Geraldine when she appears as her knight. The vast majority of the proposed ending revolves more around events happening to Christabel rather than Christabel being given any agency with which to make her own decisions and choices.

The lack of agency given to Christabel also makes Part II problematic to analyze without the lens of fragmentation. There is a separation of metaphoric spaces, and the poem does not provide a second glimpse into a world in which Christabel is capable of being assertive and making her own choices. Part II of the poem sees Christabel overcome by the wishes of her father, who takes Geraldine's narrative of kidnapping and attempts to manipulate it for his own purpose of rekindling a friendship with Lord Roland, a friend from his past (403-44). Christabel seems to figure into the text in Part II as an object upon which the text revolves rather than a subject through which the narrative is explored. The question at heart is one of agency, one which is complicated

given the structure of the poem. But, the fragmentary nature cements the queer reading of the poem inasmuch as moments of absence, gaps within the narrative, function as queer signifiers.

III. Absence as Presence

In a discussion of Schlegel, Christopher Stratham notes a dichotomous presentation of theme and subjectivity and writes “to the extent that current thinkers remain committed to reconstituting or reconceptualizing the subject in one form or another, in rethinking the subject in terms of gender, class, material construction or continental ethics, they remain within the shadow of romanticism” (30-31). He furthers this point by noting that the fragmentary imperative is such that “the fragmentary work indicates a persistent unsettling of intellectual and artistic territories and ideological position – even of freedom itself – and constantly holds open the threat of reversal” (31).

To apply these ideas to “Christabel” is to look at the lack of a containing structure in the poem and conceptualize the moments in the poem at which she is devocalized as indicators of transgression rather than repression. Despite the presence of patriarchy and control in the narrative in Part II, viewing “Christabel” as a fragment promotes analysis as a redoubling of the primary themes of Part I in which Christabel struggles with societal expectations.

Part II of “Christabel” begins with a tonal shift in which a series of bells “knells us back to a world of death” (332-33). Part I, which closed with an interior scene of Christabel and Geraldine, has been expanded and brought back to the kingdom at large, a realm that Christabel does not rule, which is made obvious with Christabel's relative absence. Characters who are little more than referenced in Part I, the Baron, Sir Leoline,

and Bracy the Bard, dominate Part II of “Chirstabel.” In fact, once Christabel and Geraldine awake and leave Christabel's chamber, she does not have a single line of dialogue and her thoughts and feelings are only described in a single stanza. The journey from the exterior to the interior of the castle that is referenced earlier has come full circle and so too has the discourse that takes place in Part II of the poem.

In addition to the physical location of the poem changing from the interior, so too has the framing of Part II. While Part I began with the slumber of the male characters in the poem and the emergence of Christabel, Part II inverts this with their awakening and as they rise so too does the sense that they are in control of the narrative. Christabel is given one last moment to appreciate Geraldine, but once they depart her room, the structure of the poem has officially shifted from an interior view from Christabel's perspective to a broader view of the Baron's land (370-90). This shift from the interior to the exterior also changes the manner in which the poem must be discussed in order to keep Christabel as a central figure and relies heavily on the deconstructionist notion of absence as presence. As Christabel is devocalized throughout Part II, the gaps in her personal narrative trajectory must be analyzed, and it seems only fitting to have a fragmentary perspective within a fragment poem.

Though Christabel is given an opportunity to reflect on the previous night, she is quick to rise and prepare herself for the day, which will start with a visit to Sir Leoline (370-92). Sir Leoline and the Baron quickly take control of the narrative however, and the concerns of Christabel and her perspective are quickly dismissed in favor of discussing Geraldine's heritage. Once Sir Leoline discovers that Geraldine's father is Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine he begins to recount his boyhood friendship with the

man and laments that “Each spake words of high disdain/And insult to his heart's best brother:/ They parted – ne'er to meet again!” (416-18). The narrative thread of Geraldine and Christabel's relationship and Geraldine's attack the night before has been displaced and repurposed by Sir Leoline as an opportunity for reconciliation with a childhood friend. The Baron is only truly moved to action under the consideration that it would promote rekindling his friendship: “His noble heart swelled high with rage;/ He swore by the wounds in Jesu's side/ He would proclaim it far and wide,/ With trump and solemn heraldry,/ That they, who thus had wronged the dame,/ Were base as spotted infamy!” (432-7). He goes on to say that “I may dislodge their reptile souls/ From the bodies and forms of Men!” (442-3). Christabel is given one last opportunity in the poem to have a voice here when the Baron asks “What ails then my beloved child?” to which Christabel responds “mildly” that “All will yet be well!” (470, 472). This moment in the poem is notable as it is the last moment at which Christabel has any agency or control within the text. Any interpretation of the poem from Christabel's perspective from this point must deal with the absence of Christabel's voice and the context in which that absence is situated.

There is, however, an interstitial moment where Christabel is given a voice, which will provide the grounding necessary to discuss Part II on Christabel's terms. Christabel views Geraldine as Geraldine hugs Christabel's father

Again she saw that bosom old,
 Again she felt that bosom cold,
 And drew in her breath with a hissing sound:
 Whereat the Knight turned wildly round,

And nothing saw, but his own sweet maid
 With eyes upraised, as one that prayed.
 The touch, the sight, had passed away,
 And in its stead that vision blest,
 Which comforted her after-rest
 While in the lady's arms she lay,
 Had put a rapture in her breast,
 And on her lip and o'er her eyes
 Spread smiles like light! (457-68)

This moment in the poem is notable not only because it is the best view of Christabel's thoughts and feelings in Part II but also because it shows Christabel attempting to determine her feelings in a manner that gestures towards some type of resolution. Christabel acknowledges her conflicted emotions here by contrasting the swelling of emotions following the night she spent with Geraldine and the harsh, monstrous language she uses to describe her feelings about Geraldine. Christabel notes that Geraldine breathes with a "hissing sound" and is possessed of a cold demeanor that only she notices. In fact, the Knight notices something may be awry based on the way Christabel is acting, but he is incapable of seeing and interpreting Geraldine as Christabel does. Christabel is the outsider both in terms of her actions in Part I of the poem as well as in her interpretation of events in Part II of the poem. While the tangible action of Part II is dominated and guided by the male figures in the poem, Christabel's narrative arc hangs in the balance of these character's actions. Since she is sufficiently devocalized as to be unable to pursue resolution to her inner conflict, her ability to interpret Geraldine

becomes a reflexive process in which Christabel must look to the other characters in the poem for validation of her emotions. This resolution, however, is never provided and Christabel's part in the narrative trajectory of Part II is usurped by other characters.

While the structure of Part II obfuscates Christabel's role in the narrative as she deals with the feelings noted here, she is present on the fringes of the narrative. The suggestion that Geraldine is otherworldly comes into play in Part II largely as male characters in the poem attempt to interpret and proscribe behavior for Christabel. Christabel is not given a voice to make decisions and speak for herself, but Bracy the Bard views a moment of unspoken questioning by Christabel. Geraldine “look[s] askance at Christabel” and Bracy believes Christabel needs to be “shield[ed] well” (581-2). The implication in Bracy's glance is the same that Christabel struggles with earlier in Part II, namely the newly discovered otherworldly features of Geraldine. In a sense, many of the characters' interpretations of Christabel's demeanor throughout Part II spiral out of Christabel's interior monologue regarding Geraldine in lines 457-68. While Bracy gestures in this direction here, Christabel's father also acknowledges her behavior several stanzas later. Christabel's father notes

And thus she stood, in dizzy trance,
Still picturing that look askance
With forced unconscious sympathy
Full before her father's view –
As far as such a look could be
In eyes so innocent and blue! (607-12)

There is a process at work here by which readers are interpreting Christabel's actions and

thoughts through the lens of her father. Since Christabel does not vocalize her thoughts, there is a disjuncture between one's interpretation of her actions and the interpretation of her actions as mediated through other characters in the narrative. This process, however, functions as a subtle metaphor for the social control that is exerted over Christabel and is noted earlier in Part I. Christabel's father interprets Christabel's actions as being simultaneously disarming ("she stood in dizzy trance") as well as sympathetic ("eyes so innocent and blue"). To read her father's interpretation of her body language, he seems to be saying everything and nothing, both that she is troubled and that she is possessed of qualities that make her impossible to be troubled. Christabel's father's interpretation here acts as a microcosm of the double bind that Christabel is placed in. The men in her life are constantly assessing her emotions while exerting social pressure to conform. At no point are Christabel's concerns or desires described by the men in her life, and the lack of Christabel's voice is the lack of a containing structure for her narrative thread.

Christabel does, in fact, get one final statement as referenced earlier: "By my mother's soul do I entreat/ That thou this woman send away!'/ She said: and more she could not say:/ For what she knew she could not tell" (616-19). These lines are the clearest statement of Christabel's lack of voice, particularly when taken into consideration in the moment at which this excerpt is situated, between the male figures in Christabel's society assessing and acting as arbiters of her feelings. Christabel's inability to speak is even referenced here as a literal facet of the poem.

Christabel's last utterance is cut short, however, as the narrative is taken from her by Bracy and the Baron. The Baron, in particular, co-opts the mental and emotional frustration Christabel is experiencing by making it about Christabel's surviving her dead

mother. The Baron configures Christabel's emotional state in terms of the loss of Christabel's mother who "prayed the moment ere she died:/ Prayed that the babe for whom she died,/ Might prove her dear lord's joy and pride!" (629-31). The Baron appears to be talking past his daughter at this point in the narrative and has reconfigured Christabel's unease at Geraldine into a statement about himself and his family. This sentiment is only furthered in the final stanza of Part II in which The Baron laments being "Dishonoured thus in his old age;/ Dishonoured by his only child/ And all his hospitality/ To the wronged daughter of his friend/ By more than woman's jealousy/ Brought thus to a disgraceful end" (642-47). These two passages which indicate the closing of Part II are thematically connected to the type of control and patriarchy running through Part I, though the roles in which power and control are enacted is flipped. In Part I, Christabel acts opposite a sense of dread and finds solace in Geraldine. Here, the same sense of control is exerted over Christabel by mediating her emotional state. Christabel is unable to speak both metaphorically and textually throughout large portions of Part II, and The Baron is perennially incapable of engaging her emotional state in a satisfying manner. Frustrating though it is to read, the absence of Christabel's strong, personal narrative like in Part I elucidates the type of patriarchy and control that is alluded to in Part I.

IV. Conclusion

A particularly scathing review of "Christabel" appeared in *The Examiner* in 1816 courtesy of William Hazlitt. In his review, Hazlitt misremembers (or misquotes) portions of Christabel, adding text that was not present in any of the published versions of "Christabel" (Swann 210). He does so during the scene in which Geraldine undresses in front of Christabel and misquotes it as reading "Behold her bosom and half her side –/

Hideous, deformed, and pale of hue” (210). The second line is nowhere to be found in any published version of the poem. While many scholars have read this as being indicative of Hazlitt's distaste for the subject matter of the poem, which is indeed a compelling analysis, Hazlitt's misquotation of “Christabel” underscores the ephemeral and fragmentary nature of the poem. Hazlitt has (perhaps) unwittingly made a cogent argument about the relationship between sexuality and fragmentation, which is the necessary lynchpin for either aspect of the poem to function. A queer reading of “Christabel” demands the fragmentary structure of the poem, both in terms of missing content and the discourse that necessarily surrounds those absences within the poem.

“Christabel” contains within itself a fragmentary structure and a fragmentary voice within that structure that is constantly evolving and being reinterpreted and reimagined by other characters. Christabel herself functions as a symbol of fragmentation and queer desire, not only as a result of her actions in Part I of the poem, but also as a result of being a character upon which other characters act and react.

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