

Coleridge's "Ballad of the Dark Ladie": The Story between the Lines

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Abstract:

The focus of this article is "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie," a short fragment by the English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Critics often overlook the piece in their reading of Coleridge although it has an interesting story between the lines. Besides enriching the unfinished surface one, the submerged tale carries significant revelations about Coleridge's literary relationship with foreign cultures and elements, the Dark Lady in this particular case. The present study intends to divulge the hidden tale in the text and to use its revealed construct to throw light on Coleridge's engagement with the Other in his literary experience. It employs a formalist reading of the text and pays attention to point of view. It also invokes culture and allegory in the process of eliciting the significance of the embedded tale. My reading intimates that Coleridge's imaginative aspiration towards the exotic Other is more congenial to his poetic creativity than other modes of the imagination. It also suggests that this Other might as well be the Orient. However, despite such harmony, Coleridge has his own personal concerns about his romantic quest of the Orient.

Keywords: Coleridge, Dark Lady, Orient, Romantic

Introduction:

Coleridge's poem "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" (1798) is a fragment of sixty lines that was intended to be a full-fledged poem of one hundred and ninety (Perkins, 1967, p. 429). It presents a recurrent case in Coleridge: an ambitious poetic conception aborted before coming to full realization. "Kubla Khan" testifies to a similar process and "Christabel" is never satisfactorily concluded. However, unlike these two fragments, "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" has not received critical attention. The poem claims a story between the lines which is worthy of investigation particularly because it throws light on Coleridge's imagination and romantic aspiration towards other realms of being. This paper intends to unravel the story embedded in the text and to employ its revelations to comprehend Coleridge's literary relationship with the Other.

Title and Form:

The title informs of both the poem's form, a ballad, and its potential protagonist, a dark lady. J. T. Barbarese (1997) suggests that Coleridge's use of this poetic form in some poems, namely "The Nightingale" and "Alice Du Clos," indicates a kind of desire to escape introspection. The ballad form, Barbarese argues: "may have impressed Coleridge as a way out of the ethically confining habit of internalizing experience that dominates the conversation poems" (1997, p.673). It must have enabled the poet to produce a kind of "poetry formally rooted in public rather than private discourse" (Barbarese, 1997, p.673). This principle, I would suggest, might also be true of "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie." However, the question to ask in regard to this particular poem is what kind of personal experience does the poem embrace and why would Coleridge wish to objectify it? And how far does he manage to curtail the subjective and self-revelatory part of such experience in the poem? The second element of the title, the dark lady, is the poem's pronounced subject matter and ought to be of relevance to the experience that the ballad form is employed to simultaneously depict and objectify.

Who is the Dark Lady?

Rather than referencing a possible Coleridgean invocation of Shakespeare's Dark Lady of the Sonnets that has endlessly mystified critics,ⁱ this study takes another direction of suggesting the possibility of an Oriental interest on the poet's part. In the absence of direct critical references to the poem, the study invokes pieces of literary criticism on Coleridge and his poetry to read the poem in hand. Michelle Levy (2004), for example, points out among other critics a well-known fact in Coleridge's biography, his interest in Oriental tales. Levy attests to the commonplace that "by the age of six" Coleridge "has become obsessed with stories of the unknown, from *Robinson Crusoe* to the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*" (2004, p.693). Such "fascination . . . reflects a larger cultural obsession of the Romantic period" that "produced unprecedented quantities of gothic fiction and exotic tales with stories set in the Middle Ages, the Orient, or, . . . both" (Levy, 2004, p.649).

Is She the Orient?

To this early interest in the Orient, the presence of the dark lady in "The Ballad"ⁱⁱ can be attributed. She comes in as a result of an orientalized, exotic act of Coleridge's imagination much in common with his surrounding culture. Critics have pointed out other types of the imagination in Coleridge. Jennifer Ford, for instance, claims that the imagination in Coleridge is one "of medicine and disease" (1998, p.33). Ford also finds the type to be culturally inspired and

"firmly grounded in the psychology and medical science of the late eighteenth century" (1998, p.183). Harry White, for another instance, defines Coleridge's poetic mode as a "distempered or diseased imagination" (2009, p.811). The mode results in creations like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" that "reveal the relationship between madness and guilt" and embody "religious melancholy" (White,2009, pp.818,816). Coleridge's imagination in "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie," I would suggest, is Oriental, for upon creating a narrative poem, he opted for a dark woman to be the focus of his tale. Much in league with his culture in entertaining interest in the Orient, Coleridge, however, has his own individualized response to it in his poetry that he probably wishes to conceal by using the ballad form. His personal attitude towards what seems more like a common subject of literary interest in the nineteenth century is worth investigating. It has been repeatedly performed in relationship to his other poems, particularly "Kubla Khan," but will be conducted in relationship to "The Ballad of the Dark Lady" in this study. Coleridge's story with the dark lady as objectified in a medieval ballad poem will be unraveled in this paper.

Reading between the Lines

Taken metaphorically or literally, the dark lady is obviously the protagonist of the poem whose story the ballad form is employed to narrate. The poet calls her the "Dark Ladie" once at the start and then shifts into calling her the "Maid" (lines 6,33).ⁱⁱⁱ The text depicts the Maid waiting in eagerness and "silent pain" for her "betrothed Knight" who delayed making appearance on the scene and caused her to be ridiculed by "friends with rude ungentle words" and to be mockingly "bid" to "fly" to him (6,19,25,26). Both her psychological trauma and social predicament become evident upon his arrival. She passionately explains to him what she has been through and asks for his protection: "O give me shelter in thy breast! / O shield and shelter me" (27-28). The question that comes to mind is to shield her from what? The slanderous tongues that lashed at her during his absence would certainly be silenced by his return. There must be something else that calls for this excited plea.

A story between the lines begins to emerge in the poem and would be of use and relevance in understanding Coleridge's interest in the Orient. Several clues ought to be addressed to divulge the embedded tale in the text. The dark Maid is evidently well placed in life. She lives in a castle and can afford a "little page" that she sends "[u]p the castled mountain's breast" to see "[i]f he might find the Knight that wears / The Griffin for his crest," her long-awaited-for love (9-12). Quite secure on the social and economic level, the Maid raises suspicions as to her desperate wait and eager reception of the Knight. Greeting him on his return, she passionately exclaims:

My Henry, I have given thee much,
I gave what I can ne'er recall,
I gave my heart, I gave my peace
O Heaven! I gave thee all. (29-32)

Indeed, the lines suggest a moral dilemma involved in the case, a possible slip that might have compromised the Maid's virtuous stance among friends in her social circle. The passionate outburst of "O Heaven!" preceding "I gave thee all" hints in that direction and would help explain what is meant by "I gave thee all," and "I gave what I can ne'er recall" (6-8). It points to an unnamed, and perhaps unnamable, act of physical submission of the female to a masculine

appropriation of her body that transgresses beyond the emotional sphere of the heart. It explains the Maid's loss of peace of mind, the "silent pain," the "heavy tear in her eye" that "drops and swells again," her "[c]ounting" of "moments" during the Knight's absence, the "dreaming fear," the "sobs" of "a thousand hopes and fears" and the eager "kisses" that she "quenches with her tears" on his making appearance on the scene (15,22-24). The eagerness and the intensity definitely intimate more than mere worry over an uncertain love or a delayed return, for the Knight has actually "pledged his sacred vow" earlier "in the eye of noon" (48,47). He has openly declared his love. A breach of his vow is not likely to occur. Nothing seems to suggest it or to justify the excessive worry and the intense "fears" that obsess the Maid (22). Furthermore, the familiarity of passionate "kisses" and embrace, the "clap . . . round the neck" (21), all speak for the possibility of a moral slip that might have compromised the innocence of the Maid. It is very likely that the Knight has taken advantage of the Maid following his betrothal and that she is devastated by the possibility of his abandoning her. Further reading of textual signs would support this suggestion.

The Knight responds to the Maid's passionate plea in what seems, at the first while, a chivalric act of protection. He promises to give her the "fairest" of his sire's "[n]ine castles" that he has evidently inherited (38). However, the move to this gorgeous place, the "statelier in the land," he plans to undertake when "the stars peep out" at midnight (36,39). He asks the Maid to "[w]ait only till the hand of eve / Hath wholly closed yon western bars" (41-42). Then "through the dark" the two of them "will steal / Beneath the twinkling stars" to the promised castle (43-44). Had he not seduced the Maid earlier, the Knight obviously intends to do so now. However, I believe that he would not dare make such an offer had not a moral fall already been involved.

To his secret romance of elopement and clandestine joy, the Maid responds in astonishment and grief. Rather than being duped by the temptation of the fairest castle in the land and the charm of shining stars, she discerns the moral setback implied in the embellished romance of mystery and secret love. Sensing the intrigue of a planned act of seduction, she sadly laments his offer and rejects it:

The dark? The dark? No! not the dark?
 The Twinkling stars? How, Henry? How?
 O God! 'twas in the eye of noon
 He pledged his sacred vow! (45-48)

The shift in address in the lines to the third person indicates the emotional distance that the Knight's offer has generated in the Maid. Against his disappointing proposal of secret elopement and illicit love, she voices her wish to be led from her "mother's door" in "the eye of noon" in a legitimate marriage ceremony with "Sweet boys and girls all clothed in white / Strewing flowers before" them, and with "nodding minstrels" preceding them "With music" fit for "lordly bowers" (50,49,51-52,53-54). It is significant that the Maid never abandons her dream of union with the Knight, despite her discomfort at his offer: "And then my love and I shall pace, . . . / Between our comely bachelors / And blushing bridal maids" (57, 59-60). Following the Maid's indulgence in the marriage fantasy, the narrative is interrupted. The Knight does not respond to her objection neither in the negative nor the affirmative. The indication is that Coleridge is having second thoughts regarding his knight's engagement with the Oriental Maid and is uncertain how to conclude the matter. Significantly, the Maid's vision of the desired event of

marital union seems to bask in the charm of her special dark Oriental beauty, her "jet black hair in pearly braids" (58). Such beauty is a matter of pride for her or, more likely, of endless fascination, or fixation, for the poet. Her sensitivity to her previous moral slip, and obsession with the value of chastity at the present as she envisions the wedding march "[b]etween our comely bachelors / And blushing bridal maids" (59-60) can also be indicative of a moral side to Coleridge's concern with his relationship with the Orient which this study will disclose later on in due time. At the present, it is important to note that the conclusion to this conflict of interest between what her betrothed Knight desires and what the Maid can accept remains unstated, for the poem is a fragment. Yet the question of why the story is not concluded or of why does Coleridge, or his bard, fail to conclude it will be addressed.

Invoking Other Poems on Fragmentation

In her discussion of Coleridge's poem "Christabel," Claire B. May traces "ominous references to the feminine and the maternal" (1997, p.701). In such references, the critic locates the roots of the narrator's psychological disturbances that culminate in his inability to properly conduct his narrative act or to satisfactorily conclude the story: "Union with the mother haunts the narrator as a bond he has rejected, a loss he never ceases to mourn" (May, 1997, p.706). The narrator's dilemma in relation to the mother figure in "Christabel" is, according to May, the cause behind "the appearance of these ambiguous female / maternal figures" which in turn farther "disrupts the symbolic signification attempted by the narrative voice" (1997, p.706). In brief, the maternal crisis of the narrator of "Christabel" results in his inability to master language (presumably an attribute of the Lacanian or, according to May, the Kristevian father figure), a failure that impedes him from accurately depicting significant moments in the story, in addition to causing him to leave off without finishing it.

Coleridge wrote part I of "Christabel" in 1798 and the poet was "haunted" for fourteen months by "what he had composed" and tried to figure out its "meaning" (Taylor, 2002, p.715). Finally, part II of "Christabel" came out in 1800. "In part II Coleridge shifts into a different voice, more assured that an evil had indeed occurred in the last section of part I" (Taylor, 2002, p.716). "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" was also written in 1798 at a time when Coleridge's was experiencing difficulties in stabilizing his narrator in "Christabel." The possibility of a parallel tension between the symbolic and semiotic in "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" ought not to be overlooked particularly because of the proximity of the time of its composition to the first part of "Christabel." The poem's bard ought to be investigated for possible signs of disturbances as those that blighted the narrator of "Christabel."

Has the Mother Caused Fragmentation?

Contrarily, "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" contains a positive reference to the maternal. The Maid is dependent on her mother's presence for protection and support. She asks her Knight to pick her up from her mother's door on the dreamt-of wedding day. In Anya Taylor's reading of Coleridge, Christabel is a deprived child whose "mother died in child birth" and the "infant has no known nurse or female relative to substitute for the mother" figure (2002, p.716). Moreover, her being a "motherless daughter with a grieving and distant father and no mentioned nurse" were enough causes to make her "lose self at the moment of sudden sexual quest"

(Taylor, 2002, p.718). "Her impulse misfires, and she is absorbed by the (M)other she has lured to her bed," which is Geraldine the lady in "distress"^{iv} that Christabel picked up in the forest (Taylor, 2002, p.720). As a result of such failed encounter with a substitute mother figure, Christabel "retreat[s] from personhood into paralysis" and becomes "a phantom soul" (Taylor, 2002, p.724). The Maid in "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" is more assured in her sexual orientation. Despite the possibility of an initial submission to passionate love, she does not fail to seek a proper marriage starting at the mother's door. Her relationship with her mother is obviously stable enough to lend her power to determinedly reject the mistress position proposed to her. She does so regardless of the precarious situation that her moral fall has placed her in. Yet despite this stability inside the tale, the bard of "The Ballad," much like the narrator of "Christabel," fails to conclude the story. His failure points at the possibility of other difficulties that he, or the poet behind him, might be experiencing and that have caused him to let go of the narrative line before bringing the tale to conclusion.

Is It the Father that Caused Fragmentation?

Taking into account the semiotic / symbolic conflict of May's reading of "Christabel" and the doubly orphaned child of Taylor's analysis of the same poem, a search for a possible sign of the bard's disturbance is worth conducting in relationship to the father figure in "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" besides the previous highlighting of that with the mother. If Christabel's problem, for example, seems to largely reside in the absence of the mother figure and the alienated presence of the father, the Maid in "The Ballad," though comfortably secure in the mother's presence is, as a matter of fact, deprived of the father figure. The fact that she intimates to the Knight to lead her away from her mother's, not her father's door, signifies the father's absence from the scene. His whereabouts and the significance of his absence from the Maid's life ought to be considered as possible causes for the bard's inability to finish his tale.

Further Reading between the Lines

The father's absence cannot be solely one of mere demise. Had he simply passed away, some replacement by another male relative would have taken place and would have been indicated in the medieval context of the story. The absent father, nevertheless, has bequeathed the mother and the daughter a castle in the land located on a mountain top complete with the medieval luxury of serfs and pages that the daughter can dispatch on missions to convenience. The story of how mother and daughter could have possibly come to the ownership of such castle is of relevance here.

It is most likely that the mother herself was a dark mistress of some lord in the past that he had kept in a castle and then abandoned her with her daughter afterwards. Otherwise, how would the absence of some male guardian in the case of the father's demise would be explained? The panic the Maid has experienced as a result of her loss of maiden innocence must have been intensified by her fear of falling into a terminal status of an exotic dark mistress to some rich lord, as did her mother. Despite the Maid's initial fall, she is keen to avoid its ultimate social disgrace and voices her dream of a lawful marriage as a rectifying act. She has her mother's example to inform her of the consequences of giving in to the temptation of the finest castle in the land and the elopement in the middle of the night offered by the Knight. This reading can be supported by the simple logic of how dare the Knight offer a well-placed, well-protected, native

girl a clandestine affair? Would he dare make the offer? Would he not think of the consequences of family feuds between their two houses and possible raids of revenge before offering to appropriate her in this anti-social fashion for life? Indeed, the Maid in this ballad is well placed but not well protected. She has a castle but no guardian. The father's absence must have caused a gap in her life and enabled the Knight to take advantage of her following his betrothal. It must have also encouraged him to propose an appropriation of her for life. But does this absence really affect the narrator? What is the significance of the Coleridge's dispensation with the father figure from the tale? What bearings does his absence have on the poet's relationship with the Orient?

Objectivity despite Fragmentation

Significantly, neither the Maid nor the narrator seems in the least concerned with the father's absence from the scene. For despite such absence, the security that the mother's presence affords seems sufficient to stabilize the Maid and to keep the bard objectively intact. The Maid does not experience Christabel's psychological and sexual disorientations in their terminal form. Nor does the bard seem to share "Christabel's" narrator's fear of the "alluring and horrible" in "the feminine" (May,1997, p.707). The Maid seems to have put her mother's past behind and moved onward, and the bard never as much as alludes to such past. If "Christabel's" narrator ends up being "a subject constituted by discourse, rather than autonomously in control of thought and discourse" (May,1997, p.705), the bard of "The Ballad" seems quite emotionally balanced and is in full control of the narrative flow. He manages to objectively handle the story of the dark Maid and never falters into self exposure or disclosure of his emotional responses to the events, as does the other narrator. The bard's inability to finish the tale cannot be a psychological dilemma developed in relationship to the father or the mother. What can the problem be?

Oriental Imagination and Narrative Stability

The subject matter in "Christabel" is that of the supernatural as an object of the poet's imaginative quest, while the subject in hand is the beauty and the charm of the exotic Other, the Orient that is to say. Coleridge seems more comfortable with the Orient as a source of imaginative inspiration than he is with the supernatural. The horrors of the supernatural, as they impinge on ordinary life experience, destabilize the narrator of "Christabel" through and debar him ultimately from finishing his tale. The exotic beauty of the Orient in "The Ballad," does not seem to have any negative effect on the bard apart from his inability to bring the tale to conclusion. If the story remains unfinished, it is because Coleridge's relationship with the Orient also does not go unchallenged. Despite the poet's comfort with the Orient as a source of imaginative inspiration, he has his own personal concerns about indulging that source.

The Divulged Tale and the Orient

Allegory in Coleridge's writings and poetry is a controversial issue among critics. Daniel Fried (2006) challenges the common notion that Coleridge is averse to allegory in his writings. He affirms that in Coleridge, "allegory is never championed, but it is often considered a potentially positive mode," all with the exception of *The Statesman's Manual* (Fried,2006, p.764). Karen Fang also finds that Coleridge's reliance on "[f]eminine symbols of lyric inspiration such as a 'damsel with a dulcimer' and a 'woman wailing' also . . . lead[s] into the allegory on genius" in poems like "Kubla Khan" (2003, p.824). Since Coleridge seem likely to

entertain allegory in both theory and practice, the presence of this element in "The Ballad" might as well be safely invoked. Approached from this angle, the poem yields a valuable reading. It has two female characters, an announced and an implied one; the "Dark Ladie" of the title and the dark "Maid" inside the poem. The first is the mother who stands for the Orient, a common object of literary interest in the British culture of Coleridge's time. Just as the Orient has become an established topic of interest in that milieu, its cultural manifestation in the poem, the mother that is to say, is also taken for granted. Her story needs not be told. Her presence is overshadowed by that of her daughter. The poet's attention turns to the Maid. She comes in to embody Coleridge's personal interest in the Orient as a literary phenomenon of his time. Her unexplained foreign presence in an English medieval castle is that of the mysterious life of the Orient in the poet's imaginations. Her initial seduction by the Knight is Coleridge's romantic fascination with the Orient. Significantly, the Knight, Lord Henry Falkland, has a name in the poem whereas both mother and daughter remain nameless. They are more of a foreign presence in the culture, and in the poet's mind, than actual life and blood characters. The Knight's courtship of the Maid is more of a projection of Coleridge's imaginative interest in foreign exotic elements. With the Knight in the poem signifying the poet and the dark Maid suggesting an Oriental turn of his imagination, the relationship between the two of them can be most revealing of how Coleridge felt about his imaginative flight to the Orient and its moral consequences.

Challenges to Oriental Imagination

The Maid's rejection of the mistress status indicates that Coleridge is experiencing second thoughts regarding his imaginative embracement of the Orient. The tension in the poem between the Knight's desire for a clandestine affair and the Maid's dream of marital union suggests that Coleridge is not quite at ease with his own appropriation of the Orient. He depicts it as an act of sexual transgression that the Oriental Other determinedly rejects; for the dark Maid is the actual source of resistance of the illegal, asocial bond with the Knight in the poem. The Knight has betrothed and seduced but did not propose to marry. Inconsiderately, he wished to prolong possessiveness by offering elopement. The Maid's request to be domesticated into marriage leads to speculations as to what does Coleridge mean by having the Oriental entity ask for domestication and local merging with the British culture? Is the Orient defeating the poet's imaginative expectations of a wild, asocial and exotic union by proving to be of an ordinary and conventional type? Or is the poet apprehensive that fascination with the Orient would entail evasion of social and moral responsibility that he feels he has failed at and should now be aware of and attend to? Or is the practice of hegemonically appropriating the Other morally erroneous and ought to be discontinued? The tale is interrupted without clues. The bard abandons the narrative line at the point where the Maid is elaborately voicing her dream of a righteous marriage to the Knight. The Knight's silence in the face of her rejection suggests that Coleridge is uncertain how to respond to the Maid's reminder. The rising tension between the Maid and her Knight remains unresolved. Lack of resolution requires further investigation and perhaps some more speculations.

Against Imperial Appropriation

In a discussion of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan" Levy indicates how Coleridge is paradoxically "captivated by printed narratives of the unknown," though

"vociferously opposed to unregulated and irresponsible venturing into the unknown in the real world" (2004, p.694). Therefore, according to Levy, the poet "sought to eradicate, or at least, to mitigate, the damage caused by reckless discovery" through emphasizing the "importance of the domestic affections" between family members and relatives (2004, pp.694,696). The statement indicates that Coleridge fears the impingement of the Other on his own world and the subsequent overlap between the imaginary and the real worlds. The case of the Maid in "The Ballad" testifies to a different kind of concern. Her mother, the Dark Lady, has been introduced at some unspecified moment in the past into the British culture. The daughter equally dark, Oriental and exotic, is courted by Coleridge's Knight in the poem. The Maid's rejection of a mistress status attests to her refusal to be negatively stereotyped, appropriated and enslaved for life. This location of resistance in the Maid suggests that Coleridge seems more concerned about the damage done to other cultures in such encounters than to himself or to his own world. The poet's imperial self, the Knight in the poem, is held in check by the Maid's act of resistance. Coleridge seems less vigilant about being negligent to his own culture than about transgression on other cultures. It is Coleridge's Oriental imagination that refuses the illicit and demeaning bond not the Knight. With the Knight being the assailant in this context and with his silence kept unbroken in the face of the Maid's protest, the poet's moral and social concerns for his local culture, if any, remain too farfetched even for this highly speculative reading of the poem.

But Levy (2004) is not totally oblivious to Coleridge's moral concern for the Other though she gives it less priority and emphasis in her reading and traces it in relationship to other poems, mainly "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." This critic argues that Coleridge critiques geographical explorations, for he "could not help but observe that many of these discoveries inevitably led to conquest and exploitation" at a time when he was much opposed to their manifestations in "slave trade and British imperialism" (2004, pp.694,695). Therefore, Levy speculates, Coleridge calls for "sympathetic identification both within and beyond the domestic sphere" as an act of compensation for involvement in the unknown (2004, p.707).

Coleridge, I would say, seems more attentive in "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" to "sympathetic identification . . . beyond the domestic sphere" than to "domestic affections" between family members and relatives. His position, I believe, is clarified in his having the foreign Other speak. Coleridge does not only empower the Other to speak but also conceives of an ideal cultural merging of the foreign and the local through the Maid's dream of a marriage bond with the Knight. Oddly enough, however, he names the Knight Lord Falkland, an appellation that opens the door for more speculations instead of satisfactorily concluding the reading suggested in this article. Is Coleridge intimating that England is the land for all folks through such choice of name? Can the intimation be taken as a reflection of a genuinely sympathetic and receptive opening up to the Other and a viable step towards cultural amalgamation? Or is it an indication that such cultural fusion can only occur on the British Isles and is thus excluding the land of the Other from having such privilege? Such speculation would make the poem a fertile ground for further investigations about Coleridge's relationship with the Other beyond what this paper has attempted to do. Another set of questions also arises in relationship to the Knight's first name, Lord Henry. Is such name an invocation of Henry Wriothesley, the protagonist of Shakespeare's Sonnets of The Dark Lady that Saul Frampton (2013) has lately identified as part of the Shakespearean love triangle with such Lady? Has

Coleridge come across this fact earlier in the nineteenth century and utilized it before modern critical efforts discovered and reinstated names and relationships in Shakespeare's life? Such second set of questions would turn the analysis in the direction of another Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets, which this study decided to veer away from at the start.

Conclusion:

Though a neglected fragment, "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" is a poem that engages Coleridge's imaginative quest of the Orient. The story between the lines reveals that the poet's fascination with the exotic beauty of the Orient is curtailed by an act of conscientious resistance of aggressive conquest and selfish appropriation of the Other. His ability to objectify and disguise personal tension about the matter is signaled by his employment of the ballad form. The objective balladic frame, however, does not preclude an allegorical meaning from being embedded into the text and a subsequent reading from divulging it. On being unraveled, the story discloses the poet's opposition to the common practice of his culture in its hegemonic appropriation of the other.

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Endnote

ⁱ See Saul Frampton for one of the most recent attempts to identify Shakespeare's Dark Lady.

ⁱⁱ The title of the poem will be occasionally abbreviated into "The Ballad" in the course of this paper.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie." Quotes from the poem in this article come from David Perkins's *English Romantic Writers*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967. References to line numbers in the paper will follow the quote in parenthesis.

^{iv} "Christabel" line 73 in Perkin's 1967 edition of the poem.

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