

NEWS RELEASE

for 7 October 2010

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National Poetry Day 2010 – public reading of poet Ralph Hoyte’s epic-length ‘(The Completed) Christabel’ in Nether Stowey in the Quantock Hills of Somerset

As a celebration of National Poetry Day 2010 (**Thursday 7 October**) and in homage to the Romantic Poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Bristol-based poet Ralph Hoyte will give an all-afternoon reading of his epic-length completion of Coleridge’s unfinished Gothic horror ballad ‘Christabel’ on the streets of Nether Stowey on National Poetry Day.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge lived with his family in ‘The Coleridge Cottage’ in Nether Stowey for 4 years from 1796 to 1800 in close proximity to William and Dorothy Wordsworth (just over the hill in Alfoxton Hall). It was this trio’s preoccupation with ‘*composing from Nature*’ and ‘*the voice of the common man*’ as well as their political concerns which manifestly influenced Romanticism and the Romantic Movement in 19th century Europe. Coleridge’s period in Nether Stowey was the poetically most fruitful time of his creative life, and it was in this very cottage that he penned the first section of his Gothic horror ballad, Christabel.

Bristol-based poet Ralph Hoyte’s (The Completed) Christabel is in the style and manner of Coleridge. It takes up the story where Coleridge left off and brings the saga of Christabel, innocent daughter of Sir Leoline of Langdale Hall, of the seductive snake demoness, Geraldine, of her supposed father, Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine Castle, ‘*nigh on Hadrian’s Wall*’, and of the gentle bard Bracy, to a rousing conclusion.

Come and find Ralph on National Poetry Day in Nether Stowey outside the Clock Tower or along Lime Street (leading up to The Coleridge Cottage)! He will start his marathon at 3pm ... and continue until he’s finished, however long it takes (...by about 7 pm).

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Ralph Hoyte brings the skills of poet, performer, wordsmith and considerable experience of innovative media projects. Bristol based, Ralph has international standing, and his poetry projects include working in the Mendips, Peaks National Park and Japan where he followed in the footsteps of 17thC Haiku Master, Matsuo Basho. Ralph views 'poetry' as an oral artform and is known for his epic-length public poetry.

Extract from Ralph Hoyte's notes whilst writing (The Completed) Christabel

Hmmm, we're halfway through and Christabel seems to be threatening to become Ophelia, who came to a rather soggy end...

*The maid came closer, singing plaintively
Then stopp'd and addressed an old oak tree
'Thou art,' said she in plangent voice,
'most like unto my hoary old sire
stern, upright, in righteousness apparell'd
his Honour, o la!, eternally unparallell'd
- dear Sir, to thee do then I upon my soul inquire,
what is a knight's honour set against a poor maid's desire?'*

Indeed, she then steals the words out of the bard's mouth:

*Have thee, Sir Leoline
Comfrey, fair antimony,
daisy, wild columbine;
'Gentle knight,' quoth the apparition,
'they virtue have to drive away the worm,
And bring to his senses he whose only daughter he did spurn
La! What is this lissome lady, most beautiful of regard
Whose beauty is only by a certain ... slipperiness marred?*

Does snaky Geraldine take this 'lying down'?

*Geraldine folded her arms across her chest
Then couched her head upon her breast
And looked askance at Christabel
Of intent, her words to quell*

*Again saw Christabel that serpent old
Again felt she that bosom cold
One moment only - and the sight was fled
But Christabel shuddered as at the touch of the dead
She fell to the ground in dizzy trance
Completely unwoman'd by that horrible glance*

*Alas alack, oh welladay! Christabel's guardian angel mother (long dead, but, hey!
it's a Gothic horror story, so of course the dead still walk) then appears in broad
daylight when the Powers of Darkness hold not sway and chases Geraldine off:*

*Then grew the radiance brighter
As the souls of men ascending to the golden realms grow ever lighter
Become more concentrated in their core
And, incandescent, burn their way through heaven's door...*

*But before the wandering mother can finish off Geraldine, brave Bracy the bard
arrives back from Tryermaine Castle hard against Hadrian's Wall and distracts
her, so Geraldine flees (in snake form) to a hole in the forest. Leoline and Sir
Roland have a touching rapprochement, only to be interrupted by Christabel, who
now may or may not still be 'doing an Ophelia/Cordelia'...*

*Then fell a silence, like a drop high on Lakeland
Fell, or mountain top,
Falling into brackish water
'Twas Christabel, Sir Leoline's daughter.*

*She, into that sudden lull spake:
'La Sirs! Such merry bunch of apes
To prance and gibber and cut fine japes
How many demons may we balance upon this pin?
Ah - to sleep with the Devil's daughter - could that be a sin?*

*But, nay! 'tis of no matter
That a young girl's heart should be all of a tatter
Have at thee Sirrah!
Tho' in the world's eyes most noble and bold
I tell thee, my liege father, thy 'honour' is cold*

*'They bore him barefac'd on the bier
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny
And in his grave rain'd many a tear
Hey non, non nonny, nonny no -'*

*There - for remembrance, that's rosemary
- upon my soul, noble knight, thou regardest me somewhat contrary
Ah - pansies, that's for thoughts
But thinking, doth it not, gets in the way of chivalrous sports?
Hey non, non nonny -
Rue, now, father dear - fennel for thee, my Lord Tryermaine
That thou ruest, 'tis they choice, for loss or for gain
Hey nonny nonny, nonny no
Sweet folk, indeed, all that life rue
I do thee a curtsey and thence bid thee - adieu*

*And off she wanders, mazed in the mind, to conveniently drown herself ... or so
the writer thought. Fortunately - or unfortunately - Christabel herself has
different ideas and seems to be made of sterner stuff*

*Is the night balmy or chill?
The night is balmy, not chill
Through thin grey cloud sails the moon
Waxing day by day - 'twill be full right soon
The lovely lady, Christabel
Of whom her father was wont to say, he lov'd her well
What doth she in the wood so late
Twice a furlong from the castle gate?
No dreams she had yesternight
No beating of her breast for her maidenly plight
That which in the midnight wood holds sway
Is that which pulls her along her way*

*So our 'innocent' little Christabel suddenly grows up - but with what, or whom,
does she have an assignment in the midnight wood?*