

The genesis of the poem, 'A Character', merits a more exhaustive study than I can give here, but it is relevant to attempt briefly to describe that stub in the Christabel MS. There is no writing for an inch from the top of the recto page and the first line that appears is slightly indented; this probably indicates space for a title and the opening of a poem. From here to the bottom of the page are the beginnings of six evenly-spaced quatrains. The first three have not been identified; the last three are stanzas 1, 2, and 4 of 'A Character'. (When Wordsworth wrote out 'A Character' in its full version of five stanzas, first, late in the Christabel MS., and, secondly, in MS.18A, he retained this original stanza order, i.e. 1, 2, 4, 3, 5, but in 18A he indicated that stanzas 3 and 4 were to be reversed.) We can have no certainty about what was on the verso of the page, as, except for an 'ing' just over half way down — probably 'doing' at the end of line 18 of 'The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale' — no line endings have clearly remained. The stub of the following page contains quatrains from the last-named poem beginning at line 25. Thus, it is at least possible that three verses from 'A Character' were once a part of a version of 'The Farmer'. It may be no accident that the two poems, beyond their general similarity in form and manner, share an element: when 'The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale' was first published in the *Morning Post* for 21 July 1800, it had as its sub-title, the words, 'A Character' (a point not noted by de Selincourt, see my article, 'Wordsworth's Poetry and Stuart's Newspapers', *Studies in Bibliography*, 15, 1962, p. 173). It all suggests that 'The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale' suffered a kind of fission before 21 July, and that out of this came the origins of 'Poor Susan' (as Professor Reed notes), 'The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale' as we now have it, and 'A Character'.

The Bird in the Brittle Grass

The bird in the brittle grass
 Mirrors its dryness.
 In a hot season
 Dust, it seems, must echo dust
 And plumage fade with flowers.

At a sound, though, dull wings beat
 And the air vibrates to a shriller blue
 As bird flashes to branch,
 Hangs there a moment bright
 Then dies again to drabness.

Why wonder at it?
 Stillness hides self-beauty
 That only flares from movement.
 Like you, he'd sooner stay safe
 Than lovely.

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