

COLERIDGE'S "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER": REHABILITATION OF THE FEELING FUNCTION

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" with regards to its interpretation and analysis. Many critics have deduced meaning of their own taste and standard. Drawing energy from the critical heritage, I proceed in a different direction. I contend that the poet establishes a flow of traffic between the conscious and the unconscious by accentuating the feeling function of the psyche in order to restore psychic balance in the individual's personality. This paper is an attempt to show as to how Coleridge ventures through the story of the Ancient Mariner in order to put stress on valorization of the feeling function to tune love and sympathy for inner and outer harmony which is so essential for a healthy and peaceful society.

INTRODUCTION

The whole problem is an ethical one; it is problem of differentiating our feeling. Western civilization of late have one-sidedly developed extraverted thinking...But feeling and the whole world of Eros, love, is in a sorry plight indeed. I even think that at present everything depends on whether we succeed in developing our feeling and social Eros or not (Louise and Franz in Dinkelaker, website).

Apparently "The Ancient Mariner" is a fairy tale and a fine blend of fantasy and realism, but to me, in addition to all its aesthetic beauties and moral colour, it seems a poem of great psychological bearing and symbolic significance if read

from the point of view of Jungian analytical psychology. As every one has a story to tell, so does the Ancient Mariner to the Wedding Guest in the poem as to what happened to the former after killing

the Albatross for no apparent reason during his sea voyage. The cruel act of killing the bird presupposes the Mariner's lopsidedness and psychic disequilibrium.

From a Jungian perspective, this psychic imbalance, caused by the suppression of the feeling function associated with the unconscious and the overdevelopment of the thinking function representing the conscious aspect of the psyche, leads to Mariner's lopsided personality.¹ The unnatural cruel deed of the Mariner due his undeveloped feeling function of the psyche corresponds to the suppression of the unconscious or one's psychological instincts. And once that happens to humans they become psychologically lopsided which not only disturbs the mental make up of the individual but also one's outer adjustment in the society. All sufferings and pain which the Mariner and his shipmates experience in one form or the other are symbolic of the after-effects

or psychic repercussions of the repressed feeling function or chaotic manifestation of the unconscious as a compensatory move.

Since the Albatross rises from the sea, and "The sea is the symbol of the ...unconscious" (Jung, 1971) in analytical psychology, it provides an ample space for the reader to suggest that the bird, by virtue of its flight, fluidity and freedom, is a symbolic variant of the unconscious from where the noble emotions gush forth, and to which the feeling function of the psyche is associated. The unconscious is not necessarily in opposition to the conscious; and neither is the feeling function of the psyche to the thinking one. Rather they are supplementary and complementary to each other provided that none of them devalues or suppresses the other. Perhaps that is why in the beginning the Albatross is hailed as a symbol of good omen by the sailors who treated it as a benevolent "Christian Soul" (63).² It "made the breeze to blow" (92). The bird coming from the mist and "fog" (62) chases the mariners and eats cooked food with them symbolizing the harmony between the thinking and the feeling functions in particular and integration of the unconscious into the conscious attitude in general. Coleridge says:

The mariner gave it biscuits –worms
And round and round it flew
And a good south wind sprung us behind,
The Albatross did follow;
And everyday for food or play
Came to the Mariner's hollo (65-72).

The bird being in the "company" of the mariner overtly reveals that the feeling function and the thinking one are in harmony and concord. In the above passage Mariner's giving the bird "biscuits-worms" clearly guides us that feeling function is valued and therefore it responds positively in harmony to the Mariner. The result is that all things around go well in the outer environment. Once the due rights of the unconscious/feeling function are accepted, it becomes positive, productive, and creative and the individual of the society becomes more efficient and healthy. Otherwise the repressed energy lying latent in the unconscious becomes negative in its attitude and manifests itself in counter move in various ways like traumas, phobias, neurosis, psychosis at individual and rigidity, extremism, Nazi holocausts at national and international levels. In order to suit our selves elatedly in the society we accept the acceptable and reject what is unacceptable to our conscious self as it tarnishes our social image. This psychological nudging of the unacceptable and the repressed feeling function in a fanatic fashion make us lopsided individuals. And it would not be inappropriate to say that the "repressed feelings are likely to burst with violence beyond ...control" (Fordham, 1953).

The Mariner's killing of the bird, Albatross, in a heroic fashion shows his inflated ego which is heroic in its functioning. It also shows that the feeling function of the Mariner's psyche is totally undeveloped and his inflated ego is emblematic of his overdeveloped thinking

function. In order to lionize the ego of the Mariner, his cruel act of pride is fairly accepted and admired by the other shipmates symbolically representing society. Therefore, they approve it by saying. "T was, said they, such birds to slay/ That brings the fog and mist (97-98). But in order to fulfill the demands and expectations of the society (the conscious), we curb our natural instincts and feeling at the cost of our psycho-social balance so essential for a peaceful and healthy society. The result is that we converge on the small part of the psyche (ego/thinking mode) and ignore the vast potential and huge treasure of latent energy (the unconscious/feeling mode) which is necessary to develop a holistic and more empathic vision of life. Consequently humans become lopsided and thus delink themselves from their original roots or the psychic centre. It is quite natural that the repressed unconscious forces should launch a counter move in order to restore a balance and rebuild the broken links. The Mariner's symbolic act of suppression triggers the furies of the unconscious for retribution which continues to torture the Mariner and his shipmates unless the wide gulf between the conscious and the unconscious is bridged, and a flow of traffic between them is restored:

Day after day, day after day,
We suck, ne breath ne motion,
As idle as a painted Ship
Upon a painted Ocean (111-14).

The above passage overtly reveals that the repressed unconscious/devalued feeling

function in reaction manifests itself terribly in many supernatural forms of repercussion like, "Drought"; "the copper sky"; "the bloody sun sickness"; "ne drop to drink"; " Yea slimy things did crawl with their legs/ Upon the slimy Sea" (121-22); "the water snakes" the spirits, the skeleton ship; the specter woman; the hanging of the dead Albatross at their necks; the feeling of homelessness and so on. These are all in way symbolic manifestations of the nudged contents of the unconscious. These sufferings and misery on the sea during their voyage proves a sort of initial shock for the Mariner and his shipmates, which lead them to be aware of their guilt which a Jungian would call lopsidedness. Since the flow of traffic between the conscious and the unconscious is blocked causing inner conflict, the outer environment also seems remote, unfamiliar, out of harmony and disturbed. Coleridge says:

The moving Moon went up the sky
And no where did abide
.....
Her beams bemoock'd the sultry main
Like morning frost yspread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay
The charmed water burnt always
A still and always red.
Beyond the shadow of the ship
I watched water snakes;
They moved in tracks of shining whites;
And when they rear'd, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes (255-59, 261-68.
Emphasis mine).

The supernatural occurrences in the above passage befittingly corresponds to the nemesis of Orestes who killed his mother Clytemnestra³ (here suppression of the unconscious/ mother/ feeling); and the indignant Furies chased and tortured him as symbolic manifestations of the unconscious forces and reaction of the repressed feeling function which seek their revenge against overdeveloped ego/conscious/ the thinking function.⁴ There is still inner conflict in the mind of the Mariner; the Mariner has not yet realized his guilt; his mental equilibrium is still disturbed which leads him to feel alone and cut off from the psychic centre. That is why he says:

Alone, alone all alone
 Alone on the wide Sea
 And Christ would take no pity on
 My soul in agony (224-27).

However, this psychological torture, continuous agony and the death of his fellow mariners make him realize his guilt which leads towards gradual inkling of psychological transformation. The Mariner further says:

How long in that fit I lay
 I have not to declare
 But ere my living life return'd
 I heard in my soul discern'd
 Two voices in the air (398-302).

The above passage clearly reveals that the Mariner is still in "that fit" and awareness. He is becoming conscious of the other voice (voice of the unconscious) which he

had kept suppressed before. But the moment he blesses on the "water snakes" and evil spirits, which is symbolic of the recognition of the repressed function of the psyche, he starts feeling himself again. Blessing on what was unacceptable to him symbolizes the recognition of contents of the unconscious/ psychological instincts and the feeling function which he had suppressed and undeveloped. In other words, the Mariner unbiased recognition of the ignored aspects of the psyche helps him restore his psychic balance; his penance subsides and he feels connected with the centre of his being again. That is why he says:

O happy, happy thing! no tongue
 Their beauty mighty declare;
A spring of love gushed from heart,
 And blessed them unaware;
 Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
 And I blessed them unaware (274-79.
 Emphasis mine).

The above passage reveals that the beauty of the undesirable, meaningless and suppressed lot of the society will remain ignored and undeveloped unless the feeling function is accentuated and developed. We can bring the marginalized lot of the society from the background to foreground if our feeling function is fully cultivated and developed. The feeling function is connective, kind and compassionate which helps us establish filial, familial and societal human bonds; Jung and all Jungian hold the feeling function responsible for interlocking relationships between individuals,

communities and societies at local, national and international levels. It is the Mariner's feeling function, triggered through shock and pain, which helps him create "A spring of love gushed from [his] heart" which enables him to see the beauty in the unassuming neglected creatures of the world. The feeling function has also a connection with the divine. The divine role of the feeling function is nurturing, kindness, caring and compassion which keeps us empathic towards those animate/inanimate, humans/non-humans whom we hate, discard and even marginalize in the society and in our lives. The real connection with the unconscious is possible only if we valorize the feeling function. The feeling of remorse on the part of the Mariner is a way of confession of one's guilt and recognition which balances the feeling function with the thinking one; the head recognizes the heart, and the conscious integrates the unconscious into its rational side. That is why, the suffering subsides and the harmony prevails:

The self same moment I could pray;
And from neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea (280-83).

"The bloody Sun" (112), being symbolic of the overdeveloped ego and head type looking at world, tames its scorching light; the heart type looking at world develops till the head and heart begin to tune the melody of "love" in concord. The wind begins to blow "like a gale spring"

heralding hope and happiness for the Mariner who says:

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow gale of spring—
It mingle strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming (461-64).

The activation of the feeling function inculcates in the Mariner at the outer level a sense of "togetherness" which makes him friendly, empathic towards all those we have marginalized, demonized, criminalized or satanized as integral part of our selves irrespective of gender, age, creed cast and colour. That is why the Mariner says:

O sweeter than the Marriage feast,
It is sweeter far to me
To walk together to the Kirk
With a goodly company.
To walk together to the Kirk
And all together pray
While each to his great father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends
And youths, and Maidens gay (634-42).

The "Kirk" in its widest sense, is symbolic of a spiritual environment where we shed off our personalized modes of being to prepare for a higher and deeper level of meaning. The feeling function of the suppliant in this environment is stirred up at all levels of age and gender differences. And they are connected by a chain of wider feeling of love, kindness, compassion, friendship and humanity into one whole irrespective of their personal agendas of cast and colour or race. The

Wedding Guest is psychologically refurbished, for he, being a symbolic representation of the opposite end of the continuum, i.e. the thinking mode, is tinged with feeling one by listening to the story of the Mariner. In a way, when the

inner balance between the conscious (the thinking function) and the unconscious (feeling function) is restored, the outer harmony in the society, with the Wedding Guest as its representative, is bound to prevail.

CONCLUSION

The seminal lesson that we learn from the whole analysis of the poem is that we need to accentuate our feeling function in order to be empathic, benign, friendly, kind and compassionate. We need to evolve such strategies in our academic institutions and business organizations where we may be able to train and educate our feeling function in order to be empathic, considerate and sympathetic humans rather than thinking machines. It is due¹ Jung's psychological theory is based upon the primary assumption that the human psyche has two aspects—the conscious or an outer realm and the unconscious or an inner realm. Jung believes that the unconscious is an essential part of the psyche which, being a hidden counterpart is compensatory to the conscious. It is an infinite storehouse of contents which cannot be all known to the conscious. Only its parts can be accessed, illumined and integrated into the conscious attitude. The qualities Jung attributes to the unconscious are freedom, flexibility,

to a worldwide decay of the feeling function that we are facing domestic and global violence, rigidity, quarrels and quibbles, human tragedies and aggression all around. Since the guiding role of the feeling function grows ever more, it is inevitable for us to "love all things both great and small" (615) to develop our ethical behaviours, to redefine our logocentric mode of approaching life and to articulate values for empathic life. In other words, we intensely need that our thoughts and feelings must mutually tinge each other in concord. Only then can we remake our psychological make up in order to make our life empathic tender, soft, and sympathetic—something that we need more today in the technologically advanced world than we did before. Instead of building walls which separate us from one another, we need to build bridges to connect with one another so essential for healthy, peaceful world of interdependence and co-existence.

Notes

vastness, immensity, irrationality, disorder, chaos, darkness, primitiveness, infiniteness etc. He further says that the conscious and the unconscious are complementary to one another and form a totality which he calls the *self*. For further detail see C.G. Jung, "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," *The Portable Jung*. Trans. R. F.C. Hull. Ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 70-138

As far the psychic functions are concerned, according to Jung, there are four ego functions, namely sensation,

intuition, thinking and feeling. Sensation is to collect information or data from the external world through senses, but it does not judge or value it. In other words, sensation just tells us that something is. Thinking defines what the thing is; it evaluates and judges the thing rationally and logically. Intuition reads future possibilities, makes prophecies and predictions about the thing. Feeling adds value to the thing; it is connective which helps us make relationships and bonds with our fellow-beings. Jung further refines these four functions into two pairs, the rational and the irrational. The former includes thinking and feeling and the latter sensational and intuition. For details see Jung, "Psychological Types," *The Portable Jung*. Pp. 178-269; Whitmont, *The Symbolic Quest*. Pp. 138-155; and Harry A. Wilmer. M. D, *Practical Jung: Nuts and Bolts of Jungian Psychotherapy* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1987), Pp.155-68

²This and all other textual references are to this edition: Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson and Raimonda Modiano, Eds. *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), and are shown parenthetically with line number from the poem unless otherwise indicated.

³See Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937). pp. 297-98.

⁴It is reminiscent of one of the great Greek heroes of the Trojan War, Agamemnon who during his expedition sail to restore

Helen killed a wild boar puffed up with his ego its heroic functioning to lionize his persona, boasted that even goddess of hunting, Artemis, could not do so herself. It was in a way the false claim of ego to identify with the unconscious. The result was that the goddess symbolic representation of the unconscious reacted against the Agamemnon brought sufferings similar to those of the Ancient Mariner in order to appease her anger or to compensate the pseudo-ego unjustified act of aggression. Read A Story of the Trojan War.

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