

The Mariner's Centre of Gravity: The Self

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In the last analysis every life is the realisation of a whole, that is, of a self for which reason this realisation can also be called "individuation" (Jaffe 377).

I define life as the principle of *individuation*, or the power which unites a given *all* into a *whole* that is presupposed by all its parts (Halimi et al 400).

Abstract

Modern day selfishness and senselessness has imperatively necessitated the quest for the true "Self." Bereft of his true identity in the confused milieu of modern times, man frantically searches for a perennial culture of which he was mythically a part and where he was firmly rooted. The search is not external but rather internal; it is to be carried out within the inner recesses of mind and not in the external social life; it does not relate to human life in social progress but in his archetypal realities that are the cornerstones of eternal human psyche. With us today it is the internal world that is desolate and uninhabited. The strong desire, which was once with the man of yore to gather ourselves into the interiority of a rare world of values and convictions, has given way to the uncertain preoccupations of which we hardly feel ourselves as part. The Mariner's story in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" relates a similar account that can be accounted for Man's eternal quest for wholeness.

Keywords: Individuation; Self; Jung; Coleridge; "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

The "Self" is Jung's concept of a total comprehensive personality comprising a harmonious integrated whole of the conscious and unconscious. As such it remains a hypothesis for it can never reach to its perfect attainment in the life of an individual. It can never be a substitute of the Ego personality for the latter only comprises of the conscious half. An integrating, assimilating flow of the unconscious into the conscious expands the horizons of the total personality thus

introducing a process of dislocation of the Ego-personality and shifting the centre to the “Self.” But the journey towards the “Self” is never-ending; its beauty lies in its evasiveness; its aim is not consummation but rather anticipation. Jung defines the ‘Self’ in the following words:

But if the unconscious can be recognized as a co-determining factor along with consciousness, and if we can live in such a way that conscious and unconscious demands are taken into account as far as possible, then the centre of gravity of the total personality shifts its position. It is then no longer in the ego, which is merely the centre of consciousness, but in the hypothetical point between conscious and unconscious. This new centre might be called the self (Jung 1983:45).”

The concept of the “Self” is not exclusively psychological; all religions and beliefs of the human history regard the Self as a heavenly manifestation in human beings. As such religion and psychology come much closer when both are considered as struggling towards a unified vision of the self (Wilmer 81-2). Coleridge’s Christianity, in this sense, is a practical one as he himself declares in *Aids to Reflection* that it is a living process rather than a theory (Halmi et al 580). His concept of prayer is rather profound where he thinks about it as a union between the Creator and the creature. His talking about union with God refers to some psychological truth; that there should be a creaturely guilt and redemptive process consequent upon which a union of the finite will with Absolute Will ensues. Psychologically, a similar process takes place in individuation where, after a certain lapse, a painful process of rediscovering the “Self” begins. If accomplished to its near perfection, the process leads to an intimation of the God image “within” which is akin to its Christian interpretation (Robert & Barth 89). The shooting of the albatross becomes a lacuna for the Mariner from where he starts a struggle of reintegration of the self. The process involves a reassessment of all the processes hitherto unattended to and culminating into the tragic act.

The *Rime* records the Mariner’s initial de-centering from the axis of the “Self” and, in the aftermath of his struggle with his shadow, the centering upon a cumulative vision of the totality of creation. Though his re-joining in the “goodly company” (604) bears religious overtones but in psychological dynamics he is intimated with a centre of the being that controls his entire psychic faculties. The trauma of his struggle involves the settling of all oddities to their proper resolution in which his psychic energies (libido) get directed into their proper channels of functioning. His seemingly preachy sermon to the Wedding-Guest is significant for psychological reasons:

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 (605-9).

Symbolically the “kirk” may be a fetish symbol through which the initiate is introduced into the ceremony of initiation (prayer) for the simple reason to purge his/her soul of dense impurities (in the form of shadows). The Father (God/Christ) is the symbol of a rare totality in all religions of the world.¹ The “Self” is achieved through the process of individuation—a synthesizing process in which the conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche are diffusively focused on a single vision. The process is a means towards an end and Fordham explains this in the following words:

The whole man is an individual, but he is not individualistic, which means being ego-centred, and is often used as an excuse to develop peculiarities at the expense of other people or to behave in an egotistical fashion. The individuated person, on the other hand, through his acceptance of the unconscious has, while remaining aware of his unique personality, realized his brotherhood with all living things, even with inorganic matter and the cosmos itself (np).

Life is a steady growth toward maturation. This involves intimations to the ego from the unconscious through different kinds of manifestations. In the process are involved a balancing adaption to the inner and outer realities that leads to a true realization of the real self. As a means towards the end, the individuation process is a natural one and not extrinsic to the inner process of becoming. It is through pains that we become humans; the commission of the crime on part of the Mariner sets him on the course towards self-certainty removing all the external factors of influence. His crime, moreover, is a suspension that divides the boundaries of the usual from the unusual. His action and thought process become intrinsic—much more painful and devastating. This is consciousness of the “other” within that had been pushed to willful unconsciousness.

The single moment of realization is accompanied by the fixture of all thought processes on a single agenda of selfhood that initially becomes a burden:

This constitutes one of the clearest perils of emergent self-consciousness. The beautiful formula, "to a deep stillness / Did my pride tame my pride," intimates not only inner conflict but also how energetically the divided self seeks recomposition. All the energy of the man goes inward; and, as

in *The Ancient Mariner*, an external deliverance—"a breeze," an action of grace or nature—is needed before the spell can be broken even in part (Hartman 47).

Initially, the unsettling consequences of setting on the path of individuation are those of internal and external alienation. Unconsciously conscious to some settled patterns of life and character, the ordinary man within and without gets apprehensive of the seeming abnormalities that are taking place in the demeanour of the individuating subject. In the common standards of assessments, he is seen as deviant from what the commonality approves of. This is typical of the attitude shown by the immediate reactions of the companions of the Mariner who become impatiently judgmental after the killing of the albatross. The exclusive difference of character is shown when it comes to endurance and steadfastness in the face of a calamitous line of action towards higher achievements. A practical encounter (the marathon process of uniting the conscious and the unconscious) with the realities of life is the best introduction to a vision of the "Self" that is constructed on sound footings. Standing idly as a bystander, looking down upon the arena is not the best substitute of participating in the action itself: "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (Kimball 56).

For a unified psychic inception, conscious and unconscious realities of the psyche should be given equal chances of interplay so that their contents may be meaningfully utilized. This may provide a coherent vision of life inclusive of all the pluses and minuses. The "Self" is not created but re-realized in the processes of psychic explorations. Like every individual, the self is there in the Mariner, but he is disoriented from it as a believer strays away at moments from the fold of creatureliness. The path is redirected to the centre (Self, God) when further self-accreditation becomes impossible. This concept, either projected into the self of the individual or the deity, is the centre of power and energy described by Jung as archetype.²

The precipitating moment for the Mariner, in which conflicting oddities settle down to resolution, is a unification of thinking and feeling, of heart and head.³ This new synthesis gathers into one symbiosis all human potentialities to negotiate with the part-whole crises. What the Mariner faces in the wake of his intellectual progress (symbolized by sun) is the inability to awaken an emotional response to a set of values and moments of existence that will not settle into the crucible of reason. He will have to bring himself to that level of the Quest⁴ where it is a tracing back to the sources of primitive innocence and emotional freedom. These unalloyed attributes act upon man's dry soul like the Mariner's

regenerative showers that wash down the dust from his heart (Vlasopolos 366). Jung further explicates this feeling of release in the following words:

It is as if a river that had run to waste in sluggish side-streams and marshes suddenly found its way back to its proper bed, or as if a stone lying on a germinating seed were lifted away so that the shoot could begin its natural growth (Jung 1981, 184).

The truth is that it is by comparative analysis that misunderstandings and misapprehensions are removed, and a culture of mutual confidence and trust instituted. Once the far-off frontiers of the self are explored with the gusto of an inner determination, a relapsing into prosaic causality and deadened sensibility may prove too costly. It is something to be guarded and guided by discretion and constant renewal of commitment. Though the Mariner's repetitive compulsion may appear his crazy obsession with his nightmares, it by no means falls short of communicating the depth and extent of its message. In Vlasopolos's view the Mariner's vision is incomplete as he sees by the sheer magic of imagination a transformed universe but lapses back into superstition by ascribing the rare vision to the kind saint or Virgin Mary (368). But these figural configurations are archetypal in their very nature revealing eternal truths lost by man in the humdrum of worldly pursuits. Though rendered in the familiar cultural and religious moulds of Marry and saint, these figures are universal thought patterns that may acquire any form retaining their idealistic significance.⁵ To my mind this kind of imaginative and psychic recourse does not seem a regression (the negative connotations of the concept) but a progression in the direction of higher truths that can be momentarily glimpsed of with constant imaginative vigil.

The ever-expanding world of collective consciousness is not simply an intellectual one. It is rather between the two extremes of individual consciousness and a bigger whole that flows from collective unconscious. That it is the archetypal wisdom manifested at moments into the limited consciousness of man. In the Mariner's journey it is by slow and gradual intimations that he arrives at a religious conclusion of the dilemma facing him so starkly. His conclusion is inherent to his story of psychic disintegration and integration, but he locates it by default in religious terms that poses questions of hasty sermonizing.

The journey of self-exploration is a timeless tradition renewed and relived in every generation by the most powerfully potential and rebellious minds in a bid to create their own epochs. Arriving at a final declaration of the slogan "I AM" restively preserves in the background a struggle of extra-human proportions. Coleridge's "I AM" is Jung's "Individuation" which in other words is the

summation or condensation of the “Self” (Kimball 78). The Mariner is one of this timeless tradition:

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach (586-90).

Only a few individuals can achieve the stage of individuation through a synthesis of the unconscious which Barnes equates with the concept of the Plotinian “ekstasis.” The moment of this inner wholeness remains that of a fleeting nature, very similar to that of a mystical experience. But it is something that recurs in the life of the individuated self at moments that crucially ask for a referential “other” (574-5). And the Mariner has reason to repeat his story at moments that need a renewal of retelling:

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns (582-85).

In the words of John Clay, the Mariner is in a puer-like state, “somebody special, like the divine child, a carrier of the divine spark, and hence shows us our destiny and where meaning resides, knows more than ordinary mortals and is on the side of Spirit (290).” Becoming conscious of the unconscious must be accompanied by the larger contexts; that the individuated self becomes a part of the larger cosmos and permeates into the soul of an all-time humanity. His sorrows are “no longer as my sorrow but as *the* sorrow of the world, no longer as personal, isolating pain but as pain without bitterness, binding all human beings together (Barnes 571).” But there lurks a danger when a man gets individuated; there could be the danger of a greater vanity, of considering oneself the source of ultimate knowledge and perfection. This new consciousness must be preserved with a realization that the individual subject is a part of even vaster possibilities. For Jung it is when one encounters the unconscious he becomes the known as opposed to the knower, “the subject of the object in a complete reversal of ordinary consciousness where I am always a subject that has an object (Jung 1940: 70).” To a certain extent such loss of self with Jung is seeing oneself as the whole of humanity. We are brought out of our isolation. On both personal and collective levels, the Mariner is becoming conscious of a new momentum of life. He is gathering into one body all bits of the self and accommodating them into a perception of totality.

Individuation and the final arriving at selfhood are real for those who go through the experience of their ordeal. Religion and psychology come closer when the final achievement is attributed to a vision of the self, a self which is the result of balancing factors that constitute a new personality. It is only a difference of naming though the means and end are the same.

Like the Mariner one needs a crucial juncture where the whole soul is aroused to activity and where further self-deception becomes futile. Then the moment of moments starts a decisive movement ultimately culminating into the true experience of the true Self. The psyche's wholeness is this experience of the true self which is brought into actuality by the synthesis of conscious and unconscious (personal and most importantly the collective unconscious which is the repository of archetypal wisdom).

Notes

¹See Harry A. Wilmer, *Practical Jung: Nuts and Bolts of Jungian Psychotherapy* (Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1988), pp.81-2.

²John Clay explains this concept of the archetype as under:

Archetypes are inherited, pre-existing structuring patterns in the psyche, that become recognizable in outer behaviour, in the basic and universal experiences of life.... Archetypal patterns are there waiting to be realized in the personality, and are powerful. The ability to resist being overpowered by the archetype, by that of the powerful mother, for example, or of archetypes such as envy or rage, depends largely on the individual's own stage of development and conscious awareness. Archetypal behaviours tend to become most evident at times of crisis, when the ego is at its most vulnerable (289).

Archetypes are the potential resources that can be tremendously meaningful in the realities of the inner world. In them are the flowering seeds of individuation:

From early childhood we are exploratory creatures, forever seeking to impose meaning on events. Conscious awareness of ourselves and the world is constructed out of meanings. This is the essence of the individuation process, for archetypes are meaning-creating imperatives (Stevens 43).

³On the differentiation of the two see Wilmer 158-9.

⁴For a complete discussion on the subject of "Quest" see Linda Forge Mellon 934-944.

⁵The idea behind is that of the wisdom of the Old Wise Man primordially inhabitant of the collective unconscious slipping very rarely into consciousness at moments that are extremely crucial to the life of an individual & community.

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