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The Shamming Self: The Mariner's Persona in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the psychic apparatus of Persona in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* which Jung calls "only a mask of the collective psyche." The Mariner's journey in the familiar social surrounding, the "kirk" and the "light-house", are images which symbolize ordinary social set up. Initially, the journey is a plain sailing as the Mariner and his peers are unconsciously conscious of a set of values that are ordinarily taken for granted. In the land of the "mist and snow" (symbolic of the unconscious), however, they come face to face with a situation that defies the normal parameters of their habitual social character. A temporary social acceptance (the Mariner's surrender to the alternative judgments of his peers) is bargained at a very high price. The modern man's claustrophobic isolation and with it the loss of identity are dilemmas resulting from one-sided consciousness. Man's vital faculties (like those of the Mariner) suffer deathblows when they are wilfully strangled in unnatural pursuits of meaningless recognitions. Our examination of the Mariner's traumatic woes will yield extensive correspondences with contemporary social and civilizational debacles.

Keywords: S.T. Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Persona, Jung, Analytical Psychology

Introduction

Man's one-sidedness in worldly affairs, high intellectualism, and incessant factualism deprive him of perennial innocence and crude spontaneity. A temporary social acceptance (the Mariner's surrender to the alternative judgments of his peers) is bargained at a very high price. A most essential half of the Self is alienated creating psychic vacuums of imbalances. Modern man's claustrophobic isolation and with it the loss of identity are dilemmas resulting from one-sided consciousness. The retrieval of psychic wholeness and with it the totality of the Self are subject to a transformed and reformed Ego-self instituted with the greater struggle of self-realization and self-examination. Man's vital faculties (like those of the Mariner) suffer deathblows when they are wilfully strangled in unnatural pursuits of meaningless recognitions. Our examination of the Mariner's traumatic woes will yield extensive correspondences with contemporary social and civilizational debacles.

This paper focuses on that aspect of the Mariner in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"¹ which Jung calls the "Persona." The Mariner begins his journey in the familiar social surrounding; the "kirk" and the "light-house" are images which symbolize ordinary social set up. Initially, the journey is a plain sailing as the Mariner and his peers are unconsciously conscious of a set of values that are ordinarily taken for granted. In the land of "mist and snow" (symbolic of the unconscious), however, they come face to face with a situation that defies the normal parameters of their habitual social character. In the aftermath of the crime, the killing of the albatross, the Mariner confronts his "shadow" which is the sum total of all those inherent realities he has suppressed in fear of their social incompatibility. From here his journey of self-analysis begins that leads him to the dark abyss of his unconscious.

The Shamming Self: The Mariner's Persona

It [the persona] is, as its name implies, only a mask of the collective psyche, a mask that *feigns individuality*, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks (*Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 105).

The greatest damage caused to the balance of the psychic equilibrium is largely due to the individual's shamming (false pretensions) occasioned by social demands. Inherent realities are held back in the unconscious for the sake of the puniest expectations. In the face of an over-emphatic ego-consciousness natural

urges and desires are suppressed due to their incompatibility in the social and moral scales. This creates a psychic deadlock in which the natural interflow of psychic components (conscious and unconscious) is disrupted. The ego tunes to a single dimension of consciousness dictated by the mass psyche in which state of the mind little room is left for the aboriginal wisdom flowing from the unconscious. This leaves the individual subject dry of soul and hard rationalist who surrenders his soul to the prevailing social encomium. Individual life becomes, then, a hollow shamming of puppetry in which the strings are pulled by the disembodied “others.”

John Clay essentially describes the persona in these words:

'Persona' refers to the mask people wear to front the world. It derives from the name of the device used by actors in Greek theatre. . . . Jungians see the persona as a universal usage, as something of an archetype, applicable to most cultures, a social archetype really, facilitating exchange and relationships, dictated partly by the demands of society, partly by one's fiction of oneself. It only becomes pathological if people begin to identify too closely with their persona, their front to the world (286).

Persona is the face of social acceptability; it is humans' inherent ability to adapt to the environment around them and become social ideals. In this adaptation the individual sacrifices something of the “Self.” The natural and biological desires, which a social, political, religious or any other environment does not allow, remain undeveloped, underdeveloped or violently suppressed. The socially undesirable or unacceptable “self” is pushed into the background and becomes what Jung calls the “shadow.” The more developed the persona, the bigger the shadow. This creates a kind of split, a divide in the personality: one, what we are in our social environment; two, what we are when we are by ourselves. Neumann points to this issue in the following words:

The ego ideal comprises the culture-conditioned will to be different from what one really is, i.e., a conscious and unconscious rejection and repression of the self, which leads both to the sham personality, or persona, and to the splitting-off of the shadow (161).

This kind of single-dimensional consciousness creates a rigidity in which the capacity to respond to the inner and outer worlds almost diminishes to the lowest ebb. The ego closes itself off to any overtures of diffusiveness either

from within the self or from without the external world. The initial setting off of the Mariner is symbolically a thrusting forth into the outer world and repudiation of an inner intimate world. This kind of repudiation leaves behind a psychic void which results into the collapse of the total self:

The bold independence of the voyager was for Coleridge only one step from an outrageous self-sufficiency which will wantonly destroy the ties of affection. The albatross is killed, and then the penalty must be paid in remorse, dejection, and the sense of being a worthless social outcast (Harding 64).

Neumann calls this self-isolation of the ego, with a certain pride of exclusivity, as “egoistic” and “egocentric (160).” This misguided conviction is shown in the *Rime* through the shooting of the Albatross: an act of assertiveness of the individual will which results in a long drawn psychic isolation accompanied by the drying up of fecundating imagination:

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the moon (111-14).²

This is a tragic picture of the outward successful man of today. The Mariner universalizes his condition of isolation, desertion and stalemated vision by appealing to those states of mind in which “expressions are baffled” and the experiencing subject is reduced to pathological repetitions (Harding 56). The Mariner’s condition is due to the loss of his spiritual numinosity in a one-sided ego-consciousness. J. B. Beer equates this loss with the diminishing Shechinah which nearly touches upon Wordsworth’s philosophy of pantheism (59). His symbolic rendering of the loss and regaining of the Shechinah are closely related to the Jungian dynamics of conscious/unconscious dyad. Psychologically, this could be a severance from the fecundating influences of the unconscious and an inclination towards its obverse, i.e., consciousness; that man becomes over-emphatically rational leaving little possibility for a faith in the transcendental realities of experiences. This rupturing pushes man to the precipice of an impending fall where the delicate balance is maintained through the wisdom of the archetypes.³ Similarly the Shechinah is the light of wisdom vouchsafed by the deity and is shed in the dark abyss created by man out of his own doings. The falling apart of man and woman, psychologically speaking, is the disjunction of anima and animus.⁴ When one predominates, the other

becomes venomous and vengeful. The unification moment, when all absurdities are removed, is the one in which God (the consummated Self) reaches to the utmost elation. Beer's whole argument can also be summarized in the contexts of the "Wandering Jew" and the curse of "Cain." The persona is wandering dry of soul because of his betraying the archetypal "Other" for a puny gain which could be nothing else but social applause. Similarly Cain's killing Abel⁵ is like slaughtering the innocent albatross that is the indispensable "other" suppressed on grounds of social incompatibilities.

In his isolation, the Mariner's absence of referential relatedness is the first stage in the revelatory process of selfhood. His inner and outer states of experience are shockingly chaotic; there is no clarity of vision through which the Mariner may see his referential relatedness. With a rigid ego, the whole world around appears repulsive and rotting (Lines: 123-126). His failing faculties are replaced by the phantoms of those unrealities of the 'not-I.' A release from such spiritual/psychic inaction is associated, as Haven puts it, with an internal and external symbolic re-animation described by Coleridge as recognition in the external objects of nature "a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new" (Halmi, et al 608). This kind of movement from a constricted mode of being to an openness of fluidity within a moment of "progressive/regressive"⁶ animation alternatively constitutes the conscious/ unconscious dynamics associated with the moment's painful self-realization. This changed angle of realization, in which the regressive movement provides a moment of deep contemplation, includes all those intentionally or unintentionally forgotten bits that were essential parts of the total picture. Hitherto unaccustomed to the language and insensitive to the modes of nature the Mariner cannot connect the two regimens of outer and inner universes that are each other's replica. Recognizing in the outer universe a familiar language, the concept of the "other" instantly acquires a meaningful significance expressed in an internal diffusion and liberation. The movement of the moon (Lines: 264-267) proves that moment of initiation in which both perceptive and conceptive dualities are replaced by progressive consciousness.

The significance and meaning of things change after acquiring a higher consciousness than the one of ordinary import. The Mariner's initial apprehension of the world around and his interaction with it are uneventful as he is driven along a normal course of action by the social norms that submerge his individuality. With a progressive development of the Ego, a new individuality comes into effect when the Mariner is confronted by the shadow element of his psyche. This is the killing of the 'Albatross' (symbolically meaning many things

ranging from human innocence to Jesus Christ, from political/religious victimization to international hegemonic bullying). In any context the negative implications of the act shatters the hitherto complacent ego to an arousal of reassessing a life history of unconditional surrenders.

The persona also mediates between the Ego and the outside world—a relationship in which the Ego sees itself comfortably settled in a world of its own preferences and choices. The painful moment of self-realization requires dissolution of the false masking of self-complacency which the Ego resists to maintain the status quo. To Clay persona is a ‘pathological’ over-assertion (286) that results into a stasis from an imposition of a man-made law upon the law of nature (consciousness suppressing the unconscious) and that obstructs the natural flow of life-forces. Consequently anything flowing out of the perennial wisdom of collective unconscious is arrested in immobility either in an impotency to keep pace with the ever exuberant manifestations of the unconscious (its “Archetypal” contents), or with the intention to create a personal history of identity from which the “other” is excluded under fearful misapprehensions. The Mariner’s too much inclination towards ratiocination and intellectualism, symbolized by the heat and light of the equatorial regions, deprive him of the roots of “historical family” that lie deep down in the unconscious: “Inner peace and contentment depend in large measure upon whether or not the historical family which is inherent in the individual can be harmonized with the ephemeral conditions of the present”.⁷ In other words, the accumulated wisdom of man’s racial history can be of immense dispensation once it is consciously realized.

Kabitoglou’s seeing the Mariner’s journey as “a fall from myth to history (208)” can be conveniently interpreted into the paradigm of conscious-unconscious severing from each other resulting tragically into man’s loss of his roots of identity. Growing along the line of intellectual maturity is, in this dialogic, a journeying away from the sources of innocent beliefs and power of a faith in the mysteries of creation. The nobler and higher qualities of creative imagination, that are still the beacon lights of our ancient identity, have been overshadowed by a growing preoccupation with nihilistic pursuits. In the confused mess of random progress, man is standing at the cross roads of a bleak future suffering backlashes at the hands of his own extraordinary achievements. His associative niche of comforting oneness has become a lair of deadly weaponry, cunningly destructive. The Mariner’s act of killing the bird is a perceptive crime in which a different orientation takes place. Things are not accepted in their own validity and right but manipulated under disguises ignoble

by any standard of decency. This is how the corrupting agency of mind maneuvers right things for the wrong reasons; the fault with perceptive misapprehension is largely conditioned by the projective⁸ faculty of the mind. Seeing the external realities of the world in a one-sided⁹ polarized ego-reflection may not give a true picture of that reality as it is tainted by that one-sidedness. Heir to this legacy of confused standards of evaluative perceptions, modern man is caught in the turbulent vortex of his own “undoings.” In the vaster contexts of nations, cultures, ideologies, religions, and dogmas this vision of self-assertion and disregard of others’ rights have created an atmosphere of unprecedented terror and misgivings in which both the aggressor and the aggressed are horror-stricken. Individually and collectively we are pursued by the ghost-like apparitions of our unacknowledged and unrealized psychic histories. The Mariner testifies to the fact in these words:

Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread (446-51).

We humans ironically prize our flimsy achievements as the crowning of our endeavours. Our entire energies are consumed in pursuits scarcely legible to a human understanding. Walking victorious, like a Tsar or Fuhrer, over the dead bodies of others may satisfy the deadly whims of the perpetrator, but an ultimate facing up of the conscience exacts a terrible price. This is how the Mariner is led to the temptation of an inflated supremacy in juxtaposition to the hierarchy of lower creation. It is the first temptation that leads on further into the unending series of sinful commissions. Each step is a distancing away from the associative selflessness into isolated selfishness. This creates a destabilizing polarity in the otherwise calm ambivalence of opposites maintained in a miraculous golden mean (Woodring 379). It is neither in the “land of ice and snow,” (the hazy, cold world of the unconscious) nor in the scorching sun of the equator (the ego of an overemphasized consciousness) that man can find redemption and peace; it is in the golden mean of “my own cuntry” where redemption is administered to the impoverished, overvalued ego and is enfolded in the “goodly company.” It is only the intentionally overlooked incidents of life that dog us ferociously when we happen to be with ourselves and in ourselves. Shutting down in the dark abysses of our unconscious, the eternal figure of our eternal humanness may result in a devastating backlash of vengeful wrath. A realistic approach to life and its

essentials, though, may encounter stern resistances from an unrealistic idealism; a first step towards the hitherto untrodden frontiers of being may shed light on those hidden truths that are the cornerstones of our existence. Man's diminishing courage in facing his inadequacies has plunged him into the darkest meaninglessness of life. As such Raimonda Modiano describes the world of the *Rime* as a continued series of "violence" in which a single act of aggression leads on to unlimited proportions (213).

Caught in the mesh of a single faceted persona, all of us have our dark sides. The following stanzas from the *Rime* are a testimony to the fact:

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean. . . .

The very deep did rot; O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea (115-18, 123-26).

In the over-assertion of consciousness man becomes hostage to a socially conditioned acceptability. Thenceforth he is required to follow a pre-judgmental course of behavior silencing the voice of his natural "other". Instead of due recognition of others' right to life and its opportunities an oppressive culture is instituted for self-assertion. For Kabitoglou the ruthlessness of such a culture can be seen in its faith in a power play of eliminating the "other" as contender rather than coexisting in a positive, constructive, competitive atmosphere (209). An unreasonable acceptance of the prevailing social and cultural values could be momentarily instrumental in the so-called successes of life but may prove devastating on personal and collective levels. It may take away from us the natural attributes of humanness and leave us desensitized to the natural voice of our inner self. In slaughtering the albatross indiscriminately, the Mariner, instead of feeling guilty, surrenders to the judgmental verdicts of his companions (his immediate society and culture). They put their faith in appearances that confront them in alternative changes of their situations. Destroying the bird in an act of unreasonable violence is equivalent to destroying the natural instinctive faculties that, as intuitions, come to the rescue of man caught in the cross purposes of his worldliness.

The deafening echoes of inner hollowness and the defiled “inner-scapes” of our being are reflected in the poem with all the horrors and terrors. It is only a moment of realization that can instantly plunge us into a world similar to that of the Mariner. The shattering of “being” in consequence of shutting eyes to those other essential parts of the whole has been pictured by J. McGraw in the following words: “One may feel anchorless and adrift in the boundless expanse of the galaxy of disjointed being(s). Things seem out of place; they are without connection and continuity, and one feels the precariousness, fragility, and contingency of human existence” (321). In moments of extreme crises, man’s discerning faculties get benumbed. Nothing seems plausible and a blind faith in fate is reposed. Being ignorant or unconscious of the prodigious drama of unacknowledged “selves” that is being played at the backstage of the unconscious, the Mariner appeals to God and Jesus for redemption but does not take heart to fathom the depth of his own evil selves. He cries hysterically:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
 Alone on a wide wide sea!
 And never a saint took pity on
 My soul in agony.
 The many, men so beautiful
 And they all did lie:
 And a thousand thousand slimy things
 Lived on; And so did I (232-38).

But the Mariner’s loneliness is not of ordinary nature. He feels lonely because he is bereft of his essential “others”; by his own compromises; by selling his “self” to the evil of “social other.” By and large we see the same tragedy happen to modern man when he estranges himself from himself. Though the albatross guides the ship out of the fog and cold of a single dimensional unconsciousness, its slaughtering and the subsequent approval-disapproval dynamics of the mariners expose them to the sterility of habitual causality. Becoming conscious of things is not bad in itself; it is the corruption of consciousness that undermines and distorts the beauty of life.

It is not each time God or the Messiah to come to the rescue of man. Man himself is to rise to the occasion and transform his destiny. This can only be achieved through a facing up of all the “others” that are held back on certain compromises or lack of courage:

We have no imagination for evil, but evil *has us in its grip*. Some do not want to know this, and others are identified with evil. That is the psychological situation in the world today: some call themselves Christians and imagine they can trample the so-called evil under foot by merely willing to; others have succumbed to it and no longer see the good (*Memoirs* 331).

When collective will is superimposed upon the individual (as in the Mariner's case), a coercive value system takes possession of the individual will denying him/her the degree of personal freedom. This may result in the individual's rebellion against the imposing culture or society which is manifested in social and political upheavals of the world. But the most dangerous aspect of the social-individual paradigm is the individual's willingness to sacrifice his/her ideals to the social expectation of becoming a social icon. This kind of self-imposition starts a self-suppressive regime requiring the individual to silence down his inner voice. The price of compromise is too high but the individual remains oblivious to it as beguiled by the social recognition. Fordham argues as under:

Christian civilization has proved hollow to a terrifying degree: it is all veneer, but the inner man has remained untouched and therefore unchanged. His soul is out of key with his external beliefs; in his soul the Christian has not kept pace with external developments. . . . the inner correspondence with the outer God-image is undeveloped for lack of psychological culture and has therefore got stuck in heathenism (np).

This pictures forth a fractured universe of corporeal predominance and spiritual aridity. Life's spiritual insufficiencies are occasioned by our narrow visions of the totality of creatureliness. The mechanisms applied by the highly pragmatic man of today to rectify such lapses (according to his own standard of values) are ironically bereaving him of his aboriginal resourcefulness. The way back to this knowledge and wisdom is through intuitions and revelations rather than scientific analyses and argumentations. A stalemated self, caught in the heat of oppressive ratiocination, can have only a vision of life devoid of all its fine sensibilities, emotional enthusiasm, and virgin beauties.

The Mariner's crime is an act of deadly assertion in which the flowing moments of life are squeezed to the narrow channels of self-preservation and safety within a social or religious set-up. Such a tragic failure of apprehension has turned an otherwise beautiful world into infernal fires. In the rampage towards

higher securities, indiscriminate atrocities are inflicted upon those that are wrongfully implicated as threats to the so-called peace syndromes.

In creating a favourable persona of sociability, man tries to intentionally overlook those facets of the Self that are ugly and uninviting by his and society's standards. Kabitolgue assembles these in the "I-slimy" paradigm, that though loathsome may contain "germs of new life" (220). Accepting one's reality in toto is the acceptance of all those ugly and uninviting shades of personality that our Ego relentlessly refuses to accept. The ambivalent co-existence of good and bad, virtue and vice, light and darkness etc. are essentially the concomitants of humanness as one is the obverse of the other. Our pretensions of piety, purity, and perfectibility create a widening gulf of what we are and what we pretend to be. The great dilemma of the Mariner in his stasis is surrendering his will to cultural and social cannons that exclude the "other" in personal and collective anthems. His isolation in the sea and on board the ship is the result of intentionally ignoring something that inherently belongs to him.

The Mariner's symbolic Journey should have been of free and bountiful attitudes. Tragically enough instead of enlarging his vision he is stuck into an immobility of spirit. He not only fails to measure the depth and dimensions of his own worth and value but of everything that surrounds and influences his life. What makes life beautiful and bearable is its quality of flexibility in crises of understanding and accommodating all those factors that defy ordinary perceptions. In moments of utter desperation, the only rescue for the Mariner and his sailors is the albatross that is subsequently obliterated through inflated supremacy; though it should have been accommodated in its own right and privilege. This act of brutality can be seen into the paradigm of creating a powerful persona that elicits from the weaker a gesture of recognition in the spree of suppression and repression. The heart's inability to expand and quicken in acts of love and sympathy leads to the sorry states of our present human predicaments. Unconsciously we remain stuck and fixated in the vicious web of our personal interests and allow no room for others to enjoy their fair share of opportunities.

The moment of confession is arrived at only when further posing and imposing appear mentally exploding. To blurt out the now oppressive inner hollowness and futility, a dialogue with the self or the 'other' is initiated. The purpose is to disburden the inner accumulated dirt in the form of all those repressions and suppressions that were done in the name of civility or social docility. The spell of immobility is broken only when mind and with it vision open up to the

beauties and prospects of the outside world; when a sense of belonging is established with all the creatures of the heaven and the earth; when rights and wrongs are decided not arbitrarily but with the view to the individual situations. The Mariner's release is accomplished only when he establishes creaturely affinity with everything around him regardless of appearance, "worth-full-ness" or worthlessness (Beer 73).

In the final analysis, humans cannot remain psychically stable in the single dimension of consciousness. They need a counter-balancing repository that would provide them with the opportunity of perceptual and conceptual rectification. This is accomplished by integrating the "not-Is" of the unconscious contents that are regenerative to psychic wholeness. This sailing through the unconscious is a dream-like journey resembling the mystical/religious experience. The journeying subject comes across realities that are outside the domains of a work-a-day reality. Becoming conscious of the unconscious orients the individual in two oppositional states: either he becomes capable of identifying himself in relations to other things around him, setting boundaries of the Self-Other interaction; or lapses into an over-estimation of his intellectual potentials that partake of living death.

Notes

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- ¹ Hereinafter referred to as *Rime*.
 - ² *Coleridges Poetry & Prose*, eds. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004). Hereinafter referred to as Halmi et al with relevant page number (s) (in case of prose) & line number (s) (in case of poetry).
 - ³ Stevens writes about the archetypes in these words:
As the basis of all the usual phenomena of life, the archetypes transcend culture, race and time. Thus, in Jung's view (as opposed to Plato's) the mental events we experience are determined not merely by our personal history, but by the collective history of the species as a whole (biologically encoded in the collective unconscious), reaching back into the primordial mists of evolutionary time (45).
 - ⁴ Jung explains the two terms in these words:
Since anima is an archetype that is found in men (mans feminine aspect), it is reasonable to suppose that an equivalent archetype must be present in women (animus that is the male aspect of a woman); for just as the man is compensated by a feminine element, so woman is compensated by a masculine one (*Aion*151).
 - ⁵ See R. A. Foakes, *Coleridge, Violence and 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'*, Romanticism; 2001, Vol. 7, Issue 1.
 - ⁶ Progression is the progressive flowing of the libido towards an external attitude in the environment, while regression is the flowing in of that psychic energy inwardly when a stasis occurs. Attitudes change from time to time and this requires an adjustment of the libido; in progression the libido is directed towards an attitude in hand but the change in attitude directs that energy in the opposite direction. The alterations of the energetic phenomenon of the psyche (i. e. the libido) work in combining of the opposites (*On the Nature of the Psyche*, 32).
 - ⁷ See C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 237. Hereinafter referred to as *Memoirs* with relevant page number (s).
 - ⁸ Projection can be understood in the analyst/analysand analysis and is mostly done by the latter. It is an unconscious psychic activity in which personal complexes are seen in the other. For further details see *On the Nature of the Psyche*, pp. 53-54.
 - ⁹ See *On the Nature of the Psyche*, 130.

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