

Voices of Unconsciousness in Romantic Works

Lilit Anna Varghese

B. Ed Scholar, Mar Theophilus Training College, Trivandrum

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between Romanticism and the unconscious mind, shedding light on the profound influence of psychological study during the Romantic era that flourished in the late centuries. This era was marked by a deep fascination with imagination, the mind, thoughts, and feelings, and it also delves into the uncharted realms of the human psyche. This work explores the ways in which Romanticism was characterized by its connection with the unconscious mind, often manifested in the forms of dreams and the exploration of the inner mind.

The exploration by Romantics left its imprints on the study of psychology, particularly in areas related to the understanding of human consciousness and the complexities of the human psyche. Romantics delved into the depths of the unconscious through their lyrics and images, which served as a connection to the emotional landscape and the enigmatic and awe-inspiring aspects of the unconscious and the collective unconscious regenerated through their works. It also discusses the influence of the unconscious mind on Romantic poetry and traces any groundwork done by Romantics to address the notion of the unconscious mind in their works.

Keywords: Romantics, Psychology, Unconscious mind, Collective unconscious.

INTRODUCTION

The dimension of human emotions, cognition, and expression has long been a subject of profound interest and exploration, in this multifaceted intersection of human experience between Romanticism and Psychology offering a dynamic terrain of intellectual inquiry.

Psychology is the scientific study of human behavior and mental processes, aiming to understand and explain how people think, feel, and act. The word "psychology" derives from the Greek word "psyche," meaning spirit or soul.

Modern psychology spawned three major theoretical paradigms – cognitivism, behaviorism, and its depths, all of which continue longstanding philosophical traditions. Modern psychology emerged in the 18th century, largely due to William Battie's Treatise of Madness, published in 1758, and in 1879, Wilhelm Wundt, also known as the father of modern psychology, established the first experimental psychology lab. During the Romanticism movement in the late 18th century, there was an emphasis on emotion, imagination, and the individual experience. It celebrated nature, the supernatural, and the irrational elements while mainly focusing on humanism.

The Romantic era, spanning from the late 18th century to the mid-19th century, was a period of changes in arts, literature, and philosophy. Romanticism emphasized individualism, emotion, and imagination over reason and logic. This movement had a profound impact on psychology as well. Before Romanticism, psychology was primarily concerned with the study of the mind and behavior. However, during the Romantic era, there was a growing interest in the inner world of the individual. Psychologists began to

explore the role of emotions, dreams, creativity, and imagination in human experience.

ROMANTIC PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Romantic psychology emerged at the beginning of the 19th century, drawing from German Romanticism and nature philosophy. It had a significant impact on the field of psychology, particularly in the development of psychoanalysis. The Romantic movement emphasized an individual's subjective experience and emotions, central to psychoanalytic theory. The idea of the unconscious mind, a key concept in psychoanalysis, was also influenced by Romanticism. The Romantics believed that the unconscious mind was the source of creativity and imagination, expressed through artistic forms.

The connection between the two lies in the exploration of human emotions and the inner world. Romanticism was fascinated with the human psyche, dreams, and consciousness, leaving a lasting influence on psychology. Figures like Freud were influenced by Romantic ideas when developing psychoanalysis.

Early psychologists, such as Sigmund Freud, were influenced by Romantic ideas when developing their theories. Freud explored the unconscious mind, dreams, and human behavior, emphasizing the inner world and emotions. Romantic psychologists understood the links between the mind and the body, as well as the unconscious processes of the human psyche. This focus on the unconscious continues to influence modern psychology, especially in the development of analytical psychology and approaches that aim to uncover hidden aspects of the psyche.

In 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau declared in *The Social Contract*: 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.' The Romantics stressed the importance of expressing authentic personal feelings. They had a real sense of responsibility to their fellow humans, feeling it was their duty to use their poetry to inform and inspire others and to bring about societal change. According to the theory of philosophical romanticism, the concept of values and emotions in life cannot be judged through scientific and objective methods. This theory is based on the concept of a unified and interconnected universe, closely resembling the psychological basis of understanding individuals. It relies on a subjective approach rather than scientific reasoning and the objectivity of the Age of Enlightenment.

Romanticism in psychology was characterized by a focus on the inner self, the imagination, and emotions. It was also marked by an interest in nature, mysticism, and the supernatural. Romantic psychologists believed that the mind was not a machine but rather a living organism capable of growth and change.

The Wordsworthian script with trauma in "Tintern Abbey" evokes two contrasting effects of doubt and certainty, as Richard Elridge remarks. Wordsworth typifies a poet capable of "a stably and powerfully enough formed manner of thought, expression, and action in the face of the chaos of life, rather than simply reverting to metaphysical pantheism or any other doctrine."

"Kubla Khan" evokes the fleeting images of a waking dream that speak not in words but in symbols. Carl Jung, a Swiss psychoanalyst, called this the "collective unconscious." The first thirty-six lines of the poem present a symbolic diagram of the "self," in which consciousness strives to find integration with the greater depth of the unconscious mind. The last eighteen lines reflect upon the power of the unconscious mind when Coleridge finally realized that full recollection of his dream work was impossible.

An individual's psychological self is a tremendous part of everyday life. Whether a person behaves in a certain way could be due to the early experiences they suffered from, which affected their mental self. Freud's theory heavily relates to the events that occur within childhood. Blake's "Songs of Innocence and Experience" explore this in detail. Freud stressed the importance of early childhood experiences, believing

that personality was formed in the first six years of life (Ciccarelli and White 10). According to Carl Jung, the collective unconscious contains a kind of species memory, memories of ancient fears and themes that seem to occur in many folktales and cultures. These collective, universal human memories are called archetypes, relevant to both past and present, conscious or unconscious memories.

The odes speak of desires and yearnings, of possibilities and impossibilities, of the joys of the imagination and the frustrations of the human state. These odes are explorations of these preoccupying conflicts and are the mature expressions of deep-seated anxieties (Watson 1992: 260-262).

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the Freudian view speaks to the imaginative engagement with the urn's project, a creative dreamlike state of mind. It focuses on how an individual projects unconscious thoughts about something known into the unknown, serving the innermost thoughts. In the Jungian view, it focuses on archetypes and the collective unconscious, a concept developed by Carl Jung, referring to the part of the unconscious mind shared by all human beings, containing universal experiences, memories, and symbols common to humanity. These might focus on universal symbols that tap into collective human experiences. John Keats' Ode to a Nightingale is a poem full of emotions and sensations. The nightingale displays her abilities to sing as an unconscious behaviour. Karl Wentersdorf explains that in a sense, the excursion in Ode to a Nightingale record in brief the aesthetic and psychological journey that had led Keats to a more mature judgment regarding poetry and its relation to life," (Wentersdorf 1984: 82). Karl Wentersdorf explains the importance of this ode: "In a sense, the excursion in Ode to a Nightingale record in brief the aesthetic and psychological journey that had led Keats to a more mature judgment regarding poetry and its relation to life," (Wentersdorf 1984: 82).

In "Ozymandias," various factors focus on the past and history. Shelley's images are not lifeless pawns in a game of philosophic chess. They are living, flexible, various in the subtle shades of meaning, which attach to them. Reflecting consistent view of life, each image is nevertheless a response to a particular poetic stimulus and situation dictated by a thousand considerations of mood, tone and artistic necessity and aspiration toward heights which he did not, as some would have conceived as easy of attainment, but which he felt to be inexpressibly have, conceive as easy attainment, but which he felt to be inexpressibly enchanting through the very difficulty of scaling them" (Foglr, 1987, 29).

The role of the unconscious in memory is referenced in "Tintern Abbey" by William Wordsworth. The lines clearly show these unconscious emotions, "thy voice, not catch from thy wild eyes these gleams, of past existence," where "past existence" refers to hidden memories and thoughts.

"Kubla Khan" is often associated with the dreamlike quality of romantic poetry, delving into the imaginative and mysterious realms of the mind. The poem is filled with fantastical and surreal imagery, such as "caverns measureless to man" and "a sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice." These images could be seen as a representation of the dreamlike quality of the unconscious mind.

Romantic poets explored the inner self. William Blake's "Songs of Innocence and Experience" contrasts the innocence of childhood with the complexities of adulthood, touching on the themes of personal growth and self-identity. In terms of developmental psychology, it examines how individuals develop a sense of self and identity over their lifetime. Erik Erikson addresses identity formation and the challenges individuals face in different life stages.

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats delineates a theory of unconsciousness in the light of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic perspective. The poetry reflects the catharsis from Freud's term of sublimation, focusing on the imaginary antique visualized in the mind. It reflects on what living, human scenes lie behind the image and the abstract relation of the human mind and art.

The Romantics were fascinated with physical death, and in Keats, this can be viewed as an objectification of the "fatal attraction" toward a union, a return to the unconscious. Thus, Keats confesses, "I have been half in love with easeful Death" ("Ode to a Nightingale" 6). Both fascination and fear are evident, with the word "half" epitomizing the ambivalence felt by the ego regarding complete ego surrender. Harold Bloom highlights the theme of completion and the finality of death in Keats' poems.

In terms of modern psychology, the poem "Ozymandias" illustrates the ideas of nature's sublime power and its ability to outlast human achievements. It recognizes the restorative and healing effects of nature on mental well-being, supporting the romantic notion of nature's significance. The use of the desert setting symbolizes time and memories, showing that everything comes from nature and ultimately returns to it. It recognizes that beliefs and attitudes guide imaginative constructions of the world.

While Romanticism and psychology are distinct fields with different methodologies and objectives, they share common themes related to human emotions, the inner world, and individual experiences. These demonstrations highlight that romantic poetry delves deep into psychological themes and concepts, emphasizing the interconnectedness of literature and psychology in their exploration of the human experience. Romantics believed that the imagination was a source of creativity and a means of transcending the limits of thought.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Romantics laid the foundation for the exploration of the unconscious mind. They delved deeply into the unconscious state of mind and its thoughts, believing that by tapping into the depth of the unconscious, they could create art and literature that resonated with the profound and mysterious aspects of the human experience. Their philosophical groundwork, with the ideas of the transcendental self, added depth to the Romantic exploration of the unconscious mind.

Works Cited

1. Camur, A. "The Cathexis Reflection of Ode on a Grecian Urn by John Keats in the Light of Sigmund Freud's Theory of the Unconscious Mind." *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, vol. 9, no. 12, Dec. 2022, pp. 192-03, doi:10.14738/assrj.912.13607. Accessed 5th October 2023.
2. Datta, Vijay Kumar. "Trauma of Modernity in Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Science*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2018, pp. 3-4, dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.3.5.16. Accessed 4th October 2023.
3. Fogle, R. H. "The Abstractness of Shelley." *Shelley, a Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by George Ridenour, Prentice Hall Inc, 1987, pp. 10-30. Accessed 5th October 2023.
4. Minasian, Serenah. "A Psychoanalytic Reading of William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience" (2019). Honors Theses, no. 454. Accessed 6th October 2023.
5. "Philosophy Of Romanticism and How It Has Influenced Modern Psychology." *Researchomatic*, 2013, researchomatic.com/Philosophy-Of-Romanticism-And-How-It-Has-Influenced-Modern-Psychology-153800.html. Accessed 7th, 2023.
6. Watson, J. R. *English Poetry of the Romantic Period*. Longman, 1992, pp. 260-262. Accessed 5th October 2023.
7. Wentersdorf, Karl P. "The Sub-Text of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'." *Keats- Shelley Journal*, vol. XXXI, 1984, pp. 70-84. Accessed 6th October 2023.

Lilit Anna Varghese, based in Adoor city in Pathanamthitta, Kerala. She completed MA in English Literature at St. Cyril's College, Adoor. She pens down her inner thoughts and feelings in the form of poems and quotes, published her poem through personal blogs, co-authored anthologies titled Beyond the Horizon, Shades of love and shadows of life: An Anthology of Love Poetry, Scribbles defying gravity A Collection of Love Poems and Expressions on War Volume II and on, and also actively engaging in research workshops. She participated in the International Poetry Writing Competition conducted by All India Forum for English Students, Scholars, and Trainers (AIFEST) and secured A Grade in the Open category and worked as a co-author in their Anthology, and also a member at AIFEST.