
Forms of Psychoanalysis in Keats, Smith and Wordsworth

While oftentimes viewed as contributing to the development of Freudian psychoanalysis, the psychological discourse, and specifically that which deals with the unconscious (the part of the psyche which subjects are actively unaware), of Romantic poetry can also be seen as possessing various methods of its own for examining the psyche. Romanticism is frequently seen as lacking the critical tool of psychoanalysis, rather than perhaps first putting into action the schema which Freud later codified. However, there is at work within the poetry of Charlotte Smith, William Wordsworth and John Keats an individual struggle to understand the machinations of the unconscious which represents an early alternative to classical psychoanalysis.

In the Romantic canon, the psychoanalytic project takes on various forms, most of which would be deemed heretical by Freudolatry. Charlotte Smith's texts use narrative commentary on the surroundings as an attempt at auto-analysis (in which either poet or narrator becomes both analyst and analysand). She describes her version of the unconscious as, "...mournful, sober-suited Night! / When the faint moon, yet lingering in her and, / And veiled in clouds, with pale uncertain light..." (Smith 1-3). This act of sublimation results in her trials with the seemingly impervious nature of the unconscious. Here it is being related as external and unresponsive to conscious efforts at comprehension. Nonetheless, "the [narrator's] enfeebled mind / Will to the deaf cold elements complain, / And to tell the embosom'd grief, however vain..." (Smith 5-8). The mind is enfeebled for some untold reason, however, it certainly appears possible, considering that she is crying out to her projected unconscious, that there is some repressed cause of her affliction. Apparently, the narrator believes that her dis-ease will not respond to this proto-"talking cure", however she continues. This continuation of her auto-analysis leads one to consider the possibility that, given the odd internal/external nature of this conception of the unconscious, success and failure might be synonymous.

Following in the same blending of analyst and analysand, Wordsworth's texts use self-reflection as a way to inform an understanding of the present and in doing so uncovers repressed trauma. In "Nutting" the narrator happens upon a "...dear nook unvisited... [lacking any]... ungracious sign of devastation..." (Wordsworth 16-18). His recollection begins innocently, yet with foreshadowing of the violent reality. His play within the unconscious becomes transformed by its alterity and lack of social constraints. This motivation (what we would identify as almost exclusively id-driven) turns to sadism and violence against object used for sexual pleasure (Wordsworth 43-45). These acts have been repressed by the narrator and are difficult to talk about "...unless [he] now confound[s his] present feelings with the past..." (Wordsworth 48-49). Conversely, the narrator goes through reaction-formation after the act itself, as a mode of repression. He now

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views this act/desire as bad/wrong. In this way, Wordsworth's text hints at a type of pre-Freudian analytical process.

More interestingly than simply falling into the Freudian paradigm, Wordsworth's "Nutting" creates a parallel form of analysis that evades Freud's by the absence of an external analyst. The narrator, through internal discussion of the event, recognizes what he recollects to have happened, recognizes his feelings about his actions at the time and considers the event from his current social location. Thus, the forest scene takes on a dual significance, the unconscious itself and a sexual object, which has been acted upon by the unconscious.

Following a similar path to the two previous poets, John Keats' texts provide insights into Romantic auto-analysis. His texts posit the unconscious as accessible through various forms of altered consciousness. In "Ode to a Nightingale" the narrator is found in a state in between waking and sleep, unable to tell which (Keats 80). He has arrived in this state through poetry, however the feeling is similar to that of "hemlock...or some dull opiate..." (Keats 2-3). These two drugs imply a forgetfulness which is the goal of repression, thus also this state which he has found himself in, a type of conscious and active repression. However once in this altered-consciousness, the narrator's death drive is openly discussed. Which seems paradoxical, considering the forgetfulness normally attached to self-destructive acts. The narrator is "half in love with easeful Death..." openly and in a way that reveals the success wrapped up in his auto-analysis (Keats 53). Although, the narrators' analysis is caught within this repetition-compulsion of trauma, it reveals itself as well. Following in this, the text refers to the "fancy", or imagination, as not being able to "...cheat so well/As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf" (Keats 73-74). The fancy, here being his introspection, deceives about her ability to cheat. Clearly, Keats recognizes the difficulty in analyzing one's own psyche, which Freud would later attempt to evade by bringing in an external analyst. However, it is similarly difficult to discount Keats' poetic and psychoanalytic success entirely. His text clearly explores the possibility of self-analysis in a way that certainly informs Freud's theory, if not rivals it.

These three poets' works present a parallel form a psychoanalysis, which intersect and diverge, that predates Freud's and creates the foundation for his psychoanalytic canonization. While psychoanalysis tends to view itself as beginning with Freud and then sectioning into various schools of thought, the Romantic poets can be seen as having an earlier and not necessarily ignorant way of viewing and interpreting the psyche. Modern psychoanalysis "enthusiasts" (scholars, readers and others outside of medical practice) tend to congregate into codified schools of thought with formal structures (Lacanian, Kristevan), and a new take on the origins of psychoanalysis could create novel individual multiplicities of thought within this theoretical discipline.

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