

THE AMATEUR

Translation by Achille Cattaneo

An 'Amateur' is someone who 'delights' in approaching an activity, a source of knowledge, a culture, with the awareness that he will never reach its peak. The peak will always be there, in the distance, unreachable.

In psychology, and particularly in Psychosynthesis, the correct attitude, in the commitment to know Man, is that of the amateur. Every way of being of Man, every one of his thoughts, every one of his sub-personalities, every one of his disturbances is nothing but a symbol whose interpretations are prolonged in the Beyond. "Everything that is perishable is a symbol" (J.W. Goethe). Life itself, therefore, even the earthly life of the human being, is a symbol.

"Ah, everything is a symbol and an analogy! The wind that passes, the night that refreshes are anything but the night and the wind: shadows of life and thought. All we see is something else" (F. Pessoa).

Reality lies behind a succession of symbolic veils of which the last one will never be raised.

The 'veil of Maya' is the illusion that for Schopenhauer veils the reality of things in their authentic essence. "It is Maya, the deceptive veil, which wraps the faces of mortals and makes them see a world of which it can not be said that it exists, nor does it exist, because it resembles the reflection of the sun on the sand, which the pilgrim confuses from afar with water".

To the amateur psychologist, to know what he can of the human being, he seeks symbols coming from remote eras, from distant lands, from unknown corners of the world, buried by sand or hidden among eternal glaciers. Already at the dawn human existence, life was symbolically interpreted with rituals, dances, masks, hieroglyphs, talismans, fetishes that played the role of producing ever new insights into its *unattainable* meaning.

The fundamental difficulty in examining symbols, which make up the various aspects of a man's personality and

way of being and operating, lies in the fact that symbols are not reducible to certain and immutable diagnoses and concepts. They are not definable once and for all.

Their meaning is inexhaustible. This is why the professional psychologist, forgets that he is an 'amateur', due to his need to offer psychological incontrovertible certainties to the client, retreats when he sees fields of symbolic knowledge where the land becomes dangerous, contestable, evanescent, compared to the psychological 'certainties' that he wants to transmit. He strives for his reputation with judgments of 'truth and reality' typical of common thought and becomes 'pedantic', unshakable in supporting them. He feels fear, and even repulsion, for non-usual symbolic fields. It is also true that those who rely on the psychologist, or perform their own self-analysis, have an insatiable need for certainties but, if they really want to know themselves, they should sense that in the background Reality is 'always' something other.

A symbol hides meanings that occur one in succession to another, if we do not focus on the first interpretation of the instinctual level, as proposed by Freud. Assigning interpretations that are static and considered valid only in the context of one's own authoritative school, results in evaluation rigidity and arid comprehension. It does not enter the systemic totality of the psyche. With such a professional attitude one does not descend into the abyss, nor ascends to the skies of the human being.

The attitude to be taken is that of the enthusiastic 'amateur', ready to start over again. Even the 'advanced amateur' cannot fail to discover that he is a beginner who sees unexpected levels of interpretation of the symbol, if he approaches the various cultures and schools that, on the planet, address the theme of Man, his personality or his 'Egg Diagram' which welcomes in itself its own Self. Psychological treatment has, therefore, two classes of therapists and customers: on the one hand 'the amateurs', on the other 'the pedants'.

The analytic current ends in the plain or rather in the cellars of the lower unconscious. For Freud and his followers it is natural to consider the snake as a phallic symbol and to freeze this interpretation, as a convinced pedantic.

Jung goes further: “The symbol is ‘alive’ only as long as it is full of meaning. But when it gives birth to its meaning, when that expression is found with which you can formulate what was sought, the expected or foreseen thing, even better than the symbol in use until then, the symbol ‘dies’”. From ‘amateur’ he becomes professionally ‘pedantic’.

Assagioli expands the interpretation. The symbols have for him an energy, a vital impulse, which strives towards ever new knowledge, some of which will remain constantly beyond. “Psychosynthesis is an open system, it does not have obligatory symbolic reference points (...) The inclusive potential of Psychosynthesis is perhaps the most vivid and original characterizing feature” (G. Dattilo).

If someone abandons the amateurish attitude in deepening the meanings on the symbols and is sure of their correct and static interpretation as he considers himself an ‘expert’ in their understanding, he deprives himself of the vivifying and inspiring contact of the internal wealth they possess. The symbolic contents are classified into already known categories, preventing the emergence of any new meaning, of a new understanding.

Playing with symbols - and all that exists is a symbol - is not a distracted game, but the way to get in touch with Life.

For graphic patterns, or Assagioli’s thought phrases, even those contained in the ‘Assagiolini’, it is appropriate, today, as forty years have passed since his departure, to activate levels of reading concerning the knowledge of Man that reach levels of understanding which promote renewed interpretative openings. Each of his writings is an allusive language that deals with knowledge that does not stop at the rational interpretation which jumps to the eye at the first reading, but requires an approach of renewed symbolic translations, aware that his scientific production entrusts us with visions that would fade even in the skies of Tibet. As the sea and the rock allude to earthly and metaphysical realities, so every symbol opens onto exoteric and esoteric spheres.

Believing that symbols arrive at a closed door beyond which one does not proceed, is behaving like an Indiana Jones who stops on the chasm that separates him from

the grotto of the Holy Grail and returns convinced that he has performed the task entrusted to him.

“The symbol creates a relationship between the original source of that man and his finitude, that is, it leads him from his origin to his end” (M.Davy). And Berkeley notes: “The symbol is the language with which the Infinite Spirit speaks to the finite spirits”.

It is not for nothing that Psychosynthesis contains the term ‘synthesis’ that alludes to the synthesis of opposites including the opposites of matter and spirit, personality and Self, exo and esoteric aspects. Psychosynthesis undoubtedly investigates personal experience and belonging to a culture, but in Man it also traces meanings that go beyond the apparent aspect of the personality and reach into the universal. It links to the visible image of Man the invisible part, the exoteric to the esoteric.

Coming down on one side, no matter which of the two, is to go against the synthetic essence of Psycho-synthesis.

If you synthesise the ‘amateur’ with the ‘pedant’ not so much by finding the midpoint that divides them, but the vertex that contains them and transforms both. The function of the symbol is to bring together lines of thought that open to the awareness the doors of rooms that continue into other rooms with other doors and new understandings. If deepened with an ‘amateur’ attitude, the symbol is a mirror from which the pedant can gradually clear away the dust, a mirror reflecting the widening of consciousness of the researcher on the path to understanding Life.

The ‘amateur’ and the ‘pedant’ should not forget that all thought-forms survive for a time, but are inexorably destined to appear for what they are, that is, partial truths destined to give way to other, broader, forms of thought.