

# CHARM IS DECEITFUL, AND BEAUTY IS VAIN

*Translation by Alberto Gabba / Gordon Leonard Symons*

Nowadays sciences and neurosciences, philosophers, psychologists, all agree in admitting that human being, whether he is aware of it or not, is in a continuous evolution, aroused by a continuum of moments of renewal, all aiming at the goal of self-realization, what Jung called Individualization, while others define as awakening of the Soul, and Psychosynthesis calls Self.

*“Man, consciously or not, is constantly looking for himself, his specificity, the reason for being in the world.”*

This is stated repeatedly by Anna Maria La Sala Batà, a great interpreter of the Psychosynthetic Theory.

Every man who comes into the world has been sent to take part in the human experience, with the task of expressing something that was not there before. Otherwise, he would have no reason to be there.

A task that consists in expressing his distinctive note, his originality ... and in becoming what he is.

*Originality* that can also be understood as *diversity* and, consequently, could be unaccepted, unrecognized, not valued, thus reducing and subtracting its creative contribution to the world.

But how can it be so *difficult* to discover our I?

The fact is that our true individuality lies latently deep within us, almost asleep, limited and moulded, even before opening our eyes to life, by conditionings and projections coming from outside. So, we should as soon as possible recover the parts of ours that I would call *betrayed*, since they have been imagined and desired more or less unconsciously *by others*.

I intend here to emphasize that, before being born, we are imagined and moulded. And this happens even before we find out who we are. Someone has already done

this for us. We have been already invented, as it were. By parents, who, in turn, as children, had been invented too...

It is therefore an *unescapable transmission* that takes place over generations.

Being fantasized and imagined, more or less unconsciously, I repeat, is a bit like being robbed of our individuality, our uniqueness as human beings who will be ours *only* as a result of great *conflicting efforts*, efforts needed to get rid of the fantasies belonging to primary figures, pushing the child to incarnate them.

We could define this image built for us by others before our birth “an unconscious psychic prison” which, however, has also the positive characteristic of reassurance.

And this is how in this game we become “accomplices and victims” at the same time...

That’s because embodying the other’s projection is, in fact, very reassuring for the child.

On the other hand, we cannot fail to note that between parents and children occurs a disproportionate asymmetrical relationship of strength: the child is absolutely powerless, and the duration of his dependence is the longest compared to that of other living beings.

## **The complacency towards parents is lurking**

The child is willing to accept almost everything from them. His primary needs even induce him to transfer onto himself parents’ faults and misdeeds in order not to spoil their image, so decisive in that period of life.

Maslow, the great scholar of motivation, the author of a research lasted over 12 years, observes:

*“The needs of security, belonging, relationships, love and respect can be satisfied only by other persons, that is, only from the outside. This implies a considerable dependence on the environment ... Which means that he will have to adapt and change himself ...*

*He is the dependent variable. The outside is the fixed and independent variable.”*

And also:

*“What makes people neurotic? Neurosis appears in essence and at its very beginning as a deficiency disease, arising from the deprivation of some satisfactions to*

which I impose the name of needs.

Neuroses involve frustrated desires of security, belonging, identification, authentic loving relationships, respect, prestige.”

Therefore, we have to deal with *basic, primary needs*:

- the absence of their satisfaction causes disease
- their satisfaction avoids disease

Continuing our reflection according to Maslow, “healthy people” who have sufficiently satisfied their basic needs of security, belonging, love and respect, are motivated primarily by “selfrealization” tendencies. The individual who realizes himself, as *able to respond to his basic needs*, is far less dependent on the environment.

And, if it is true that even before birth we are swallowed up by hopes and mortgages *ad usum* of others, when parents entrust our coming to the world with the task of satisfying something of theirs, and *not of ours*, which can be their need, the solution of an unresolved problem, filling a void, perhaps healing a relationship, what will our task be then?

**Waking up - Inventing our space - Discovering ourselves, getting to know ourselves and changing the games that life offers us - taking away from us what is not ours.**

Jung invites us to wake up as soon as possible to take our life in hand, and his friend Assagioli does the same when he writes:

“The “*Gnosce te ipsum*” carved on the temple of Delphi tells you to study your innermost *SELF*, your *I* oppressed by projections and conditioning and to catch your wonderful potential”.

And that’s why I used “at the limit” the term betrayal.

Then, continuing in the reflection, we notice many moments in which RENEWAL is necessary.

Growing up, becoming mature adults means progressing through moments of renewal: accepting to face obstacles, detachments, separations, losses, *crises*...

If we reflect on our history, we can see that *life begins with a loss*.

We learn immediately, at the dawn of life, to put our-

selves in a position to live with the inevitable, accepting separation from the maternal womb, the great detachment from the first attachment.

It is then that we pass violently from the great bond to having to get by ourselves. The need to grow, to become and to move away seems to be as strong as the desire for fusion.

Exploring life, entering the world of relationships, school, work, discovering the freedom of human separateness: here are our stops...

At each stage we strengthen or vacillate; we grow or get stuck; we defend ourselves and avoid the obstacle or we stabilize at that level...

We learn, so to speak, “to cooperate with God”, as Bachellet wrote in his notebook, to accept what we cannot change, which is the *dynamic* base to express authenticity and creativity.

If we consider the two groups of *optimists* and *pessimists*, among the first ones we find more innovators, open to the future and its opportunities, endowed with courage and self-confidence, rather than among the second ones, who consider changes as “risky”.

In the other group, to the desire to be creators of one’s own life, with the risk of slipping into a delirium of omnipotence, is opposed the risk of a passive attitude, surrendered to immobility. An attitude undoubtedly deriving from low confidence and self-esteem and also, to a large extent, from the family footprint, that makes them *prisoners of the past*.

“*Slowly die* - Pablo Neruda writes - *those who become slaves of habit, repeating the same journeys every day, those who do not change the march, those who do not risk, those who do not speak to those who do not know...*”

According to some research, the awareness of the motivation to renewal is unclear, often induced by factors partly located in the past.

In the course of personal evolution even *hope*, which has something of the sacred, can activate resources and projects towards a real renewal.

What is really important is that *everyone gets to know* and deal with one’s *motivations* and *energies*.

With this we return to the “Gnosce te ipsum”.

To the lack of a motivation based on the exterior, by contrast, corresponds the augmentative motivation “to struggle” that is undertaken and chosen *primarily* by the subject as a reward for his own needs.

I would like to emphasize that these people are more autonomous, as they don't need others, and are more self-sufficient, since they are motivated from within.

The more or less unconscious *defence mechanisms* aimed at avoiding suffering, are therefore countered by *the mechanisms of struggle*, fruit of awareness, aimed at overcoming difficulties. Therefore, to *grow*.

Through many obstacles and different changes, we go beyond childhood, adolescence, move on to adult life, mature, revise our choices, stabilize ourselves in work, in the families to which we give life, in the social sphere, and proceed in the various ages.

Day after day, we also happen to come to terms with *decline*, when we realize that we are being *stripped*.

*It is the moment* in which we feel that future is no longer infinite...

It is the moment in which the world of affections and relationships is gradually reduced...

We realize that, as the Book of Proverbs proclaims:

**“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain”**

grace and beauty that have been taken away from us over time, while in us arises the awareness that true wisdom is that of the heart.

It is then that we can learn not to recede in front of the distress and the impairment that frequently accompany us over the years, but to be willing to make our love still useful and fruitful, while the strength of fragility is revealed in us.

It is difficult to undress, day after day, of strength and energy, to contrast the emptiness and bewilderment that beset us in the face of the great questions of life... and we begin to consider time as *time we have left to live*.

But even the feeling that time is running out could serve to a profound renewal...

*“It is difficult for the soul to sing when it ages”*, wrote Simone de Beauvoir.

And again: *“A long life is a gift, but it has a price”*.

Certainly, old age has the *price* of innumerable *losses*: *people we love*, a place in the family community, a role in the welfare state, often economic security, the power of choice, of autonomy...

Our body declines, our feelings flatten, reflexes are slow, it takes an effort to concentrate, to elaborate new information... Instead of dancing, we limp...

But I do not intend to treat old age as if it were a disease or a wait for the end or if it were linked to the date of birth. Like youth, advancing age is a state of the Soul, an always possible moment of growth and renewal

in which we live the transcendence of body and psyche. Of course, commitment and interests support our identity, they are an anchor for both the private Self and the transcendent Self.

(Maria Montessori, the spirited pedagogist of the early twentieth century, at the age of 90, arthritic from head to toe, but seeing well, used to read as much as possible and, in doing so, continued to stimulate her growth, to activate neurons, to help others to comfort themselves... The same that Levi Montalcini, the Nobel prize, invited us to do daily).

The transcendence of the I allows us to invest in the future through our footsteps, a form of mysterious inheritance for the next generations, engaging ourselves in a revision of life, in a real therapeutic examination of our past that allows us to *read the difficulties, the losses, the errors* we encountered, highlighting their value and meaning.

Let's not forget that, as Erikson claims in his studies and researches on the various ages of man,

## **WE ARE ALWAYS RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR LIFE**

Assagioli himself emphasized in his lecture of March '43: “Up to the last breath we are responsible towards Life for how we live, for the use we make of the “talents” entrusted to us”.

I end with a poem with very evocative images:  
*“Living the renewal”*

*Be masters of yourselves, penetrate your being  
to capture the beat of life.*

*Break the bonds that fetter yourself,  
reach out to grab the unknown,  
open your arms wide to the embrace of air,  
make a pair of wings to soar above.*

G. Rawlings

---

Paola Tarchini Delgrosso