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Book Review

Message for a monkey who believes to be an eagle By Mimmo Oteri, Uno Editori, 2018.

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The novel by Mimmo Oteri (2018), *Messaggio per una scimmia che si crede un'aquila*, p. 318, Publishing House Uno Editors, year of publication 2018, tells the story of the haughty and arrogant Professor Roberto Battaglia.

Prof. Roberto Battaglia teaches Constitutional Law at the University of Messina and for a long time now (since he lost his son due to a car accident) he spends his days in tedium, deeply detached from everything that can give him a reason to live a happier life. One day, before starting with the usual routine of exams (when the Professor sadistically enjoyed putting his students in difficulty and then sending them back to the next call), upon entering his office he noticed that someone had messed it up and also left him a mysterious letter, in which its contents were: "Your time has come. Know yourself. Follow the instructions". The personality of Prof. Battaglia would never have led him to do what is required by the letter; until, however, a series of bizarre events, most recently the stealing of his son's teddy bear, the most precious memory left to him, led him to follow everything the letter recommended.

From here begins an incredible adventure for the Professor, which ends with an unexpected ending.

The text offers many ideas in a narrative and psychological key: as often happens in narratives, it is possible to find similarities between some passages of the novel with other literary works (in fact, it seems that some narrative characteristics can also be traced in other works such as the *Odyssey*, *Harry Potter* or *Beauty and the Beast*). By interpreting the text through exquisitely psychological lenses, it is

possible to detect the emergence of different cues both original such as, for example, the role of 'transitional object' (Winnicott, 1953, 1971) that the teddy bear assumes in this case for the same Professor and classics, such as the invitation to the realization of the original archetype (Brooke, 2015; Jung, 2014), the possibility of knowing and being oneself, that is the Jungian fulfillment of the process of individuation (Corbett & Kugler, 1989; Frisone, 2019; Jung, 1977; Settineri, Merlo, Turiaco, & Mento, 2017) that make the novel an interesting tool for psychological reflection.

Structural elements of the text

Professor Battaglia's story involves different types of places. Although, in fact, there are many related to the city in which Professor lives, Messina, some chapters are set elsewhere: Chapter III, Journey to the Holy Land, for example, is set in Fiuggi. The second part of the book, instead, starting from chapter VI, is set in Armonia. Armonia is described as a magical island, in which those who had bravely managed to face their fears would have been transformed into better people; vice versa, those who would have renounced courage by crying without overcoming adversity, would have been transformed into a whining tree. In this magical world Professor Battaglia begins his journey in search of his son's teddy bear. In clear contrast to the ἀνακύκλωσις, here the dimension of time embrace linear logic, that is the temporal dimension characterized by the unrepeatability expressed by Jaspersian psychology (Jaspers & Rigobello, 1982).

With reference to the actions that give life to the story, it is possible to point out the above mentioned, that is how the story undergoes a drastic change when a small monkey steals the teddy bear of the Professor's son; starting from here, in fact, Prof. Battaglia will decide to carry out a series of actions that he had never ever imagined doing. The characters of the text carry with them a variety of meanings for the same Professor. In reference to the university context, it is possible to learn about different figures, experienced indiscriminately as harmful: we find his colleagues who take him into consideration only to ask him for favors or for his assistant, kept in consideration a detestable sycophant, Miss Pina, handyman janitor of the faculty with whom the Prof. had never had a dialogue, and the students, sacrificial victims used to vent her anger. Outside the university context, a special place in the heart of the Prof. was reserved for his now ex-wife Claudia (they were separated soon after the death of their son Emanuele) and for who was considered his only true friend, Baron Vittorio Amedeo Mancuso, with whom their friendship was born since they were children. With his parents, Professor Battaglia had never had a very good relationship: Miss Iolanda, aged seventy-eight, was from Palmi, in Calabria, and had moved to Sicily to follow her husband. The role of housewife was very close, she used to intrude on condominium chores, trying to pour over the political ideals inherited from her family of origin. With reference to the relationship with his son, the author highlights how the two «had never been understood. An abyss separated them. A deep sea of unspoken emotions,

unspoken things, unexpressed thoughts. With a tender heart and a hard head, she had never realized that she had been too strict with him. The bulky figure of Miss Iolanda had occupied every single space of her son and had helped to forge his shy and irritable character». The father, on the other hand, «despite the fact that he had always been very busy at work had tried to be present in the life of his only son. He had seen him play, grow, study, face the great goals of life and finally that immense tragedy, but never, not even for a moment, he had stopped considering him a child, to love, protect and drive».

The characters present in the second part of the book constitute the inhabitants of Armonia.

And, as clarified only at the end of the text, the whole world of Harmony is the fruit of the soul of Prof Battaglia. A world created after having fallen into a coma due to lightning that struck him and burned most of his internal organs. To save himself, to have one last chance before it was too late to reconcile with his experience, Prof Battaglia lives as a real world in which the characters present are nothing but representations of those who, in the meantime, continued to assist him in real life: Maya, Armonia's adventure companion, a nurse who assisted him in the months he was in a coma. Patrizio, another adventure mate to Armonia, a cleaning boy who confided to the professor before someone came to visit him in the hospital. And so also all the other characters of Armonia, Polyphemus, Icarus, Mr. Pippo, each of them was part of the life of Prof, and in this fantasy world they had the task of helping him in his mission of reconciliation.

Narrative approach

The subjectivation is constantly present in the narrative discourse, not by chance that every person mentioned, when he finds himself having to act or express his opinion, does so in correspondence with a different judgment - sometimes opposite - from that of others, thus favoring the unpredictability of the consequences of history.

The plurality of perspectives emphasizes the personality characteristics of the one as of the other character, pointing out for example the different way by Professor Battaglia and his wife to elaborate the loss of their son. Or the way in which his friend, Baron Vittorio Amedeo Mancuso, had managed to react to the mourning of his beloved companion, is quite different.

Interpretation

From the text it is possible to notice how the author, external narrator, paints a picture of personality of Professor Battaglia that makes him appear with a typology of personality attributable to the introverted thought type, with sensation as a secondary function.

This classification of personalities can be derived from a series of considerations; for example, for Prof. Battaglia external facts do not constitute the cause or objective of his form of thought even if, as

happens to the introvert, this is often the impression he wants to give. Thus, above all during the quarrels with his wife Claudia, it is possible to deduce how much his form of thought begins in him and returns to him, although the attempt by the Prof to cling to the field of objective reality is evident. For the introverted thought of Prof. Battaglia, therefore, the facts assume secondary importance with respect to the value of the subjective idea. He wants to see the external facts as they are conceived in his idea and seems to feel satisfied when the idea he created seems to result from external facts, thus protecting its validity. A further demonstration relating to the personalization of Prof. Battaglia can be seen by considering how much the latter turns out to be a man incapable of not investigating his problems to the utmost, thus complicating them further by remaining anchored to a dimension of perplexity. Moreover, it really seems that the Prof. is struggling to admit that what is clear to him might not even be clear to others (in particular to Claudia or Vittorio Amedeo).

Moreover, one has the impression that the sensorial perception of Prof. Battaglia ensures that the psychic objects do not really penetrate him; rather, what results is that it is Prof. himself who sees things differently. From the novel it seems that his introverted sensation manages to capture what lies behind the surface of the physical world. From the elements that can be drawn from childhood, it is possible to see how resentment has accompanied the protagonist of the story throughout his life, finding loyal allies in irritability and irascibility, especially since the day of his son's death.

What the outside narrator brings to the protagonist is a journey of individuation, through which Prof. Battaglia develops his individual personality. Since childhood the author reveals how different events have led the Prof. to find great obstacles to effective personal development. The artificial deformation resulting from numerous events had meant that the adaptation of the Prof. to life could be translated more on a level of passive adjustment than on the ability to "stay in the world". After being able to go all the way to his path, the Prof. finally manages to reach the evolution of consciousness with respect to the previous state of identity, thus deriving an important psychological benefit.

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