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Aldo Carotenuto (1933-2005)

Aldo Carotenuto, one of Italy's foremost Jungian psychoanalysts, died on February 14th, 2005 of a heart attack. He was often considered as the psychologist of love—which he often dealt with in his writings. With his death, the Jungian panorama lost one of its historic figures. He was a member of the Editorial Board of JEP.

Born in Naples in 1933, Carotenuto studied in Rome and Turin, earning a degree in philosophy. He then lived for a period in the US, where he attended the School of Experimental Psychology at the New School for Social Research in New York, where he made the acquaintance of Edward Whitmont. Upon his return to Italy, he became Professor of Psychology of the Personality in the new faculty of Psychology at Rome's University "La Sapienza", as well as President of the Associazione di Psicologia e Letteratura, dedicated to the study of the relationship between psychoanalysis and artistic creativity.

His analyst was Ernst Bernhard, the founder of analytic psychology in Italy—who was also the analyst of Federico Fellini, and of well-known writers Natalia Ginzburg and Giorgio Manganelli. After the death of Bernhard, Aldo Carotenuto, along with other colleagues, entered AIPA (Associazione Italiana per lo Studio della Psicologia Analitica), founded in 1961 by Bernhard, in order to continue the diffusion of Jungian thought. He founded the *Rivista di Psicologia Analitica* and the *Giornale Storico di Psicologia Dinamica*. He was a member of AIPA until 1992, when he resigned following an incident related to a sentimental liaison with one of his patients. He subsequently became a member of the American Psychological Association. Carotenuto was a gifted albeit controversial figure in the ambience of Italian psychoanalysis, above all due to the kind of relationship he developed with his patients, a very close and affective bond which often made concluding the analysis painful to him. Consequently, as the human relationship to Carotenuto was more important than method, he did not always follow to the letter the rules of the setting. This was in order to succeed in penetrating the complex personality of the patient by virtue of his own wounds (ferite)—ferite feritoie (wound embrasures, or openings), as he was wont to call them. In many of his works, he probed the question of transference and counter-transference, hypothesizing the eventual possibility of the passage to a sexual and sentimental relationship during the treatment—a type of transference relationship which had in fact been encountered by early analysts, such as Ferenczi, Rank and Jung. Carotenuto came into possession of correspondence between Jung and his patient Sabina Spielrein, with whom he had a relationship concluded traumatically. Carotenuto's ensuing book, *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud* (1982), was translated widely, earning international acclaim. Another of Carotenuto's major interests was the relationship between analytic psychology, artistic creativity and works of art, literature in particular. His university seminars on Kafka, Dostoevskij and Bousquet were very popular.

Let us 'leave the floor' to Carotenuto's description of himself in an interview() of January 30, 1989:

"As a child I was afflicted with rheumatic fever, which led to acute endocarditis. Fortunately, at the time, penicillin had just been discovered and after three months of intense hospitalization I was cured. However, in the process, my heart was damaged. This event affected my life, also psychologically. The body speaks and a wounded heart inevitably will affect the world of sentiment; as a result I became more introverted, tending more to a life requiring mental rather than physical effort. And, as I am of a fairly aggressive nature, having to re-direct this aggressiveness towards an inner dimension resulted in a frenetic productivity. I normally work 14, sometimes 16, hours a day: I teach at the university, am director of two psychological journals and two book collections, have an extensive range of patients, write books and newspaper articles. Swimming, playing soccer or tennis hold no interest whatsoever for me. All my inner energy is funnelled

into creative efforts, and my life consequently is dominated by those activities—something which often causes me to feel extraneous to those around me... Anyone occupied with psychological problems must inevitably have a difficult rapport with himself. It is an essential aspect of our profession. Without this continuous dialogue—with something which howls inside us, pushing to escape, which is painful and demands the right to exist—it would be impossible to enter into contact with others having a more or less similar psychological need...

I was constantly depressed during my childhood and adolescence. My father died in the bombing during the war when I was 11 years old, leaving my mother and four children. I am profoundly grateful to my mother for having succeeded in having us all complete our studies, including earning a university degree. In conditions of extreme poverty, however, the limitations we encountered weighed heavily. I remember wanting to buy books, clothes, attend certain schools, but it was impossible. I could not smile, be content, as I felt inevitably on the wrong side. I experienced life as a constant frustration. This suffering led me to become estranged from those of my own age, predisposing me to a solitude which has accompanied me to this day. True solitude is not the lack of friendships, which I have always cultivated and experience in a positive way, but feeling alone, so to speak, in the midst of a crowd. Often I become aware of, intuit, certain things which when I attempt to express them are not understood. This unfortunately is a condition which one has to learn to accept. At the beginning it is painful, upsetting. Then, it becomes clear that it is strictly bound to the capacity of seeing beyond what is usually perceptible. Often, when conversing with others, I sense the absence of this capacity. My existence, all things considered, has always involved being led from the wrong side of things to the right side, which coincides with the realisation that what one does is by necessity in conformity with one's own being...

As a child I was afraid of the dark. Only much later did I understand the significance of that fear. And it is an extremely revealing fear. In fact, one sees nothing in the dark. The forms we think we see respond to our own interior reality. In that fear of the dark, my predisposition to the world of the unconscious was already delineated—however, the aspects it presented were frightening. The mythical descent into Hades implies the encounter with monsters and dragons. One of the dragons threatening my life was the impending danger of failing to survive, of being overwhelmed. But then, all this occurred at the age of 12 or 13. That terrifying sensation is closely tied to the paternal figure, an extremely important figure as it is always experienced as protective. It is the father who advances and kills the dragon. It is when he is no longer there that we realize, ultimately, that we are alone. In a recurrent, childhood dream, while walking over a desolate moor, there would be a sudden landslide, at which point I had to struggle to avoid being swallowed up by the earth. Not everyone perhaps understands just what being a child without the protection of a father involves. The impression is one of being exposed to a series of injustices without any sort of recourse...

As an adult, other problems intervened, related to the symbolic dimension of the wounded organ—the heart. According to Jungian typology, I would be defined as an introvert, with a highly developed intuitive capacity. That would imply that other functions, such as that involving sentiment, would have remained slightly in the background. With the passing of the years, therefore, I had to learn to relate to this aspect of my personality, which was and still is, a neurotic and at the same time most beautiful dimension of my life... It is as though it were impossible to quench my thirst for love. Our cultural canons assert that love is immortal, that it is constancy, and so on. My own experience, however, has taught me something else: for me being together has to do with reciprocal growth. I have matured with the persons with whom I have been involved; however, I could not say that they always matured at the same pace. After a certain period, variable in each case, I would find myself in a particular condition—changed from the initial one—in which the failure of my partner to develop prevented me from feeling nourished by our relationship. While I continued to nourish her, I no longer received the anticipated nourishment in return. The affective dimension had thus become arid. This is an extremely trying situation and painful as, according to Freud, a man who does not love falls ill. I was never gratified by what occurred: nothing external seemed to exist to alter my mood. What comes to mind here is the tale of King Midas, who, despite possessing everything, was ultimately condemned to die of hunger. Finding myself deprived of dialogue, all my inner energy was turned in upon myself, becoming transformed into a tremendous and painful block. It was similar to the depression of my childhood; I was incapable of smiling, of enjoying the so-called simple things. I was unable to do anything, until I had found a new relationship, into which that energy could once more flow. The same

condition.

In retrospect, I must admit that I owe my very life and my realization—as in Italian we call the psychic achievement—to women, in the sense that they made possible the transformation of my inner energy by providing a canal into which it could flow. I might also add that while women have always been my allies and very generous, my relationships with men have always been difficult. With time, I understood the reason for this. We men are truly children who, upon each encounter, must make a penis comparison to decide who has the longest. It is a very distressing condition, as life among men is nothing more than a stupid and continuous competition. Men inspire compassion in me, while what I feel towards women is profound admiration...

The notes spread about the room, on books, on the table, the telephone numbers jotted down for the taxi, the pony express, the university, and so on, are useful in speeding up and simplifying my work. I have always thought that, besides the common thief, there exists a disguised thief who steals time. I am only too familiar with having to participate in endless meetings. No one in these situations seems to realize that they are being robbed, for futile ends, of something substantial, essential. If it were up to me, meetings would last only a few minutes. However, as there are individuals who, having nothing serious to do, and above all nothing to think about, spend their existence planning meetings, robbing the time of those who are committed and productive. Considered thus, wasted time for me is an obsession. I loathe those who take up my time. My reaction to this is showing a difficulty in breathing. At times I do it on purpose. Certainly, the person taking up my time will be aware of my nervousness and the disdain I feel for him...

Another problem is my intolerance of being ordered about. Evidently I have a difficult relationship with authority; I am incapable of submitting myself to it, above all when it is exercised in a stupid manner. I am very good at discovering whether or not someone exercises, as would be logical, his role in a functional way. The conductor of a train and the pilot of an aircraft are “functional” heads, as they make it possible for me to go from one point to another. However, once the ride is over, the thing ends there. There are those who, not having understood the value of service, which is intrinsic to the exercise of any authority, utilize their function as a means to obtain personal power. I have been acquainted with many of this type of person. Not only is it difficult for me to get on well with such individuals, but they inspire in me only contempt. Perhaps it is a neurosis, as our sense of reality would encourage learning to accept authority. However, in such circumstances, I am totally incapable of doing so. Those using their power arrogantly are in reality lacking any creative perspective. Power becomes the surrogate of this missing capacity. Those who thus express power deserve our “pity”...

I know that I can be possessive in relationships, however only as regards patients. A patient may tell of having undergone a medical examination the day previous to the session. That visit represents a first attempt at escape and being confronted with episodes of this sort are painful to me, as they touch on a complex of my own. That patient has succeeded in unconsciously intuiting my possessiveness, and behaves in reaction to that intuition. And I feel the pain of betrayal even if, objectively, it is nothing of the sort. Clearly, in my case, this once more has to do with the problem of abandonment. And here I must go back to the death of my father and the absence of my mother who, in order to bring us up, had to work all day, and to the suffering I felt at being left home alone. This dimension of abandonment returns in the relationship with patients, and I become aware of this thanks to my rapport with them. In fact, I learned much more about myself from those relationships than during my seven years of Jungian and seven years of Freudian analyses, although admittedly they were useful, functioned...

The problem I feel most intensely about is involvement. As I am totally involved in my work, I always choose my patients with great care—as far as this is possible—accepting in therapy only those for whom I feel an immediate liking. Those who are unpleasant or who in any case give me that impression, I reject. I know that with those subjects, even exerting great effort, I could never be generous. And the results could be neurotic. In my work I let myself go to a certain extent, ignoring for the most part those cautions normally exercised — above all that of maintaining a distance between myself and the patient. When possible, I tend to avoid the use of this barrier. It is undoubtedly for this reason that my therapy succeeds in being more productive than that of many of my colleagues. However, there exist dangers which, in my case, coincide with becoming significant to the other. That significance is not always bound to a sexual dimension. It can also be correlated to a particular intellectual brilliance, or a profound sensitivity, although the sentimental

aspect cannot be completely excluded. I hold that all those analysts who claim to always and in any case maintain their reserve are simply lying. In my own experience, I have seen that every now and then we can encounter patients who are truly significant, probably because they incarnate one of our own psychological dimensions. When this occurs, we are often surprised to find ourselves thinking of that person. It is thus that involvement begins—imperceptibly at first, and progressively becoming more intense. And concealed here is the neurotic aspect. Having lost that detachment which allows us to see the situation clearly, we end up being captured by that very dimension of the complex with which we were able to enter into contact in virtue of that particular patient. We find ourselves at the mercy of the other, who can now behave towards us with all his love, but also all his aggressiveness. Sentiment is always ambivalent. What we have here is a true neurosis; the masochistic exposing of one's chest to the other's knife. I have never avoided the unconditional acceptance of these confrontations, laying all my cards on the table. Obviously, a similar event will occur only rarely; however, when it does, I am prepared to pay all the consequences. That does not mean, obviously, marrying one's patient, or dining out with her. These are only the banal and ridiculous aspects. What is relevant here is succeeding in experiencing, on the unconscious level, a genuine sentimental adventure, which is far more dangerous than many paradoxical elements so often present in the caricature of the analyst. From these experiences, I have at times been burnt, really suffered. Thrown violently from the horse, only over time and with great difficulty was I able to remount. However, once more, it was precisely in these situations that I learned things about myself of which I had been totally unaware...

The most painful wounds were always the result of relationships which did not nourish, in which I had to count exclusively on my own forces. I normally expect nothing from anyone, and I am always amazed whenever anyone shows a little kindness. Certainly this is a neurosis, as in this way I do not experience the solidarity of others. I construct the world each day. With great effort, it is true, but also with much narcissistic satisfaction, even presumption, since that attitude has to do with omnipotence. However, it is also true that these characteristics have aided me in life. Having to depend only on myself, I became my own best friend. I am very fond of myself. Consequently, I protect this person whom I care about, and as a result of this I am also acutely aware of what it means to care about others.”

Edited by Giorgio Mosconi

Translated from the Italian by Joan Tambureno

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Notes:

- 1) Vaccari, L. (1989), *Di nevrosi si vive*, Camunia, Milano.