

GUILLERMO JULIO MONTERO

**PSYCHOANALYSIS OF
AGING AND MATURITY**
The Concept of Maturescence



Psychoanalysis of Aging and Maturity

As developing countries increasingly confront the issues of an aging population, this important book identifies the key period in the life cycle in which changes to the body, as well as concomitant psychological developments, result in the entering of a new phase of life, maturescence.

The author defines the metapsychology of maturescence from a psychoanalytic standpoint, detaching it from the concepts of midlife and middle age. Supported by clinical examples, the book defines the stimuli which are the precursors to this phase, before examining the complete set of psychological challenges it entails. The author also highlights how maturescence has been illustrated in key literary figures in the 20th century and draws parallels with the mythical cycle of the hero.

This fascinating and original book will be essential reading for psychoanalysts, psychotherapists and any professional working with issues around aging.

Guillermo Julio Montero is a member of the International Psychoanalytical Association, President of Fundación Travesía (Psychoanalysis for Midlife Transition and Crisis), Chair of the IPA Psychoanalytic Perspectives of Aging Committee, as well as the author of several books and frequent deliverer at international psychoanalytical congresses.

“In *Psychoanalysis of Aging and Maturity: The Concept of Maturescence*, Guillermo Julio Montero offers psychoanalysis—its theory, its practitioners and its patients—a thorough and inspiring approach to the creative middle age period in the human life cycle. Through theoretical, literary and clinical considerations, he shows how the drive increase characteristic of men and women climacterics—equivalent to the one of puberty—infuses the experience of aging. The concept of *maturescence* repairs a constricted focus on ‘midlife crisis’ and opens our thinking to the potential for growth that the somatic and psychological transitions of middle age present.”

Harriet L. Wolfe, MD, President-Elect, International Psychoanalytical Association

“In this very interesting book, Guillermo Julio Montero introduces the concept of *maturescence*, which has its roots in the Freudian idea of a universal both for women and men when they reach their 50s. From a metapsychological perspective, this universal coincides with the demand of psychic work and working through stemming from drive increase that occurs during this period of life. The way in which this psychic work is set in motion and its outcome depends on many factors, always unpredictable and singular. The author also distinguishes midlife crisis from midlife transition, both of which trigger the aging process. This book is an important contribution to the field of psychoanalysis as it shreds light into the internal processes characteristic of a period of life that has been previously studied differently.”

Virginia Ungar, MD, President, International Psychoanalytical Association

Psychoanalysis of Aging and Maturity

The Concept of Maturescence

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Preface

Psychoanalysis is a very strange *device*. I am suggesting this word with all the polysemy that could be assigned to the concept, since it is *something* very different from other known *somethings*. Among many other factors, psychoanalysis is strange because the transmission is carried out by other means than those in other disciplines. Consequently, psychoanalysis is not only conveyed through books, the university; its authentic transmission differs from any other (so-called) scientific *devices*.

This alien and *savage* nature of psychoanalysis is surprising because it requires making an additional effort by those who would like to practice it, having to constantly discover it. And discovering psychoanalysis is a task that those who wish to become psychoanalysts must be willing to undertake. This means that psychoanalysis *is there*; it is only a matter of discovering and owning it. Perhaps an instant will be enough, perhaps only a reflection will be sufficient ... in order to possess it only for a moment. Yes, it is an evanescent *device*, and perhaps this is one of the reasons why it produces such a fascination and has the transforming power that distinguishes it.

I would therefore like to extend the use of Goethe's metaphor, so dear to Freud (1912–1913) [p. 158] 1940a [1938]) [p. 207], regarding the everyday discovery of psychoanalysis by the initiated: "What thou hast inherited from thy fathers, acquire it to make it thine" (Goethe, *Faust*, Part I, Scene I).

Freud *discovered* psychoanalysis, but the nature of the *device* forces us to rediscover it each time someone wants to start learning its art, something similar to alchemy and the work of an alchemist, if presented in this way. There is a tradition that bequeaths an inheritance, but that inheritance must be acquired, rediscovered in this case time and time again; this is psychoanalysis.

Furthermore, this does not end here because an added difficulty arises: it is impossible *to be* or *to become* psychoanalysts once and for all. With modesty, those who wish to initiate themselves in this field will only be able to remain permanently by *becoming* psychoanalysts minute by minute, day by day, a month after the previous one, etc. The present participle *becoming* allows for a liberty and spontaneity that will leave the *device* open so that it will not become obstructed by supposed truths that only lead to the cancellation of the subversive power of psychoanalysis. In this permanent becoming the work of

the psychoanalyst is daily renewed; here, work acquires the equivalent status of dream *work*, symptom *work*; that is, an active process that mutates at every moment towards an objective that will satisfy a particular demand of psychic *work*.

However, psychoanalysis completes itself like a strange *device* that is very different from all others we know because it is not only a *scientific discipline* but also a *shared experience*, maintaining a complementary tension that is a excluding one at the same time. Conceived as a *scientific discipline*, it can be measured, validated as well as refuted; whereas as a *shared experience* it is nontransferable, impossible to translate, codify and transmit in a reliable manner outside the experience itself. Therefore, from the perspective of a *scientific discipline*, parameters can be used that validate it only with a measurement that is undertaken off-line: here the key—*ultima ratio* as well as *primum movens*—is psychoanalytic metapsychology; whereas, from the perspective of a *shared experience*, it becomes impossible—also absolutely unnecessary if it were possible—to steer a scientific determination of the experience itself, since a claim of this sort being on-line—immersed in the situation—would totally invalidate the psychoanalytic process, thus raising the philosophical problem of knowledge that gnoseology has attempted to unsuccessfully decipher for centuries.

From this standpoint, there would be no need to force an exclusive inclusion within the so-called *scientific field*, since psychoanalysis is something which implies such a special vertex that it has the advantage of being able to validate itself by itself. If the supposition that the experience and intimacy shared in the consulting room is valuable only if the so-called scientific parameters could be measured, where would this lead?

In this regard, sometimes psychoanalysis would seem to suffer from a kind of *inferiority complex* with respect to other fields. This would explain why it would want to be included among other scientific fields at all costs, forgetting in this way the transcendental *handcrafted* effort an *authentic* psychoanalytic treatment implies, which is beyond any kind of reliable measurement ... fortunately for everybody: patients and psychoanalysts. This so happens because it is a human experience more than a laboratory test and perhaps for this reason there is no need to replicate and evaluate it with variables that are alien to the very nature of psychoanalysis.

Possibly, the demand for scientific validation does not arise so much from psychoanalysis itself but rather from the widespread psychoanalytically based psychotherapy. Perhaps the triangulation suggested by psychotherapeutic treatments with the inclusion of the health system or health insurance as a *third party* included in the phantasmatic scene shared by both patient and psychotherapist—often forcing a difficult transference elaboration in order to clear up the analytic field—makes it necessary to acknowledge psychoanalysis as a science.

If scientific validation were an essential requisite, it is important then to distinguish between psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, thus ending the dispute. Psychoanalysis would then have the *freedom of action* to achieve its purpose

of gaining access to the unconscious truth, something which does not need to be confirmed except in the analytic setting, in the transference, in the intimacy of the consulting room. Here two paths seem to diverge between “the pure gold of analysis” and “the copper of direct suggestion” (psychotherapy?), in Freud’s words (1919a [1918]) [p. 168].

For these reasons, I would not be pleased if psychoanalysis became scientific, in which case it would run the risk of becoming *pasteurized* instead of maintaining the *contaminated, subversive, savage* and *untamed* validity that carries human desires and wishes—the mark in the selvedge bequeathed by Freud more than one hundred years ago.

This way of thinking does not pretend to condemn psychotherapy to uselessness: on the contrary. Generally the patient seeks psychotherapy and not psychoanalysis; the latter cannot and usually is not an *a priori*; it is also a resource that can be reached as the result of an achievement in psychotherapy. The patient seeks help because he experiments anxiety, and the psychoanalyst suggests a *device* that hopes to solve it: from then on the path to psychoanalysis can be opened.

This same formulation of the tension between the *laboratory* and the *experience* becomes valid for the so-called *specialty areas*. A book like the one the reader is holding does not pretend to be a treaty on maturation and its derivatives—midlife, middle age, beginning of aging, etc.—in order to propose a certain *specialty area* of the topic. Nothing could be further from my intention.

My idea is that it is essential to understand the metapsychology underlying the maturing experience, which must always be considered off-line since, only immersed in the psychoanalytic process is it possible to treat the internal universe of a particular and unique individual; something quite different from a person who is aging or aged.

The proposal implies considering the metapsychological study of maturation in order to *forget it or set it aside* at the precise instant the psychoanalyst closes the door of his consulting room to share the psychoanalytic experience with the patient—moment from which metapsychology operates from a background where it would seem to constitute itself in the silent continent that facilitates and contains the content of the whole experience—regardless of whether the patient is undergoing maturation or any other moment of the vital cycle. This guarantees a certain authenticity to the whole process of psychoanalysis because suggesting *applied* psychoanalysis to someone who is aging or someone who has already aged can only result in a psychoanalytic *as if*, with a time-worn, false and inauthentic result, a *pasteurized* outcome, perhaps innocuous, as previously stated.

True applied psychoanalysis has a different aim: to comprehend a work of art, whether a novel, a film, a play, a painting, etc., being absolutely relevant and valid in the situations noted, but with the great difference of knowing that one is operating *per via di porre* (mass-produced), instead of *per via di levare*

(tailor-made), as Leonardo da Vinci and Freud (1904a [1904], p. 260) said. The risk of *applying* psychoanalysis to the maturing patient would lead to running the parallel risk that the psychoanalytic process be marred by contaminating itself with previous concepts that can hinder the psychoanalyst's liberty to listen, by operating *per via di porre*, instead of *per via di levare*.

Of course, this is also valid for all the so-called *specialty areas*: childhood, adolescence, addictions, depressions, etc. *Applying* psychoanalysis may become iatrogenic because it inevitably sets aside the subjectivity of the patient if the listening is predetermined by concepts that clog up the essential liberty *to be there*. For this reason, I highlight a perspective centered on subjectivity—from inside out—instead of doing it from the opposite perspective—from outside in.

I know that a book like this one runs the risk of turning into an *introductory handbook* on maturation. I would like to point out that I distrust *handbooks* for various reasons. They tend to function as authentic inhibitors of autonomous thinking. For this reason, these words would like to avoid falling into frequently incurred generalizations. This book only aims at being useful to understand the metapsychology of maturation—that latter being the theoretic *princeps device* that allows the psychoanalyst to infer interpretations during the session; it is a tool that the therapist already has internalized long before.

Perhaps due to the difficulty of referring to *shared experiences*, the reader will find few clinical examples of psychoanalytic treatments—the interpretation of a patient's dream, two interpretations of the maturing processing in two patients, not more—and many examples linked to classical and contemporary literature. On the other hand, I believe that the *applied* examples are definitely valuable to transmit an authentic experience because the reader has the same resources owned by the psychoanalyst that interprets them: in this case, the rules of the game are clear because there are no disguised data.

In conclusion, the task is twofold: the work that involves *discovering* psychoanalysis and the work of *becoming* a psychoanalyst. The tension between these two tendencies is what gives authentic life to the search of each *initiated* therapist who, in his efforts, will follow a path that will obtain different results—investigations, papers, books, lectures—that will evince not only the task of *discovering* psychoanalysis once again, but the task of *becoming* a psychoanalyst. I would like the reader to consider that, of course, the metapsychology of maturation presented here is the result of my own attempt not only *to discover* psychoanalysis but also *to become* a psychoanalyst every day of my life.

The reader will find in this book a personal work, unusual in some respects because the state-of-the-art, among other things, appears as the last chapter. The reason lies in the fact that when I started to research what had been written about middle age, I came upon several books and papers that described the phenomenon from very different perspectives; in many cases, with post-Freudian visions. Several years later, I began to discover by myself that which I was beginning to understand through my maturing patients, could also be

inferred in Freud's work. For this reason, I dedicated my efforts to delve into this process.

The attempt to describe the metapsychology of maturation from the perspective of Freud's work offers an important advantage: Freud's work is our mother tongue. That is the reason why it is necessary to share the root experience of this effort in the first place. Only afterwards the post-Freudian tenets, also important, begin to have any value. The motto for my proposal regarding maturation, therefore, is: "Instead of returning to Freud, I propose depart from Freud." And it is from this positioning that all subsequent developments acquire any meaning.

The effort to coin a new concept may also seem to contradict what I have set forth in the previous paragraphs. The idea of *maturation*, however, implies the consideration of a specific moment—something synchronic—in contrast to the decades that can be considered as middle age—something diachronic. Similarly, the concept of *midlife*—despite sounding both synchronic and diachronic—is inappropriate because it became associated with the representation of midlife crisis, an insufficient concept to account for that which characterizes the specialty and totality of maturing processing, as it will be explained in the following chapters. For this reason, I consider legitimate to introduce *the concept of maturation* in order to define it from Freudian concepts, as I hope will be clearly set out in this book.

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Nevertheless, if I had to make a summary, I am grateful to Calvin Anthony Colarusso MD (San Diego, California, US), whose human warmth permitted a daily communication based on our scientific interests: we edited and published papers, presented symposiums in congresses, without forgetting to talk about life and trying to live it; all this simply after I made contact with him because I was interested in his works until time did its work, making possible for our friendship to extend itself to family ties that honor me with the authenticity and sincerity that have remained firm throughout all these years.

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I would also like to thank my colleagues at the International Psychoanalytical Association's Committee: *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Aging*, of which I am honored to be its Chair and with whom I have established a sincere friendship as well as the wish to make known our way of understanding aging. This has led to the production of important work that continues up to now. Its members are: Audrey Kavka (United States), Valeria Egidi Morpurgo (Italy; who died in 2009, sadly), María Cristina Reis Amendoeira (Brazil), Mi Yu (United States), Daniel Plotkin (United States), Renata Sgier (Switzerland), Gianina Micu (Romania), and Alex Oxenberg (Chile).

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To all those whom I am forgetting.

All of them.

Glossary

- Maturescence** The psychic outcome to the true beginning of biological aging. It is fostered and shaped through a universal drive increase which Freud already linked to somatic climacterics phenomena in men and women. Each individual will work through these exigencies of psychic work with his/her own psychic resources, allowing the selection and manifestation of a series of paths depicting different subjective landscapes, procedures and aims.
- Maturity** The end result of maturescent working-through and midlife symptomatic manifestations during middle age, ending with the subjective perception of a greater psychic space and a renewed experience with time, something that makes reality become more lifelike through the enhancing and deepening of individual identity.
- Midlife** The symptomatic manifestations of maturescence depicting a series of different subjective landscapes, procedures and aims which encompass a continuum between the extreme poles of midlife transition and midlife crisis. Each individual will traverse it in his/her own way, trying to find a renewed tension and bond between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, something that maturescent drive increase not only challenges but threatens to split.
- Middle age** A period of years ranging between age forty-five to age sixty-five beginning with maturescence and ending with old age and ensuing senescence. There are no previous universal psychological tasks or frames to go through, but really different individual needs and wishes to be tamed, promoted and fulfilled in order to guarantee the living continuity and achievement of psychic growth and inner development.



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Mid-life

Steps to be taken before the introduction of a new concept

The 1960s decade was paradigmatic because it was a time when many Western youngsters began to occupy a transcendental place that was different in the human vital cycle—a vital spot which had never been previously filled. From that moment on it was possible to define youth as an important stage of life with its own identity and subjectivity. This was not the result of any particular concession; on the contrary, it was the determination of making a commitment with their lives that perhaps attempted to avoid some of the phantoms and fears brought by the Second World War, long after it ended. The phenomenon can be understood as a reaction to the failure of a generation that led the world to such a manifested disaster: a way of self-defense, a desire of giving birth to something that was different to what their parents had endured. Furthermore, the sixties' revolution can be conceived as a way of self-protection against an adult world that had sent a lot of young people to die in the Vietnam War.

These youths—as a generation—began to have their own voice, which demanded to be heard. Young people were convinced that they had something to say and this was an unprecedented phenomenon. The concept of an oncoming social revolution that would change the world order, the idea that a new man existed who had to be discovered, the possibility of investing in a future with a notion of renovated liberty, were premises that erupted in the public stage with unusual force, unknown until then. And this occurred simultaneously throughout the Western world as a synchronic phenomenon—an emerging *global village* before information technology (IT) developed its own revolution, transforming the world in an authentic global village. In fact, it had already been suggested by Marshall McLuhan (1962)—something that today remains sounding prophetic as well as anticipatory of a future of hyper-connectivity at all levels, anticipated by the available media of those days; innocent devices, compared to the ones available nowadays. Perhaps McLuhan never dreamt that his theory would become such a notorious reality as it actually turned out to be; neither did his followers and exegetes, but it all came to pass.

Important cities of the Western world were filled with young demonstrators who took to the streets demanding, confronting and affirming that they would