

# Free Composition of an Adolescent Girl

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**Editor's Note.** The following psychological inquiry into the free composition of an adolescent girl has come to us from Athens, Greece. The manuscript was written by Dr. Moraitis in English, and some words and phrases were used which might be confusing to the English or American reader. Some changes have been made in the text for the purpose of clarity, but care has been taken to preserve the original style. The author's method of presentation was to give a portion of the young girl's letter and then to interpret that portion psychologically. The letter itself is reproduced here exactly as Dr. Moraitis has translated it from the young girl's present-day Greek into English, and if the letter is obscure in places, its beauty and foreignness are left untouched, and Dr. Moraitis' interpretation should make its meaning universal and clear.

During the last years a great effort was made by pedagogues to study the psychology of the child. Many notable works and treatises were published, so that today the pedagogical claim—that the teacher should know the child psychologically—is admitted on all sides. Until the present time, the period of puberty has not been so thoroughly studied despite the fact that a large number of adolescents are attending the high schools.

We shall endeavor to understand the main psychological signs of puberty from the letter of an adolescent girl, about 16 years old. This girl was a pupil in the sixth class of a provincial gymnasium. Her letter was written at school as a free composition; it was written to a female friend. At my request she gave the letter to me with her permission to publish it. Throughout this psychological inquiry the important service which free compositions offer to psychology will be noted.

"My dear ———:

Life with its many faces keeps me firmly in its power. If I dared to escape, it will be angry and it will torture me much more. I obey its orders."

Here the girl expresses her strong interest in life, that is, in life-problems. She feels that life oppresses her.

We know that human life was always social, that human beings always lived and do live together and that, therefore, life-problems are of a social nature. Society imposes some limitations on the individual and forces him to adapt himself to them. In this letter the girl expresses these limitations. During her childhood her life was carefree, but now suddenly life is represented before her "with its many faces."

"Perhaps, could we act against its imperative will which is represented as reality, social conditions and duty? No, I feel it very well. My limited experience marks it. There is no doubt about it."

Here is what oppresses the adolescent soul: duty and the submission to social conditions and laws. She admits that no one can act against these laws which are judged as an imperative will of life. Indeed, family, school, religion, social institutions, impose their imperative will by all means they possess.

But why does only the adolescent feel this social oppression and not the child? Because it is the adolescent who tries to obtain freedom and independence, and because during puberty each personality has to resolve new life-problems. In this case the social oppression may be stronger, perhaps because the girl lived in special familial conditions, or because, having some organic defect, she believes she cannot succeed in life. But we can generally admit that every adolescent, even when bred under the best conditions, will have this feeling of social oppression and limitations.

The life-problems of the mature years appear suddenly to the adolescent as something imposed from without, which he cannot escape. This is what Adler calls "life-logic." The sudden appearance of the life-problem coincides with the sudden development of the organism. The adolescent looking at her quick bodily development feels the need to resolve the problems of the mature years, but she thinks she is not able to do it.

"Nevertheless I never could live a balanced life. I never put on the top of my life-program the word 'duty.'

"Sometimes I decide to strike out all the 'usual established duties' of my morality."

The life-problems seem difficult. She tries to formulate a life-program according to conscience, but she cannot. This program must conform to the life-logic and to the usual established habits. But she cannot do it, and therefore she strikes out these problems or duties. She ignores the existence of these problems. Alcoholics try to resolve problems in the same way. They over-shade their conscience by becoming intoxicated, and so "strike out" the difficult problems too.

"I constantly take new decisions. I revise the old ones and I make new plans. But I don't put them into execution and I begin to plan again. I have the misfortune to obey my heart faithfully. Sometimes I am angry with myself. I decide to work. But this decision doesn't last for a long time. The rhythmical life tires me."

The method of "striking out" doesn't last for long. The more one drives away his problems, the more imperatively do they return calling for solution. The adolescent makes new plans, she leaves them, she again makes new ones without success. She wants to confide in herself. "to obey her heart faithfully." She

doesn't want the demands of community living. Where does she search for her happiness when she doesn't find it in duty?

"I find the happiness in myself. I don't exchange my joys, my love, my anxieties nor my oppressive griefs and have no concern for common opinion."

The adolescent turns to herself and she manifests what Jung calls "introversion." By this she tries to know herself. For a while she overlooks the external world and she looks into the internal one. By this introversion she hopes to find her happiness.

"You may tell me that till now I had but failures. I also fear that my efforts will fail in the future."

She turns out to the external world again because, by the use of introversion, she finds only a strong feeling of inferiority. That is why she experiences failure. If she wants to succeed, she must obey life, its limitations and duties. But she contemplates such a solution as a breaching of her ego.

"But I shall not give in. I rise against injustice.

I am decided to offer myself on the altar of truth.

I shall never betray myself and capitulate."

The adolescent turns to herself again, and she is in a state of insurrection against the social yoke. She doesn't want to obey the social life, the "rhythmical"—the routine life oppresses her. The school with its many claims disappoints her, and the family, too.

It is true that many injustices exist in social life, but the social man must collaborate with the others for a constant amelioration of society. This amelioration takes place gradually. But the adolescent wants insurrection. The greatest psychologists do not say they know the truth, but only the least error. But the adolescent thinks she knows the truth, and she is ready to offer herself on its altar.

Adolescents are easily inspired by great ideals. Therefore, they can easily fall victims of shameful deceptions; and, as they are inspired easily, so do they respond quickly to disappointment. This great swing in feeling is an usual phenomenon of puberty.

"I see you. You laugh and you tell me: 'You think out of place and time. You look like you don't know life because you have not suffered and struggled'."

After her inspiration for the great truths, after her insurrection against the social yoke, she falls into pessimism, into the difficulties of the struggle against the social duties. From the abstract ideas she returns to the concrete society which has a definite place and time.

The sudden falling from optimism into pessimism is a normal attribute of puberty. Under such shocks, the adolescent is reeling.

"You are right. I want to live honestly. I want to find the real meaning of life, its goal. How these thoughts oppress me! They keep me in constant agony."

Her friend, as she thinks, is more rightminded than she, and laughs her away, trying to bring her to recognize that she has not yet found the truth and the goal of life.

Behold the adolescent before the greatest problem, which many philosophers have tried to resolve without success. The adolescent thinks about it constantly with agony. If she can find the goal of life, she will live honestly. She wants to give a definite direction to her life. But she doesn't find it, and—

"My ship is breaking. The savage waves surround and threaten it. From inside the fire corrodes it, from outside there are the wild and untamed ghosts. Will it sink? My ship struggles desperately. Will it blow out the fire? Will it stand up against the waves?"

She represents her psychological situation in an interesting way: While from inside she is oppressed by her different problems, from outside she is threatened by many dangers. She doesn't know what to do. Must she blow out the fire (that is, resolve the life-problems in accordance with social limitations) or must she oppose herself against the waves (that is, conquer the external difficulties by refusing to submit herself to these limitations)?

". . . Its humble ship-master prays to love . . ."

The adolescent has found a new symbol: Love. Now she is waiting for her rescue. What she understands by the word "love" she doesn't explain well. Love toward God? Love toward the other sex? Love toward her fellow man?

She doesn't need anything more, the magic word is sufficient. For a while she thinks that she has found the content of life in love.

"Beyond, the island of love shines. He is comforted, he hopes, he believes in love, in the coming of Its reign. He feels encouraged and he arrives at a piece of earth."

The island of joy is the haven for the difficulties of each disappointed soul. This happy island is the place of the reign of love.

"A storm-tossed ship is looking for a safe harbor, for light and smile, for a dear person who may be ready to help him and also for a consoling look and for a few encouraging words, which are of more

value than any other relief.

"Although all the people could give such relief, unfortunately only few of them know how to give it. Am I not right, my dear?"

Here she is looking for someone's encouragement, assistance, and help. Nostalgic, she returns to her childhood when she was carefree through her parent's love and constant leading.

"I think you asked me about my improvement at school. I always failed. Do you ask me how I could go to school without studying? I can't explain it either."

Really, according to one of her teachers' reports, the young girl was often unprepared. She didn't give attention to the lessons because she was occupied with other problems.

"But this period was very creative. The hours after midnight (when I sat as if I should study) I was in such a frenzy and I wrote so much and such things as I cannot now understand or explain."

Actually, the girl was really never negligent nor lazy. She was not diligent in school work, but only in other work interesting to an adolescent. If school could satisfy the adolescent's ruling interests, she would never be lazy:

"Please tell me, how can I study, how can I listen to my teacher for such a long time speaking in this pedantic way about such indifferent things? When I have to resolve all the important life problems, which are imperatively asking for a solution? How can I be indifferent before them? How can I listen to him when I am from one minute to the other waiting to confront life itself, which is usually called society? We all know that it has many claims. Our teachers ignore us knowingly. For them we are only knowledge-receivers and their work is to evacuate their wisdom into our heads. But only a small part of it remains in us.

"We are not vexed with these poor fellows, because ever another one superior is responsible."

This is an intense criticism against our educational system which is more or less true. This is what the pupils of our schools think about our education! They contemplate it as insufficient to prepare them for life. Besides the criticism, she expresses courage and audacity against the teachers; this also is peculiar to puberty.

"We must do something in future. Everyone according to his strength must carry his stone for the big building which will be built on the ruins of the old one. We must leave an inheritance and a request to our descendants, to respect and to honor

the child as a personality with a rich internal world. Who will undertake such a colossal task? The most important are mother and child. They are the present and the future of the world."

The adolescent tries to resolve the great problems. She doesn't hesitate to give advice and directions. For a while she thinks she can do the greatest deeds, she can be the great reformer of society. During puberty, the rule "either all or nothing" has authority. That is, either she will be a great personality, or nothing.

"What can I say? When I cannot save myself and I am in a continual struggle against school and home. I don't know what will happen. I pass through decisive years of my life."

After her ascent into the inquiry of the great problems of social life, she falls down, conscious of her own inability to resolve them (either all or nothing). The struggle against school and home has also been on her conscience. Also she understands the decisiveness of the period which is passing. Unfortunately, neither the family nor the teachers understand this decisiveness. Both family and teachers think the adolescent is a child, and they do not know the devastation of her soul.

"I feel a fermentation in myself. I feel my head full of abstract ideas. I don't know what this is. I should like to pass as quickly as possible this oppressive and transitory period and to remain on some point. I should want to trace a direction in my life and to march upon it till the end."

With great clearness she describes her position. She feels the need to find an outlet from this labyrinth in which she is fallen. This longing will help her to find the outlet.

Further down she represents the outlet under the shape of spring:

"Come, my darling, as quickly as you can. I am ever waiting for you, we have so much to say! Here the spring is so beautiful. Everywhere odors and light. Immense new lives grow up from the earth. Spring is very generous, it distributes its gifts everywhere. I feel it touching me and I am so happy!! Oh! spring, with your magic force drive away the deep darkness of the winter. Come, I think with you will also come the time of my deliverance.

"Yours sincerely"

With the appearance of the spring she introduces the hope of the amelioration of her position. She believes she will finally surmount the difficulties which are before her as an adolescent.

This hope is beneficial for her, because through it she gains courage and patience.



From the psychological dissection of this composition the main signs of the adolescent girl's physical position appear clearly. These signs can be found in other adolescents, too. They are described in different treatises as the signs of puberty.

At first the adolescent takes upon his conscience the new problems which are vital and foremost. Then he understands that he is no longer a child and that the period of his carefree life has passed. These problems appear under the shape of new duties which are imposed from without. He feels them as limitations upon his individual freedom, and as an unbearable yoke.

Second, the adolescent has a strong feeling of inferiority an inability of his ego to resolve these problems.

Third, the adolescent turns to himself, he finds his ego, and he wants to assert it in society. Therefore, he contemplates the limitations of society as a yoke and as a binding of his freedom. He adopts the "either all or nothing" rule for the solution of all the problems. Therefore he swings between many contrasts: pessimism - optimism; despair - hope; courage - timidity.

The whole psychology of puberty appears in this composition. Such compositions are of great value in discerning the pupil's psychological position. Only the sexual problem could not be named in this adolescent's free composition. That is understandable when we take into consideration that it would be read by the pupil's teacher. The need of intervention by a psychologically trained person to save the adolescent appears from this composition. This person should be the psychologist of the school, a person specially trained for such an intervention. During the short time of my being in the city, I tried to help her. I talked a little with her, and I requested her to write me. I received two letters over a long time, but I have not permission to publish them. In her first letter, she expresses the same position, and also some resistance against the psychologist. She writes to me: "I don't want you to behave toward me as if I were ill. The love of pity oppresses me. That is why I shouldn't like to write you. I saw in your affability the behaviour of a physician towards a patient." In her second letter she shows more courage because she writes: "I believe I am able to resolve all my life-problems. I always try to humanize myself and to be free from different difficulties."

Really she began to understand her position. I am sure that soon she will find the right way in her life.