

先生とお別れしたのは、フランシスコ会修道院の僧房のように殺風景な病院の一室でした。老齡にも苦痛にもめげず、自分の死が近いことを知りながらびくともしない、先生の人間として、科学者としての立派な姿に触れるのに、これ以上ふさわしい場面はありえなかったでしょう。先生は、泰然自若として死を受け入れておられました。しかも最後の最後まで、研究への関心を、人との競争のためや能力を誇示する手段としてではなく、自然を理解したいという純粋な気持ちだけから持ち続けておられました。競争のための科学研究という考え方が優勢だった時代に、私たちの最後の会話で先生がなお新しい研究のことを知ることに強烈な関心を示されたことは、私の研究のあり方に対する最後の教えだったに違いありません。そして、ここに、先生が若者たちに及ぼした大きな影響の秘密が潜んでいるのでした。それは、学界の泰斗が受ける名誉や賞賛からは超然として、ご自分の研究に励み、弟子たちの指導をなさった、あの情熱でした。

名誉や賞賛——先生はそうしたものを「愚劣千万なもの」と軽蔑していました——を捧げられて喜ぶには、九十二歳のジュゼッペ・レーヴィはあまりに若く、また、好奇心に溢れていたのです。

美しき未完成

ノーベル賞女性科学者の回想

リタ・レーヴィ=モンタルチーニ

藤田恒夫・曾我津也子・赤沼のぞみ 訳

平凡社 (1990)

Il commiato in quella stanzetta d'ospedale, spoglia come una cella francescana, metteva in risalto le sue qualità di uomo e di scienziato, che né la vecchiaia, né le sofferenze, né la consapevolezza della fine imminente avevano affievolito. Accettava la morte con stoica serenità pur mantenendo intatto, sino all'ultimo, l'interesse per la ricerca intesa come strumento di conoscenza e non come oggetto di competizione e strumento di potere. In un tempo nel quale sembrano essere questi i criteri che guidano l'attività scientifica, quel nostro colloquio, in cui seguì, con appassionato interesse, l'ultimo «rendiconto» delle mie ricerche, mi rivelò il segreto della grande influenza che esercitava sui giovani: derivava dalla passione con cui aveva perseguito i suoi studi e dirigeva quelli dei suoi allievi, indifferente agli onori e ai plausi tributati ai vecchi maestri.

A 92 anni Giuseppe Levi era ancora troppo giovane e pieno di interessi per compiacersi in queste fatuità, come lui le definiva con supremo disprezzo.

Elogio dell'imperfezione

Rita Levi-Montalcini

(1987)

Our farewell—in that small hospital room whose bareness reminded me of a Franciscan’s cell—could not have taken place in surroundings or under conditions more apt to bring out his qualities as a man and a scientist, consumed neither by old age, nor suffering, nor by the knowledge he had of his approaching end. He accepted the latter with a stoic serenity while maintaining till the very last an interest in research as an instrument for the understanding of nature and not as an object of competition and an instrument of power. In an era when the latter conception of scientific activity prevails, that last conversation of ours, the vivid interest he took in what he knew must be his last “briefing” on the state of my research, revealed to me the secret of the great influence he exerted on the young. It derived from the passion with which he had pursued his studies and later directed those of his pupils, while remaining indifferent to the honors and plaudits that are granted old Masters.

At the age of ninety-two, Giuseppe Levi was still too young and full of interests to be pleased by such fatuities—as, with supreme disdain, he was wont to call them.

In Praise of Imperfection

My Life and Work

Rita Levi-Montalcini

Translated by Luigi Attardi

Basic Books, Inc., Publishers New York (1988)