

THE TURNING POINT OF ITALIAN ANALYSTS

“PSYCHOANALYSIS IS NOT JUST FREUD”

Under the new president Nino Ferro, the Italian Psychoanalytical Society is turning the page. “Enough with dogmas; it’s time to open to the outside world, to dialogue with the others.”

Luciana Sica interviews Nino Ferro, LA REPUBBLICA 18/12/2012,

“Is the golden age of Italian Psychoanalysis behind us? What an insane idea. Such psychoanalysis was a psychoanalysis in isolation, acknowledged exclusively by its members, totally unknown to the outside world. Twenty odd years ago I wanted my book to be published in English, but it was refused always with the same reason – good work, I was told, pity it is written by an Italian, nobody would buy it. So I said – sign it Iron then.

Iron is the English translation of Ferro, Nino Ferro, the new President of the Italian Psychoanalytical Society. Born in Palermo, living in Pavia, 65 year old, author of books translated in more than 10 languages. His new essay on “The viscera of the mind” will be published next year in Italy.

He is an analyst well renowned everywhere. One of the most brilliant minds in world psychoanalysis, the American Thomas Ogden, perhaps exaggerating somehow, considers Nino Ferro “the best psychoanalytical theorist and clinician writing today”.

The new President, more incline to understatement, seems determined for Italian psychoanalysis to turn the page. Two are his key words: “pluralism and internationalization”, and the conviction that he will work closely with Stefano Bolognini, at the helm of the International Psychoanalytical Association, a first for an Italian since the IPA was founded by Freud in 1910.

Q. - You want to break the “provincial” boundaries of the Italian Psychoanalytical Society.... It is not going to be easy as from the outside it appears like a closed organization, which claims self-validation and is rather self-complacent. How do you envisage opening it up and accepting dialogue?

A. - It’s important to show change right away, in order to come out from this anti-historical isolation which at times restricts our thinking to local thematic. I shall be everybody’s president, I want to guarantee that each accepted model be considered legitimate and with equal dignity. No single thinking should be lessened and no one

should be allowed to curse and declare “this is not psychoanalysis” in the name of Freudian orthodoxy.

Q. - Where do the excommunications come from and who are they directed to?

A.- They come from those who like to mark each single line and word with the sense of “belonging”, without feeling the need of any originality. Generally, anathemas are thrown at the “others”, those which are demonized rather than actually studied.

Q. - Could you give us an example of the changes you have in mind?

A. - Let’s talk about our Rivista di Psicoanalisi (Psychoanalytic Journal) whose director is Giuseppe Civitaresse. It should be open to many more contacts and international exchanges, including with American Psychoanalysis, which we can also criticize but only if we know it thoroughly, without taking refuge behind what is 'already known'.

Q. - What is so controversial about American psychoanalysis?

A. - They put themselves on the line in the analytic relationship and they would even include 'self-disclosure'. They might even tell something about themselves, though strictly related to what the patient is bringing.. They have a theoretical and clinical model which is t is strongly 'relational'.

Q. - Is that a mortal sin for a classical analyst?

A. - It is a taboo maybe worth shattering. After all if Freud saw today’s patients being analyzed in the same way as in the first decades of the ‘900s he would have a fit of despair. He did not want an infertile science; but a science able to develop and transform itself, able to fly....

Q. - Aren’t you afraid that some flying could be risky?

A.- I believe that everyone has the right to deepen one’s own model in a free and creative way, without eclecticism or messing it up, but also without ignoring all the rest. One of our most important trademarks in terms of serious commitment is the training; here the study of the classics - which is fundamental - will not be enough any longer, from now on it should include also contemporary psychoanalysis.

Q. - It might seem obvious, yet don’t you find it a challenge, considering that Italian analysts are somehow lacking in their knowledge of English ?

A. - Indeed, this is really tragic. In this condition you cannot move in the scientific world. The study of English will be mandatory during the formation period of our analysts – this will be a focal point in my program.

Q. - Alberto Semi, who was your rival in the run to the presidency, accused the Society's establishment of centralizing every decision, without facilitating the participation. talent and creativity of the members..... Did he have a point there?

A. - It's certainly not creativity that's missing from Italian psychoanalysis. Our problem was the lack of prompt and agile channels to make it known abroad. We must have those channels, and without any dogmatism – if something was not said by Freud, it does not mean it cannot be valid.

Q. - But is there a psychoanalysis without Freud? Rather, is there continuity or a fracture between Freud and 'the contemporary psychoanalyses'?

A. - Let me say – is there a microbiology without Pasteur? Of course there is, thanks also to Pasteur! The point is that we must have the courage to put forward new ideas, rather than celebrating the old ones. Let's not keep focused on the past splendors, let's focus on the brilliant future that psychoanalysis will create for itself thanks to its research and commitment in treating new pathologies. Stopping at Freud would mean transforming a discipline which is based on experience into a religious belief.

Q. - According to Semi, we are risking to lose sight of the unconscious.... Do you believe its centrality or not?

A. – Absolutely yes. And a proof of that is in last year's Mexico City IPA Conference, where I was one of the five analysts organizing the event, I strongly advocated for its title to embrace the three pillars of psychoanalysis –“Sexuality, Dreams and Unconscious”... I don't think Semi was at the conference.

Q. - Let's not talk about whether he was there or not. I would rather know what your idea on the unconscious and how much the patient's past will still matter?

A. - In line with Bion's model, I think that the unconscious is formed and transformed in the analytical relationship, in the unique encounter of two minds which constitute a new entity and give life to new and unforeseeable scenarios. The past is obviously important, but perhaps the problem is related more to the stories which we could not live or – in Ogden's words – dream of.

Q. - You seem to have a conciliatory attitude, but in your Society there have been some ferocious conflicts.... which is rather a disappointment when it comes from people in your profession, don't you think?

A. - Analysts exist only in the relationship with the patients. In their everyday life, they are men and women like everybody else, neither better nor worse.

Q. - But it seems to me that the your Society has suggested an image of a circle of beautiful souls?

A. - Us, beautiful souls? Please! Meanness and generosity are found among us as in every other professional environment. Perhaps, with us, it might be worse. Why? Because, if we are good analysts we have to contain all day long our patients' anguish and anxieties. And so, after that, we might feel like letting off steam somehow