

Interview with Giuseppe Civitarese, MD, FIPA

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The following interview was conducted in the spring of 2014 by EBOR Organizing Committee Co-Chair Caron Harrang, LICSW, FIPA in advance of the tenth International EBOR Conference in Seattle, Washington (USA).

Caron Harrang: First, let me thank you for taking the time to conduct this interview which I hope will give participants coming to EBOR this fall a sense of who you are as an analyst, supervisor, instructor, and psychoanalytic author beyond what they might learn by reading your published papers.

You and I first corresponded a little more than a year ago after my organizing committee co-chair, Dana Blue, and I had selected the conference theme—*From Reverie to Interpretation: Transforming thought into the action of psychoanalysis*—and we were trying to think of who might be as inspired as we were by the topic. We then read a paper you wrote called *The Inaccessible Unconscious and Reverie as a Path of Figurability* and it seemed to us like a natural fit for you to be one of our plenary presenters. Fortunately for us, you agreed and accepted our invitation right away.

Before I inquire further about reverie and how it informs your work, I'm wondering if you might tell us a little about where you live and work in Italy. I know Pavia is near Milan, but I don't think I'm alone in not knowing much more about that part of Italy. What kind of psychoanalytic community do you have there?

Giuseppe Civitarese: First, let me thank you, Caron, and the Seattle psychoanalytic community for inviting me to participate in this year's EBOR conference. It is a prestigious event and one that I am eager to experience and contribute to in teaching one of the pre-conference Master Classes and in my plenary presentation on Saturday. Moreover, I love coming to the US as it each time brings to mind memories of my paternal grandfather—whom I'm named after—who traveled at age 17 in 1905 from a small village in Abruzzo overlooking the Adriatic to Ellis Island, seeking his fortune. Like him, I too moved from my home region after completing High School (Liceo Classico) to attend college and study medicine in Pavia, which is my home now.

Pavia is a small town in northern Italy near Milan with a very old university and renowned medical school founded in its current form in 1361 but having existed as a respected institution of learning as far back as 825 CE. During my years of study at the University of Pavia (1977-89) I chose to specialize in psychiatry and had the good fortune of studying with medical school faculty, most of whom were also psychoanalysts. It was a very fertile environment for my interests.

From an aesthetic standpoint, Pavia is also quite wonderful. I especially enjoy the historical quarter with its beautiful courtyards, magnificent medieval towers, and

Romanesque churches. This historical ambience is contrasted with a lively campus atmosphere and many students everywhere. All this and delectable risotto!

In terms of my psychoanalytic community, I belong to the Italian Psychoanalytical Society, which was founded in 1925 by Levi Bianchini in Abruzzo, not far from my hometown (Ortona). Presently, I serve on the National Executive Board and am editor of our journal, *Rivista de Psicoanalisi*, which was founded by Edoardo Weiss in 1925 in Rome. Our Society of 861 members has eleven training centers located in major cities throughout Italy. For example, the center in Milan has approximately 200 members. In Pavia, which is much smaller, there are 20 members. This geographical diversity has resulted in a psychoanalytic community where many theoretical *dialects* are spoken and not always shared by colleagues from the different regions. Unfortunately, because of the language barrier (many papers not being translated), this richness of thought in our psychoanalytic culture has not been sufficiently known abroad. The need for Italian psychoanalysis to be more internationally appreciated motivated me as editor of *Rivista* to initiate publishing original contributions in English from analytic authors outside of Italy including Thomas Ogden, Andrea Celenza, Christopher Bollas, Dawn Farber, Julie Leavitt, Jay Greenberg, and Lisa Weinstein among others. Fortunately, this change and widened perspective has been well received by the Italian psychoanalytic community. So much so that we have plans to create an online version of the journal in the future. We also currently publish an *Annual* in English featuring the best papers of the year, which is accessible on the Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing (PEP).

CH: So many interesting things you're saying about Pavia and the psychoanalytic culture in Italy. How to cultivate respect for diversity of opinion is, I believe, a universal challenge for the profession. During the formative years NPSI sought collaborative contact with other local psychoanalytic societies and participated in forming the Seattle Inter-Institute Committee comprised of all the local psychoanalytic training institutes. One of the outcomes of this group effort was an annual clinical symposium for advanced psychoanalytic candidates and recent analytic graduates designed to develop and safeguard a space for creative psychoanalytic discourse that goes beyond the theoretical stamp of the different training institutes. Although the Committee has now disbanded as energies have turned in other directions, its enduring effect is a psychoanalytic culture here that is, we're told, unusually collaborative and respectful of differing theoretical perspectives. All this to say, that the approach you have taken in fostering respect for theoretical difference is simpatico with what we have tried to cultivate in Seattle.

Looking back, can you say a bit about what drew you to psychoanalysis rather than a medical career and the teachers or ideas that have influenced your own development as an analyst?

GC: I had a science teacher in the seventh grade when I was 13 years old who was young, charismatic, and enthusiastic. He spoke of the great personalities of the culture that had fascinated him, including Marx, Pascal, and a certain Sigmund Freud, who claimed to have discovered the meaning of dreams! I purchased a copy of *The Interpretation of Dreams* that I did not read for some years because of its complexity and

challenge to understand. Nonetheless, Freud's thoughts about the meaning of dreams remained a curiosity. I've always been fond of reading and since then I have not missed an opportunity to learn more of this enigmatic world (internal and external) we inhabit. So this is one factor in what drew me to psychoanalysis.

However, the deeper reasons for one's career path are, as you know, always more complex and intimate: unconscious aspects of one's personality that are discovered only later, family dynamics, socio-cultural influences, personal inclinations, and aspects of emotional suffering. I also believe that my love of classical studies and philosophical thought influenced my inclination toward psychoanalysis. I studied medicine and then right away had the idea to become a psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst. Pavia, as I've said, was an ideal place to forge a psychoanalytical approach in psychiatry. I started psychoanalytic training at the Milan Center for Psychoanalysis almost immediately after becoming a psychiatrist. At that time in Italy there was a sociopolitical movement that led to the abolition of the psychiatric hospital that married well with my egalitarian leanings and interest in working with psychotic disorders. In addition to my analysts and professors at the University, I consider my true maestros Antonino Ferro, who was one of my training supervisors, and Thomas Ogden. I consider both of them to be exceptionally creative and original psychoanalytic thinkers and writers and am honored to be friends with both.

CH: Having curiosity about the meaning of dreams in your youth does seem to have been an early indication of professional interests that are unfolding in several directions. A number of your papers address dreaming or what interferes with dreaming. I'm thinking of, *Dreams that Mirror the Session* (2006), *Do Cyborgs Dream? Post-Human Landscapes in Shinya Tsukamoto's Nightmare Detective* (2006), *Exploring Core Concepts: Sexuality, Dreams and the Unconscious* (2011), and *The necessary dream: New theories and techniques of interpretation in psychoanalysis* (2014). And then there's the related topic of reverie or, as Bion would say, waking dream thoughts. I think our readers would be interested to learn how you arrived at your affinity for Bion's extensions of both Freud's and Klein's theoretical and technical contributions. And, more generally, how it is that Bion's ideas and, more recently, field theory has taken strong root in the Italian psychoanalytic culture. I realize these are large questions, so please feel free to address any aspect you wish.

GC: Bion has not become universally "popular" with Italian psychoanalysts, but he has left a strong influence here following seminars he gave in Rome during the 1970s, invited first by Francesco Corrao and later by Claudio Neri. Apparently Italian culture made a strong impression on Bion as well. For example, in the book I'm editing with Howard Levine, *The Bion Tradition*, due out later this year, Neri describes Bion being a passenger in a car with him while driving in Rome with its typically chaotic traffic, and finding it quite unnerving, even terrifying. Nevertheless, Bion survived the seemingly unpredictable Roman style of driving while Neri and other Italian analysts survived the impact of Bion's radical way of thinking. In fact, several groups formed as a result of these meetings to further investigate the significance of Bion's thinking.

As I've mentioned, Italian psychoanalysis is made up of many small centers, each with its own traditions. Currently, Bion's thinking is well known in some parts of Italy and less so in other areas. As for myself, I had an analysis with a post-Kleinian analyst and another with an analyst identified with the French school. One could say that my most significant "meeting" with Bion occurred through my supervision and collegial contact with Antonino Ferro, who has elaborated and expanded Bion's thinking on the analytic field. Ferro's is an original model because it synthesizes influences, not only from Bion, but also from narratology (the structure and function of narrative and its themes, conventions, and symbols) and from the work of Robert Langs and Willy and Madeleine Baranger. Before Langs and a few Italian authors, relatively few psychoanalysts were aware of the work of the Barangers on the psychoanalytic field. For example, until 1983 there were only 34 references to their work by authors listed in the Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing (PEP) database. Ferro's thinking and his drawing attention to the work of the Barangers' and to Bion's ideas were decisive influences in the direction of my own theoretical interests. My purpose and where I've chosen to focus in my own psychoanalytic writing is to help expand and enrich this model.

To elaborate, and as it relates to the theme of EBOR this year, it seems to me that transformations in K (knowledge) and transformations in O (the ineffable) refer to ways of experiencing that are, respectively, more intellectual or more emotional. In terms of the relationship between K and O, I see them as circular. K is closer to conceptual understanding whereas O centers on emotional experience; both are necessary for psychic growth. The concepts of psychoanalysis guide our experience as analysts, and experience produces knowledge. Bion's invitation (issued late in his career) to listen to our patients "without memory or desire" can be seen as a daring elaboration of Freud's recommendation to listen with "evenly suspended attention," as well as a new paradigm for listening to the session as a dream. For Bion, or in the field model, the analyst is present with all of his or her subjectivity. The model is no longer based on the notion of an isolated subject. In this orientation focused on the field, analytic process is more concerned with what is *in between* analyst and patient. Furthermore, in this model intuition and reverie are psychoanalytic tools with precise technical meanings.

CH: What you are saying about Bion's ideas being well known in some circles within the Italian psychoanalytic community, and yet not universally popular is similar, I believe, to the psychoanalytic culture in the US and elsewhere. Additionally, although the concept of reverie is often credited to Bion as a psychoanalytic term, it has other meanings in philosophy and in how various psychotherapists and analysts define the term. One of the exciting aspects of organizing an international conference on the theme of reverie is to learn how a diverse group of analysts and psychotherapists define and employ this evocative concept in their clinical work with patients. Your plenary presentation and the precise meaning you assign to reverie and how you see it functioning in your own psychoanalytic work with patients will serve as a springboard for discussion amongst the participants coming to the conference. Similarly, those who attend your pre-conference Master Class (October 17) will have an additional opportunity, in a small group setting, to experience how you transform reverie into the action(s) of psychoanalysis.

Before we conclude, I want you to thank you for your generosity in being available for this interview and to ask if there is anything else you'd like to convey to our readers that I have not touched on in my previous questions?

CG: Caron, thank you for your kindness and for the opportunity you gave me to share with you some of my thoughts about psychoanalysis. I'd like only to end this conversation emphasizing again how in my opinion we are experiencing a change in the psychoanalytic paradigm, which is exciting and demonstrates what an incredible instrument we have in the psychoanalytic method to understand human nature. It is a privilege to participate a bit in this extraordinary development and to share the enthusiasm I see in your community and in your dedication to it.