

Book Review

The Role of Dynamic Psychiatry and Psychotherapy in Psychiatric Rehabilitation

Giacomo Gatti

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When my friend and colleague Giacomo Gatti asked me to write a review of his latest work, I felt honored and delighted to be able to express my appreciation. This appreciation arose spontaneously as, prior to publication, I had the opportunity to read draft several excerpts of the text.

This volume will prove valuable, not only for students of the subject matter (as with all readers interested in the subject matter) but especially for young graduates and psychiatry specialists, psychologists, rehabilitation therapists, social workers and any other practitioners intending to work, in a conscious and constructive way, in the field of mental health.

This derives, first of all, from the fact that the author, given his philosophy of knowledge, along with the integration of biological, psychological and social models is something unavoidable and concretely recommended in the clinic, and not, as for many, a generic theoretical statement, a “flatus vocis”, which allows easy loopholes and refuge in one’s own particular vision. Therefore, do not be influenced by the fact that he has a solid and well-founded psychoanalytic training, which obviously gives body and consistency to the acute psychopathological descriptions of the various clinical conditions that are described in detail. It is certainly not a text aimed solely at psychodynamic psychiatry students (even if the latter will be able to find themselves at ease and appreciate the vastness of the points of view expressed). On the contrary, it aims to show the substantial inseparability of the various knowledge and practices that must unfold in the course of the treatment of serious pathologies. In this regard, it is significant that the author, in the last section of the volume, has the therapists of the “Passaggi” community exhibit a series of clinical cases in which the importance of integration of interventions: psychological ones, pharmacological ones, those of social insertion, those of a family context, etc. is presented. Only in this way can the “complexity” of these problems be approached.

This, moreover, is consistent with the fact that one of the presuppositions that informs the setting of the treatise is that of the indivisibility of the moment of treatment from that of rehabilitation, and that both moments cannot be conceived except in the “continuum” of an interdisciplinary and multi-contextual perspective. Some consequences derive from this: the first is that to treat and rehabilitate one must know the dynamics of the onset of the disease, the second is that, in this field, all practitioners must have a store of basic knowledge, both with respect to psychopathology, and with respect to the problems of the “therapeutic relationship”. In essence, it also means recognizing the ubiquitous nature of the phenomena of “transference” and “countertransference” at individual, group, personal and institutional levels.

This is why Gatti repeatedly insists, explicitly and implicitly, on the need for an



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“emotional knowledge” of oneself, possibly on the part of all practitioners in the “treatment-rehabilitation” area.

It is well known that, strictly speaking, throughout the twentieth century, psychoanalysts believed that the only way to acquire this “peculiar” self-knowledge was to carry out a prolonged personal analysis. Gatti does not enter into the merits of the age-old question, but rather urges understanding that there may be myriad ways to address the issue of this “training” in introspection and the ability to “relate”, in therapeutic dynamics and that, in any case, it is essential to question oneself about the issue. For example, one such path is that of group-analysis. It is not broadly known that for some years now in Great Britain, Germany and other Western countries, it has been compulsory to participate in “Groups Balint” organized by local institutions for a period of 1 to 2 years. As is well known, Michael Balint (psychoanalyst, pupil of Sandor Ferenczi) already in the 1950s had understood the importance of training in the “therapeutic relationship” of general practitioners. Later this type of training was also extended to non-medical health workers and finally to non-health sectors, in particular towards those professions that have the “helping relationship” as the central moment of their operation.

Without dwelling on this topic, however, I here point out that some acquisitions of psychoanalytic thought, beyond the divisions of “school”, the rigidity of traditional psychoanalytic institutions and the infinite variety of psychotherapeutic practices (psychodynamic and not) now have universal recognition, in training programs, at many levels.

We are still in a phase in which, not only in Italy, the various schools, recognized by the ministries and authorized to “train” psychotherapists have little dialogue with each other. This must change. . Already now, for example, the more aware cognitivist-oriented schools are attentive to some elements of clear psychoanalytic extraction. Basically, in addition to the transference / countertransference phenomena, other aspects such as the presence of unconscious processes (clearly demonstrated, at an

experimental level, as well as by neuroscience), the concept of intrapsychic conflict, drive dynamics and their importance in the genesis of psychic disorders, should be common cultural understanding for all those involved in therapy.

In this text Gatti, in addressing above all those who work in public services for the treatment and rehabilitation of seriously ill patients, exposes a series of elements of “clinical psychoanalysis” which constitute a “breviary” of real psychopathology dynamics in which the explanation of the mechanism of onset of symptoms is explained through the description of the conscious and unconscious processes that underlie them, along a tradition inaugurated by some analysts, particularly attentive to concrete clinical practice, which led them to write treatises with high-level didactic intentions such as Fenichel, Glover, Arieti, Kernberg, Gabbard. The authors to whom Gatti refers are many more, belonging to different psychoanalytic currents and, sometimes opposed, such as Klein, Mahler, Bion, Kohut, etc., but from all these he manages to draw a synthesis of great efficacy, given an over forty-year personal practice, which allows him, on the one hand to look critically at many commonplaces accumulated over time in private and institutional clinical practice and, on the other, to propose, in a way effective, and with an original and very lively style, a series of clinical cases followed by himself and, in the last part of the text, as already mentioned, other cases followed at the “Passaggi” therapeutic community, consistent with the criteria described above.

On the whole, it can certainly be said his orientation is adherent to the thought of Otto Kernberg, in particular with respect to his approach to personality disorders, but his work is also influenced by the teaching of Aries and is most evident in the treatment of the field of psychosis and mood disorders. But, I repeat, what matters most is the synthesis of many contributions of thought that he was able to offer and the contribution of a personal, wide-ranging and truly original clinical experience.

Mario Giordano