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American events shared with Romano Biancoli

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I first met Romano Biancoli at the meeting “Incontro con Erich Fromm” which was held in Florence in 1986, twenty four years ago. We later took part together in many national and international meetings, from Locarno to Athens and Madrid, sharing a common interest in Fromm. Here I shall deal in particular with four events which I shared with Romano and which are linked to the United States. The first is a joint paper which we presented in San Antonio, Texas, in 1990, at a meeting of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, in the Erich Fromm Anniversary Program which I organized together with Saul Tuttmann to mark the tenth anniversary of Fromm’s death. The title of the paper is *Frommian Themes in a case of Narcissistic Personality Disorder*. We were later together in Washington, D.C., in 1994, at the Washington School of Psychiatry. The title of Romano’s paper is *Opening of Alternatives and Modification of Character Traits in Psychoanalysis*. Then, in 1998, I was Guest Editor of a Special Section of the Journal of the American Academy, to which I invited Romano to participate. The title of his paper is *The Idologic View of Transference*. Finally, ten years after our joint paper, we were again together in Brooklyn in 2000, for the IFPS Forum in memory of Fromm on the centenary of his birth. The title of Romano’s paper is *On Impediments in the Process of Individuation*.

Before examining Romano’s contributions in more detail I wish to say a word on our relationship. I was eight years older. In our 1990 joint paper the case was treated by me. I feel

therefore that at the beginning our relationship was that of elder and younger brother. Already in 1994 Romano was quite independent. We examined different aspects of Fromm, each on his own. At the end of 2008, after not hearing from him for some time, I was told of his illness. I immediately contacted him by phone and e-mail. Between December 15, 2008, and May 27, 2009, shortly before his death, we exchanged messages practically every day. I feel that at that time we re-established our relationship of elder and younger brother, but, unfortunately, no longer to encourage his autonomy but to accompany him towards his death.

1990, San Antonio. *Frommian Themes in a case of Narcissistic Personality Disorder*. The case was treated by me and we discussed the Frommian themes together.

The case. Both parents had a history of losses, and the mother was cold. Today I would think of a D-type attachment, as Romano did in his last case. In 1990 this type of attachment had just been described by Mary Main in 1986, and I was not yet aware of it. In arriving at the diagnosis of narcissistic personality I quoted Kernberg and Kohut, but today I would quote the DSM. In describing the case I start from the first dream, as Romano did in 1994 and 2000 and in his last case. In describing the dynamics of the case I feel I applied attachment theory correctly. Finally, in describing the treatment I present various enactments of mine, thus applying what I had said in Locarno two years before, in 1988.



Frommian themes. We start from themes discussed by Fromm in his published works: malignant aggressiveness, the having and the being mode, the Self and narcissism. From the unpublished works we make use of the concepts of secret family narcissism, the secret plot, and the forks of the road where the patient took the wrong turning. Finally, we arrive at a new concept, that of homosexual symbiosis. Neither of us took up this idea subsequently. Maybe it deserves further consideration. To this discussion of Frommian themes Romano brought his great knowledge of Fromm, especially of the unpublished works.

1994, Washington. *Opening of Alternatives and Modification of Character Traits in Psychoanalysis.* This paper is mainly clinical.

The case. Also Romano starts from the first dream. Also here the mother was cold. The father submitted to the women of the household, he was depressed, and died prematurely. The patient was full of rage at her father and fell into line with the other women, but she actually loved her father. When she realized this in therapy she burst into tears. This was the first alternative which presented itself to her. She then realized her mother's coldness and confronted her with it.

Frommian themes. At a theoretical level Romano takes up a theme from Fromm's unpublished works and states that one of the aims of psychoanalysis is to open up alternatives in the patient's life. Alternatives may be hidden by secret plots.

1998, JAAP. *The Idologic View of Transference.* The third paper, unlike the previous one, is purely theoretical. According to Fromm, transference is the repetition of earlier experience, but it is also the construction of idols onto which human powers are transferred in an alienated way. As to counter-transference, Romano points out that Fromm had a traditional view of it as a limitation of the analyst. Instead, Fromm held that "center-to-center" relatedness between analyst and patient should prevail.

In discussing these themes Romano shows great command of the literature. Not only of

Fromm's works, both published and unpublished, but also of earlier authors like Ferenczi and Groddeck, of contemporary authors like Kohut, and of very recent contributions such as those of Mark Blechner and Lewis Aron, who had just given rise to the relational school and were publishing on "Psychoanalytic Dialogues".

2000, Brooklyn. *On Impediments in the Process of Individuation.* Romano's fourth paper is once more focused on a clinical case.

The case. Here too Romano starts from the first dream, which shows the patient had an intrusive mother. The patient is an only son who lives with his parents and makes the girls reject him. When he was a child the mother was hot-tempered and to control her child would threaten to give him away. Also the grandmother took part in this "maternal terrorism" with stories of witches. As a child the patient had terrifying visions. On the other hand, the mother was also seductive. The patient defended himself through isolation and dissociation.

Frommian themes. In examining the dream Romano displays his great culture by quoting an anthropologist like Frazer and a mythologist like Kerényi, whom he also mentions in his last case. The Frommian theme which Romano emphasizes in this case is the syndrome of decay, characterized by narcissism, necrophilia and incestuous symbiosis. Clinically, this syndrome gives rise to malignant neuroses, which are close to the psychoses. Here Fromm seems to describe what is at present known as BPD (Borderline Personality Disorder).

The Double Issue. Finally, I shall discuss the journal issue in which Romano's fourth paper was published. It is a double issue of "Psychoanalytic Forum", the journal of the IFPS (International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies), the international psychoanalytic organization alternative to the IPA (International Psychoanalytic Association), to the foundation of which Fromm contributed in 1962. This double issue, titled "Erich Fromm: 'Center to Center Relatedness' ", was prepared in order to mark the centenary of Fromm's birth. It was edited by Marco Conci, who was unable to be present today and



whom I therefore replace. Marco wrote an Introduction to the Double Issue. In addition to Romano's paper discussed above, the issue also contains a report by Romano on the Istituto Fromm of Bologna. Highly relevant in the issue is the first English translation of Fromm's 1935 paper, "Die gesellschaftliche Bedingtheit der psychoanalytischen Therapie", in which, soon after Ferenczi's death, he defends him from his excommunication on the part of the Freudian orthodoxy. Previously, Marco Conci had already published an Italian translation of this paper. The issue also contains three unpublished lectures which Fromm gave in 1959 at the WAWI (William Alanson White Institute). Finally, next to other contributions, there is a paper by Rainer Funk on Fromm's role in the foundation of the IFPS.

To conclude. In the second and fourth paper Romano, by making a creative use of Fromm and other authors, was on his way to becoming a great clinician. This is what he was fully in his last case. On the theoretical level, I believe that Romano's specific contribution is the development of Fromm's concepts in the unpublished works, such as secret family narcissism, the secret plot, the forks in the roads where the wrong turning was taken, and the opening of alternatives in the patient's life. Another contribution was to establish connections between Fromm and other authors such as Bowlby, Kohut and many others.

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