

## Stephen Mitchell in Italy, 1988-1996

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ABSTRACT. – What does it mean to receive and promote in Italy the important work of a foreign psychoanalyst? The author deals with this issue with regard to S.A. Mitchell (1946-2000), having he devoted himself to the promotion of his work in Italy in the years 1988-1996, with the result of its greater reception in Italy than in any other European country.

*Key words:* H.S Sullivan; S.A. Mitchell; relational psychoanalysis; history of psychoanalysis.

### Introduction

I am extremely grateful to Laura Corbelli and Paolo Migone for inviting me to tell the story of the reception of Stephen Mitchell's work (1946-2000) in Italy, in terms of the pioneering role I played in it from 1988 to 1996.

I have dealt with this issue in the chapter '*S.A. Mitchell (1946-2000) in Italy*' in my book, *Freud, Sullivan, Mitchell, Bion, and the multiple voices of international psychoanalysis*, published in 2019 in New York by International Psychoanalytic Books, the publishing house founded by Arnold Richards, editor of the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* in the 1990s. In my book, I tried to show how the thinking of the authors mentioned in the title can only be understood by relating it to their biography, their personal issues, the context in which they worked, the colleagues with whom they came into contact, and the scientific debate of that time. In particular, I also believe that the authors quoted were all excellent clinicians and that, on this basis, they could easily understand each other when discussing their patients. Not to mention the need to create, in this way, a 'comparative psychoanalysis' based on the way our theories

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have developed from the complex interaction described above between authors, contexts and related scientific exchanges, rather than a 'comparative psychoanalysis' based only on the comparison between theories divorced from the variables mentioned above. As for the chapter in question specifically, in writing it I was guided by the double need to account for the personal relationship I had had with Stephen Mitchell in the reception of his work in Italy, and how over the years I had been rethinking and re-evaluating his important contribution.

Indeed, it was in *Ricerca Psicoanalitica* that a fine review of my 2019 book appeared in 2021, by Alessandro Musetti of the University of Parma, to whom I am grateful for the seriousness with which he approached my work and the generosity with which he spoke about it. These are his concluding remarks:

*'Freud, Sullivan, Mitchell, Bion, and the Multiple Voices of International Psychoanalysis'* is recommended reading for anyone interested in psychoanalysis - in particular, I believe, for students and post-graduate students of psychology and psychotherapy, and candidates in psychoanalytic training - because it allows one to get in touch with a living psychoanalysis. A psychoanalysis that has a history, and therefore a development, that does not aim at purity and omniscience, but at extending the possibility of being alive in one's own humanity: this is the engine driving the bookish transposition of the psychoanalytic corpus that often alienates even before it is known. While awaiting the Italian edition, which I hope will appear soon, I recommend reading the English version published by International Psychoanalytic Books' (Musetti, 2021, 530).

On the strength of this positive feedback, I have gladly accepted the opportunity offered by *Ricerca Psicoanalitica* to tell 'my story' to Italian readers too.

Florence, April 1988

I met Mitchell in Florence on Saturday 8 April 1988 during the clinical seminar he held there on the invitation of the Institute of Analytical Psychotherapy, directed by Virginia Giliberti Tincolini, whose students at the time were colleagues of mine who later became friends, such as Carlo Bonomi, Anna Maria Loiacono and Roberto Cutajar. I arrived at the seminar at the last moment, as there was a conference at the Family Therapy Institute in Florence that weekend which I decided to forgo once I heard about the meeting with Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell. In Florence I had graduated in Medicine in the autumn of 1981, I had a good information network and knew the city well - not an easy city from various points of view, but very fascinating

For me, 'Greenberg and Mitchell' meant the important encounter I had

already had with their book, *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory*. Published in the United States in 1983, the book was promptly published in Italian by Il Mulino in Bologna in 1986, having been recommended by two colleagues psychoanalysts teaching at the University of Padua - Giuseppe Fava and Cristina Esposito. It quickly became a classic and represented, at that time, not only the first important work on 'comparative psychoanalysis', but also the first book which led to the unravelling of a 'relational thread' in the history of psychoanalysis as a whole. Written in a clear, stimulating style, the authors - two young psychologists and psychoanalysts from the W.A. White Institute in New York - did not hesitate to connect the theories they dealt with and the lives of their authors and their contexts. Last but not least, because of Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell's 'first-hand' knowledge of the subject matter, the reader could tell that the book had been written in New York, at that time an important capital of psychoanalysis - a city I knew well, having lived there as a teenager, and to which I felt deeply attached.

For those who do not know this book, which the publishing house in Bologna failed to reprint for several years (and which I now see, thanks to the Internet, is once again available), I can say that the problem the authors started with was one which they experienced as a difficulty in psychoanalysis, the divergence between a Freudian theory anchored in a metapsychology based on the libidinal economy of the individual patient, and, on the other hand, a clinical activity which in the post-Freudian era had become increasingly attentive to the analytical process developing in the relationship between two people. The book is made up of four parts: the first, devoted to Freud and Sullivan; the second, to Melanie Klein, Fairbairn, Winnicott and Guntrip; the third, to Hartmann, Mahler, Jacobson and Kernberg; and the fourth, to Kohut and Sandler, whom the authors value for their 'mixed model', drive and relational at the same time. One should bear in mind, however, that the 'epistemological thread' of their approach lies in what the authors claim to be the logical incompatibility between the two models, drive and relational, which leads them to see the future of psychoanalysis not in a model like Sandler's (which, in my opinion, has ended up as the prevailing one) but in a persisting opposition of the two models, with the possibility that in future one or the other will prevail, with a continuous exchange and mutual enrichment. But here is what they wrote almost forty years ago:

'It is difficult to predict the future directions of a discipline as complex as psychoanalysis. It may be that the drive model will prove convincing and elastic enough to incorporate within its framework the data and concepts produced by the study of object relations. In this case, the relational models will disappear, having fulfilled the positive function of stimulating and extending the original approach. On the other hand, relational models could prove increasingly con-

vincing, they could expand and combine with each other, creating an attractive and comprehensive framework for theory and technique. If this were to happen, drive theory would gradually lose its followers and become an important and elegant antique item, no longer in use' (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1986, p.401; translation from the Italian).

And immediately afterwards:

'We suspect, however, that neither of these two eventualities will materialise. The paradox of man's dual nature - being highly individual and at the same time social - goes too deep and is too connected to our civilisation for us to choose one direction or the other. It seems more likely that both models, the drive and the relational, will continue to be viable, passing through continuous revisions and transformations, and the fertile exchange between these two ways of viewing the human experience will generate creative dialogue. We hope that our work will contribute to making the dialogue meaningful' (ibid., pp.402-403; translation from the Italian).

I have always been convinced that Greenberg's and Mitchell's contribution to this dialogue was fundamental and have continued to use it and to recommend its study in my teachings, on the history of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, at various Italian schools since the second half of the 1990s, even though I no longer agree with the emphasis on the epistemological premise mentioned above. But I will return to this later. For instance, the book contains an unsurpassed chapter - written by Mitchell - on H.S. Sullivan (1892-1949), Erich Fromm (1900-1980) and interpersonal psychoanalysis.

But let's go back to April 1988. Mitchell and Greenberg were involved in two parallel groups, and by sheer chance I was in the group led by the former of the two. I soon realised that the consecutive translation being carried out was not working well and offered to translate Mitchell's speech to the group myself. After a few minutes, Mitchell was relieved to see that the group had started to laugh at his jokes, which he had included - as he told me later - in order to check whether the translation was working effectively. So it was that I spent the rest of the time translating Mitchell consecutively, which not only brought us very close, but also earned me the gratitude of the board of the Institute of Analytical Psychotherapy, who - by inviting me to dinner - actually allowed me to get to know him.

In the course of the evening, I told him that - thanks to a scholarship in 1972 from the American Field Service (AFS) - I was able to spend a year in a New York suburb, living with a family of Jewish origin, and I graduated from the local high school. I mentioned that I was also very interested in Sullivan's work and I was giving a seminar on his interpersonal theory at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Venice - as an Assistant Professor of Dynamic Psychology, a course taught at the time by Lucio Pinkus. And so it was that 'Steven', as I now began to call him, told me about his personal passion for Sullivan, and that he himself had written the

above-mentioned chapter, and gave me a whole series of insights to help further my understanding of his work.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, in my recollection he was so impressed by this sudden unexpected possibility of sharing, that I myself was motivated to write a book on Sullivan. A book which would introduce colleagues - both Italian and foreign - to

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<sup>1</sup> I have reported these details - personal and professional - to clarify to the reader my transference on the figure of Mitchell - indeed, a kind of 'love at first sight', undoubtedly deserving of analytical investigation. Without doing so, it would be more difficult to understand my whole (neurotic, that is, irrational, or at least exaggerated) commitment of many years to the promotion of his work in Italy. As for Mitchell himself, his interest undoubtedly helped him to positively correspond to my commitment to his figure.

Now, developing this line of research, I can identify as a starting point of my commitment all the despair I was then experiencing in connection with my professional choice - which I originally made with a naivety similar to that with which Freud himself speaks of it in his 'Autobiography' of 1924. I refer to his motivation - which he himself adduced and formulated - to become a doctor in order to participate in the shared goal of a scientific community wholly devoted to scientific research - and within which the merit of each researcher would be dispassionately acknowledged. The case of Freud comes to mind not only because it is well known to all, but also because I have dealt at length with the unconscious reasons for his choice to study medicine, on several occasions (see Conci, 1992b, 1996b and 2016b), as a historian of psychoanalysis.

It actually took me many years to realise that, even in our field, the prevailing aspect is business. With a few exceptions, everyone tries to sell his psychoanalysis - or, to take a recent example, his 'field theory'. I also dealt with this aspect - albeit implicitly - in an article a few years ago (see Conci, 2016a).

The fact remains that my ability to turn my encounter with Mitchell into 'good business' was actually so limited as to deserve this kind of self-analytical investigation. In short, while it never occurred to me to found a 'Mitchell Institute', I hoped in my heart that the expertise I had accumulated in this field might find more space within, for example, the Milanese group in which I had trained - but it did not. Perhaps it was because I was waiting to be invited to do so without putting myself forward with greater determination?

At the same time, it is also true that the familiarity I acquired in this way with the 'new American psychoanalysis' allowed me - together with my familiarity with German-speaking psychoanalysis - to pursue a 'nice career' within the IFPS (see above) and its journal, the *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*. Indeed, it is an activity I still enjoy to this day - but even this does not exempt me from trying to understand the neurotic reasons behind my then exaggerated commitment to Mitchell and his work. A commitment that arose from a passion worthy of investigation.

Perhaps there are might be some colleagues who believe that I was right to do all that work, and that the Italian analytical community also benefited greatly from it - but I have yet to hear anyone say so.

Having said this, to go even deeper would be to point out to the reader that my father was actually a 'very good businessman' - and that this conflict still gives me pause. Be that as it may, this is also the explanation for the 'hypomanic tone' of my speech and all the details I recount - to protect myself from getting in touch with the sense of despair that preceded the flash of lightning that I experienced upon meeting Mitchell.

Last but not the least, by this I also mean that for me psychoanalysis is firstly something personal (*i.e.* interpersonal), and only secondly the work we do with our patients - a fascinating line of disciplinary research.

Sullivan's life, the context of his work, and his overall oeuvre. And that was how *Sullivan revisited – Life and work. Harry Stack Sullivan's relevance for contemporary psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis* (2000) was born, which is to say that I spent the next twelve years working on this project. I believe my book is worth reading, and this has been confirmed by its subsequent translations into German (2005), English (2010 and 2012) and Spanish (2012). Moreover, thanks to his enthusiasm for psychoanalysis and his passion for writing, Mitchell inspired a whole generation of colleagues during his lifetime, all of whom were very grateful to him.

But back to that evening, and another reason for gratitude. I don't recall Steven ever asking me - either that evening or ever - what point I had reached in my analytic training and where I was doing it. In fact, Pier Francesco Galli, whom I met for the first time in Zurich, at the International Psychoanalytic Liaison conference in May 1986, took the same approach with me. That is to say, they were both relieved - if I may say so - by the fact that I was able to understand what they were saying and that I was, in some way, able to talk to them. I say this also because after specialising in psychiatry in July 1986 at the Catholic University in Rome, I was then working as a psychiatrist for the SSN (National Health Service) in the province of Trento, my hometown, where I was also undergoing my own analysis. I would begin analytic training a few months later, in September 1988, at the Scuola di Psicoterapia Psicoanalitica (SPP) in Milan - founded a decade earlier by a group of students of Gaetano Benedetti (1920-2013) and Johannes Cremerius (1918-2002).

Pier Francesco Galli had actually initiated that contact from the mid-1960s onwards, but that group of colleagues (who included Guido Medri and Ciro Elia, Lilia d'Alfonso and Teresa Corsi) should be credited with having carried out such collaborative work leading to professional growth with great commitment - culminating in 1989 in the admission of the Associazione di Studi Psicoanalitici (ASP) to the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies (IFPS). Incidentally, this is a story I wrote for the readers of the *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IFPS, celebrated in Mexico City in 2012 (see Conci, 2014a).

After all these years, I would also like to point out that it is likely that by treating me as they did, Mitchell and Galli intended to show me, or rather to confirm, that the most important gift we can bring to our analytical work is our personal baggage, baggage that our course of studies and our training - our personal or didactic analysis and our analytical training - can greatly improve but will not change in its basic features. And by this I mean our personality, our family of origin and our personal history.

From this point of view, it took me many years to realise what an important role was played, in my aforementioned first meeting with Steven

Mitchell, by sharing with him the deep conviction - which I already had at that time - that our psychological problems can only be understood in the context of our most important interpersonal relationships. Ever since I was a child, my biggest problem had been my father, namely, how to find a way to get along with both my mother and my father, while at the same time managing to find my own way in life - that is, to elaborate the *oedipal phase*. I was the eldest of three sons, and particularly close to my mother, who involved me in her conflicts with her husband. I found myself having to take care of my family in a way similar to what Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (1889-1958) talks about in her memoirs - collected in 1989 by Anne-Louise Silver - in which she writes that she had been a psychiatrist since she was a child! It was precisely along these lines that I myself must have developed - as has also been the case for many colleagues - the desire, or rather the vocation, to become a doctor, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst as a child. To go back to my father, the additional problem was the fact that he was a skilful and successful construction engineer with his own company, and his wish to have me working with him was so great that he never approved of my decision to become a doctor. In short, based on my own experience, I believe that the most important protective factor for our mental health is how soon we are able to go beyond the commandment to obey our father and mother, and to trust ourselves rather than them, in finding our own way in life. Well, I already knew all this before I started my personal analysis (in September 1983), although it did help me to 'really find my own voice'.

By this I also mean that when - as a medical student in Florence in the mid-1970s - I read Sullivan's *Interpersonal theory of psychiatry* following a personal interest, I discovered - *mutatis mutandis* - that Sullivan wrote in the equally 'crude, but true' manner which I have used in the previous paragraph. Anyone who knows him a little knows that Sullivan was of the opinion that if we have a clear idea of how our interpersonal relationships work, what we - without realising it - put into them, what we - without realising it - expect from them, and what we get out of them, we can rightfully aspire to mental health - which for Sullivan was also the essential prerequisite for a satisfying life. And, by this, I also mean that, in my personal and professional experience, it is not only the personal baggage we bring to our work that is crucial, but also our curiosity and our ability to work in a self-learning manner, as I did as a medical student. It is well known that many colleagues unfortunately limit themselves to the knowledge of authors and theories handed down to them by their training institution, without exploring on their own the contribution of many other authors who are equally useful to our work. I could not otherwise explain the non-existent role that Sullivan's work and legacy still play in the analytical training of many International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) societies, including the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI).

Well, many years after that first meeting with Mitchell described above, I do believe that all the things I have just tried to express played an important part in creating the common wavelength I have described, as well as its positive outcome, a positive outcome that marked my subsequent life for many years to come. At the same time, I also think that our meeting in April 1988 represented for me an important confirmation of my choice to undertake the analytical training at the aforementioned SPP in Milan, since it was Gaetano Benedetti who introduced Sullivan's work in Italy in the early 1960s. I am referring to the brilliant Preface written by Benedetti in 1961 to the Italian edition of Sullivan's *Conceptions of modern psychiatry*, *La moderna concezione della psichiatria*, from which the following passage comes, which I am always pleased to quote:

'Sullivan's ability to dissect the dynamics of mental states has rarely been achieved by other researchers; in this passage, the clinician Sullivan surpasses the theoretically inclined Freud, who studied a relatively small number of mental patients. We are also impressed by the sense of authentic veracity that emanates from Sullivan's clinical observations, and by how alien he is to any purely doctrinal construct. Sullivan makes us experience before our eyes what in other psychiatric systems sometimes appears as a preparation of psychic anatomy. Freud himself seems caught up in a rigid and abstract mechanism, in comparison with Sullivan's dynamic phenomenology' (Benedetti, 1961, p. XVIII).

Or, to put it differently, just as Mitchell with his Florentine seminar created a 'first-hand' contact with interpersonal psychoanalysis, so I expected that authoritative Central European psychoanalysts like Benedetti and Cremerius would permit me, through their training and work in Switzerland and Germany, respectively, to come into contact with the cultural and linguistic roots of psychoanalysis, *i.e.*, to 'drink directly from the source'. As a medical student and as a psychiatry resident in Florence and in Rome, my contacts with the psychoanalysts of the SPI revealed that none of them seemed to know German - an important ingredient in Freud's work. I grew up in Trento, where I was exposed to the German language and culture since childhood and came to experience it as a positive resource, which encouraged me to attend my first year of medical school at the University of Innsbruck. And, in fact, my decision to follow the work of Benedetti and Cremerius proved so rewarding that since the spring of 1999 - although I never closed the practice I opened in Trento in October 1988 - I have been working in Munich as a psychoanalyst within the framework of their unique *Kassensystem*, that is, their nationwide system of financial coverage of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Since then - in my role of Italian *Kassenpsychoanalytiker* - I have worked mainly with the many Italians living in that city, so far and yet so close to Italy.



In fact, a comparable sensitivity and orientation allowed Pier Francesco Galli and Gaetano Benedetti to give life to the prestigious 'Library of Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology' for the publisher Feltrinelli, with the aim of making up for the great delay that the Fascist Regime and the idealistic orientation of the philosophers Croce and Gentile had caused in the reception of a whole series of fundamental texts in our field. These included an author like Sullivan. The above-mentioned *La moderna concezione della psichiatria* was the first volume in the series, quickly followed by: *Teoria interpersonale della psichiatria* (1962), *Studi clinici* (1965), and *Il colloquio psichiatrico* (1967). Incidentally, Galli himself wrote a very good and concise Preface to Sullivan's second book (Galli, 1962) - and in 1991 a 'Nota introduttiva alla nona edizione' of *Il colloquio psichiatrico* (Galli, 1991). It is a fact that the colleagues at the above-mentioned Florentine institute would not have been able to invite Greenberg and Mitchell or to understand them if they had not first read Sullivan's work published by Feltrinelli. Not to mention the fact that it is still impossible to understand Mitchell - or Bromberg - without knowing Sullivan's work well. To know only Mitchell or Bromberg is like knowing Bion, but not Klein, or even Freud.

Incidentally, my work in promoting Sullivan's work - before Mitchell's - culminated in the publication of his 1962 anthology *Schizophrenia as a human process* as No. 84 in Feltrinelli's Library in March 1993, to which I added my own Preface, where I argued that it was in fact Sullivan's first book that we should all read if we want to understand him fully. As for the overall history of the reception of Sullivan's work in Italy, I refer the reader to my 'Introduction to the new Italian edition' of Sullivan's *The psychiatric interview*, written for the new edition promoted by the publisher Giovanni Fioriti in 2017 - forty years after its first Italian publication. Of course, in it I also argue that it is a classic not to be missed, and in any case of a superior quality to the many books that have been published in recent years on the subject of the first interview.

I have written all this because I believe that everything I have written so far pertains to and shines a light on my first meeting with Stephen Mitchell - I myself have now not only rewritten in Italian what the reader can find in my 2019 book, but I also expressed considerations that are new to me as well. To these I would add the following: I had begun to take an interest in Sullivan seeing in him a social psychiatrist capable - unlike our 'new Italian psychiatry' - to deal with the social aspects of our work without putting the clinical and therapeutic dimensions of the individual patient in brackets, and in Gaetano Benedetti I saw a psychiatrist who knew how to be, like Sullivan himself, a psychiatrist, psychotherapist and psychoanalyst at the same time - at a time when the culture of the Società Psicoanalitica Italiana (SPI), the Italian IPA group, was, if I am not mistak-

en, going in the opposite direction. Moreover, Mitchell, Benedetti and Cremerius also agreed on - as I discovered in the years of my analytical training - the concept of continuity between psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. Incidentally, I published an article on these issues in 2014 entitled 'Le radici della svolta relazionale in psicoanalisi. Da Sullivan a Mitchell attraverso l'ASP, ossia il punto di vista di Benedetti e Cremerius'.

However, I do not wish to end this first paragraph without mentioning Paolo Migone. Paolo was not only the colleague to whom in those months of 1988 I turned to for advice on whether or not to resign from the National Health Service and start to work in private practice, putting my analytic training at the centre of it, which he encouraged me to do. It is also thanks to Paolo Migone that I became acquainted with Merton Gill's (1914-1994) *Theory and technique of transference analysis*, the book in which Gill (1982) enhances his sympathy for Sullivan's point of view by focusing on the specific contribution we as analysts make to the structuring of a certain type of transference by the patient. Incidentally, on this issue I gladly refer to Migone's 1991 article 'The difference between psychoanalysis and psychotherapy: a historical overview of the debate and Merton N. Gill's recent position' - later included as Chapter 4 in his book *Terapia psicoanalitica* (Migone, 1995). Well, transference no longer depends, as it did in Freud, only on the patient's past, but also on the kind of relationship we allow him to develop with us. By this I also mean that, in my personal analysis - then in progress - I felt that this dimension was not sufficiently considered. That is also why I turned to Sullivan's interpersonal tradition and the manner in which Mitchell was carrying it forward.

Not to speak of the kind of listening I was receiving, a listening tuned more to Ego Psychology, to which of my psychic agencies was most active at that moment - whether Ego, Id or Super-Ego - than to a more active participation in the concrete detail of what I was narrating. My analyst listened to me carefully, but... did she really see me? Today we know how important it is not only to listen to patients, but also to see them move in the world - not to mention the need to mirror them so that they can get in touch with themselves. Well, these are all issues introduced into psychoanalysis by Sullivan, who was also the first to lament and criticise the limits of free association divorced from relationship. If we all have not only conflicts but also deficits, we will never reach these deficits through our free association alone since they can only be explored and illuminated if they are shown to us in the context of a sufficiently close relationship in which we feel adequately supported. In other words, Sullivan would say, the problem is not only repression, but also a simple failure to perceive the world around us, a phenomenon he calls 'selective inattention'. And free association alone cannot overcome it, only an adequate analytical relationship.

From *Relational concepts in psychoanalysis. An integration* (1988)  
to its Italian edition: *Gli orientamenti relazionali in psicoanalisi*.  
*Per un modello integrato*

In spite of all the details I have already given of my first meeting with Mitchell and Greenberg, there are still important aspects to be explained. I remember, for instance, how surprised and delighted they were by the unexpected invitation from Italy and by receiving such a warm welcome, not least because they had never been celebrated for their 1983 book at home, at the *W.A. White Institute*. And yet, the book had the great merit of bringing Sullivan and Fromm into the psychoanalytic mainstream, that is, of restoring to interpersonal psychoanalysis the important role it deserved within the contemporary analytic debate - later also being considered by many as the book that decreed the birth of relational psychoanalysis. It is true, however, that when the *W.A. White Institute's* application - upheld by the director Clara Thompson (1893-1958) - to join the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) and the IPA was definitively rejected in the mid-1950s, a situation had arisen in New York in which the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and the *W.A. White Institute* no longer had any relationship with each other. Well, if the publication of *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory* was also intended to offer a way out of this stalemate in the scientific and professional dialogue, the 'old guard' of their colleagues had not felt or had long since given up on this need. Among them, for example, was the then director Earl Witenberg (1917-2002), director from 1963 to 1992, whom I got to know at a subsequent conference organised by the Florentine colleagues in Montecatini Terme, in October 1988, as well as on other occasions in the following years - and to whom I am still grateful for having introduced me to his neo-Sullivanian point of view.

Not to mention the fact that Greenberg and Mitchell were brilliant young psychologists who had done their training at White not only because of their adherence to the politically progressive point of view that had always characterised the institute, but also because - contrary to Freud's own wishes - the APsaA excluded non-MDs from analytic training, and this would continue until the early 1990s. As Paolo Migone (1987) has recounted in full detail, this was an epoch-making turning point that the APsaA was obliged to introduce following a class action by American psychologists who appealed to the Supreme Court. Well, this is another essential contextual fact in order to understand the political motivations that may have led Stephen Mitchell to formulate and develop Relational Psychoanalysis, as he began to do in his book published in 1988, *Relational concepts in psychoanalysis. An integration*. Whereas his initial motivation for 'psychoanalytic politics' had been to end the isolation of his institute and create a series of conceptual bridges between Interpersonal Psychoanalysis and the analytic mainstream, his second was to give his fellow psychologists a new theory - Relational Psychoanalysis - with which to oppose on an equal footing the medically trained analysts of the APsaA, trained in the tradition of North American Ego Psychology.

As for Jay Greenberg, who was four years older than Mitchell, I can at this point say that he too shared these aims, although he was at that time much closer to the analytic mainstream than Mitchell. He contributed the chapter on the Ego Psychology to the 1983 book, and in 1991 he published his only book, *Oedipus and beyond. A clinical theory*, in which he reinstated the drive dimension in psychoanalytic theory, as I reported in my review of the book for the journal *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane* (see Conci, 1994).

Referring now to the latter, I can state the following: as the culmination of a sophisticated and complex theoretical journey, Greenberg proposed a new drive theory of his own since he believed for a psychoanalytic theory of personality without any concept of drive to be unfounded. As a result, he ended up proposing the following two drives: the *drive for safety*, which moves us towards objects, and the *drive for effectance*, which moves us away from objects. In this way, Greenberg also intended to safeguard the primary status of conflict, in its pre-experiential rather than interpersonal nature.

By going back to Freud's work in the 1890s' and his *Studies on hysteria* and revisiting it in the light of Joseph Sandler's (1927-1998) concept of the 'representational world', the author also introduced the interesting new concept of *re-representation*, according to which we represent the same event differently in keeping with our personal evolution. In this way the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis moves in the direction of creating conditions of safety that allow the patient to re-appropriate the repressed experience and expand his representational and therefore behavioural repertoire. This also allows Greenberg to revisit the concept of 'analytic neutrality', which he redefined in the sense of the use that the analyst must make of himself in order to maximise both the security and the risk of the analytic work: if the analyst cannot be experienced as a 'new object', the analysis can never begin; if he cannot be experienced as an 'old object', it will never end.

This was my conclusion to my review of the book:

'Shuffling the cards in the field of analytical theory and technique is a game Greenberg plays very well and to the great benefit of the reader. But what is the outcome? In the preface he writes that he does not intend 'to combine the models (drive and relational) but try to extract from each model the one that best fits my understanding of the patients' (p. VIII), while in his response to Irwin Hirsch's review for *Psychoanalytic Books* No. 2/1992, he states 'that he is of the conviction that new wine in old barrels is what psychoanalysis needs' (p. 192). What happened to the epistemological rigour that characterised the handbook he wrote with Mitchell in 1983? And furthermore, why does the author in this book not take an explicit stance towards his earlier work, thus helping us to better understand its evolution? In his reply to Hirsch we can also read the following: because of the paradox that makes our life at the same time inexorably social and eminently private, 'I hope that the debate between analysts of the drive and relational models will never be resolved' (ibid.). Is this a step backwards? Is this a step forward?' (Conci, 1994, p. 133).

Well, today I would argue that Greenberg did well to maintain at that time, as well as in his later career, the aforementioned tension between the drive and relational models, a tension that was lost in Mitchell's 1988 book, but the loss of which also led, in my view, to Freud's work as a whole being increasingly overshadowed by the kind of evolution that Relational Psychoanalysis has had since Mitchell's untimely death. I was able to have a chat with Jay Greenberg in July 2019 (at the IPA Congress in London), and he reminded me that he had not at that time followed Mitchell in setting up the journal *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* (1991), for fear that such an initiative would cause the fragmentation of our discipline to escalate. In 2010 he became the editor of the prestigious journal *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, and has carried out for ten years a remarkable and important renewal of the psychoanalytic mainstream, introducing into it the dialogical instance he had originally developed with Mitchell as he had stated in his first Editorial in 2011: '*My hope is to use these pages to reflect and encourage the creative expansion of psychoanalytic ideas as they emerge within different analytic cultures, and also related disciplines that share our interest in studying human experience in depth*' (p. 2).

On the other hand, an eloquent example of how post-Mitchellian Relational Psychoanalysis has lost sight of Freud, *i.e.* claims to represent a kind of 'new beginning' of psychoanalysis itself, can be represented by Steven Kuchuk's recent book *The relational revolution in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy*, a book the author dedicated to Lew Aron, who passed away in 2019 at the age of 67. Those who read it may miss the fact that Freud not only created our profession, but also provided it with the solid clinical foundations on which our work still rests today. I refer, for example, to his concept of how the patient's unconscious and the analyst's unconscious can come into direct contact with each other, as we learn from his famous 1912 article 'Recommendations to the physician practicing psychoanalysis'. Not to mention the concept of 'transference', around which all our work still revolves, regardless of our theoretical orientation. That Freud's metapsychology, with particular regard to his drive system, should be properly revisited and criticised is another matter, but this - in my view - should not obscure the important legacy Freud left us on the clinical level.

But I have now come to the great turning point imprinted on my relationship with Mitchell by his book published in 1988. At that time we were keeping in touch through letters, and Mitchell informed me of the publication of an important book, *Relational Concepts In Psychoanalysis. An integration*. I decided to spend part of the Christmas holidays that year in New York, buy his book, read it and discuss it with him. That is when he explained to me that the Relational Psychoanalysis he formulated in his book, which was taken to be a new current or school of psychoanalysis, actually saw the light not at the W.A. White Institute, but within the Post-Doctoral Program in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy at New York University, founded in 1961 by Bernard

Kalinkowitz (1915-1992). The Program was already famous for offering a Freudian, an interpersonal, and a mixed training track, and Mitchell was now able to create a new *relational track*, counting on the active collaboration of Emmanuel Ghent (1925-2003) and Philip Bromberg (1931-2020) - as Lew Aron (1952-2019) explained in detail in his important book *A meeting of minds: Mutuality in psychoanalysis*, translated into Italian by Gianni Nebbiosi and Susanna Federici. In other words, that was when I began to put Mitchell definitively in focus, both as the person he was and his professional evolution, and as regards what he proposed to achieve in the psychoanalytic field. And this is exactly what I informed my Italian colleagues about in the review of his book which I published in No. 1/1990 of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, to which I refer the reader regarding what I learned and understood of Mitchell at the time, as well as the detailed summary of the book I formulated in it. As a second-year candidate in the five-year course of studies at SPP in Milan, my hands were of course trembling as I wrote a review of a book whose great importance I sensed, finally formulating the following concluding considerations, with which I am proud to say I still agree:

‘I personally wish Mitchell’s work all the luck it deserves. I also hope that it will be translated soon, and that it will be discussed at length. Not since Sullivan (1892-1949) has the relational point of view had such a coherent and lucid presentation. Clinically, Mitchell’s approach seems to me to echo the extraordinary sensitivity and delicacy, as well as the incredible conceptual sophistication, with which Sullivan dealt with patients. At the same time, it is clear how the author’s ability to promote such a fruitful dialogue between a whole range of psychoanalytic schools is not only of enormous didactic value but can also aim to reduce the obstacles to the development of psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline. And this is undoubtedly no small achievement’ (Conci, 1990, p.130).

In the above chapter of my book, published in 2019, I presented and discussed the most important reviews Mitchell’s 1988 book had received, reporting extensive excerpts of the regular correspondence I had with him at the time. For a detailed description of the events that followed my 1990 review I refer the reader to my Introduction to *Gli orientamenti relazionali in psicoanalisi. Per un modello integrato* - published in Italian in March 1993, almost thirty years ago, in Simona Rivolta’s translation. Here, instead, I will simply list them: having sensed the fundamental importance of personal contact with Italian colleagues, to help Mitchell promote awareness of his work in our country, I organized a series of Italian appointments for Mitchell in April 1991, and translated the paper he gave in Rome, Milan and Bologna, which Pier Francesco Galli accepted in No. 3/1991 of his journal. I am referring to the Italian translation of the article - which later became a classic - ‘Contemporary perspectives on Self: Toward an integration,’ which was published in the English original version in the first two issues of the new journal launched by Mitchell in those very days, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. A

*Journal of Relational Perspectives*. Indeed, I still remember how excited I was on receiving from his hands the first issue of this now well-established journal, containing his famous 'Editorial philosophy', whose crucial opening paragraph I will never tire of quoting:

'There is a great irony at the heart of contemporary psychoanalysis. The skilled psychoanalyst as clinician is, perhaps, the most careful and systematic listener, the most precise and respectful speaker, the most highly trained and refined communicator, that Western culture has produced. A sustained and dedicated effort to discover and articulate the personal meanings, the inner logic of the patient's communications, is the most fundamental dimension of the craft of psychoanalysis in all its variations. Yet, psychoanalysts have enormous difficulty listening and speaking meaningfully to each other' (Mitchell, 1991a, p.1).

Incidentally, with its editorials, monographic issues, and psychoanalytic dialogues, the journal also played an important innovative role in the field of psychoanalytic journals, which gradually adopted one or the other of these solutions. This is true, for example, of the *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, the journal of the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies (IFPS), which came into being the following year (1992), whose editorial board I have been a member of since 1994 - having become co-editor in 2007. Thanks to my collaborative relationship with Mitchell, with then-editor Jan Stensson (Stockholm) we were even able to organize a weekend conference in New York in early 1996, a meeting of the two editorial boards with presentation of papers and clinical cases. As I wrote at that time (see Conci, 1996a), we agreed to make our journals primarily a tool for the growth of the editorial board, the authors, and our readers.

But let's go back to April 1991. Our tour began in Rome, at the Catholic University, on Saturday, April 13, where Mitchell presented his paper as part of a Seminar called 'Matrici relazionli del Sé.: Una prospettiva individuale-famigliare-gruppale', organized by Massimo Ammaniti, Leonardo Ancona and Nino Dazzi, with the participation of Sergio Bordi, Corrado Pontalti and Raffaele Menarini; I presented a paper called 'La psicoanalisi interpersonale. Da H.S. Sullivan a S.H. Mitchell' (see Conci, 1992a). On Wednesday, April 17, Mitchell presented and discussed in Florence - at the Istituto di Psicoterapia Analitica- the paper 'Comparative theories of aggression.' And in the afternoon of the following day, we were in Milan, at the Associazione di Studi Psicoanalitici (ASP) at the invitation of Ciro Elia and Lilia d'Alfonso, where Mitchell presented his paper 'Contemporary perspectives on Self,' and I made the consecutive translation of the very interesting discussion that followed.

Having identified the lack of knowledge of the W.A. White Institute's interpersonal tradition as a major obstacle to understanding Mitchell's thinking, in the months that followed I hastened to translate into Italian for the journal *Quaderni dell'ASP* Mitchell's important contribution 'The

intrapsychic and the interpersonal: Different theories, different domains or historical artifacts?’ - re-proposed by Francesco De Bei in his translation in the 2016 volume of Mitchell’s writings which he edited under the title *Teoria e clinica psicoanalitica. Scritti scelti*. Incidentally, the book edited by De Bei contains an important autobiographical writing by Mitchell - published posthumously in 2004 - entitled ‘My psychoanalytic journey.’

Finally, on Saturday, April 20, we were in Bologna at the invitation of Pier Francesco Galli – the founder and editor of the journal *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane* - and after the presentation and discussion of his paper, Mitchell coordinated the discussion of a clinical case presented by Maria Luisa Mantovani. Incidentally, this convergence of interests also gave rise to the project, carried out together with Sergio Dazzi (Parma), of translating a series of classics of interpersonal literature and collecting them for publication in the anthology, *La tradizione interpersonale in psichiatria, psicoterapia e psicoanalisi* (1997). Not to mention the renewed interest in this important tradition on the part of Pier Francesco Galli himself, which allowed me to propose to him to translate, for the journal he edited, Philip Bromberg’s important article ‘Interpersonal psychoanalysis and Self Psychology,’ which appeared in No. 4/1993. Mitchell had pointed it out to me, in order to make the work of one of his most important friends and collaborators known in Italy as well. It was the first paper by Bromberg to be published in Italian.

It was at this point that Bollati Boringhieri purchased the rights to publish *Relational concepts in psychoanalysis. An integration* as part of the ‘Programma di Psicologia Psichiatria Psicoterapia’ coordinated by Pier Francesco Galli but giving the book a title that was perhaps commercially useful but scientifically misleading. I would have preferred a literal translation such as ‘Relational concepts in psychoanalysis. An integration,’ but I was not consulted on this. However, by this time I was no longer - shall we say - the only Italian who knew Stephen Mitchell well, and he gradually became part of the collective heritage in our field thanks to this book. As far as I am concerned, I would like to mention only that, since I - in the last part of my Book Presentation - mentioned Luciana Nissim Momigliano (1919-1998) - who in 1992 edited with Andreina Robutti the important anthology, *The shared experience: Essays on the psychoanalytic relationship*, I was contacted by her through the historian Michele Ranchetti (1925-2008) and invited to visit her in her studio in Milan, Via dei Chiostri. I went there - on a hot afternoon in June 1993 - and she told me how much she had enjoyed the book, how much she felt in tune with Mitchell’s way of working, and how she had been looking forward to meeting me, as I was not an SPI candidate. It was this kind of open attitude that facilitated the reception of Mitchell’s work within the Italian Psychoanalytic Society - and secured for me a constructive contact with the latter.



## And how does this story continue?

I have already far exceeded the space I was granted for my account, which means I had better stop here at this point in my story, although it was my intention to go at least as far back as 1996. The other topics I covered in the above-mentioned 2019 chapter are: the evolution of my relationship with Mitchell, in the light of our correspondence by mail and fax, and the publication in 1995 of *Hope and dread in psychoanalysis*, accompanied by my short Presentation. Then in 1996 it was the turn of *The experience of psychoanalysis*, which Mitchell wrote together with his wife Margaret Black. Both are texts that I still regularly use in my analytic teaching. The same goes for the next book, *Influence and autonomy in psychoanalysis*, which was published in 1999 in Mariella Schepisi's translation, but which Mitchell had presented in its basic outlines as part of the seminar I had organized for him in Florence, with the help of Adriana Ramacciotti, at the Institute of Neuroscience on April 13, 1996. It was a very well-attended seminar, which I discussed in detail in the 2019 book - but which I would have gladly reported on even earlier, if, for example, I had been invited to do so by Vittorio Lingiardi, Gherardo Amadei, Giorgio Caviglia and Francesco De Bei for their 2011 volume *La svolta relazionale. Itinerari italiani*. The same is probably also true for Cesare Albasi, the author of the first Italian dissertation on Mitchell, which he discussed with me in Brescia in the mid-1990s (see Albasi, 2018), regarding his contribution to the reception of Mitchell's work in Italy.<sup>2</sup>

Then my life changed direction. Between the spring of 1996 and the autumn of 1997 it took such a turn that it shifted its centre of gravity from the University of Brescia (where I had been an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry since 1991), and from Trento (where I lived), to Munich, where I still work today. Since 1999 as a German *Kassenpsychoanalytiker* - after having worked as a Guest Professor at the University of Munich's Psychiatric

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<sup>2</sup> A third colleague whom Vittorio Lingiardi, Gherardo Amadei, Giorgio Caviglia and Francesco De Bei could have invited to contribute a chapter of their own to the volume *The Relational Turning Point, Italian Itineraries* is Marco Bacciagaluppi, who also comes to mind because, in a studied coincidence with the morning spent with Mitchell on Saturday 13 April 1996, in the afternoon a number of participants in the meeting with Mitchell met - in the Sullivan Institute - for one of the founding meetings of OPIFER (Organisation of Italian Psychoanalysts, Federation and Register), which he had firmly wanted and implemented at the time. A Milanese physician and psychiatrist who was a pupil of Galli, Benedetti and Cremerius, Marco Bacciagaluppi - with whom I have been in regular contact for almost thirty years - deserves the merit of having promoted the reception in Italy not only of the work of Silvano Arieti (1914-1981), of whom he was an excellent translator, but also of Erich Fromm and John Bowlby. He recorded his life, his clinical activity and his scientific contributions in his autobiographical book *Appunti autobiografici di uno psicoanalista relazionale* (2018).

Clinic from 1997 to 1999. In fact, I was so busy that I missed the chance to be with Mitchell in September 1998 in Lindau, on Lake Constance, where the German DGPT (*the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychoanalyse und Tiefenpsychologie*, the German Society for Psychoanalysis and Deep Psychology) invited him to its annual congress to deliver one of its plenary lectures. Well, even in Germany Mitchell aroused such interest and sympathy (see Buchholz, 2003) that his first and only visit was followed by the translation of three of his books. Two of them are *The relational model. From attachment to intersubjectivity* and *Can love last? The fate of romantic love*, published in Italian in 2002 and 2003 by the publisher Raffaello Cortina and in Francesco Gazzillo's translation - also coinciding with the management crisis that hit Bollati Boringhieri at the time. Incidentally, I do not know of any of Mitchell's books in French, while I know of a good reception in Spanish.

Mitchell died suddenly of an acute myocardial infarction at the age of 54 on the morning of 21 December 2000 at his home in New York, leaving us all orphans of such a competent, creative and original colleague. And he was so committed to redeeming both Sullivan's legacy and the role of American psychologists that he created a new 'psychoanalytic tradition', as he called it in his Preface to the mighty 1999 anthology *Relational psychoanalysis. The emergence of a tradition*. Shortly before he died, he created the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy (IARPP). And it is precisely my attempt to assess his legacy that takes up the last part of my 2019 chapter - to which I refer the reader. A balance sheet that I can summarise in the following few words: Relational Psychoanalysis will continue to make an important contribution to the psychoanalytic discourse to the extent that it will not give up interacting with it in the complexity of its entire history, starting with Freud, instead of trying to develop only its own discourse, separate and autonomous from it. Indeed, Jack Foehl (Boston), since 2021 one of the four co-editors of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, is also of this opinion, as is evident in his positive review of my 2019 book published in the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*.

The same applies to the 'Ferenczian colleague' Jay Frankel, as he explained in detail in the interview to Alexandar Dimitrijevic, in course of publication in the *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*. As well as to my colleague Joyce Slochower, whom I had the opportunity of meeting at SIPRe in Milan a few years ago where she had been invited by Michele Minolli and Romina Coin. I refer to her recent paper 'Going too far: Relational heroins and relational excess', published in 2018 in the volume edited by Lewis Aron, Sue Grand and Slochower herself, with the eloquent title *De-idealising relational theory - A critique from within*. Incidentally, this book also contains a very interesting interview by Lewis Aron to Jay Greenberg, entitled 'The emergence of the relational tradition'.

But it is on a different note that I would like to end my contribution. The

history of psychoanalysis - a field that is unfortunately not sufficiently cultivated in our country - presupposes that we should give equal importance, as I have done in this contribution, to the personality of an author, to the context in which he developed his ideas, to our encounter with him, and to the factors that made the reception of his work possible. The same applies, for example, to Otto Kernberg's work, which we cannot truly understand without having experienced him in person, and without having spoken to him in person - as I did, following Paolo Migone's example. And this opportunity, to bring to Italy a psychoanalysis that speaks a language that is different from ours, was one of the most important challenges of our generation, and many other examples could be given - for example Franco de Masi with regard to the work of Herbert Rosenfeld (1910-1986). Having overcome this challenge has finally allowed us, Italian psychoanalysts, to perfect our own psychoanalysis to such an extent that we in turn can contribute to its development on an international level (see also Conci, 2008).

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