

PARAPSYCHOLOGY IN ITALY TODAY

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When on August 29th, 1957, Mrs. Garrett greeted the small group of Italian people who took part in an International Research Coordination Meeting, she addressed Dr. Marabini and me—a very active tandem up to that moment in the field of experimental psychical research—and, looking into our eyes, said: “You, Dr. Cassoli, will continue studying and researching in parapsychology. You, Dr. Marabini, will not.” It was the last time I saw this extraordinary person, who has forever left her trace on the history of parapsychology. With this reminiscence I would like to pay homage to her clairvoyant faculties. Indeed, thick clouds gathered over our Center in Bologna; members were divided over methodological problems that even risked—and I could not permit that—questioning the existence of parapsychology itself, and Dr. Marabini left the national parapsychological stage. At first, helped by Dr. Buscaroli, then by Dr. Inardi, present President of the Center, I continued working amid the difficulties, the disbelief, the distrust and continuous professional injury, for what in my opinion is, today more than ever clear, this wonderful but grievous ordeal, the study of parapsychology in Italy.

It is true, as Professor Servadio says, that in parapsychology as in every science, “life starts today,” but it is also true, as he adds, that “it is the experience of yesterday which makes that of today possible.”

In Italy, the coordinated planned study of our subject started in November 1901, when Angelo Marzorati founded the Società di Studi Psicici (Society of Psychic Studies) in Milan, and started a series of experimental researches with the mediums Politi, Eusapia Palladino and Lucia Sordi. Among members, I will mention such well-known personalities as the anthropologist, psychiatrist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso; the physiologist Filippo Bottazzi; and the neuropsychiatrist Enrico Morselli, whose book *Psicologia e Spiritismo* (Psychology and Spiritism) is certainly a classic in our field. I must also cite Luigi Barzini, Antonio Fogazzaro, Luigi Capuana, Ernesto Boz-

zano, Antonio Bruers, William Mackenzie, and Rocco Santoliquido who were interested in parapsychology at different levels.

In Rome, in 1937, four well-known scholars, Ferdinando Cazzamalli, L. R. Sanguineti, Giovanni Schepis and Emilio Servadio founded the *Società Italiana di Metapsichica*—SIM (Italian Society of Metapsychics), which, on January 23rd, 1941, was recognized by a State Government decree.

In 1946, after the war, a section of SIM led by Professor Cazzamalli left the Society and formed the present *Associazione di Metapsichica* in Milan—AISM (Italian Scientific Association of Metapsychics). Later on the *Società Italiana di Metapsichica* changed its name to *Società Italiana di Parapsicologia*—SIP, using the term parapsychology instead of the more traditional metapsychics.

In 1948, the *Centro Studi Parapsicologici* (Center for Parapsychological Studies) was established in Bologna. The founders were Dr. Buscaroli, Dr. Marabini and Dr. Cassoli. At first it was a section of the AISM of Milan; then it led an autonomous life asserting itself as the most active center, particularly in the experimental field.

In 1959 in Naples, the Review *Uomini e Idee* (Men and Ideas) started publication. In 1965 it was replaced by *Informazioni di Parapsicologia* (News of Parapsychology), as an organ of the *Centro Italiano di Parapsicologia* (Italian Center of Parapsychology), a new association that joined the other three already in existence.

At the end of 1968 there was established in Pavia the *Centro Italiano di Studi Metapsichici* (Italian Center of Metapsychic Studies), with a more limited program: the organization and study of psychic healers in Italy.

Finally, in Rome, in 1960 the *Facoltà di Scienze Psiciche e Psicologiche* (Faculty of Psychic and Psychological Sciences) of *Accademia Tiberina* was established.

This concludes the historical survey of the associations interested in parapsychology in Italy.

I think it is appropriate now to give an idea of the work of each of these associations and of the trend, too often not very clearly stated, of the association itself or its members. The order of precedence coincides chronologically with the appearance of each on the Italian stage, keeping the Center I represent, that of Bologna, until the end.

Società Italiana di Parapsicologia—SIP (Italian Society of Parapsychology). Present President: Professor Stefano Somogy of the Faculty of Statistic Science of the University of Florence. Address: Via dei Montecatini 7, Rome. Periodical: *Rassegna Italiana di Ricerca Psi-*

chica (Italian Review of Psychic Research), four monthly issues grouped in one or two volumes.

After a period of intense activity before the Second World War, the Society slowed down, with brief revivals, as is usual in our field, this being tied in with the activity of such scholars as Egidi, Tron, Mancini, Perrone, Schepis, and Nestler. The work of Professor Servadio who, I think, is today celebrating his twentieth participation in the Conferences of the Parapsychology Foundation, has always stood out for its continuity and important contributions to international meetings. We see his articles (the most recent on healers, psychedelic substances, Voodun and Comblé rites) in the Review of the Society. But Professor Servadio's activity embraces general parapsychological activity both in Italy and elsewhere, so it is superfluous for me to emphasize his contribution here.

SIP has the cooperation of a very qualified journalist and scientific writer: Dr. Leo Talamonti, author of *Universo Proibito* (Forbidden Universe), a very popular book in Italy (Sugar, 1966, Mondadori, 1969). I would say that the SIP's present contribution is only cultural and informative (Journal and annual series of lectures); no known experimentations, no or very few on-the-spot investigations of so-called spontaneous phenomena.

As our purpose here is to inform you of the trends of the different groups and societies in their respective geographic areas, I should add that except for the attitude of a few members of the SIP, we can observe from the latest issues of the Review a particular trend toward interest in books and subjects dealing more with "related fields" than with "the scientific approach to parapsychology." The Society does not even seem interested, as other associations are, in obtaining funds for research, or in attempting to persuade the University to establish free university courses or a chair in parapsychology.

Before going on to the Italian Scientific Association of Metapsychics in Milan, the second chronologically, I would like to mention a Roman institution:

Accademia Tiberina. President: Professor Igor Istomin-Duranti. Address: Via del Vantaggio 22, Rome.

The Accademia Tiberina carries out didactic activity in different areas, including the psychological field in general, with the Facolta di Scienze Psiciche e Psicologiche (Faculty of Psychic and Psychological Sciences) at the head.

It is a sad fact that in Italy we found it necessary to establish such a "Faculty" outside of the University, because of the insensitivity of

the academic world, which even today has difficulty in catching up not only with new trends, but also with students' demands. Indeed, in many universities, psychology is not taught; it is considered an optional subject.

In Italy out of 22 universities where medicine is taught, only five Faculties of Medicine have chairs of psychology; and only three universities have a course in medical psychology. It is impossible to obtain a university degree in psychology because we do not have a Faculty of Psychology and there are no departments of psychology.

This lack has been made up through the "good will" of the "Faculty of Psychic and Psychological Sciences" I just mentioned. But what we want particularly to emphasize is that the teaching course, divided into a normal course of three years and a course of specialization, provides also for the teaching of parapsychology with duplicated lecture notes, lectures and groups of experimentation.

I personally got in touch with a peripheric section of the "Accademia," that of Padua, which, before becoming a section of the Accademia, was already known in Italy through the publication of a survey on the "Centro di Ricerche Biopsichiche" (Center of Biopsychic Research), edited by Mr. Giorgio Foresti. This Center was active in research relating to spontaneous phenomena, and one of its Council members, Ing. Aldo Berlanda, was one of the few Italians to witness the "psychic surgery" of the famous medium José Arigò in Belo Horizonte in Brazil. Today, the aim of the Center in Padua is mostly directed toward filling the need for teaching psychotherapy in Padua and in Venetia, and it tries to cooperate at an academic level with Italian and foreign associations having the same interest. Mr. Giorgio Foresti is helped in his work by Ing. Aldo Berlanda and Mrs. Carla Berlanda, a doctor in pedagogy. The address of the Center is: Via Dante 13/A, Padua.

Associazione Italiana Scientifica di Metapsichica—AISM (Italian Scientific Association of Metapsychics). Present President: Ing. Ettore Mengoli. The Honorary President is now Professor W. H. C. Tenhaeff. Address: Corso Firenze 8, Genova. Periodical: *Metapsichica*, official organ of the Society and of our Center in Bologna; two issues, January–June and July–December.

In Milan, headquarters of the Center, Mr. Luigi Occhipinti, who is a lawyer and one of the vice-presidents, carries on active work.

This association was founded in 1946, breaking away from the SIP in Rome because of friction between the then President Professor Ferdinando Cazzamalli and some members, and officially assumed the

denomination "scientific." Now it carries on social and official cultural and information activities (through two annual interregional meetings and the Review), while leaving investigation or experimentation to the individual researcher. But I must say that the activity of the Society regarding diffusion of information and relations with all the other national and foreign associations is of enormous value. For this, special praise is due Ing. Mengoli who is the animator. This activity was reported in the Review *Metapsichica*, which, I think, after the *Parapsychology Review* is one of the best for up-to-dateness and wealth of news. The Review also avails itself of the cooperation of a keen parapsychologist, Professor Vincenzo Nestler, whose knowledge of parapsychology is surpassed by few other persons in Italy.

Dr. Giuseppe Crosa of Genova, a psychiatrist, is one of the two Vice-Presidents of the AISM. He is known for having taken part in several international Congresses (Konstanz, Kyoto, Moscow, Freiburg) and for introducing into Italy the autogenous training of Schultz. Lately he became interested in the phenomena of the paranormal tape recording of Kostantin Raudive, and in the Rol case, a much debated instance of complex and polymorphic phenomena, still talked about in the press. Dr. Crosa also studied the phenomenon of psychic healing and collected numerous case histories of subjects with mediumistic painting ability. He organized three meetings on parapsychological topics in Campione d'Italia (1968-69-71).

Another cooperator of the AISM is Dr. Giorgio Alberti, a young doctor who, in Milan, obtained his doctoral degree discussing a thesis on "Methodological Criticism of the Experimental Parapsychological Method" with Professor Cesa-Bianchi, professor of psychology at the University of Milan (Faculty of Medicine). Dr. Alberti was still a student when he was entrusted with the supervision of a group of eight students who asked that parapsychological subjects be included in their curriculum. He carried out this task both at didactic and experimental levels. Working with Dr. Alberti, the student Franco Guarnieri, physics major in his senior year, taught a course on experimental PK, and will present his doctoral thesis on this subject. This year at the Institute of Medical Psychology, Professor H. Bender was invited to give a lecture on spontaneous PK at which he showed three films (Kulagina, Ted Serios, and the Rosenheim case). Another serious and active collaborator is Mr. Nicola Riccardi, who recently concerned himself with the so-called Rol phenomena and with physical phenomena.

Centro Italiano di Parapsicologia—CIP (Italian Center of Parapsychology). Address: Via Calascione 5/A, Naples. President and editor of the Review: Architect Giorgio di Simone. Periodical: *Informazioni di Para-*

psicologia (News of Parapsychology). In 1959, in Naples a review of philosophy, science and metapsychics started publication under the title *Uomini e Idee* (Men and Ideas). In 1965, the review was first changed into a literary review and later gave way, in the parapsychological field, to the present *Informazioni di Parapsicologia*.

CIP is active in cultural, informative and experimental programs. Recently, Professor Di Simone agreed to edit for a Roman publishing house a series of books entitled *La Ricerca Psichica* (Psychic Research). He will start with the reprint of rare and out-of-print books, and follow with books on modern parapsychology. Recently, the Center promoted an inquiry into interesting cases of paranormal phenomena with a well thought-out questionnaire. This was widely accepted here and abroad.

CIP continues to maintain relations with academic authorities and others, attempting to get subsidies and obtain a chair of parapsychology. But in vain—all doors remain closed.

It is true that it appears more and more clearly from the Review, that some doubts may be raised about the trends of this group. Indeed, in January 1969, it published a very extensive report of many hundreds of sittings carried out with a person who, Di Simone says, "I will call the 'medium' because I cannot violate a pledge of secrecy of his identity, and this has prevented us up to now from imposing a rigorous scientific control of his faculties."

The communications come from a "dimension X" and are given by an "Entita A." The author realizes the danger he is running and concedes this over and over again. We acknowledge this. But we hope that Professor Di Simone will admit that it is not with this kind of material that we can hope to enter the university. The author intends, according to the program he sent us and which we are now illustrating, to carry out experiments on "spectra of voices" through comparative analysis with the medium's voice. This is an incorporation phenomenon not one of "direct voice."

The tenor of the communications from the so-called "Entita A" are, as you may suppose, of a spiritual nature; they attempt to explain moral, ethical, cosmological and scientific problems.

Another collaborator of the CIP is Mr. Corrado Piancastelli who was—and is—interested in the so-called "San Gennaro's blood miracle"; his pamphlet on this puzzling phenomenon gives a thorough description of it.

Centro Studi Parapsicologici de Bologna—CSP (Center of Parapsychological Studies in Bologna), Via Tamagno 2 (the President's home). President: Dr. Massimo Inardi. Periodical: *Quaderni di Parapsicologia* (Notebooks on Parapsychology). I personally edit the review and direct

the group on experimentation. My address is Via L. Valeriani 39, 40134 Bologna. Professor Enzo Nardi, a lawyer and full Professor of Roman Canon, is our Honorary President. He published, some years ago, a book on *Haunted Houses and Old and Modern Canon* which is, in my opinion, still basic today, if one is interested in the legal details of rent agreements where a "haunted house" is concerned. CSP now has 110 members. Reports of its activities from 1956 to 1961 were published in *Minerva Medica*, the most important Italian medical review. Then, and this was a big mistake, we gave up such academic aims in order to establish, jointly with the other associations in Rome and in Milan, a review that came to an end with the death of Professor G. Schepis. The CSP now cooperates with *Metapsichica* of the AISM. It will try to publish in the *Notebooks on Parapsychology* reports of experimental work, texts of important lectures (given in Bologna during the academic year), and the contributions of its scholars to Congresses and meetings.

Two and a half years ago, the Group of Study and Experimentation was formed. Today it comprises twenty members, graduates and students in physics, biology, medicine, the humanities. In order to join the group, one must be qualified to take part in experimental activities. The applicant must possess a general knowledge of parapsychology; he may present a short thesis with his comments to the Group in session.

Competence is necessary because the Group receives numerous requests from subjects who want to be examined, or for information on alleged paranormal phenomena taking place in Italy or abroad. In such cases, we form a Commission of three or four, led by an expert (up to now, most of the time, my wife) and start the so-called preliminary or explorative examination. If the phenomenon appears worthy of consideration, if it is publicly known, then I intervene personally and investigate the case to the best of my ability (check and control period).

I will mention briefly some of the studies that have up to now given the best results.

Many years ago, we studied at length (for three years) one Maria Gardini, a palmist, using more and more rigorous controls to prevent the so-called "sensorial cues," going so far as to put the subject, examined by the palmist, behind a wood screen (a cabin-shaped construction) from which only the hands came out. The results were always positive and they have been published in two works.

In the past we also carried out GESP experiments, using as "targets" events really lived by people who operated as transmitters or agents. The results were presented at a Congress held in Bologna at the local Neuropsychiatric Clinic.

I also engaged in a series of experiments in precognition using preferred targets, that is to say, chosen by the twelve subjects at the beginning of the experiments (which lasted six months) and which would always be mixed in their single pack. The data, although negative, were considered interesting by Professor A. Naddeo, professor of Statistic Sciences at the University of Rome, and Mr. Alberto Agnetti worked on these data to make them the subject of his graduation thesis "Statistical Criticism of an ESP experiment." This was the first thesis on a parapsychological topic discussed in Italy (1961-1962). My wife and I led this work on precognition with the help of a subsidy from the Parapsychology Foundation.

I also went to Greece for a preliminary examination of the phenomenon of fire-walking, again with funds provided by the Parapsychology Foundation, and reported on my trip here in *Le Piol*. The results were positive and probative.

We followed up with an experiment in fire-walking here in Bologna, with two subjects of Naples who claimed to be able to repeat the Anas-tarides performance, but the result was completely negative.

We organized two surgical operations performed under hypnosis (appendectomy and tonsillectomy) with controls excluding any possibility of fraudulent (pharmacological) intervention, and obtained positive and really exceptional results. Professor Servadio was present.

More recently, we initiated experiments in influencing the growth of fungi by the laying on of hands. After many trials, in which I also served as subject, it seems we found a subject giving positive results.

Dr. Inardi, my wife and I were present at one of the "exploits" or "performances"—I cannot call them experiments—of the famous Dr. Rol of Turin. My preliminary report, already published, bears the title "G. A. Rol, a Great Medium or a Great Illusionist?" The impossibility of applying even the slightest control prevents me from expressing any judgment. I can only say that what we saw that evening was something akin to the miraculous. In our many years of activity, we have examined about one hundred subjects, and the on-the-spot investigations of alleged paranormal phenomena have been many (some far from Bologna and for periods of many days). We have uncovered many tricks, some trivial, others complex and shrewd.

The last investigation worthy of interest was the so-called "case of the bells of Carpegna." Carpegna is a small village in the center of Italy, close to the Republic of San Marino, where there is a priory of Franciscan Friars. In November 1970, in the cloister and inside the priory itself, people began hearing the sound of bells, sometimes loud, sometimes soft, exactly like the sound of the bells of the bell-tower.

But the priory bells actually remained perfectly still and silent. With the cooperation of an electronic technician and a physicist, we explored every corner of the priory for two days and conducted some experiments. We did not uncover any tricks or presumed medium. The phenomenon stopped three days after our departure only to start again later and continue sporadically up to Easter. We will publish a report on this subject after we have studied the collected data.

Also in November 1970 we came across a case of presumed "spiritualistic painting." As the subject lived in our town, we were able to follow up the case, using controls, for about four months, that is to say, until the phenomena ceased. The subject is 57 years old, a dental mechanic, who had never painted in his life. On the night of March 19, 1970, an irresistible impulse compelled him to get up and paint. Since then and for the whole year, almost every night (at 1 or 2 o'clock) he got up and produced a painting. With the aid of hypnosis we obtained some results, even after the end of the spontaneous phenomenon. Of this case also I will write a report this year.

At present I am investigating a poltergeist case in Rimini about which it is still too soon to speak.

Apart from these five associations, I would like to mention, though I think few are unaware of it, that the review *Luce e Ombra* (Light and Shadow), founded by Marzorati with Ernesto Bozzano as a collaborator, is continuing its program firmly though with difficulties. Everyone knows the spiritualistic leanings of Dr. Gastone De Boni and of many of his collaborators, among whom I would cite Jacopo Comin, one of the few "scholars" already mentioned as exceptional experts in parapsychological bibliography. The trend, the aims, the dangers are clear. We have a deep friendship and esteem for Dr. De Boni and his work; we would like to help him still more. But in no way can we agree to his standards of control of the phenomena.

There are still three matters to speak about concerning parapsychology in Italy. One is a thesis (the third) by Mr. P. Curci on "Extrasensorial Perceptions and Psychopathology," which was discussed in Modena with Professor Rossini; no relations between capacity and psychopathology have been found here, either.

The second matter puzzled me. On October 17, 1969, in Rome, at the Accademia Alphonisiana of the Pontifical "Università Lateranense," the opening lecture of a course in parapsychology directed by the Reverend Father Professor Andreas Resch, was presented. The course was included in the first academic semester 1969-1970, and seminary directors and Catholic priests of every race and country took part. Perhaps it will be useful if I make a list of the subjects which were treated: 1. Concep-

tus paranormale; 2. Paranormalia in historia et scientia; 3) Phaenomena parapsychica (levitation, haunted houses); 4. Phaenomena parapsychologica (stigmata); 5. Phaenomena paraphisica (materializations); 6. Phaenomena paranormalia mere intellectuality (intuitions, prophecies, precognitions); 7. Faticitas phaenomenorum paranormalium; 8. Expliationes et theoriae.

I must say that I don't like to present this news as a conquest or as an Italian contribution to the achievements of parapsychology here and in the world.

On the other hand, I can proudly announce that on September 25, 1971, a symposium on parapsychology, sponsored by the SIP (Italian Society of Psychiatry), and in which directors of university institutes and head physicians in hospitals will take part, will be held at the psychiatric Clinic of the University of Modena. Professor Emilio Servadio will speak on "Parapsychology and Psychoanalysis," and I will speak on "Limits and Subjects of Parapsychology." I think this symposium marks an important stage in the achievements of parapsychology in Italy.

And so I have finished. I think I have answered the questions I was asked when I had the honor to be invited by the Parapsychology Foundation to this meeting. Anyway, I would like to answer these questions in a brief, concise way:

1. Which scientific doctrines are concerned with psychical research?

Here in Italy, for the moment and in a marginal way, psychology, psychiatry, hypnosis, psychoanalysis (Servadio and Gaddini are at this time the most directly interested) and statistic sciences.

2. Are the different groups scientifically oriented or do they tend toward occultism, spiritism or related fields?

All groups, except the review *Luce e Ombra* (Light and Shadow), declare that they follow scientific aims and methodology. Almost everyone includes, more or less clearly, some trends which do not follow the Galilean method, the experimental one. Immodestly I would say that the CSP has never deviated from the scientific approach.

3. Is there an increase of interest among students and young people?

Without a doubt, there is a great increase. The study groups in Milan (Dr. Alberti) and our study group show evidence of this. Also in the other societies, there is an increasing demand for information and requests for membership by young people. Two months ago, for example, I was invited to a university college to give a series of lectures on parapsychology. The invitation came about at the express demand of the students.

4. The Parapsychological Association became a member of the Amer-

ican Association for the Advancement of Science. Does this represent progress in the acceptance of parapsychology as a scientific doctrine? Is it true for you, too?

I have always stressed that fact whenever possible. But for the moment, the fact is known to only a few and has not yet influenced the acceptance of parapsychology as a scientific doctrine. This acceptance is spreading here, in other channels, as, for example, in the press which devotes much space to it, with many articles by Professor Servadio, a pioneer—as always.

I thank you for your kind interest and hope I have been sufficiently thorough. We Italians will gratefully accept any help from any of you that will contribute to the success of parapsychology in Italy.