Book Review

To the origins of psychosis
Study paths between clinic and culture

AMELIA RIZZO

Psychologist, PhD in Psychological Sciences, University of Messina
Email Corresponding author: amrizzo@unime.it

The volume, edited by Daniele La Barbera, Luigi Baldari and Lucia Sideli, deals with the extended contributions of the Italian Society of Medical Psychotherapy Congress, which took place in April 2015 in Messina. Original title: “Alle origini della psicosi. Percorsi di studio tra clinica e cultura” Editor: Nuova Ipsa Editore, 2017 N. of pages: 159 Language: Italian. The papers exposed have been focused on various topics related to psychosis, analysed from several scientific points of view with a common thread.

Psychotic diseases represent one of the toughest challenges for psychiatry and clinical psychology because of the heterogeneity of psychopathological manifestations, the degrees of disability in the global functioning, caregivers’ burden and high costs for society.

Several lines of scientific evidence support the presence of psychotic symptoms in the general population, suggesting the existence of a spectrum which span from subclinical psychotic experiences to psychotic and affective disorders (Van Os et al., 2009). For this reason in the last few years there is increasing scientific and clinical interest - as suggested in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM – 5) - (1) in the recognition of the prodromal symptoms and the intake of attenuated psychosis syndrome (APS) and (2) in all those bio-psycho-social factors that may precipitate the onset of the psychotic features in
predetermined individuals, including stressful life events such as: interpersonal traumatic experiences, communication disorders and dissatisfaction with family life, migration process and social isolation, substances consumption or cannabis and stimulants abuse (Howes et al., 2012).

From a clinical point of view, the progressive commitment to developing methodologies and protocols addressed to all those patients labeled as psychotics and traditionally considered not suitable for psychotherapeutic treatment should be considered. This, of course, has increasingly enriched the experience of clinicians for the peculiarities of the content offered by these patients and the resonance they produce both on the relational and emotional side. It is no coincidence that Jung, sensing in a unique way the latest neurobiological theories (Kapur et al., 2005), realized that psychotic disorders were characterized by a polarization on the deepest anthropological and existential themes, whose increased salience seems to correspond to hyperactivity of the subcortical regions (Silverstein, 2014).

To know and to understand a complex psychopathological theme it is necessary to scan it in all its aspects, from the most easily visible and superficial to the hidden and deep ones. Dealing with psychosis means to speak of the indissoluble bonds that these conditions have with the personality (see Muscatello et al.), with the emotional and relational experiences (see Ferraro et al.) and with all his trans-personal and trans-generational baggage (see Frigione) made of stories and, often, with decisive family dynamics (see Marchese et al.)

In a complex and multiform view, it is important to consider the relationship between psychosis and other psychopathological manifestations (see Baldari) and, in addition, the relationship with internal or external key risk factors, such as possible neuropsychological alternations (see La Cascia et al.) or a history of drug abuse (Pomar et al.). The interest of psychiatry and clinical psychology cannot ignore the consideration of the socio-cultural context, in which the most varied forms of psychosis are manifested. Despite their importance focusing on purely theoretical contributions and studies is insufficient; it is rather necessary understanding the concrete relationships between psychotic experiences and the anthropological and cultural aspects (see English, see Guarneri and Pitti), by realizing the impact that these pathologies have on contemporary reality. An impact that finds tangible representation in many cultural references (see Furchi), particularly in the post-modern literature (see La Barbera and Taffaro) and the cinematographic world (see Inguglia).

The approach to psychotic disorders must also include the study of experiences and inner dimension, so that the increased knowledge could indicate effective pathways of care and recovery (Settineri et al., 2015; Rizzo et al., 2015). For these reasons, it is crucial to try to fully understand psychotic experiences, thanks to the availability of different models and
theoretical approaches (see Sartorio and Marinaro), producing a substantial starting point for the progressive improvement of clinical practice (see Rizzo and Mento), of internal experiences of residential structures (see Sideli et al.) and of rehabilitation activities (see Sartorio et al.).

Overall, the whole set of contributions contained in this book could facilitate mental health professionals to take a multilateral and multi-faceted vision, able to unify the most different aspects that contribute to determining psychotic conditions and improve treatment paths.

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