

## **Psychoanalysis, crime fiction, and art criticism: the relevance of mutual cross-references**

*Daniela De Robertis\**

**ABSTRACT.** – The text underlines the links and logic between psychoanalysis, crime fiction, and art criticism, the common basis of which is the “aesthetic of the sign”, a formula composed of two unbeatable devices: the semiotic-hermeneutic code and the method of abduction. Abduction, a procedure theorized by Peirce (1989), uses a lateral approach, an icon of choice of the creative processes underlying the “discovery”; an investigative culture that does not stop at surface level and the obvious but identifies alternative levels of interpretation. The protagonists of this approach are those secondary details which, although negligible, are instead vehicles of meaning, supporting a sort of epistemology of predictability, attentive to the fragments of meaning that are reconstructed from thin clues, minimal signs, which seem insignificant and negligible.

Very similar to this is the approach proposed in Morelli’s method (1890) of art criticism, which refers to a minimalist perspective that captures the residual data, the marginal element, as something revealing. These methods used in the investigation by the detective and art critic are treated in the contribution as a way of “importing” into the analysis room the salience of transformative clues, such as the patient’s plasticity parameters and the register of his/her evolutionary needs. The indices of alternative and change that are at the margin of the patient’s story, but not marginal, take on a vague and nuanced contour, indicating their germinal state. The proposed hypothesis is that the therapeutic value lies in welcoming these clues, recognizing the patient’s potential for change, and proposing them again for self-reflection in the analytical pair. To conclude, clinical vignettes are presented.

*Key words:* abduction, semiotics, Eco, Peirce, method of inference, clues.

---

\*Philosopher, Psychologist, Psychoanalyst; SIPRe Member and Supervisor; International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies Member; Lecturer in Cognitive Science, Freudian Theory, Freudian Epistemology, and Foundations of Epistemology at the Rome, Milan, and Parma Institutes of the Italian Society of Relational Psychoanalysis Specialization Schools, Italy. E-mail: dan.derobertis1@gmail.com

## Introduction

In this work, three topics will be compared, in order to underline their common links and logic, which are, moreover, formally quite distant and different: psychoanalysis and its interpretative measure, crime fiction and its investigative procedures, and art criticism and its method of decoding.

However, psychoanalysis, crime fiction, and art criticism are linked: there are mutually linked historical, epistemic, and procedural commonalities. In fact, all three originate in the same era, all three proceed by investigation and use circumstantial procedures, all three move within the domain of semiotics, as they are based on the interpretation of signs.<sup>1</sup>

As we delve into the convergence between these three forms of investigation, the first part will look at the methods of exploration used by detectives, and the second part will examine the method of art criticism. With a focus on psychoanalytic care, these areas of knowledge will be taken as a starting point and as a stimulus to enhance the resources that occupy the mutative factors in clinical treatment, as illustrated by three clinical vignettes.

### Crime fiction: the rise from second-rate novel to top of the ranks

Crime fiction and crime novels (called “*giallo*” [yellow] in Italian from the color of the cover of the successful crime series that Mondadori began to publish in the 1930s), but also mystery novels and noir stories, much like the romance novel, were born as forms of popular literature, intended as readings for leisure, fun, and escape. Thus, crime fiction, for a long period of time, bore the weight of its origins: in fact, in the eyes of the literary critic, this kind of fiction showed the limit of presenting itself as a second-rate novel, a product of gratuity and little effort that lent itself to travel and holiday readings (Del Monte, 1975). In short, to the harsh gaze of literary criticism, crime fiction appeared to be a byproduct, a form of writing that was “lesser” compared to other elite literary genres.

However, as time went on, opinions changed thanks to the different approach taken by literary critics, scholars, and writers themselves, who, in assessing crime fiction, noticed an “intellectual” purpose in it, not so much in relation to the plot and the contents of the novel, but in relation to the “*ratio*”

---

<sup>1</sup> Semiotics, from the Greek σημεῖον, “sign”, deals with the general conditions of meaning, and being the doctrine of signs and symbolic knowledge in general, it represents a knowledge inherent in the field of epistemology. In this framework, the focus is on the signs and the context in which they appear and how they acquire sense. In Eco’s *General Semiotics* (1978; see also id., 1997), we find the foundation of a logical and cognitive semiotics useful to the faculties employed in reasoning and cognition, protagonists of the experimental mentality.

[logic] and the underlying intent of the author.

Eco (1978) was one of the most authoritative voices who helped ennoble this narrative genre, identifying in the investigative procedure a semiotic approach, namely the method of the meaning of signs, the careful use of clues. Sciascia (1971) also favored the rehabilitation of crime writing as a “noble” form, founded on the exploratory value of the investigation. In fact, like Eco, Sciascia is an author who used the interweaving of the crime novel to create a type of story-inquiry or “crime story from reality” (Sciascia, 1971).

The importance of this literary genre was also understood within historical-philosophical knowledge by the Ginzburg studies (1986), which pointed to the protagonism of secondary clues and signs in every path of knowledge that orients the human to operate within it.

The result was to rehabilitate the crime narrative due to the fascination it exercised via its taste for investigation, exalting its value insofar as its methodology of investigation loomed as a powerful epistemic potential transversal to every form of knowledge.

But let us talk about the interweaving, the plot of these stories. The general formula of *detective stories* is this: a problem is posed, a solution is sought, and through the reflection of the detective, they must find a motive and a culprit for the offence committed (Sciascia, 1954, p. 29).

## In Eco’s echo

The attraction for *problem solving* (Wertheimer, 1945), which identifies in this kind of literature the centrality of cognitive devices at the service of creativity, is well represented in Eco’s narrative: the investigative activity carried out by the friar William of Baskerville in *The Name of the Rose* (1980) on a series of murders perpetrated inside the abbey, includes this novel, at least formally, in the mystery novel genre.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, some years before Eco, Sciascia set his novel *Todo Modo* (1974) [*One way or another*] in a hermitage where, in the midst of the spiritual exercises, a series of unexplained crimes occur. For both Sciascia<sup>3</sup> and Eco, as for many other writers of mystery and crime, in reality the *plot* is simply a *medium* to illustrate from an epistemic point of view the procedures and methodologies adopted in the paths of knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Umberto Eco’s contribution and passion for crime literature is witnessed not only in *The Name of the Rose* (1980), but also in *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1988), and let us not forget that in *Baudolino* (2014) there is a crime writer’s sign: an invaluable “closed chamber”, a common feature of the mystery plot, in which the corpse is found in a room that is completely inaccessible from the outside.

<sup>3</sup> In Sciascia’s vast narrative production, the text that most explicitly deals with the “philosophy” of crime storylines is the essay entitled *Il metodo di Maigret e altri scritti sul giallo*

The latter is precisely the objective of the Eco's work, the great master of semiotics (Eco, 1978), who animates his literary essays with this (cf. Eco, 1997). Let us now discuss one of his essays that is most focused on exploring the investigator's mental process: that is, *The Sign of Three* (Eco, Sebeok, 1983). But who are the three? Conan Doyle and Poe, the highest levels of crime and noir fiction writing, and the third is Peirce (1989), the founder of semiotics: a type of inferential logic, which ties this trio together. Eco's essay analyzes the extent to which the investigative method used by Sherlock Holmes and Dupin, protagonists of Conan Doyle's and Poe's novels, respectively, is closely related to Peirce's abduction method, concluding that the link between crime plot and semiotics hinges on the cross-reference between sign and meaning. A valuable link in the convergence of Conan Doyle's and Poe's logic with Peirce's method.

As if *The Sign of Three* were not enough, Eco's reference to the detective's epistemic activity as a circumstantial paradigm of knowledge is already condensed into the title of the essay, a clear homage to Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* (1890), the second novel in which Holmes enters the field. A nod to the procedures of understanding the crime classics is recurring in Eco; proof of this is the fact that the detective-friar *William of Baskerville*, protagonist of *The Name of the Rose*, derives his name from Conan Doyle's novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902).

At this point, however, we must make a clarification: if the "sign" that unites the three is a specific logic of reasoning known as the abduction method, it is true that in the stories of Conan Doyle, Detective Holmes, who often illustrates his method with a certain amount of arrogance, always describes it in terms of "deduction". As proof of this, it is sufficient to scroll down the index of *The Sign of the Four*, where the first three chapters of the novel, which precede the actual story, are respectively entitled: *The Science of Deduction*, *The Statement of the Case*, and *In Quest of a Solution*.

So, while Holmes is "showing off" the method he uses in his investigative research before his interlocutors call it deductive, it is actually more precisely a method of research that, at about the same time on the other side of the ocean, Peirce (1989) theorized giving it the name "abduction". A method that crime writers already practiced without knowing it, who were convinced they

---

(1954) [*The Maigret method and other crime writings*]. But the investigation into the mystery, the disappearance, and the crime are at the heart of all his novels: a project where the cognitive method of discovery is aimed at political denunciation, that is to say, at revealing the occult plots of the sources that exercise "power", such as the church, the state, and all of their "accomplices". With respect to this "duty" of ethical-political demystification, we highlight some titles among the most representative, such as: *Death of an Inquisitor* (1964), *The Day of the Owl* (1961), *Atti relativi alla morte di Raymond Roussel* [*Acts related to the Death of Raymond Roussel*] (2020; see also Sciascia, 1971), and *The Disappearance of Majorana* (1975).

were employing the deductive method. The hypothetical-deductive reasoning employed by Holmes would therefore not properly be that of deduction, although Conan Doyle and his translators use this term, but rather that of abduction. A method that is neither inductive nor deductive, but hypothetical-inferential, that is, a proceeding of knowledge that uses a lateral approach, a transversal and divergent thought, not surprisingly an icon of choice of the creative processes (Guilford, 1950) that are the basis of the “discovery”.

Within the sign, Peirce proposes for the first time in the history of thought a theory of knowledge and a method, which he calls abduction (from *abducere*, *i.e.*, to extract, to deduce) based on inference; a mental act that benefits from the use of signs. The sign thus takes on a fundamental role in knowledge, as it is the category present in every cognitive act: every form of knowledge takes place by passing through the sign. The position that the sign occupies in the progress of the investigation is a position of mediation between reality and the subject, insofar as the sign does not refer to reality, to the phenomenon, or to the object in an absolute way, but only returns one aspect or element of it, so that semiotic knowledge is always partial knowledge.

Abduction is the formulation of a hypothesis within the framework of an epistemic conception that does not discover the “Truth” but tries to get closer to it. Nevertheless, in the process of knowledge, the assumptions that gradually acquire reciprocal correspondence become increasingly less probabilistic and more consistent, getting closer and closer to reality.

However, that is not all: the sign is related to an Interpretant, that is, it concerns an act of understanding and significance – a hermeneutic action – which is an inescapable cognitive function of the person who knows, investigates, and examines. By intersecting the hermeneutics and the interpreting action of the subject, the forms of confluence between psychoanalytic hermeneutics are already beginning to emerge. This qualifies the analyst as an interpreting subject, and the logic of the Sign with its abduction method is the mainstream method of investigation.

Therefore, in cross-disciplinary terms, the methodology of research, both in hard sciences and in soft sciences, is exemplified by the investigation of the “detective”: every research is a detection, from which the English term “detective” derives. This indicates a mental process interwoven with hypotheses, inferences, conjectures, and attempts, which may be risky, accompanied by a set of fine intuition, curiosity, and shrewdness, specific to each mind that is ready to reach a conclusion,<sup>4</sup> that is not necessarily conclusive, nor truthful, but sustainable as it is equipped with relative coherence.

---

<sup>4</sup> A mix of dispositions, summarized by what goes under the name of *serendipity* (Pievani, 2021); the origin of the term leads us to *Sarandip*, the ancient name of present-day Sri Lanka.

All this is to substantiate the idea that even the analytical enterprise may concern an investigative activity that fully belongs to the analyst in the role of the one who seeks to understand their patient (and of course also themselves and the relationship between the analytic couple). This is done by drawing on the signs the patient provides and inferring from them hypotheses and conjectures – not as absolute interpretative Truths, but as exploratory propositions to be offered to the patient. From this dialogue, further hypotheses can be “abducted” – progressively approaching a “truth” that is co-constructed in a dialogical process and capable of acquiring a relative internal coherence for the patient.

With regard to investigative literature and its “procedures” of research, even the logicians and philosophers of science, discussing the scientific method, have long referred to this kind of investigation and in particular to Sherlock Holmes, finding in the mental process that our detective adopts observation criteria and methods of discovery that are similar to those adopted by the logic of scientific discovery.

At this point we can see to what extent for many writers and essayists the plot of crime and misdeed is a technical device: with its format of puzzle, riddle, or narrative crossword, the plot of the crime is used as a medium: the purpose is not to discover the culprit, but as Sciascia himself asserted (1954), to study a situation, investigate a context, and find an interpretative code of the phenomena.

And is it not the same undertaking for the psychoanalyst who, although certainly not on the lookout for the guilty or for misdeeds but driven by respect and desire to know the other’s subjectivity, is committed to finding an “interpretative code” to understand the patient, their contexts, and experi-

---

In the narrative masterpiece of Amir Khusrau (14th century), *The Eight Stories of the Paradise* (1996), the story told on Saturday recounts the adventures of the sons of the King of Sarandip. During their travels, the three young men meet a camel driver searching for his lost camel and, despite never having seen the animal, they deduce its characteristics from simple clues found along their way: the camel is blind in one eye, missing a tooth, lame, carries on one side a jar of oil and on the other a jar of honey, and bears a pregnant woman on its back.

The power of predictability and conjecture, played through the logic of signs, had already attracted Voltaire, who – drawing inspiration from the famous tale of Amir Khusrau – constructed the intuitive wit of his *Zadig* (Voltaire, 1784): this fantastic and adventurous character, using the system of traces, identifies the characteristics of the queen’s dog and the king’s horse that have gone missing, and which the courtiers are anxiously searching for.

The red thread of the “sign” continues to unwind from Voltaire to Eco, who in *The Name of the Rose* invents an opening scene purposefully modeled on the two aforementioned literary precedents: William of Baskerville, upon arriving at the abbey, meets some monks searching for the abbot’s horse, whose characteristics William deduces through “the traces by which the world speaks to us like a great book” (Eco, 1980, p. 31).

ences? This correlation between psychoanalytic action and detective work is now also recognized within psychoanalysis:

“The birth of the investigative novel takes place just before the construction of the psychoanalytic model, and the figure of the psychoanalyst in its early days seems to share many of the constitutive aspects of a good investigator (...). Like the investigator, the image of the analyst in the Freudian era is that of an external observer, who reconstructs a story with an attitude of suspicion with respect to the evidence, basing his/her knowledge on a strong interpretative pattern” (Mazzacane, 2011, p. 4-5).

Although relational psychoanalysis has demolished the analyst’s myth as an external observer and introduced the role of the participating observer as a participant in the relationship, we can preserve the idea that interpretative methods and codes continue to maintain dignity and functionality in care.

Returning to the “crime scene”, the investigators, who are the protagonists of detective novels, love the intellectual game that is built around the crime-investigation-solution sequence and dominate using a winning formula made up of two unbeatable devices: the semiotic-hermeneutic code, useful for deciphering data, and the method of abduction (Peirce, 2003). And here, magically, parading before our eyes is the knight Dupin, a dandy character created from Poe’s imagination, who, with his Victorian colleague Sherlock Holmes by Conan Doyle, adopts the so-called “aesthetic of the clue”; but also Philo Vance, the New York *viveur* born from the pen of Van Dine; Father Brown, a unique figure as priest-investigator by Chesterton; Hercule Poirot, the timeless creation by Agatha Christie; Commissioner Maigret by Simenon; and, in more recent times, Inspector Montalbano, based on Camilleri’s Sicilian wit.

These are the so-called *soft-boiled* characters, but for the sake of completeness it is necessary to include in this list also the detectives of the *hard-boiled* genre, a branch of the classic detective novel that arose in the US in the 1920s embodied by the hard detectives, who are a bit damned and tormented (that is, *hard-boiled*), such as Chandler’s Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade by Hammett, interpreted on screen by the unforgettable Humphrey Bogart. Whether *soft* or *hard*, they are all clever and invincible puzzle solvers. In unwinding the mystery, some of them work on observable traces, as Holmes does by analyzing materials, substances, chemical elements, and fingerprints: it is precisely with regard to the latter that we should remember, as Ginzburg (1986) points out, that fingerprints are a circumstantial technique whose ancestor can be traced to the animal footprints that Palaeolithic hunters followed. The trail, the footsteps, the clues are important at the origin of the cultural history of our species, a reference made by Conan Doyle when Holmes says, “There is no branch of detective science which is so important and so much neglected as the art of tracing footsteps” (Conan Doyle, 1887, p. 191).

Other investigators rely on clues localized through a subtle web of sophis-

ticated deductions and inductions, such as Poirot; yet others, such as Maigret, immerse themselves in the context and habitat of the murder and, with sociopsychological expertise, investigate local culture and use signs of the heart and psyche, such as the tone of a voice, the hesitation of a gesture, the redness of a cheek, the crease of a lip.

But let us ask ourselves why crime fiction, the noir genre, and mystery novels, despite their ignoble origins, which have since been largely rehabilitated by literary criticism and aesthetics, have been so successful, making publishers a great fortune, bringing great fame to their authors, and arousing so much curiosity and passion among readers.

It is said that crime literature is a genre particularly capable of stimulating the release of adrenaline and dopamine. What do these neurotransmitters have to do with crime fiction? The very path of neurobiological chemism could explain this: this kind of narrative, in addition to the ability to keep tension alive – called *spannung* in narratology<sup>5</sup> – also stimulates predictive knowledge that is linked to investigative procedures. Perhaps the amazing success of the thriller genre, both in the past and today, is due to the suspended structure plot of mystery novels (De Robertis, 2024), which, endowed with suspense, not only produces excitement (with the complicity of adrenaline) but also stimulates the epistemophilic need, that is, the need for knowledge, endemic to the *sapiens* species. The latter in turn activates the search for the solution. Finally, once found, the solution acts on reward systems in the form of gratification (with dopamine complicity). In short, in hindsight, the experiences of excitement and gratification release adrenaline and dopamine, respectively, which are the two neurotransmitters activated by mystery plots.

The convergences between psychoanalysis and crime literature, that is, the encounter between analyst and detective

These heroes of the enigma borrow from psychotherapists, as has already been said, not only the epistemophilic need but also the art of mind reading: the investigator is in fact skilled in the ingenious “challenge” of reading into the suspect’s mind, retrospectively reassembling all the mental paths one after another in a clever puzzle. And here, precisely because we are talking about mentalisation, we find a further parallel process between the psychoanalytic investigation, which is about the patient’s mind, and the investigation of the inquest.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Spannung* in German means sexual tension. As sexual tension has its own climax, the term also in narratology means an element of the narrative text that corresponds to the moment of maximum tension preceding or culminating in the action.

Another convergence between the role of the psychoanalyst and that of the detective is the motivation that arouses interest in investigative activity. Just as the patient's "novel" triggers the psychoanalyst's interest in life stories and gives rise to a heuristic of questions and reflections about who the other is, where they come from, what happened to them, so does the mystery novel answer the question of what happened and who did it. But there is more: the enterprise of the psychoanalyst and the enterprise of the detective, due to the subtlety attributed to details, are said to satisfy the "philologist" that is in us (Del Monte, 1975): that is, our passion and our selective attention to those details that, although negligible, we see and suspect are full of meaning. A sort of predictive epistemology that supports the idea that the universe is inhabited by fragments of meaning that the attentive eye reconstructs from small clues, as the abduction method teaches us to handle. Understanding how things have gone and what reason they have fills a knowledge gap and rewards the so-called epistemophilic drive, specific to our species, that is, the drive to knowledge linked to the need to know.

However, the harmony of sense between psychoanalysts and crime writers does not end there: the two figures can also be combined for other coincidences and similarities. The culture of sign identification, which represents the convergence between detective fiction and psychoanalytic treatment, is a direct and common strand from medical semeiotics, the unparalleled diagnostic method that, moving backwards, from the effects discovers the causes. It is no coincidence that Freud and Conan Doyle were both doctors. The latter confesses that he had already begun to make notes for the writings of his mystery novels during long sea crossings between visits to his patients as a ship doctor. There are countless convergences between psychoanalysis, crime investigations, and the diagnostic activity of medical art through the use of signs (*i.e.*, medical semiotics). For example, when Dr. Conan Doyle first introduces Holmes to his readers, the investigator works in the anatomy lab of a London hospital; but Watson too, a faithful companion and the narrative voice of Holmes' prowess, is a retired military doctor. The commonality between police investigation and medical semeiotics is further testified by the recognition that Conan Doyle pays to his teacher and mentor, Dr. Joseph Bell. As an assistant, Doyle followed Bell during ward rounds and, grateful for his teachings, recognized the doctor's precious gift of being able to formulate impeccable diagnoses based on semiotic inference, verdicts that Doyle faithfully transcribed on patients' medical records. We will see how, if we continue our discussion on the topic of art criticism and medical diagnosis, Morelli too, another enthusiast of the "sign" who we will meet shortly, was also very knowledgeable on this.

Continuing to trace the affinities between psychoanalysis and crime fiction, we encounter two forms of knowledge that both arise after the first half of the 19th century and, above all, are children of the same culture of investigation and suspicion, in the Foucauldian sense of the term, found in

Freudism as a “hermeneutics of suspicion”, without which the unconscious could never have been explored (Fornari, 2024). We are talking about a common method of thinking that does not stop at the surface and the evidence but identifies alternative interpretations, an expression of criticism that is not indulgent to simplicity and the banal, it is curious in seeking the specific “difference” from what is taken for granted.

The parallelism between the figure of the investigator and that of the analyst is now a given accredited in psychoanalysis (A.A.V.V., 2011); based on the consideration that the circumstantial character of the crime story makes it similar to the psychoanalytic narrative (Mazzacane, 49, p. 2),<sup>6</sup> insofar as in both fields of research and work, “investigation uses errors and doubts as work tools” (Carofiglio, 2019, p. 49). Speaking of doubts and errors, it is worth pointing out that abduction, as conjectural and hypothetical inference, follows the Popperian logic of scientific knowledge modelled not on the certainty-verification binomial, but on the conjecture-refutation binomial (Popper, 1963). Just as Carofiglio suggests (2019, p. 63), “usually when we are looking for something, we follow a pattern, even though we do not have a pattern to try to find the fact or the resolving object”.

Returning to the comparison between knowledge within the clinical process and knowledge within the investigative enterprise, one important difference must be highlighted, at least in terms of plot and purpose: in the area of treatment, it is not a question of reconstructing the “misdeed” nor of assimilating the figures of a “crime” of psychopathology, let alone giving the patient the role of the “culprit”. In reality, this is the traditional anthropological view of psychoanalysis, founded on “the guilty man”, whose historical denunciation at the time was brought forward by Kohut (1984), who had the courage to replace this paradigm with that of *Homo tragicus*. It does not take long to become an ally of Kohutian criticism; just look at the death instinct or Oedipus complex or the function of defense as a barrier to guilt.

In this direction, the aim of this contribution is to highlight the logic of investigative procedures in psychoanalysis in order to try to return to the psychoanalyst a more complete, less defective, and less obscure anthropological concept of the human being; an approach that can make the tools of treatment more multifaceted, that is, attentive not only to dysfunctions but also and above all to the evolutionary progress of the subject-patient.

To do this, it is useful to also use Morelli’s method and the current investigations carried out by art experts. So, let us move now into the field of art criticism.

---

<sup>6</sup> On the role of the analyst as a detective, for the sharp and ironic parallelism between the figure of “Lieutenant Columbo” and that of the analyst, I refer the reader to the contribution of Foresti, *The biologic of Lieutenant Colombo* (2011).

## Art criticism and Morelli's method

There was once a very “in-demand” figure in the world of pictorial art. Let us examine the story.

Towards the end of the 19th century, an interpretative paradigm based on the investigative method made its way into Europe. It was employed in the field of art history by its inventor, the Italian Giovanni Morelli. Morelli, son of the positivist philosophy of his time, which exalted as a guarantee of true knowledge the objective approach to investigated phenomena, urged the art critic to have an empirical approach to the work, that is, to interpret art based on specific aspects that were internal to the painting itself. The “Morellian method” is based on the minute analysis of details in the work. For example, each artist has their own way of painting hands, ears, drapery, and gazes. In the eyes of the critic, these details become traces of the author's imprint, of their signature, which help the expert to identify the painting's authorship, being able to “scientifically” prove its identity. Morelli had studied natural sciences and medicine (especially anatomy) and, like Freud, had drawn from the experience of medical semiotics the skill of being a refined observer (Ginzburg, 1986, p. 165).

Once again, another parallelism: like Freud, Conan Doyle was a doctor and had practiced his profession before turning to literature, just as Morelli moved from biomedical studies to art criticism. Like Conan Doyle, Morelli had learned from medicine the value of semiotics, which he then applied in the field of art. But what specifically legitimized this transfer?

The 19th-century art market can give us the reason, because it is here that the method of signs and clues (De Robertis, 2007) comes into play, which Morelli will adopt to unravel a problem that at that time was difficult and widespread in painting: the difficulty of attributing authenticity to paintings. In fact, before the 19th century, the canvases did not always bear the date and the signature of the author. Moreover, the more ancient the painting was, and therefore the more it had passed through the hands of different owners and collectors, the harder it was to trace back to its creator.

In short, in the middle of the 19th century the world's museums, aristocratic residences, and the mansions of magnates were all full of paintings with false attributions, but above all, full of “copies”. How then could we return the painting to its true author, Morelli wondered? And here his investigative method was born: the authorship of a picture did not have to be reconstructed on the basis of the depiction as a whole, and there was no need to derive a general evaluation of the work. In this case, the attribution could have been based on those pre-eminent features that more easily stood out and therefore were more easily imitated by the copyist, such as the gaze towards the sky of the Perugino saints, the unmistakable almond eyes of Botticelli, or the ambiguous smile typical of Leonardo's characters (Figures 1-4).



Figure 1. Perugino, *San Sebastiano*. Louvre Museum, Paris, France.



Figure 2. Perugino, *Head of two saints*. Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York, USA.



Figure 3. Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna and Child*. Soumaya Museum, Mexico City, Mexico.

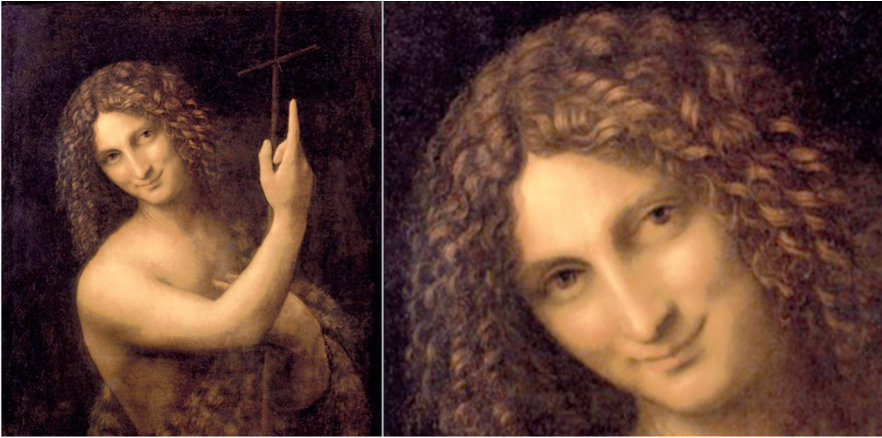


Figure 4. Leonardo da Vinci, *St. John the Baptist*. Louvre Museum, Paris, France.

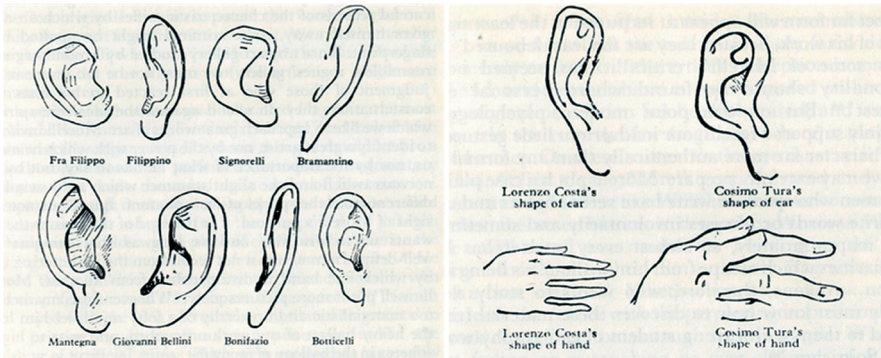


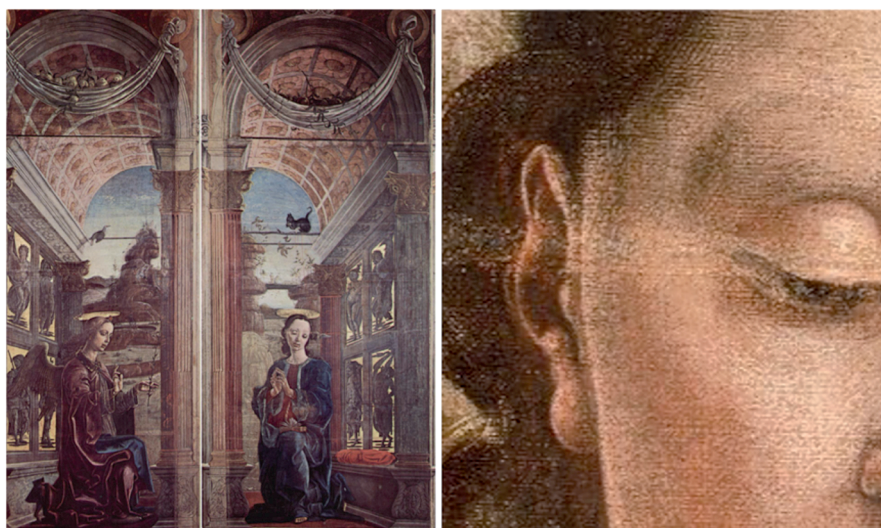
Figure 5. Images and hands of different artists. Images taken from the English edition of *Kunstkritische Studien über Italienische Malerei* (by G. Morelli).

Morelli stated that to understand “the expertise” of a painting, it was not necessary to focus on the primary characters, but on the secondary details: on those minimal, insignificant, and negligible clues that precisely for this reason, go unnoticed by the one who paints the copy, pretending it is authentic. Following this method, our scholar paid attention to secondary details, mostly anatomical ones, such as the inclination of the face, the position of the hands, the shape of a nail, the morphology of the ears, and from these secondary stylistic traits, he would find the author (Figure 5).

This category includes, for example, the earlobes of Botticelli or those of Cosmè Tura (Figures 6 and 7).



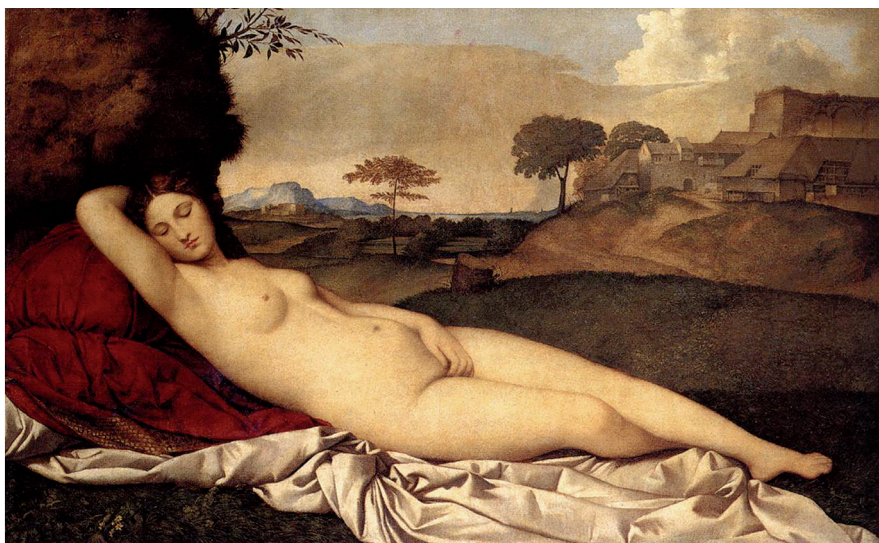
**Figure 6.** Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna of the Book*. Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan, Italy.



**Figure 7.** Cosmè Tura, *Madonna Annunciata*. Museum of Ferrara Cathedral, Ferrara, Italy.

Not only as a good anatomist but also as an expert naturalist, Morelli also included among the clues of authorship of the picture naturalistic elements, such as flowers, plants, animals, and landscape details. Precisely these kinds of details work as small clues that, present in the original painting, are instead absent in the works of the copyists (Bellet, 2019). In fact, they are minimal and secondary indices to which the copyist pays no attention; but this very lack of attention, this, so to speak, “distraction”, is precisely what betrays the copy.

By applying this method, Morelli foiled many false attributions. His *Treatise on Italian Painting* (1897) caused a stir, exerting a considerable influence on future generations of art critics; in this Morelli illustrated his method of attribution, accompanied by numerous sensational examples, such as the identification of some portraits of Raphael previously attributed to other painters. But the most sensational scoop was the Venus of the Gallery of Dresden: a copy by Sassoferrato painted of a lost Titian, in it Morelli identified one of the very few works of certain authorship by Giorgione (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Giorgione, *Sleeping Venus* (1510). Gemaldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, Germany.

The Longhian method, named after a well-known art historian of the 20th century, Roberto Longhi, largely descends from the Morellian method. For example, Longhi applied Morelli's method to distinguish which hands were by Masolino and which were by Masaccio in the frescoes of the Carmine Chapel in Florence (Longhi, 1910-1967) (Figure 9).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Following the Morellian inferential method, which interprets details as significant signs, recently Vittorio Sgarbi, a pupil of Longhi, through whom he revisits Morelli, has refuted the attribution to Caravaggio (carried out by Silvia Danesi Squarzina) of an unprecedented oil on canvas depicting St. Augustine, based on the details of the hands resting on the pages of a text: hands, which Sgarbi says, "seem to have just had a manicure", which is in contrast with the authentic Merisi da Caravaggio signature of hands, calloused and with dirty nails.



**Figure 9.** Brancacci Chapel, Florence, Italy.

Recently, again in the field of art criticism, in relation to the attribution of authorship of a painting, another example of an investigation based on details, on distinctive signs, on those traces that allow us to identify what we are looking for, is exemplary, even if we do not know where to go to find it. It was established how the importance of understanding through the small clues that characterize Morelli's method, like all inferential procedures, stimulates comparison with the crime investigations (Castelnuovo, 1968, p. 782; Ginzburg, 1986, p. 160) and just like in crime investigations, the investigation that revolves around a portrait is solved. It is a character, who until recently remained anonymous, depicted in the sumptuous *Portrait of a Humanist* by Sebastiano del Piombo, kept at the *National Gallery of Art* in Washington, which depicts a young man in his thirties, with dark hair and a pensive look and a gaunt face, wearing a large dark overcoat. But who is this mysterious character? (Figure 10)

Various attributions have been advanced so far: Federico Gonzaga da Bozzolo, Leone Africano, Marcantonio Flaminio, but none had exhibited convincing evidence to be fully credited. Until the scholar Lucia Tantorgi Tomasi (2021) pointed to a promising new lead that the humanist portrayed was Fernando Colombo, the son of the famous navigator. Based on what semiotics and which clues led her to come to this conclusion? Following the canons of Renaissance portraiture, to the right of the figure, Sebastiano del Piombo leaves the emblems of identification of the character. In fact, on a shelf, there are objects that are the "scenic furnishings" or the signs of a figurative semiotics, which lead straight to the figure in the portrait: the goose quill dipped in ink next to a manuscript attests to the fertile literary activity



**Figure 10.** Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of a humanist*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, USA.

of the character; the wooden box, which for the first time is thought to contain a compass, alludes to the journeys undertaken; the wording on the three finely bound volumes hints at a notable book collection belonging to Fernando Colombo, still to this day called the “*Biblioteca Colombina*” since the era of Charles V, housed in the Cathedral in Seville.

But the most convincing “sign” for the identification of the portrait is yet another: on the shelf there is also a terrestrial globe. The portion of the globe exposed to the viewer does not depict the Mediterranean or European coasts, but an archipelago that could well correspond to the Caribbean islands, a clear homage to his father Christopher and to those *terrae novae* on which, before conquering the continent, Columbus landed. It was October 12, 1492, when Columbus’ expedition landed on an island in the Bahamas, the first American land touched, that Columbus named San Salvador.

The route proposed by this extensive study is not only cartographic; the globe sign refers to another and similar sign: the Caribbean islands of the terrestrial globe present in the painting lead to the same islands of the heraldic coat of arms of the Columbus family. This time the scholar’s investigation is not “inside” the canvas, but moves outside, “into” the Cathedral of Seville, where, next to the most grandiose tomb of Columbus, the funeral monument of Fernando is housed. Here on the plaque (Figure 11) is visible the original coat of arms of the Colombo family granted by King Ferdinand on the return of Columbus’ first voyage from the *terrae novae*. In the upper section of the coat of arms there is the lion of Aragon and the castle of Castile, but at the lower apex there is a cartographic glimpse of the

Caribbean archipelago, which is clear recognition of his father's discoveries. In short, the investigation of the signs, conducted through the abduction method, made up of hypotheses that gradually confirm each other by intertwining in a network of mutual coherence, leads straight to identifying the anonymous *Portrait of a Humanist* as the effigy of Fernando Colombo in the role of erudite *gentil hombre*, as the great humanist and traveller that he was (he participated at 13 years of age in the last journey with his father towards the Orient) and he was also the heir of that glory that his father's adventures had granted on his lineage. One last clue? Sebastiano del Piombo painted the very famous portrait of Christopher Columbus of the Metropolitan, commissioned, it seems, by his son Fernando.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 11. Tomb of Fernando Colombo. Seville Cathedral, Seville, Spain.

<sup>8</sup> It is surprising how much Morelli's method is a process of widespread transversality: in fact, it has recently been applied in literary criticism as well. Stroppelli (2019) attributed to Machiavelli the authorship of the *Letter on the plague*, and not, as was the case beforehand, to Lorenzo Strozzi, relying not only on external arguments, but also on internal characters. In the latter case, the application of the Morellian method has supported the identification of "Machiavellian" details, such as recursion in the use of certain types of lexical terminology, the use of words characteristic of his prose, and the presence of themes such as love, old age, and sexuality, elements to be interpreted as biographical evidence of the author.

## Between art gallery and crime museum

Straddling the comparison between art gallery and crime museum, it becomes apparent that both “investigations”, artistic and criminal, refer to a minimalist perspective that captures the revealing element in the residual data, in the most negligible details, in the marginal consequences, almost light, endowed with something that “takes weight”, precisely in the sense in which Calvino had entitled *Lightness* the first of his six *American lessons* (Calvino, 2017). A method whose interpretative sense is that measurements or interpretations are not made on direct observation of what is most easily perceived and manifested, of what is visible, but are the result of paying specific attention to selecting indirect, imperceptible, and seemingly random clues. In Arab culture, the word “*firāsa*” indicates the organ of inferential knowledge, of penetrating thought, capable of passing from the known to the unknown, and vice versa, by exploiting clues.

In fact, Poe supports the principle, which experience shows us and which philosophy has always asserted, that an important and illuminating part of the truth comes from what is seemingly irrelevant. In fact, the plot of his story *The Purloined Letter* (1845) is wrapped up in this cognitive assumption, which becomes apparent when Dupin senses that the hiding place of the precious document should not be searched for in places designated for concealment. He finds the letter in a place visible to everyone: on the shelf of the mantelpiece where the Minister received the visitors. Salient signs, but because of their marginality people do not pay attention to, just as for *The Purloined Letter*. Proust’s wit had well grasped the importance of the little things that can escape, of the elements that go unnoticed, when in *Sodom and Gomorrah* he quotes *The Purloined Letter* with regard to: “Those objects which escape the most meticulous searches, and which are simply exposed in front of everyone’s eyes, passing unnoticed, on top of a fireplace” (Proust, 1921-22, p. 418-419).

## Notes on care

We are psychoanalysts and not detectives or art history experts, but I have the impression that the lesson of investigators, like that of art critics, with their focus on secondary clues, can be effectively imported into our field of work with the patient.

Moving into the analysis room, let us see then how we can proceed by adopting the method of clues or the method of abduction linked to hypothetical inferences.

Unlike the rigid and conservative elements, which consciously or unconsciously, frequently and conspicuously pile up in the patient’s story, the

indices of change to evolutionary needs manifest themselves through poor visibility; they subtly enter the patient's account, with a silent and discreet presence that sounds in their speech like a small aside, a small space between two commas, or a parenthetical element.

It is precisely these details that seem of little importance, these quiet details, these minimal, marginal, but not negligible, clues that can be indicators of future development phenomena of considerable scope and importance: they are revealing elements of potential transformations and progressive changes (Fosshage, 1997). However, these residual elements, which index a potential for evolution and a prospective direction, appear as "signs" at the margins of the patient's narrative, and as they appear, they take on a silent tone, a subtle and almost imperceptible color. As they are "discreet" details, one might think that they almost escape the patient's control, and luckily, they do, but they can also escape the analyst's listening, with far less happy outcomes.

It is indisputable that, insofar as the past collapses on the present, what the patient communicates expresses their past, reproduced with rigidity and preservation (De Robertis, 2008-2009; 2015). But that is not all. The patient also communicates, in spite of everything, elements of flexibility and transformation (Mitchell, 1993, p. 238), which can manifest alternatively, but also together, with their consolidated static, symptomatic, and dysfunctional mental models. So, we can imagine the analysis room as a container of conservative indices and transformative clues. But what is the difference? How do we recognize them? To try to answer this question, I find the Morelli method helpful, as it claims that the painter's mark of authenticity lies in the small clues (Morelli, 1897, p. 71).

And are those minimal clues not exactly what the patient shows when they allow themselves to interpret, think, or do something that goes beyond their consolidated and stereotyped path?

These are new clues, they are mutative elements, which are this way exactly because they are free from standard criteria, that is to say, from procedural dynamics. But, in hindsight, when a patient makes flash expressions that are not bound by their maladaptive beliefs, they are often accompanied by a certain reticence, a disappointment or embarrassment and even veiled by fear, as if something had gotten out of hand. I would like to stress that clinical attention to these circumstantial elements refers to a broader model of care and intervention, in which only dysfunctional and symptomatic aspects are not the subject of analytical observation and clinical dialogue (De Robertis, 2009). While it is appropriate that analytical listening does not underestimate these aspects, I am not inclined to think that the resources of therapy lie only in identifying these references. According to Ferro (2003) the analyst's intervention should return to the patient elements not only of reification and *impasses*, but also indices of growth and evolution factors: as Ponsi says,

“The ideal would be to exploit one’s hidden potential” (Ponsi, 2019; see also Ehrenberg, 2018).

In short, the inferential and abduction method is a device that adds to the necessary observation of the conservative manifestations present in the patient’s story, insofar as it is appropriate to give space and broaden the field of attention and analytical sensitivity, positioning ourselves on the epiphany of transformative clues. Therefore, I think that the parameters of patient plasticity, the register of evolutionary needs and the indices of alternative and change should be welcomed and proposed again in the dialogue between the analytical pair, because they propose traces of something that is not engaged in the exercise of its conservative functions or in the observance of its consolidated images (De Robertis, 2008-2009; 2015). So, it would be interesting to dig deeper into the profile and size of these clues.

The new indices of change are presented through small clues, minimalist statements that condense into small things, they appear in small thoughts, they take shape in tiny actions, inhabiting the dimension of the discrete. These are patient communications that appear in a low voice, because what is new, being less obvious, whispers, while what is rigid, repetitive, fixed and coercive and represents the coefficients of stillness, is more visible, it shouts out.

Translated in terms of the Morellian method, in the patient’s story the shouts would correspond to those stereotypical and repetitive characters (scripts, procedures) that most easily stand out, and instead the whispers correspond to those alternative and minimal details that are the most salient. By “whispers and shouts” I mean two ways of “talking” by the patient, which put in place a particular receptive sensitivity of the analyst, who takes up the lesson of other areas of knowledge, such as investigative literature, art criticism and epistemic theories in general, to also tune into the “value” of small details, those indices that, if we do not sharpen our hearing, can escape analytical consideration, resulting in the detriment of mutative resources.

If we want to be carers at the service of the evolutionary needs of the patient and faithful to their mandate to promote growth and change, we must hear and recognize their cries, but also and above all listen and follow up, confirming and strengthening the whispers.

In summary, I think that often in the narrative of the patient and in their relationship with the analyst, we find a conservative path, parallel to a prospective one, in which we see germinative elements of novelty, but which the patient has not yet made their own.

In such situations it happens that a new thought, a new affection, a new pattern of behavior, precisely because it is emerging for the first time, takes on a vague and nuanced contour, an inconclusiveness that indicates its initial state: we are dealing with signs and traces that can work for the analyst from indices of orientation; a sort of road map that allows us to repropose to the patient, recognizing their prospective potentials (De Robertis, 2009).

The presentation of three clinical vignettes aims to make the theoretical notes presented so far more concrete and operational.

### Dorothea and her little mutative “sign”

Dorothea is an established pediatrician, aged 50 and unmarried, with a life focused exclusively on work. For a long time in therapy, she spent entire sessions talking about her little patients. The story unfolded in a particular form: Dorothea seemed not to talk about “her” patients, but about “entities”. I mean that her participation, her “being with”, did not emerge; the little ones were transformed into symptoms and syndromes. Dorothea spoke of her cases with medical-scientific language; she delved into their implications, made differential analyses, elaborated on the diagnostic tests she had prescribed, lingered on drug therapy and the course of the disease, just as if she was reading me a medical record. The *locus* of interpersonal for her worked as a code of impersonal, not to enter into relations with the world, but also not to talk about herself and with herself. In addition to the patients, the analysis room was filled with a host of characters: colleagues, lab analysts, and health directors, whose lives she loved to dwell on, but ultimately to prove how badly they behaved, how incompetent, manipulative, and uncaring they were. But there was another privileged theme: the families of her patients. Here the scenario was really multifaceted: mothers, fathers, aunts, grandparents, ancestors, and so on paraded in front of her. Family stories, big and small tragedies, betrayals, interests, and indifferences. In short, all the family dynamics; and here too she spent a lot of time describing mothers who wanted their children to get rid of their fever so they could leave for a skiing holiday, or for their child’s cough to resolve so as not to have to get up at night; they asked for methods to wean their children in advance or ways to circumvent the quarantine of measles and send them back to school.

In her narrative, I perceived her excessive sense of responsibility and low self-esteem, caused by a very intense relationship with a father who was insecure, but very demanding of his daughter’s academic-professional achievement; he was on a sort of personal *revanche*. On the other hand, in the descriptions of mothers or colleagues, I could see the anger toward her mother and older brother, who were selfish and distracted in recognizing her needs. I mean, there was a clear, unconscious intent in the patient to talk about other things as long as it was not herself. This was the purpose of her communications aimed at keeping out the slightest reflection on herself, in such a way as to maintain an aseptic and projective discourse and keep out any possible connection that placed her in the presence of herself. In fact, every attempt I made, even shyly, to break the defensive film was experienced by Dorothea as unbearably painful, pain to which she reacted by protesting: “You see? You

do not understand me, or you do not understand. What I tell you is the reality of the situation!” Dorothea, with her protest, with her denial, was “rightly” telling me how much pain it cost her to access her intrapsychic, her emotional sensitivity, her feeling. . . . But one day during a session, while she was telling me about the clinical picture of one of her patients, listing the serious symptoms that had induced her to prescribe hospitalization, she inserted, as if in a quick parenthesis, just as an aside to this speech, the following sentence: “I felt so bad, poor little one”. I was struck by this statement, because perhaps she was beginning to incorporate herself, her experience into her relationship with the other. I did not tell her; it seemed to me that it might sound too much for her, but in order to recognize the appearance of this feeling, I simply shared her feeling with her.

### Exploiting the “sign”

In reconstructing the story of Giacomo, it seemed to me that the figure of an intrusive and interfering mother emerged, who did not see what he needed or desired, and a father who abandoned commitments and attention to the family, and so Giacomo ended up maturing and structuring an unconscious vision of himself as a person who is unseen and alone. However, a partial relief to his solitude was the presence of two older brothers, who are both more than ten years older than him; but when Giacomo was 13 years old, both of them moved out of their family home: one of them built a new family in another city, and the other went to work abroad. At this point Giacomo reinforced his identity formula of being alone and abandoned, misunderstood, deserted, and above all, unaided in his growth. It turns out that the unconscious answer at the time was, “They left me alone, what selfish people! Because I am so sad and angry, I will do things on my own and I will take refuge in studying”.

At the age of 40, both the constructed meaning and the response produced became a rigid script, expressed in the analysis room via catchphrases of grievances, persistent complaints, and accusations generalized towards the whole world, including me of course, and therefore sometimes also verbalized in *transference*, as elements that are repeated in the narrative appearing in macroscopic form. Today, he does not trust the few friends he has; they are indifferent and selfish, thinking about their own business and having fun, and if he cannot go out because he has to deliver a project and he has to study, he complains that they go out anyway, not caring about him. It is easy to see to what extent the behavior of his friends is interpreted as if they were his two brothers in the past.

Recently, during a holiday to Ibiza, he slid on a motorbike round a corner and had a bad accident. In narrating the incident, he says, almost in passing,

as a blitz without any emphasis whatsoever, that a friend arrived immediately who called an ambulance, and another stayed with him all night in the emergency room until they medicated and discharged him. The aside lasted a nanosecond, then he continued his complaints about the distracted medical staff and that he had to spend hours on a stretcher abandoned in a corner of the emergency room. He says that the motorcycle must have been faulty and that the person who rented it to him was not attentive in letting him rent it, since the brakes did not work and so on... I wonder if the help of the two friends (the two brothers?) who enter in his narration, albeit hastily, without being given much importance, could signify the fact that Giacomo felt less alone and desperate, contrary to how he usually feels? It is a small detail, said half-heartedly, on the margins of the story, but it is not marginal. A side note, a "sign" from which one can infer a hint of a change in his rigid structure, which can be summarized as "I stay only because others do not care". This time someone appeared. I assumed that perhaps there was a small sign of potential change in his interpretations and answers and that it was worth trying to verify this anyway. I therefore intervened in order to underline, but also to inform him, that I had "noticed" the sign of his possible incipient change of interpretation. I think, however, that in this "different" interpretation of the facts – which remains for now – there is just a small hint of change, so I choose a somewhat interlocutory intervention, which I propose to him not in a forward and direct way, but in a tangential and indirect way, through a question: "What do you think about what your friends did?"

### Adopting the abduction method: conjecture hypotheses

Perhaps due to shyness, perhaps due to shame, and a little due to the distrust in the listener, when Massimo narrates his stories in sessions, he alters his reality a lot; he ennobles it but also distorts it. For example, he says he works online for the advertising campaigns of an internationally renowned photographer. I hypothesize that he is really concealing from other information deduced in other moments and spaces a more "modest" (and not tolerated?) occupation in a family photo store. It is unimportant "where" Massimo works or "what" he does, that is to say that his narrative is obscured, a narrative behind which, however, there is always a hidden "truth".

The patient also suffers from a very disturbing obsessive ideation: he fixates on a subject that is the object of his fixed thoughts, which he then replicates in the analysis room as a "single topic" to be brought to the session. His current mental "fixation" is Anthony, who is, in his words, an old friend from kindergarten, with respect to whom Massimo feels very attracted but at the same time rejected by, not considered. In short, he feels his friend is "far away", which, on an extremely surface level, would appear to be a homosex-

ual desire. In addition, the narrative on the subject of Anthony is difficult to follow, like he is inventing a story and is inconsistent. But I wonder, “Who is hiding between the lines of this Anthony?” Thus, like a “detective” – although nevertheless curious and interested, affectionate and participatory – I begin to make conjectures, inferring from other signs: the young man he speaks of is loved; Massimo feels his distance, he would like him close; they have known each other from an early age. Could he be a brother, beloved and far away? But the hypothesis is unlikely: Massimo told me during our first session that he was an only child.

Until one day a brother comes up: Massimo, who, in the course of the treatment, seems to me a little less bashful and a little more open to recounting his facts, speaks to me of the existence of a half-brother. In the next session we continue on this topic: is it about Marco, who is a little older than him, the son of his father from an extramarital relationship, opposed, therefore, I think to myself, by his mother? I conjecture that Massimo could not be close to this desired and forbidden brother, cultivating an infinite desire because it was never achievable. All this mishmash of conflicts, shortcomings, and suffering comes to light in the imminence of Anthony-Marco’s marriage. Trapped between the two bonds, will my patient be able to attend the ceremony without conflict with his mother? I do not know how this is going to end, but ever since Marco got here, Anthony’s been unraveling. Maybe it was worth speculating after all.

#### REFERENCES

- A.A.V.V. (2011). *Psicoanalisi in Giallo. L'analista come detective*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Khusrau, A. (1996). *Le otto novelle del paradiso*. Catanzaro: Rubbettino ed.
- Bellet, H. (2019). *Falsari illustri*. Milano: Skira.
- Calvino, I. (2017). *Lezioni americane*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Carofiglio, G. (2019). *L'errore di Fenoglio*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Castelnuovo, E. (1968). *Attributions*. Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, vol. II, p. 780-783. It. trans.: *Sull'attribuzione: la storia in Castelnuovo*, in “Storie dell'arte.com”, 2012.
- Conan Doyle, A. (1887). *Uno studio in rosso*. Milano: Mondadori, 1971.
- Conan Doyle, A. (1890). *Il segno dei quattro*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2017.
- Conan Doyle, A. (1902). *Il mastino dei Baskerville*. Roma: Newton Compton, 2005.
- Del Monte, A. (1975) (edited by). *Il racconto poliziesco*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- De Robertis, D. (2007). Mosè, Michelangelo e Freud. Da un intreccio di storie nella storia ad alcune suggestioni per la teoria della cura. *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, XVIII, 2, 137-154.
- De Robertis, D. (2008-2009). Alcune osservazioni sul tempo fenomenologico applicate al processo e alla cura analitica. *La Pratica Analitica*, 6, 79-97.
- De Robertis, D. (2009). Complessità della domanda e relazione di aiuto. In F. Vanni (edited by) *Giovani in Pronto Soccorso*. Milano: Franco Angeli, p. 53-63.
- De Robertis, D. (2015). Costruzioni narrative e dialettica dell'intratemporalità nel life-span. Ripensare il tempo psichico nella cura psicoanalitica. *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, XXVI, 2, 19-44.

- De Robertis, D. (2024). *Le origini dello spettro dissociativo tra narrativa gotica e nosografia psichiatrica*. In corso di pubblicazione.
- Eco, U. (1978). *Trattato di semiotica generale*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Eco, U. (1980). *Il nome della rosa*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Eco, U. (1988). *Il pendolo di Foucault*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Eco, U. (1997). *Kant e l'ornitorinco*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Eco, U. (2014). *Baudolino*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Eco, U., Sebeok, T. A. (1983) (edited by). *Il segno dei tre. Holmes, Dupin, Peirce*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Ehrenberg, A. (2018). *La meccanica delle passioni. Cervello, comportamento e società*. Torino: Einaudi, 2019.
- Ferro, A. (2003). *Il lavoro clinico*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Foresti, G. (2011). *La biologica del tenente Colombo*. In: Ferro, A, Civitarese, G., Collow, M., Foresti, G., et al. (2011). *Psicoanalisi in giallo. L'analista come detective*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, p. 37-69.
- Fornari, F. (2024). *Il sogno di Irma e il destino della psicoanalisi*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis.
- Fosshage, J. (1997). The organizing function of dreaming mentalization. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 33(3), 429-458.
- Ginot, E. (2015). *Neuropsicologia dell'inconscio. Integrare mente e cervello nella psicoterapia*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2017.
- Ginzburg, C. (1986). *Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario*. In *Miti emblemi e spie. Morfologia e storia*. Milano: Garzanti, p. 158-209.
- Guilford, J. P. (1950). Creativity. *American Psychologist*, 5, 444-454.
- Kächele, H., Buchholz, M. B. (2019). L'analisi conversazionale. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, LXIV, 4, 337-352.
- Kohut, H. (1984). *La cura psicoanalitica*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1986.
- Lyons-Ruth, K. (1998). *La conoscenza relazionale implicita: il suo ruolo nello sviluppo e nella psicoterapia psicoanalitica*. It. trans.: Rodini, C., Carli, L. (edited by). *Le forme di intersoggettività*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2008.
- Longhi, R. (1910-1967). *Fatti di Masolino e di Masaccio e altri studi sul Quattrocento*. Firenze: Sansoni, 1992.
- Mazzacane, F. (2011). *L'analista sulla scena del sogno*. In: *Psicoanalisi in Giallo. L'analista come detective*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, p. 1-36.
- Mitchell, S. A. (1993). *Speranza e timore in psicoanalisi*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995.
- Morelli, G., Lermolieff, I. (1890). *Della pittura italiana. Studi storico critici. Le gallerie Borghese e Doria Pamphili in Roma*. Treves, Milano, 1897. Reprint of the Italian edition edited by J. Anderson et al. Milano: Adelphi, 1991.
- Peirce, C. (1989). *Semiotica. I fondamenti della semiotica cognitiva*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Poe, E. A. (1845). *La lettera rubata*. It. trans. in: *Racconti del mistero*. Torino: Einaudi, 2017.
- Pievani, T. (2021). *Serendipità. L'inatteso nella scienza*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Ponsi, M. (2019). Neuro-identità. Il cervello come soggetto. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, LXV, 4, 855-871.
- Popper, K. (1963). *Congetture e confutazioni*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1972.
- Proust, M. (1921-22). *Sodoma e Gomorra*. Torino: Einaudi, 1964.
- Sciascia, L. (1954). *Appunti sul "giallo"*. In *Il metodo di Maigret e altri scritti sul giallo*. Milano: Adelphi, 2018.
- Sciascia, L. (1961). *Il giorno della civetta*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Sciascia, L. (1964). *Morte dell'inquisitore*. Milano: Adelphi, 1992.
- Sciascia, L. (1966). *A ciascuno il suo*. Milano: Adelphi.
- Sciascia, L. (1971). L'affaire Roussel. *Il mondo*, XXIII, 963-65, 25-27.
- Sciascia, L. (1974). *Todo modo*. Torino: Einaudi.

- Sciascia, L. (1975). *La scomparsa di Maiorana*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Sciascia, L. (2020). *Atti relativi alla morte di Raymond Roussel*. Milano: Adelphi.
- Stroppelli, P. (2019) (edited by). *N. Machiavelli. Epistola sulla peste*. Roma: Edizioni Di Storia e Letteratura.
- Tantorgi Tomasi, L. (2021). *Ritratti, libri, giardini. Sebastiano del Piombo, Fernando Colombo, Agostino Chigi*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki.
- Voltaire (1784). *Zadig o il destino. Storia orientale*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2016.
- Wertheimer, M. (1945). *Il pensiero produttivo*. Firenze: Giunti, 1997.

---

Conflict of interests: the author declares no potential conflict of interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate: not required.

Received: 4 February 2025.

Accepted: 2 June 2025.

Editor's note: all claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, editors and reviewers, or any third party mentioned. Any materials (and their original source) used to support the authors' opinions are not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

©Copyright: the Author(s), 2025  
Licensee PAGEPress, Italy  
*Ricerca Psicoanalitica* 2025; XXXVI:1015  
doi:10.4081/rp.2025.1015

*This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.*