



Opening Ceremony of the Sixth International Congress on Twin Studies

Capitol's Hill, Monday 28 August 1989

Opening Address by Luigi Gedda

I am grateful to the City of Rome for permitting us to inaugurate the Sixth Congress of the International Society for Twin Studies on the Capitoline Hill. There is no place in the world more symbolic than this, because a hall here is dedicated to the Orazi triplets who represented Rome in battling against the Curiazi triplets of Albano, and because Rome is said to have been founded near this hill by a twin named Romulus, who with his twin brother Remus was found just after birth in a basket by a she-wolf who nursed them with her own milk.

I point out, first of all, that the presence of wolves in those times and in this area cannot be pure invention if at the entrance of the so-called Teutonic cemetery in Vatican City there is a plaque declaring that that cemetery was fenced at the time of Pope Eugene the Fourth in 1400 to defend the corpses from wolves who even so long afterwards came down to the banks of the Tiber.

In addition to this fact, the legend continues, and I would like to tell you exactly why we as gemellologists can evaluate its reliability.

It is clear that we are not discussing facts actually verified but the collective folk memory that nevertheless should be respected, since it expresses in a legend the age-old Roman experience with the twin phenomenon. Even in Rome today, of every eighty births, one is a twin birth, so that one out of forty Roman citizens could have been born a twin.

In satisfying our curiosity about mythological events, we must in the first place presume that the collective folk memory has treated Remus and Romulus as so-called identical twins – we call them monozygotic – since they are the result of the fertilization of a single egg by a single spermatozoon so as to form a single first cell or zygote, which then divides and implants.

The collective folk memory is symbolic, preferring the extraordinary to the ordinary – and the extraordinary in the case of twins concerns the existence of two identical persons.

According to the legend, Romulus in planning Rome traced the perimeter of its foundations with a plow. It appears that this caused Remus to deride his plan, to such a point that Romulus became furious and slew him. At that, Remus' children, Senius and Aschius, fled Rome to escape their uncle's anger and went to Tuscany, where Senius founded the city of Siena, which even today bears on its coat of arms the wolf with the twins and is called *urbs lupata*.

The basic problem we must discuss in order to judge how likely the legend may be concerns the psychology of monozygotic twins and plants its roots in the physiological aspect of their bodies. The fact that these twins are so alike as to cause one of them to be taken for the other applies also to the organs of sense, which are the channels that lead from the outer world to man's psychological one. Monozygotic twins, having the same visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory sensations, possess analogous perceptions and so are led to judge the environment and events in the same way, to such a point that in their reciprocal relationship they have no need to use many words, not even normal language. Each one intuits what his twin thinks, and therefore they frequently create a language of their own based on phonemes the twins call their "secret language" because only they can understand it. With this secret language, we find ourselves on a frontier of twin psychology where identicalness ends and identity begins. Identicalness and identity are two words that are similar but are very different in content and, in certain aspects, opposite to each other.

The identicalness of monozygotic twins is almost complete and is agreeable in the period of growth, but when puberty begins, a crisis of a psychological nature arises: the problem of identity. At first unconsciously and then aware, each twin feels the need of individuality, or of personalizing himself – in other words, of being himself and not his twin.

This need of acquiring a personal identity is accentuated when his growing up confronts the twin with two choices: occupation and marriage. Then identicalness remains a way of life that was pleasant and unforgettable, but now gives rise to problems which at times produce profound uneasiness and bodily discomfort.

As an example, I quote what Maurizio and Lorenzo, monozygotic twins who are present here now, wrote to me last March: "The fact of having a twin brother

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can be, as more than one person has told us, an advantage during our childhood because we help each other, defend each other, do not need anybody else, and exactly this independence of ours enabled us to go on bike trips, vacations without our parents and most of our peers, but perhaps with only older boys. Our parents always trusted us, just because there were two of us who could check and help each other in every situation. Fortunately, after grammar school we went to different high schools, thus keeping our personalities quite distinct, but we have never completely overcome the discomfort we felt and feel even today of being a singleton for five hours a day and a twin for the rest of the day. The very fact of always being together, if at first did not give us concern, now irritates us, because at twenty-five years of age we seem, especially in the eyes of those who have always known us, to be little boys. Even in the street or stores, on vacation, being alike makes us uncomfortable because when we are together we are the twins and not Maurizio and Lorenzo. We will probably be regarded somewhat separately only when we marry.”

This is a paradigmatic case, in which it is the twins themselves who report the open psychological crisis between identicalness and identity.

Let us make use now of these other data to analyze the legend of Romulus and Remus. They were well past the years of childhood, puberty and marriage if Remus had two children, Senius and Aschius. It is therefore very likely that their identity crisis had brought about competition between them that turned into a more or less violent fight. It is much less probable that this crisis or dispute could have led to the killing of Remus because argumentative assertion of a twin's personality does not reach the extreme point of doing away with his cotwin.

Of the more than twenty thousand twin pairs we have studied, we have never come across indications of this type. From the literature we know of twin pairs who contemporaneously committed suicide. We know of no homicidal crimes between cotwins, and I have the impression that the killing of one's twin could be the equivalent, in the case of monozygosity, of the unconscious feeling of a suicide. There is a twinship ethic that reinforces the conscience ethic.

The study of the psychology of monozygotic twins leads us therefore to maintain that the collective folk memory was right in supposing that an even harsher quarrel arose between Romulus and Remus because this can lead to that identity crisis that we mentioned, but I maintain that the folk memory exaggerated in relating that Romulus killed Remus.

On the other hand, the mythological tale regarding Siena being founded by the sons of Remus is more trustworthy, in that the very desire to organize a settlement for a family group (that the folk memory simplifies by speaking of the founding of a city) can be revealed in the twin humiliated on the banks of the Tiber by reason of psychological identicalness and competitive identity, or else in his sons, in that there exists a genetics of the human psyche – be that expressed by Remus with respect to his monozygotic twin, or be that inherited by Senius and Aschius, the sons of Remus.

Mr. Mayor, we know that the Capitoline Administration has a project for a vast archeological exploration in the area adjacent to this hill and that there have

already come to light some constructions which go back to the era of Romulus. Our Congress wishes to associate itself with this undertaking, excavating not in the earth but in the city's mythological history, to the extent that the collective folk memory allows us to discover new things in the gemellological culture of that age. Please accept our homage rendered by the scholars of twins in the Eternal City.

The work of our Congress will deal with gemellology in every aspect: the frequency of twin births, with its variability of place and time, the genetic or hereditary characteristics of twin conception and the epidemiology of hereditary or acquired diseases, as well as the usefulness of the study of twin pathology in offering deeper understanding of non-twin diseases. Many reports concern the problem of the language and psychology of twins, their reciprocal behavior, with their families, with outsiders, and even particular situations like triplets, twins reared apart, as well as twin clubs and mothers of twins.

Finally, we cannot forget that, here on Capitol hill, two great twins open the piazza Michelangelo designed: Castor and Pollux. This too is a symbol, which refers, however, to Greek mythology and shows that all peoples have imagined extraordinary things in thinking of twins. So from this hill, so rich in twin memories, our Congress turns its thoughts to all the twins that live in the world: we greet them and wish them health and peace.