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In the middle of Gadda's *Mess:* Shakespeare[1]

1.

In an article of 25 February 1993 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* Carlo Emilio Gadda was described as: "The most significant writer and best language craftsman that Italy has produced in this century".[2] Signed by the renowned German historian and critic Gustav Seibt, the contribution brought into the spotlight the recent publication of Gadda's tragic record of the First World War, his *Diario di guerra e di prigionia* [*Diary of War and Imprisonment*]. The article itself was stimulated by a previous one in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, recalling Gadda's negative review of Mario Monicelli's tragicomic film *La grande guerra* (1959) [*The Great War*].[3]

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2 "Den bedeutendsten Schriftsteller und größten Sprachkünstler, den es [Italien] in diesem Jahrhundert hervorgebracht hat", Gustav Seibt, "Krieg ist Krieg und keine tragische Farce", *FAZ*, 25 February 1993, p. 35.

3 Giulio Ungarelli, "No, non dovete toccarmi Caporetto", *La Repubblica,* 21 February 1993, p. 34. In his article Ungarelli recalls Gadda's one and only film review "Dal carso alla sala di proiezione" [From the Karst to the big screen] originally published in the weekly magazine: *Settimo giorno*, 50, 15 December 1959, pp. 28-29. The review criticises the mediocre humour of Monicelli's film, along with

Interest in Gadda in 1993 was stirred by a double anniversary: the centenary of his birth and 20th anniversary of his death.[4] The Gadda celebrations culminated in the publication by Garzanti of his entire works in five volumes between 1988 and 1993, edited by a group of scholars working under the direction of Dante Isella, a professor at the University of Zurich from 1976 to 1986, and a disciple of Gadda's friend, the eminent scholar Gianfranco Contini, who was one of Gadda's first commentators and himself a professor at the University of Freiburg (Switzerland), between 1938 and 1966.

Gadda studies can thus claim a renowned scholarly tradition in Switzerland. It is a tradition which continues to date with the first complete commentary on what many consider to be Gadda's literary masterpiece, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* [*That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana*]. Sponsored in 2009 by the Swiss National Foundation with a four-year award, and directed by Prof. Maria Antonietta Terzoli, the commentary was released in Autumn 2015.[5]

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its commonplaces and oversimplifications, in the name of the tragic dignity of those who (willingly or not) took part in the war and experienced first hand its indescribable sufferings. The text can now be read in vol. 5 (*Scritti vari e postumi,* pp. 1170-75) of Gadda's complete works: *Opere di Carlo Emilio Gadda. Edizione diretta da Dante Isella.* 5 vols (Milan: Garzanti, 1988-1993). All quotations from Gadda are from this edition and will be referenced by: title of the work, title of the volume and volume number, page numbers.

4 Born in Milan in 1893 into a family with a strongly nationalistic background, Gadda studied to become an engineer in spite of his literary ambitions. After taking part in WW1, when he lost his beloved brother Enrico, he graduated and began to work in Italy and Argentina. It was not until the end of the Second World War that Gadda was able to devote himself professionally to writing while also working for national Italian television (RAI). His literary success came with the 1957 publication of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (a first shorter and significantly different version had been published in instalments in the journal *Letteratura* between 1946 and 1947), and was later consolidated by *La cognizione del dolore* (1963) [translated into English as *Acquainted with Grief*]. He continued writing to the end of his life, and died in Rome in 1973.

5 M. A. Terzoli (ed) *Commento a Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana di Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Rome: Carocci, 2015), 2 vols. In the last decade, Gadda's literary importance and renown at an international level has also been fostered by the on-line journal *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, http://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/, launched by Federica Pedriali in the year 2000 and hosted at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

Gadda's long critical history in Switzerland helps explain why the first translation of the *Pasticciaccio* was made into German, one of the country's three national languages. The translation was published in 1961, just four years after the Garzanti edition,[6] and started a wave of other translations in the 1960s that, besides French (1963), Spanish (1965) and English (1966),[7] include Serbian (1962),[8] Czech (1965),[9] and Rumanian (1969).[10] In Gadda's texts, however, whose idiosyncratic style may even prove a challenge to Italian readers, the linguistic and cultural difficulties of any literary translation are magnified.

In his article Seibt looks deeply into the reasons behind the author's peculiarities:

> The humiliation and suffering caused by the war never abandoned Gadda, and Gadda's war-diary shows that the war was the original catastrophe that released the stream of his language […]. The impossibility of rendering this terrible experience in an adequate language transformed Gadda […] into that critic of language and tradition that dragged the entire Italian literary heritage to the trial of this experience of suffering, and that invented a new literature on this principle of truth.[11]

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6 Toni Kienlechner, trans., *Die grässliche Bescherung in der Via Merulana*, by C. E. Gadda (Munich: Piper, 1961).

7 Respectively: Louis Bonalumi, trans., *L'Affreux Pastis de la rue des Merles* (Paris: Seuil, 1963); Juan Ramón Masoliver, trans., *El zafarrancho aquel de via Merulana* (Barcellona: Seix Barral, 1965); William Weaver, trans., *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1966) [all translations in English are from this edition, with the indication of the page number/s].

8 Ćiril Petešić, trans., *Ta gadna zbrka u Ulici Merulana* (Zagreb: Zora, 1962).

9 Zdenek Frýbort, trans., *Ten zatracený prípad v Kosí de via Merulana* (Praga: Státní Nakladatelství Krásné Literatury A Umení, 1965).

10 N.A. Toscani, trans., *Incurcatura blestemata din strada Merulana* (Bucarest: Pentru, 1969).

11 "Schmach und Leiden des Krieges haben [Gadda] nie wieder losgelassen, und das […] Kriegstagebuch Gaddas zeigt, daß der Krieg die Urkatastrophe war, die den Sprachstrom dieses Autors entbunden hat. Die Unmöglichkeit, diese grauenhafte Erfahrung in eine angemessene Sprache zu bringen, machte Gadda […] zu dem Spach- und Traditionskritiker, der die gesamte literarische Überlieferung Italiens vor das Gericht dieser Schmerzerfahrung zog und mit diesem Wahrheitskriterium eine neue Literatur erfand", Seibt, "Krieg ist Krieg", p. 35.

Seibt defines Gadda's work a "literary discovery" ("literarische Entdekkung").[12] This is certainly true to the extent that he explores thoroughly the Western tradition in order to re-write and re-work its most beautiful and best known texts in the light of his own experience and *Weltanschauung*. A bemusing combination of cruel realism and lofty pathos,[13] Gadda's work appears to Seibt to move both horizontally and vertically. The metaphors he uses for the purpose – the labyrinth, and the molehill, in which everything is interdependent and hangs together,[14] – give insights into the complexity of plot and characterization of the *Pasticciaccio*, to be investigated here.

2.

Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana is a novel that falls broadly under the category of the detective story. It hinges on the unresolved theft of jewels from the widow Teresa Menegazzi, and the assassination of her beautiful, gentle-hearted but depressed neighbour Liliana Balducci. It is set in 1927, at the height of Fascism in Italy, in a large block of flats in Via Merulana, in the centre of Rome. Called in to investigate the crimes, detective Francesco Ingravallo, nicknamed Don Ciccio, a secret admirer of the murdered woman, discovers that almost everyone in the building is somehow involved in the case, and with each new development the mystery only deepens and broadens.

The language of the novel matches the complexity of the plot. Following Gadda's own suggestion that reality is imbued with the grotesque and the monstrous,[15] "baroque" has become the epitome of his way of writing.[16] By conceiving a powerfully moulded, multilayered

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] "merkwürdige Verbindung von grausamem Realismus und expressiv überhöhtem Pathos", *Ibid.*

[14] "labyrinthische[s] Werk", "einem gewaltigen Maulwurfsbau […], in dem alles mit allem zusammenhängt", *Ibid.*

[15] C. E. Gadda, "L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore", in *Romanzi e racconti I, Opere* vol. 1, pp. 759-65.

[16] See, for example, Robert S. Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements: Gadda and the Baroque* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999).

and densely intertextual language, in which realism, swear words and eschatological images coexist and clash with the most sublime and tragic lyricism, Gadda re-forged and re-invented almost unrecognizably the classical literary tradition from Homer onwards. In the *Pasticciaccio* this feature is further complicated by Gadda's endeavour to confer on each character his or her own language. Not only does he replicate the words, pronunciation and modes of spoken-Italian from such different places as Rome, Venice, Naples, the region of Molise and the Val d'Ossola, in Piedmont, but he makes his characters further identifiable through expressions typifying them, such as the curses of policeman Santarella, or the melodramatic appeals to the Virgin of Teresa Menegazzi. These characteristics make any translation of the *Pasticciaccio* inexorably incapable of conveying the connotations and nuances from which a great deal of its meaning derives, a meaning which remains encapsulated within the frame of its unique and inimitable *parole*.

For Gadda this language holds a mirror up to nature and human life. He claimed that if his language sounded baroque to critics, it was because it provided a veridical portrait of the baroqueness of reality. The "enormous molehill" to which Gadda's work has been compared and where, in Seibt's words, "everything hangs together" is what the hero of the *Pasticciaccio* calls "groviglio, o garbuglio, o gnommero, che alla romana vuol dire gomitolo" (p. 16) [knot or tangle, or muddle, or *gnommero,* which in Roman dialect means skein (p. 5)].[17] The metaphors convey the complexity of a world in which everything is so deeply interconnected that nothing can change without affecting the whole system. They offer the strongest bond between Gadda's world and Shakespeare's, by suggesting the sense of an existence that remains hidden and inscrutable to the common man.[18]

[17] With the sole exception of the above one, quotations from the *Pasticciaccio* (*Romanzi e racconti II, Opere* vol. 2, pp. 11-276), will appear in the footnotes with indication of page numbers only.

[18] For the influence of Shakespeare on Gadda see also: Emanuela Bertone, " 'Nel magazzino, nel retrobottega del cervello / Within the book and volume of my brain': per l'Amleto di Carlo Emilio Gadda", Cristina Savettieri, Carla Benedetti, Lucio Lugnani (eds) *Gadda. Meditazione e racconto* (Pisa: ETS, 2004), pp. 105-36.

3.

In an interview of 1958, one year after the publication of the *Pasticciaccio*, Gadda was asked what book he would take with him "should he know he would never return to the earth". His choice would probably fall on "the Shakespearean 'canon' ", he replied, on the grounds that it breaks with "pre-constituted images, pre-fabricated sentences, ritualized duties and obligations deprived of sense".[19] For Gadda, Shakespeare offers an antidote to the clichés, over-simplifications, routine or conventional schemes of thought that he considers typical of bourgeois life. The English playwright appears to him an interpreter of life on earth, his characters are witnesses and spokesmen of a view of mankind he shares. In act I of the eponymous tragedy, Hamlet urges Horatio to consider that: "There are more things in heaven and earth, […] / Than are dreamt of in our philosophy" (I, v, ll. 168-169, pp. 745-46).[20] Gadda invites us to consider the complexity of reality along similar lines.

In his philosophical work *Meditazione milanese* [*Milanese Meditation*] written during the spring and summer of 1928, at a time when he was studying for a degree in philosophy, Gadda problematized the notion of "person". For him a "person" is not a single individual, a clearly identifiable character, but a system of relations – among others, social, economical, and psychological relations – subject to such continuous changes and transformations, that it is impossible to reduce them to a unified piece of thinking and living matter. Similarly Gadda also rejects the idea of "cause", arguing that events do not happen for *one* cause, but are the result of a muddled network of causes, brought

[19] "Se sapesse di non poter più ritornare sulla Terra, quale libro porterebbe con sè e perché? Un libro che m'aiutasse ad allontanarmi dalle immagini pre-costituite, dalle frasi prefabbricate, dai doveri e dagli obblighi di una ritualistica del contegno che risulti priva di senso. Forse il cosiddetto 'canone' dello Shakespeare" (*Carlo Emilio Gadda. "Per favore, mi lasci nell'ombra". Interviste 1950-1972* (Milan: Adelphi, 1993), p. 67). Here and elsewhere the English translation from Gadda is mine.

[20] All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from: Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds) *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

about by circumstances so tightly knit with each other that their origin cannot be disentangled.[21] By pointing at the Shakespearean canon as an exemplary rendering of the complexity of the human world, Gadda takes a clear philosophical stand: he refuses the soothing assumption that an ultimate meaning in social and psychological life can easily be discovered and identified.

Significantly, in the same year he wrote the *Meditazione* and was carrying out his philosophical studies, Gadda planned a number of projects, including one described as: "The work on Shakespeare (e.g. – The philosophical thought of W. Shakespeare or other similar title, but better formulated). Avail yourself of your English teacher's suggestions: try and do it. Degree dissertation".[22] Gadda's loyalty to Shakespeare also surfaces in the contemporary *Racconto italiano di ignoto del Novecento* [*An Italian Tale by an Unknown Author of the Twentieth Century*], an unfinished novel (also known as *Cahier d'études*), whose protagonist, a strongly autobiographical character named Girolamo Lehrer, is planning to write a commentary of *Hamlet*.[23] In fact, Gadda's life-long attachment to Shakespeare's masterpiece is well documented. More than once Gadda stated that the character of Hamlet was a "moral model". It comes as no surprise therefore that *Hamlet* is a crucial text to bear in mind when turning to the moral framework of the *Pasticciaccio.* Indeed, Don Ciccio, investigator and principal character, who opens and closes the novel, shares several features with the Prince of Denmark:

> […] one of the youngest and, God knows why, most envied officials of the detective section: ubiquitous as the occasion required, omnipresent in all tenebrous matters. Of medium height, rather rotund as to physique, or perhaps a bit squat, with black hair, thick and curly, which sprang forth from his forehead

[21] *Meditazione milanese*, in *Scritti varie e postumi, Opere* vol. 5, pp. 645-51.

[22] "Il lavoro sullo Shakespeare: (p.e. – Il pensiero filosofico di W. Shakespeare o altro titolo analogo ma migliore). Valermi dei suggerimenti della prof.[ssa] di inglese: tentare. Tesina di laurea" (*Note ai testi*, in *Romanzi e racconti II, Opere* vol. 2, p. 1306).

[23] "fargli fare un commento di Amleto" [make him write a commentary of Hamlet] (*Racconto italiano di un ignoto del novecento*, in *Scritti vari e postumi, Opere* vol. 5, p. 410).

at the halfway point, […]. He had a somnolent look, a heavy, lumbering walk, a slightly dull manner, like a person fighting a laborious digestion; […]. A certain familiarity with the ways of the world, […] a certain knowledge of men: and also of women. […] Officer Ingravallo, who seemed to live on silence and sleep under the black jungle of that mop, shiny as pitch and curly as a strakhan lamb, in his wisdom, he sometimes interrupted this silence and this sleep to enunciate some theoretical idea (a general idea, that is) on the affairs of men, and of women. […] The […] persistent opinion, almost a fixation, which melted from his fleshy, but rather white lips, where the stub of a spent cigarette seemed, dangling from one corner, to accompany the somnolence of his gaze and the quasi-grin, half-bitter, half-skeptical, in which through "old" habit he would fix the lower half of his face beneath that sleep of his forehead and eyelids and that pitchy black of his mop. […] Some colleagues, [...] insisted he read strange books: from which he drew all those words that mean nothing, or almost nothing, […]. His terminology was for doctors in looneybins. […] On him, on Don Ciccio, these objections, just as they were, had no effect; he continued to sleep on his feet, philosophize on an empty stomach, and pretend to smoke his half-cigarette, which had, always, gone out. (pp. 3-7).[24]

[24] "[...] uno dei più giovani e, non si sa perché, invidiati funzionari della sezione investigativa: ubiquo ai casi, onnipresente su gli affari tenebrosi. [...] di capelli neri e folti e cresputi che gli venivan fuori dalla metà della fronte [...] aveva un'aria un po' assonnata, un'andatura greve e dinoccolata, un fare un po' tonto come di persona che combatte con una laboriosa digestione [...] Una certa praticaccia del mondo [...] doveva di certo avercela: una certa conoscenza degli uomini: e anche delle donne. [...] Ingravallo, che pareva vivere di silenzio e di sonno sotto la giungla nera di quella parrucca, lucida come pece e riccioluta come d'agnello d'Astrakan, nella sua saggezza interrompeva talora codesto sonno e silenzio per enunciare qualche teoretica idea (idea generale s'intende) sui casi degli uomini: e delle donne. [...] labbra carnose, ma piuttosto bianche, dove un mozzicone di sigaretta spenta pareva, pencolando da un angolo, accompagnare la sonnolenza dello sguardo e il quasi-ghigno, tra amaro e scettico, a cui per 'vecchia' abitudine soleva atteggiare la metà inferiore della faccia, sotto quel sonno della fronte e delle palpebre e quel nero pìceo della parrucca. [...] sostenevano che leggesse dei libri strani: da cui cavava tutte quelle parole che non vogliono dir nulla, o quasi nulla [...] Erano questioni un po' da manicomio: una terminologia da medici dei matti. [...] Di queste obiezioni così giuste lui, don Ciccio, non se ne dava per inteso: seguitava a dormire in piedi, a filosofare a stomaco vuoto, e a fingere di fumare la sua mezza sigheretta, regolarmente spenta" (pp. 15-17).

Ingravallo, whose clumsy appearance and social isolation do not make him popular among women, continually expresses fierce jealousy towards Giuliano Valdarena, cousin of the assassinated woman, whom he obstinately but wrongly believes to be the murderer. This temperamental feature, along with his thick curly black hair, might at first suggest a similarity with Othello. However, it is the first words Hamlet addresses to his mother on entering the stage that stirred me to consider his closeness to Ingravallo. Hamlet, who mourns for his dead father before knowing he shall be summoned to revenge his murder, draws his mother's attention to his "inky cloak" and "customary suits of solemn black" (I, ii, ll. 77-78, p. 739). Like Hamlet's mourning dress, Ingravallo's hair and gloomy looks connote his destiny. Both characters are called upon to do justice and to solve a murder; both are, as it were, condemned to dig deep into the secrets of life and of death for which they carry a visible sign.

Repeatedly in the novel, the narrator underscores Ingravallo's sleepy and silent appearance. Significantly, silence and sleep as metaphors for death occur at two key moments of Shakespeare's play: in Hamlet's famous monologue in act III of the play ("To die, to sleep – / No more", III, i, ll. 62-63, p. 754), and in the final scene in the last words of the dying Hamlet ("The rest is silence", V, ii, l. 310, p. 774). With his slow gait, Ingravallo walks disjointedly with eyes half-closed and mouth half-open. He resembles a shaman, a visionary entranced by the secrets of life and death. It comes as no surprise that he is the only character in the *Pasticciaccio* to whom the ghost of Liliana appears: "to which [his 'other' soul] Liliana seemed to address herself, calling to him desperately, from her sea of shadows: with her weary, whitened face, her eye dilated in terror, still, fixed forever, on the atrocious flashes of the knife" (p. 381).[25] This happens in the last chapter of the novel, in a symmetrical position by comparison to *Hamlet,* in which the spirit of the dead king appears in the opening scene. While the "sea of troubles"

25 "Liliana gli sembrò rivolgersi [all''altro' suo animo] disperatamente chiamandolo, dal suo mare d'ombra: con lo stanco volto sbiancato, l'occhio dilatato nel terrore, fermo, per sempre, sui baleni atroci del coltello" (p. 271).

(III, i, l. 61, p. 754) of life in the famous monologue of the third act of *Hamlet* is transformed in the *Pasticciaccio* into the "sea of shadows" of death, Liliana's whitened, still and gazing face mirrors the feature's of Hamlet's father's ghost:

> Hamlet: Pale or red?
> Horatio: Nay, very pale.
> Hamlet: And fixed his eyes upon you?
> Horatio: Most constantly.
> (I, ii, ll. 230-233, p. 741)

A central theme of the tragedy of *Hamlet* is the protagonist's pretended madness. Everybody would like to know why the young prince has turned mad, but nobody realizes that, in fact, he is the sole character who is completely sane, and the only one who knows the truth: that his father was assassinated, and his uncle is the murderer. The ambiguous logic of Hamlet's madness puzzles Polonius: "Though this be madness, yet there is / method in't" (II, ii, ll. 206-207, p. 749). Not unlike Hamlet, Ingravallo bewilders his acquaintances, many of whom prefer to consider him little more than a freak. Both characters are solitary and isolated, for which their philosophical temperament, duly emphasised in both texts, is responsible. Hamlet studied at the University of Wittenberg, the site of reformist, and therefore revolutionary and innovative thought. Ingravallo, who enjoys reading strange and difficult books, speaks a bizarre language ("His terminology was for doctors in looneybins"), and is dismissed by his boss as a philosopher ("all right, Ingravallo, you're our philosophy professor", p. 240).[26] Moreover, not unlike a slow developing illness, Ingravallo's words are said to become clear, and therefore understandable, only after long incubation:

> At first sight, or rather, on first hearing, these seemed banalities. They weren't banalities. And so, those rapid declarations, which crackled on his lips like the sudden illumination of a sulphur match, were revived in the ears of people at the

[26] "e vva buono, Ingravallo, vuie site nu professore 'e filosofia" (p. 174).

> distance of hours, or of months, from their enunciation: as if after a mysterious period of incubation (pp. 4-5).[27]

Gadda believes that Hamlet has not doubts about his uncle's guilt, nor of his duty as son to have his revenge. Yet, finding evidence of his uncle's crime is for Hamlet as important a moral duty as doing justice. Yet again, this brings him close to the investigator Ingravallo: his profession is to find the assassin, but his investigation must be grounded on evidence. For such a purpose, Hamlet asks a group of actors to stage a play, *The Murderer of Gonzago*, which recalls the circumstances of his father's murder. He hopes that his uncle's emotional reactions to the play will betray his guilt and offer the final evidence he is looking for. Hamlet wants an objective and impartial witness to observe the scene with him, and asks his friend Horatio:

> Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt
> Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
> It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen,
> […]
> […] Give him heedful note,
> For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
> And after, we will both our judgements join
> To censure of his seeming.
> (III, ii, ll. 78-84, p. 756)

Gadda published a review of the *premiere* of *Hamlet* staged at Teatro Valle in Rome in December 1952. He underlines the importance of the actors' expressions in conveying the emotions and the psychology of the characters: "the 'evidence' of the criminal act will be the paleness, bewilderment, anguish of the guilty mother and the uncle when the actors

[27] "A prima vista, cioè al primo udirle, sembravano banalità. Non erano banalità. Così quei rapidi enunciati, che facevano sulla sua bocca il crepitio improvviso d'uno zolfanello illuminatore, rivivevano poi nei timpani della gente a distanza di ore, o di mesi, dalla enunciazione: come dopo un misterioso tempo incubatorio" (p. 16).

have performed the scene of the murder on the stage".[28] A comparable investigative strategy is adopted by Ingravallo. Like Hamlet, Don Ciccio depends on trusted witnesses for his investigation. His collaborators, Pompeo and Blondie ("il Biondone") are sharp observers and shrewd interpreters of character and personality. To the eyes of the investigator-observer reality disentangles like a play in front of a spectator:

> Those two had sharp noses: they could catch on to people from their faces, after one glance: and usually without letting on. What was important to him, to Ingravallo, was, above all, the face, the attitude, *the immediate psychic and physiognomical reactions,* as he said, of the spectators and the protagonists of the drama (p. 112, here and elsewhere italics are in the original text).[29]

Hamlet is situated somewhere between Gadda and Ingravallo. The author of the *Pasticciaccio* makes his character, Don Ciccio, the spokesman for his own profoundly suffered interpretation of life and the world. Ingravallo's absent-minded and sleepy look, along with his withdrawn, silent and solitary life, are Gadda's own. They are the attributes of someone inclined to explore the "reason of the world" (p. 6),[30] the secret and mystery of human relations, the system of existence that accompanies every individual in his path towards death.

4.

If Ingravallo is the moral model of Gadda's novel, Dr. Fumi, the Head of the Police, offers a kind of rhetorical model. His gift for eloquence endows his words and voice with an enchanting and

[28] "La 'prova' del consumato delitto sarà il pallore, il turbamento, l'affanno della madre colpevole e dello zio quando i comici avranno rievocato per finzione la scena del delitto" ("Amleto al Teatro Valle", in *Saggi Giornali Favole I, Opere* vol. 3, p. 541).

[29] "Queli dua ciaveveno er fiuto bono: sapeveno conosce le persone da la faccia, così a un'occhiata: e magara senza paré. Quello che je premeva, a Ingravallo, era più de tutto la faccia, il contegno, *le immediate reazioni psichiche e fisiognomiche*, diceva lui, degli spettatori e de li prottagonisti der dramma" (p. 88).

[30] "ragione del mondo" (*Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p. 17).

mesmerising power; anyone who listens to him lets himself easily be soothed and persuaded. Another Shakespearean figure hides behind him: the Anthony of *Julius Caesar*, who speaks at Caesar's funeral and reads his testament. In Shakespeare's tragedy, however, Antonio's eloquence has a strong political meaning foreign to Fumi. Anthony reverses the direction of the republicans' rebellion, turning the Roman people against the conspirators. In the *Pasticciaccio*, on the other hand, it is the brief scene of the lynching of Cinna that follows Antony's speech which carries a violent political denunciation.

In act III of *Julius Caesar*, Cinna, a man with the same name as one of the conspirators but actually a friend of Caesar, comes upon a crowd, who, on hearing his name, transforms into a raging mob who wants to tear him to pieces regardless of his desperate cry of innocence:

> First Plebeian: Tear him to pieces! He's a conspirator.
> Cinna: I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet.
> Fourth Plebeian: Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.
> Cinna: I am not Cinna the conspirator.
> Fourth Plebeian: It is no matter, his name's Cinna. Pluck but his name out of his heart, and turn him going.
> Third Plebeian: Tear him, tear him!
> (III, iii, ll. 28-35, p. 693)

In chapter IV of the *Pasticciaccio*, the preamble to the description of "the Pirroficoni case" (p. 119),[31] could function as a gloss on the lynching of Cinna in *Julius Caesar.* Gadda re-writes a historical episode that occurred in 1927 in Rome, and which polarized public opinion. After the murder of a number of young girls, investigations led to the arrest of a man called Girolimoni, who was charged with being a serial killer. The man was actually innocent, but he conveniently served as a scapegoat to satiate a population that was craving to find a culprit. Even though Girolimoni was eventually acquitted (without the real murderer ever being captured) he suffered severe beating and serious injuries. In preparing the ground for the sad story of Pirroficoni (a pseudonym

[31] "caso Pirroficoni" (p. 92).

of Girolimoni), the narrator of the *Pasticciaccio*, with caustic humour, warns his readers how any politically manipulated event risks igniting collective rage, and legitimizing fake justice and fake morals:

> "To exploit" the event – *whatsoever* event Jove Scoundrel, big-cheese in the cloud department, dropped in your lap, plop – to the magnification of one's own pseudo-ethical activity, in fact protuberantly theatrical and filthily staged, is the gain of the institution or person who wishes to endow propaganda and fisheries with the weight of a moral activity. The displayed psyche of the political madman (a narcissist of pseudo-ethical content) grabs the alien crime, real or believed, and roars over it like a stupid, furious beast, in cold blood, over an ass's jawbone: behaving in such a way as to exhaust (to relax) in the inane matter of a punitive myth the dirty tension that compels him to action, action *coûte que coûte*. The alien crime is exploited to placate the snaky-maned Megaera, the mad multitude: which will not be placated with so little: it is offered, like a ram or stag to be torn to pieces, to the dishevelled women who will rip it apart, light off foot, ubiquitous and mammary in the bacchanal which their own cries kindle, purpled with torment and blood. In this way, a pseudo-justice assumes illegal course, a pseudo-severity, or the pseudo-habilitation of the fingerpointings. (pp. 119-20).[32]

A comparison between the *Pasticciaccio* and *Julius Caesar* brings to the fore a number of similarities between the episodes of Pirroficoni and

[32] " 'Adoperare' l'avvenimento – quel *qualunque* avvenimento che Giove Farabutto, preside a' nuvoli, t'abbi fiantato davanti il naso, plaf, plaf – alla magnificazione d'una propria attività pseudo-etica, in facto protuberatamente scenica e sporcamente teatrata, è il giuoco di qualunque, istituto o persona, voglia attribuire alla propaganda e alla pesca le dimensioni e la gravezza di un'attività morale. La psiche del demente politico esibito (narcisista a contenuto pseudo-etico) aggranfia il delitto alieno, reale o creduto, e vi rugghia sopra come belva cogliona e furente a freddo sopra una mascella d'asino: conducendosi per tal modo a esaurire (a distendere) nelle inane fattispecie d'un mito punitivo la sudicia tensione che lo compelle al pragma: al pragma quale che sia, purché pragma, al pragma coûte que coûte. Il crimine alieno è 'adoperato' a placar Megera anguicrinita, la moltitudine pazza: che non si placherà di così poco: viene offerto, come laniando capro o cerbiatto, a le scarmigliate che lo faranno a pezzi, lene in salti o mamillone ubique e voraci nel baccanale che di loro strida si accende, e dello strazio e del sangue s'imporpora: acquistando corso legale, per tal modo, una pseudo-giustizia, una pseudo severità, o la pseudo-abilitazione a' dittaggi" (pp. 92-93).

the lynching of Cinna. For obvious reasons the "scenic" and "theatrical" component mentioned by Gadda ("[an activity] protuberantly theatrical and filthily staged") is inherent in Shakespeare's play. Anthony gives a speech whose function is not dissimilar from the play within the play in *Hamlet*: it marks a turning point in the action. In *Julius Caesar* the cry "Revenge!" (III, ii, l. 200, p. 692) at the sight of Caesar's corpse overturns the republicans' plot, and precipitates the action towards the lynching of Cinna. Gadda calls this social phenomenon, the yearning for justice that regulates collective psychology, the "punitive myth". In fact, *Julius Caesar* offers an extraordinary performance of this phenomenon, and effectively sketches the speed in which collective psychology operates: with unconscious immediacy the crowd turns Cinna's guilt from being a conspirator into being a bad poet; this serves to justify a compelling urge for violence that turns on the unfortunate character. Gadda has a name for this too: he calls it "action *coûte que coûte*", pragmatism at all costs. It is ultimately nothing else but a scapegoating ritual.[33]

The name Cinna, like the name Pirroficoni, is an equivocal referent. Incapable of telling revenge from violence the mob does not care about the identity of the person on whom they turn their thirst for justice. Significantly in *Julius Caesar* one of the citizens shouts that Cinna's name, hence his identity, should be plucked out of him with his heart. Cinna, like Pirroficoni, can soothe the mob only when reduced to a body without a name, when nothing else of him is left, but the remains of a scapegoating ritual. It is only the sight of blood that will appease the ritual of violence for "the snaky-maned Megaera, the mad multitude".

5.

The relationships between characters in the *Pasticciaccio* bring into play at least three other works by Shakespeare: *King Lear, The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice.*

In the tragedy of Lear, as in Gadda's novel, issues of blood and inheritance, nature and the law, are core themes, and an ambiguous

[33] On the theme of the scapegoat in history and society, see: Yvonne Freccero, trans., *The Scapegoat*, by René Girard (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

equivalence is established between the two terms. When Lear decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters (a legal operation, as it were), he asks each of them to express in words their love and gratitude for him as a father. However, when his youngest daughter Cordelia speaks the simple words: "I love your majesty / According to my bond, nor more nor less" (I, i, ll. 84-85, p. 1027) Lear misinterprets and doubts her love. Bemused by her succinct answer, Lear invites his daughter to continue: "mend your speech a little" (l. 86, p. 1027), "So young and so untender?" (l. 99, p. 1028). Cordelia's reply, "So young, my Lord, and true" (l. 100), problematises her father's perspective. The bombastic rhetoric of Cordelia's elder sisters blinds the old king, who assumes that the affection that should *naturally* bind daughters to fathers requires, as it were, a quantifiable counterpart in words. As a result, and to punish Cordelia's supposed lack of filial love, Lear disinherits and forsakes her. The error of the King is to rely on a mistaken conception of nature, an artificial idea of nature, to take words for feelings. By weighing his daughters' affection on such a scale, he makes an injustice, a legal error.

Both characters appeal to nature, but from different viewpoints. For Lear nature (i.e. filial love) equates rhetoric, *flatus voci,* for Cordelia it equates truth. In fact, "true" not only means "natural", "sincere", "genuine", "real", but also "rightful" and "legitimate". The confusion between the two terms induces Lear to misjudge. Unlike her sisters, Cordelia is true to her father according to nature, yet fails to obtain her due according to the law. Within a short span of time, however, an issue of quantity – the number of his men halved, from 100 to 50 – will make the king fully aware of his mistake. Lear experiences how the law (his right as a king to hold a coterie of men) is taken away from him by those very daughters whose nature he had taken to be true (real and just). The consequent realization of their indifference along with the wrong done to Cordelia will break his heart.

Edmund, illegitimate son of Glocester, is another character in this tragedy who advocates an overlap between nature and law:

> Thou, nature, art my goddess. To thy law
> My services are bound. Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom and permit

> The curiosity of nations to deprive me
> For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
> Lag of a brother? Why "bastard"? Wherefore "base",
> When my dimensions are as well compact,
> My mind as generous, and my shape as true
> As honest madam's issue?
> […]
> […] Well then,
> Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
> Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
> As to the legitimate.
> (I, ii, ll. 1-18, p. 1030)

For Edmund, nature means irrational and vital energy. In its name he feels authorized to break the norms and customs which interfere with it, because they fix and force within legal boundaries what is loose and free (for example love outside of marriage). As a "natural son", which paradoxically means "illegitimate son", Edmund embodies the outrage of constraining nature within the legal sphere – within the language of the law – because it is an uncontrollable, and, potentially, also a destructive (and self-destructive) force. The idea of nature therefore, as in "natural son", is self-contradictory because it states a naturalness that is denied by law. In many ways Edmund is a reversed copy of Cordelia. The play on the meaning of nature in Shakespeare's tragedy therefore questions easy assumptions about its significance and implications that are picked up by Gadda in his novel.

Like Lear, whose three daughters all die, Liliana in the *Pasticciaccio* leaves no descendants. As a result she gives a schizophrenic response to the demands of nature. She is married, but cannot have children: and the impossibility of motherhood torments and obsesses her. She fantasises about conceiving a child with a man who is not her husband (especially her attractive cousin Giuliano Valdarena), but this is not legal; she deceives herself into believing she can obtain filial love from an adopted child, but this is not natural. She takes home, one after the other, three young women, in the hope of gratifying her frustrated motherhood, but is disappointed by each of them. There

is symmetry in Liliana's relationship to her adopted daughters and Lear's relationship to his own natural ones. In Shakespeare's tragedy, Cordelia, the King's third and youngest daughter, genuinely loves her father and cares for him. In the *Pasticciaccio*, Virginia, the third girl Liliana hosts, kills her foster mother.[34] Significantly, Liliana's *protégées* are referred to as "the nieces" (p. 16),[35] a word that defines a diagonal, rather than vertical genealogical lineage, and implies a weaker, and looser relationship, which leads in terms of the plot to lawless (and unnatural) behaviour.

Like Edmund, Virginia illegitimately wants to gain her (adoptive) mother's properties. Even more than the Shakespearean character, however, she finds herself outside of law and nature: she is not Liliana's daughter, and, even before becoming a murderer and a thief, she has a dubious moral profile, no less because of her lesbian tendencies at a time when homosexuality was condemned as a sin against nature. On the other hand, like King Lear, Liliana confuses filial affection and property – even though from an opposite viewpoint. Lear divides his kingdom among his daughters because he relies on the affection of a legitimate offspring that betrays him, and upsets his conception of nature. Liliana, who was a very rich woman, wastes her property; she tries to get rid of her material wealth because it reminds her of a progeny she will never have, either naturally, legitimately or legally. She hates it because it carries the memory of her impossible motherhood.

Therefore, indeed, she had trusted the will to Don Corpi, urging him to "hide it and forget it."

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[34] While this is true for the first version of the *Pasticciaccio,* published in instalments in the journal *Letteratura* (see note 4 above), in the final, 1957 version of the novel the responsibility of the murder is ambiguously shared by Virginia and Assunta. See Maria Antonietta Terzoli, "Iconografia criptica e iconografia esplicita nel *Pasticciaccio*", Maria Antonietta Terzoli, Cosetta Veronese and Vincenzo Vitale (eds) *Un meraviglioso ordegno. Paradigmi e modelli nel Pasticciaccio di Gadda* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), pp. 145-93, pp. 158-59.

[35] "nipoti" (p. 24).

> […] to forget it for the duration of her life, as if she wished to see buried, as soon as possible, that guilty list of possessions: which, only in the final loss of herself, she was permitted to scatter: which at every new day led her back towards the obligations, the inane reasons of living, while her soul tended already towards the kind of expatriation [...] from the useless land towards maternal silences (p. 137).[36]

On the theme of natural and legal lineage, it is worth recalling an episode from the *Tempest* which, by contrast, evokes the discontinuity in bloodline linked to the sterility of Liliana in the *Pasticciaccio*. Twice in a very short span of time, Prospero, usurped Duke of Milan and now wizard of the Island, warns Ferdinand, son of the King of Naples who has been brought by a contrived tempest to its shore, not to break the virgin-knot of his daughter Miranda prior to their marriage: sterility and discord would otherwise plague their union. With the help of the spirit Ariel, Prospero summons Iris, messenger of the Gods, who invites Juno and Ceres, symbols of wealth, abundance and fertility, to join and "To bless this twain, that they may prosperous be, / And honoured in their issue" (IV, i, ll. 104-105, p. 1334). In the *Pasticciaccio* another figure, Hermes, plays the part of the divine messenger and replaces Iris. He is conjured up twice in the novel not as a messenger of prosperity, but of death. Hermes is ultimately an intermediary for Proserpine, wife of Pluto, and goddess of the underworld, and interestingly enough, daughter of Ceres, who also laments her loss in Shakespeare's play.

6.

Traces left in the *Pasticciaccio* by Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* can be spotted in the way Gadda portrays the economic repercussions of lineage and inheritance. The title of Shakespeare's comedy is highly significant: the word "merchant" conveys the idea of a wealthy world

[36] "aveva affidato il testamento a don Corpi, raccomandandogli di 'nasconderlo e dimenticarlo'. […] dimenticarlo quanto la durata di sua vita, come bramasse di vedere sepolto al più presto quel turpe elenco di averi: quelli che soltanto nell'ultimo smarrimento di sé le era conceduto di disperdere: quelli che la riconducevano a ogni nuovo giorno verso gli obblighi e verso le ragioni inani del vivere, mentre già l'anima tendeva a una sorta di espatrio […] dal paese inutile verso materni silenzi" (pp. 104-5).

regulated by monetary and property exchanges. Liliana's husband, Remo, is a textile merchant. Moreover, she lives in the so-called "palace of gold" (p. 17),[37] and her father was a "shark",[38] a nickname given him for his shrewd business sense. In addition, the theme of the caskets, around which the subplot of *The Merchant of Venice* revolves, also surfaces in Gadda's novel: twice, both times with reference to a crime.

In Shakespeare's play, Bassanio, in love with Portia, can only hope to win her as a wife if he guesses which of the three caskets – golden, silver or leaden – hides the lady's portrait. Unlike his predecessors, who, out of sheer pride, choose the most precious metals, gold and silver, Bassanio, for whom the world is mere deceit and appearance, prefers the unpretentiousness of the lead and thus gains his fortune.

In Gadda's *Pasticciaccio* the first mention of a casket or coffer (as Weaver chose to translate the Italian "piccolo cofano") is made in relation to the burglary at Teresa Menegazzi's. In a state of affected shock, the victim reports that: "There was all her gold, her jewels: in a little leather coffer" (p. 30).[39] The second reference to a casket occurs after the murder of Liliana, when her husband, Remo Balducci, immediately notices its missing contents: "the best, the money and the jewels which the signora kept in a little iron coffer in the second drawer of the dresser" (p. 112).[40]

The inverted relationship between the material value of an object and the spiritual nobility of the person who owns it underpins the lottery of the caskets in *The Merchant of Venice*. Arguably this is reinterpreted in the *Pasticciaccio* in the opposition between Teresa Menegazzi's leather jewellery casket and Liliana Balducci's iron one. These subtle details add to the clues, which are progressively accumulating to delineate the opposite nature of the characters of the countess Menegazzi and Liliana: comic and grotesque the former, tragic the latter. And they offer yet another example of the way in which Gadda reinvents and rewrites a well-known theme of classical literature in order to appropriate it and make it unequivocally his.

[37] "palazzo dell'Oro" (p. 24).

[38] "pescecane" (p. 78). The English translation gives "profiteer" (p. 97).

[39] "C'era tutto l'oro, e le gioie: in un cofano di pelle. C'era il denaro" (p. 33).

[40] "la mancanza del meglio, del denaro e delle gioie, che la signora teneva in un piccolo cofano di ferro nel secondo cassetto del comò" (p. 88).

7.

In trying to pin down the extent and range of Gadda's reworkings of Shakespeare in the *Pasticciaccio*, the theme of legal and social legitimacy is arguably the main one to emerge from the above analyses.

But what is exactly meant by legitimacy? On the one hand, it means justified by nature. In other words, it means that human relations have a natural and psychological root that legitimises them, even when the feelings expressed, such as hatred, jealousy or greediness, may be negative. On the other hand, "legitimacy" means legalized by law. Human relations are regulated by a tight system of rules, which enable society and history to operate. In Elizabethan England, attention to the second meaning of the term was, for obvious social and political reasons, of major concern. One aspect of the greatness of Shakespeare consists in having created characters who continually interrogate themselves about the meaning and validity that this set of values has in human affairs.

In the *Pasticciaccio,* the investigator Ingravallo is a legitimate representative of the law, but, at the same time, he is also a person, like any other, who is subject to the conditioning of nature. His nature affects his perceptions of reality; for example, he dislikes Valdarena, and, from time to time, enjoys indulging in power games. Ingravallo is a careful observer of the world, a sharp interpreter of the code of reality, someone who, in analysing an event, strives to retrieve and unravel the intricate network of associated circumstances that brought it about. However, he is also aware that the referent of knowledge is unstable, and, as Gadda notes in the *Meditazione milanese,* the process of knowledge that anyone tries to guide is subject to endless change.

The need for action that Gadda calls pragmatism does not clash with the need to observe and explore a world, in which subject and object are, both, in a process of endless change. The philosopher must take action, he is motivated by an objective, an end. In paragraph VI of *Meditazione milanese,* called "Hesitation and purpose"[41] Gadda claims that one term does not exclude the other. On the contrary, the person

[41] "L'indugio e il fine", *Scritti vari e postumi, Opere* vol. 5, pp. 657-60.

who acts successfully is the one who hesitates, which means taking doubt into account, and including the possibility of being unsuccessful when planning an action. A purpose, an objective is not determined by its degree of intensity for Gadda: either you have a purpose, an objective, an end, or you do not. Therefore, Hamlet is not at all doubtful about whether he should take action and kill his uncle and revenge his father, or not. For Hamlet "to be" does not mean "to live" but to take an action that he knows will also cause his death. If the pursuit of his objective, revenge, leads Hamlet to death, the same is true for Liliana, who cannot perform her reproductive function (so encouraged by the Fascist regime), and commits herself to frantic adoptions. Liliana's aim is to become a mother at all costs, and this objective will cost her life. With reference to Hamlet, Gadda observes that "the frenzied activity to obtain one's purpose wears out the weak fibres of the human body. The end destroys matter".[42] The same is true for poor Liliana, whose melancholy, little by little, wears her out and ultimately destroys her.

Hamlet does not doubt whether he should take action or not: but he reflects on what it means to pass from thought to action, to shift from an idea to its realization, from thinking to doing. In *Hamlet* this passage coincides with the character's consciousness that taking action will mean he will die. This excruciating moment was described by Shakespeare in a previous play, *Julius Caesar*, through the words of the character Brutus:

> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
> The genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in counsel, and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection.
> (II, i, ll. 63-69, p. 681)

[42] "l'attività finalistica lacera le deboli fibre della creatura umana. Il fine strazia la materia" ("I viaggi la morte", in *Saggio giornali e favole I, Opere* vol. 3, p. 584).

The time between thought and action is the time of agony, suffering and nightmare. The end of Gadda's novel seems, again, to be indebted to Shakespeare, in that it freezes this *interim* for Ingravallo, and stops just before action:

> The incredible cry blocked the haunted man's fury. He didn't understand, then and there, what his spirit was on the point of understanding. That black, vertical fold above the two eyebrows of rage in the pale white face of the girl, paralyzed him, prompted him to reflect: to repent, almost (p. 388).[43]

The closure of the book freezes the action on the ending of the novel. The reader remains suspended, puzzled. A vacuum fills the space of the action. Is Assunta really Liliana's murderer? By leaving the question open, Gadda does not simply break the traditional conventions of the detective story. Nor does he only enhance the psychological complexity of his novel's texture. He strips the fiction from his page and casts the reader violently into the dark and dramatic abyss of human consciousness – he enacts the infinitesimal moment of intuition, the fraction of a second which passes between an illuminating perception which paralyses, and the movement ahead of thought, the stimulus to think further: an extraordinary insight which makes him one of the greatest Italian modernists indeed.

[43] "Il grido incredibile bloccò il furore dell'ossesso. Egli [Ingravallo] non intese, là pe llà, ciò che la sua anima era in procinto d'intendere. Quella piega nera verticale tra i due sopraccigli dell'ira, nel volto bianchissimo della ragazza, lo paralizzò, lo indusse a riflettere: a ripentirsi, quasi" (p. 276).