«Un romantico preso a calci dal destino»:
Gadda and the Nineteenth-Century Novel.

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ABSTRACT
This article focuses on Gadda’s crucial (if largely unexplored) dialogue with the tradition of European realism, especially in the period spanning from Racconto italiano to La cognizione del dolore. Building on a series of previously undetected intertextual echoes from Dickens, Balzac, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, and Flaubert, the present article aims to underline the importance of such models in Gadda’s formation as a novelist, with particular regard to a fundamental polarity underlying his fiction – the satirical representation of bourgeois society on the one hand, and the Quixotic portrayal of isolated misfits on the other. At the same time, the nineteenth-century paradigm is altered by Gadda in a modernist perspective, as its most distinctive feature (i.e., the ultimately serious representation of everyday life) is radically put into question.

Keywords: French Realism, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Modernism, Gadda.

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1. ROMANTIC POLARITIES

Most of Gadda’s major projects from the Twenties and Thirties, up until La cognizione del dolore, involve an isolated protagonist being stifled by a dismal and grotesque social environment. Grifonetto Lampugnani, the protagonist of Racconto italiano, was envisioned by the author as a «persona forte che si perverte per l’insufficienza dell’ambiente sociale» (SVP: 397); in Un fulmine sul 220, Elsa is «sola», «strappata via dall’anima comune», i.e. a stranger to the Milanese «tribù» (F220: 111) – her solitude being echoed by Adalgisa’s own struggle against her destiny as an outcast («il destino che l’aveva inzacherata di quell’epiteto di cantante», F220. 175). Likewise, in Cognizione, Gonzalo is depicted as a lonely misfit, as opposed to a nameless crowd: «S’era veduto cacciare, come fosse una belva, dalla loro carità inferocita, di uomini: di consorzio, di mille. Egli era uno» (RR I: 728). Indeed, despite being quite different from each other, such characters do share a state of isolation, of being one against thousands – their motto could be that of Dostoevsky’s underground man: «I am alone, and they are everybody» (Dostoevsky 1999: 47).

The polarisation between an outsider and society as a whole is further exemplified by several other works – from the short story Cinema, where the narrator’s solitude contrasts with a pervasive folla, to Il castello di Udine, where from the very beginning the author himself is portrayed in opposition to the collective law («legge»), namely the «sistema delle inibizioni che costituiscono eredità normativa della tribù. Nel caso del Ns., la tribù è il ceto mercativo-politecnico di Milano e dintorni» (RR I: 122). It is in his novelistic projects, however, that Gadda exploits this pattern in the most intense and productive way – and it could not be otherwise, given the particular inclination of the genre to capture the conflict between the Soul and the World (Lukács 1971), that is to say the problematic nature of modern socialization (Moretti 2000). In other words, Gadda’s handling of the novel from Racconto to Cognizione is characterised by a persistent – if ambiguous and ever-changing – pull towards what René Girard has labelled as the romantic lie, with special regard to the rigid opposition between a single outsider and a debased social norm. To be sure, this pattern is also visible in Quer pasticcaccio, through the social isolation of such key characters as Ingravallo, Liliana, and Angeloni; yet, as will be discussed later, the romantic split between the Self and society is not the main narrative or conceptual focus of Gadda’s late masterpiece.

In summary, the individual’s struggle against his/her environment is the binary pattern underlying most of Gadda’s fiction, especially during the Fascist ventennio. After all, this is only natural for an author who perceived himself as a disillusioned but inveterate romantic: «Le mie naturali tendenze, la mia infanzia, i miei sogni, le

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2 On the notion of romantic deceit, and its implied polarisation between the Self and society, see of course Girard (1976).
On the other hand, this binary structure undergoes significant changes over time, from the narrative and stylistic simplifications (or indeed romantic deceits) of *Racconto italiano* to the disillusioned novelistic truth of *Cognizione*. As this essay aims to demonstrate, taking such a perspective on Gadda’s early production can help us better understand his dialogue with nineteenth-century realism – which, in turn, plays a crucial role in the process outlined above. Basing on a series of previously undetected intertextual similarities, the following paragraphs will therefore investigate the influence exerted by the classics of European realism (from Dickens and Balzac to Dostoevsky and Flaubert), with particular attention to how Gadda builds on such models in order to achieve his own, modernist take on both sides of the polarity – a ludicrous society on the one hand, the isolated individual on the other. Far from allowing us to give an exhaustive account of Gadda’s debts towards those authors, this double focus will hopefully be of some help in providing a tentative overview of such a vast, and still largely unexplored, topic.

2. LAUGHING AT THE BOURGEOIS: FROM DICKENS TO FLAUBERT

*Racconto italiano* displays a rigid stylistic opposition, with an idealised protagonist like Grifonetto («persona forte», «buon tipo di razza», SVP: 397) being surrounded by a serious-tragic aura, as opposed to the predominant grotesque/satirical tone used to portray his mediocre environment. As will be illustrated later on, the former aspect would soon be altered by Gadda in favour of a more complex and multi-faceted representation of the secluded hero, also basing on a close dialogue with romantic-realist sources; on the other hand, the satire of bourgeois society at large would persist as one of the most notable features of Gadda’s writing. In this respect, too, the paradigm set by the classics of nineteenth-century fiction is of primary importance for Gadda. A pivotal (if underappreciated) role is played by Dickens, as suggested not only by Gadda’s definition of the «maniera umoristico ironica, apparentemente seria, dickens-panzini» (*Racconto italiano*, SVP: 396), but also by a more detailed note from the *Cahier d’études*, dating back to 12 September 1924:

Il Dickens molte volte si astiene dal commento e fa ridere. […] Molte volte si tratta della inserzione di una fittizia idea riferimento, idea misura, che non è e non può essere comune, che è assurda, irreale (caricaturale). Ma per analogie simbolistiche viene accettata come reale. P. E. L’episodio dei francobolli: (se ben ricordo) in principio del «Circolo Pickwick». Fare l’analisi dell’assurdo. (SVP: 484)
According to Gadda (Bakhtin would agree here), Dickens’s humour is based on a caricature-like exaggeration of common sense, whereby glaring absurdities are ironically presented as «idee comuni». The episode referred to by Gadda as «episodio dei francobolli» can be found at the beginning of *The Pickwick Club*, where the narrator – following a mock-heroic preamble – quotes directly from the minutes of the club’s latest meeting, including a note on postage expenses:

The first ray of light which illumines the gloom, and converts into a dazzling brilliancy that obscurity in which the earlier history of the public career of the immortal Pickwick would appear to be involved, is derived from the perusal of the following entry in the Transactions of the Pickwick Club, which the editor of these papers feels the highest pleasure in laying before his readers […]

«May 12, 1827. Joseph Smiggers, Esq., P.V.P.M.P.C. [Perpetual Vice-President-Member Pickwick Club], presiding. The following resolutions unanimously agreed to: […] That the members of the aforesaid Corresponding Society be, and are hereby informed, that their proposal to pay the postage of their letters, and the carriage of their parcels, has been deliberated upon by this Association: that this Association considers such proposal worthy of the great minds from which it emanated, and that it hereby signifies its perfect acquiescence therein».
(Dickens 1972: 1-2)

The magniloquent style in which the document is written is clearly absurd, yet the narrator introduces it as perfectly appropriate. Quite significantly, one month before writing the note on Dickens’s «gioco caricaturale», Gadda took this episode as a model for his *Racconto*. In order to introduce Luigi Morone, an engineer whose simple-mindedness is emblematic of the «insufficienza dell’ambiente», the narrator quotes from the proceedings of a meeting held at Moroni’s society:

Qui è bene interrompere il racconto del giovanotto per notificare a chi ci onora di una longanime attenzione quanto segue. Il Consiglio di amministrazione della Società Generale Accessori per Autoveicoli (S.G.A.P.A.), in una recente seduta, accettate le dimissioni da Amministratore delegato dell’esimo suo membro ing.r comm.r Giuseppe Palafroni per imprescindibili motivi di salute, aveva preso diverse deliberazioni: anzi tutto quella di assumere due impiegati e venti nuovi operai […]; e finalmente di addivenire col detto ing. Morone ai necessari pourparlers, che egli aveva d’altronde sollecitato, perché, previo acquisto di qualche caratura d’azioni, egli potesse divenire l’Amministratore Delegato della Società, essendone già il Direttore. […] La scelta non avrebbe potuto cadere più opportunamente tanto che i diversi membri del direttorio, nel rimuovere le seggiole in fin di seduta, non poterono esimersi da reciproche fervide congratulazioni per il perfetto accordo nel quale venivano a trovarsi i loro provvvidi deliberati. (SVP: 433, 6 August 1924)

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3 See Bakhtin (1981: 259-422), where Dickens’s comic style is analysed with particular regard to its parody of “common language”.
Gadda’s solemn tone, echoing that of the company’s document, is evidently reminiscent of Dickens’s «gioco caricaturale». An even more pertinent example of Dickens’s influence can be found in Un fulmine sul 220, where Gadda’s satire is overtly directed against the Milanese bourgeoisie, as embodied by the Caviggioli clan. The members of this family have a habit of buttoning their coats up to their neck as an alleged sign of gravitas – Valerio, the young heir, is generally regarded as a serious and reliable person precisely due to his buttoned-up coat or paltò («paltò scuro rigorosamente abbottonato», F220: 45; «lo dicevano tutti un ragazzo serissimo: difatti aveva sempre il paltò rigorosamente abbottonato», F220: 99). More generally, the Caviggiolis are often referred to as a bunch of fastened black coats («quei paltò neri [...] neri e lustri tutti i bottoni», F220: 34), that only zephyrs could unfasten («zefiri ch’erano i soli a saper disbottonare il paltò a un Cavigioli», F220: 46). Quite identically, in Dickens’s Little Dorrit, the distinctive sign of the Barnacles’ respectability was nothing but a buttoned-up coat:

But Mr Tite Barnacle was a buttoned-up man, and consequently a weighty one. All buttoned-up men are weighty. All buttoned-up men are believed in. Whether or no the reserved and never-exercised power of unbuttoning, fascinates mankind; whether or no wisdom is supposed to condense and augment when buttoned up, and to evaporate when unbuttoned; it is certain that the man to whom importance is accorded is the buttoned-up man. Mr Tite Barnacle never would have passed for half his current value, unless his coat had been always buttoned-up to his white cravat. (Dickens 1963: 565-66)

Just like Valerio, Tite Junior inherits the same mannerism from his father: «Even this youth, if his jacket could have been unbuttoned and his heart laid bare, would have been seen, as a distant adherent of the Barnacle family, already to aspire to a situation under Government» (Dickens 1963: 313). Further evidence of Gadda’s Dickensian vein is provided by Valerio’s custom of carrying a measuring rod in his pocket («dal taschino della giacca [...] un piccolo e civettuolo regolo calcolatore», F220: 106) — something he shares not only with his fellow engineers graduating from the Politecnico, but also with an emblem of society’s standardising compulsions such as Thomas Gradgrind from Hard Times («with a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket», Dickens 1994: 2).

Dickens, however, is far from being the only nineteenth-century source for Gadda’s anti-bourgeois satire. In La Madonna dei filosofi, for instance, the fatuity of Maria’s parents is illustrated by their inability to foresee such a natural event as their daughter’s twenty-fifth birthday («Maria Ripamonti, la figlia, aveva raggiunto e di poco superato i venticinque anni senza che i famigliari e i conoscenti se ne avvedessero», RR I: 75), which is very likely to be an echo from Dostoevsky’s derision of the Epanchin family in The Idiot: «But among all these irrefutable facts another fact occurred: the eldest daughter, Alexandra, suddenly and almost quite
unexpectedly (as always happens) turned twenty-five» (Dostoevsky 2003: 39). Gadda’s attention to Dostoevsky’s humour and satire was already documented in the Cahier, and represents a rather isolated case in the author’s reception in early 20th-century Italy.

Likewise, the notes from Racconto also contain references to the satirical side of another novelist who was mainly acknowledged for his ultimately serious representation of society, i.e. Balzac: «vi è tutto un gioco caricaturale (Dickens, talora Balzac, molto i francesi; “sui generis” gli inglesi) circa il quale si resterebbe perplessi se classificarlo “ab interiore” o “ab exterioire”» (SVP: 484; my emphasis). Balzac’s influence is particularly clear in one of the best allegories of bourgeois uniformity in Un fulmine, namely the episode in which the librarian of Milan’s Circolo Filologico gets entangled in the web of homonymies and kinships intertwining his clients, and making them virtually unrecognizable from each other:

Il valente bibliotecario si irretisce ne’ diversi indirizzi degli omonimi: il Perego di via Giulio Cesare si chiama Filippo e il Perego di via Filippo Carcano si chiama Giulio. […] Invano! Ché la esavalente famiglia è imparentata con altre famiglie esavalenti della vecchia Milano, tanto che ne è venuta un’arnia: e le api di quest’arnia, di sabato, mellificano al Filologico. Cognati dei Pèrego, cugini dei Maldifassi, nipoti dei Lattuada e pronipoti dei Corbeta, legati in seconde nozze coi Rusconi, in seconda cognizione coi Ghiringhelli, e in terza con altra casata di cui mi sfugge il patronimico, d’altronde notissimo, facile è il pensare cosa sia per i Cavigliol, il gomitolo degli zii e delle zie. (F220 98)

Milan’s middle class is depicted as a tangle («gomitolo») or beehive («alveare») in which each family, like a hexavalent compound («esavalenti famiglie»), is linked to the others by the bonds of uncleship or cousinship. As stated by Balzac in Ursule Mirouët, «every bourgeois is cousin to another bourgeois» («tout bourgeois est cousin d’un bourgeois», Balzac 1976, vol. III: 783). More precisely, a passage from Balzac’s novel stands out as a major source for the Circolo Filologico episode:

Sous Louis XI, […] la bourgeoisie de Nemours se composait de Minoret, de Massin, de Levraut et de Crémière. Sous Louis XIII, ces quatre familles produisaient déjà des...

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4 Not by chance, Dostoevsky’s passage is in turn rather Dickensian, as confirmed by two similar passages from Hard Times: «Time, with his innumerable horse-power, worked away, not minding what anybody said, and presently turned out young Thomas a foot taller than when his father had last taken particular notice of him» (Dickens 1994: 89); «From the period when her father had said she was almost a young woman—which seemed but yesterday—she had scarcely attracted his notice again, when he found her quite a young woman» (Dickens 1994: 91).


6 Further aspects of Gadda’s dialogue with Balzac are investigated by Rinaldi 2001 and Italia 1995.

Just as Gadda does with Milan, Balzac describes Nemours’s bourgeoisie as a human web («une toile humaine»), or a beehive («ruche-mère») built by a limited number of families, where each element is so interlaced with the others that not even atomism («la science atomistique») could shed any light on it. Balzac’s ironical conclusion, too, is undoubtedly in line with Gadda’s perspective on the Caviggiolis: «a family can become a nation — and, unfortunately, a nation can become one single family».

To sum up, Gadda’s derisive representation of (bourgeois) society as a whole is highly indebted to romantic-realist models, such as Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Balzac. Nonetheless, Gadda’s satire of middle-class mimetism is essentially different from such standards. In Dickens and Balzac, social life is often satirised for its uniformity, but its fundamental seriousness and dramatic potential are never really questioned; in Gadda, instead, society and its dramas are so contaminated by bêtise that it has become far more difficult to take them seriously. Not by chance, Flaubert is another relevant, if less visible, source for Gadda. In Un fulmine sul 220 and even more so in the Adalgisa version, for example, the description of the pompous Milanese businessmen (and wives) at the Opera owes much to Madame Bovary’s Lucia di Lammermoor chapter – just like Flaubert, Gadda ironically refers

\(^7\) «Under Louis XI, […] the bourgeoisie of Nemours was made up of Minorets, Massins, Levraults and Cremieres. Under Louis XIII, these four families had already produced the Massin-Cremieres, the Levrault-Massin, the Massin-Minoret, the Minoret-Minoret, the Cremiere-Levraults, the Levrault-Minoret-Massin, Massin-Levraults, Minoret-Massin, Massin-Massins, and Cremiere-Massins. […] The variations of this family kaleidoscope of four branches was now so complicated by births and marriages that the genealogical tree of the bourgeoisie of Nemours would have puzzled the Benedictines of the Almanach of Gotha, in spite of the atomic science with which they arrange those zigzags of German alliances. […] Diverse are the destinies of these bees from the parent hive. […] Full of the same blood and called by the same name (for sole likeness), these four roots had ceaselessly woven a human network […]. One family may become a nation; unfortunately, a nation may become one family» (translation based on Honoré de Balzac, Ursula, trans. by Katharine Prescott Wormeley, Boston: Little Brown, 1900).
to the concert as a ritual purification from the anxieties of business: «ils venaient se délasser dans les beaux-arts des inquiétudes de la vente» (Flaubert 1992: p. 494);
«dal tumulto efimero del Conservatorio [...] il loro spirito “positivo” si sarebbe ripreso al più presto, salpando verso le incombenze e gli incassi del lunedì» (RR I 471). Besides, Gadda’s insistence on the viewers’ «lorgnoni» or «lorgnons» (RR I 454, 458) is a probable echo from Flaubert («on tirait les lorgnettes de leurs étuis», Flaubert 1992: p. 494).

An explicit reference to Emma’s wedding is made in Invito a pranzo, a satirical sketch from the early Thirties; more generally, however, Gadda and Flaubert share an inclination to consider bourgeois civilisation at large as a ridiculous pantomime – a tendency which is variously embodied by many European modernists, from Musil’s «absolute (religious) lack of respect» for any «moral» and «social» form of life to Wyndham Lewis’s celebration of «anarchist» laughter, from Zeno’s (and Svevo’s) habit of «ridere di tutto» to Pirandello’s conception of reality as an «enorme pupazzata».

In romantic realists like Dickens and Balzac, the ridicule can be directed at more or less common vices, but stupidity is never so ubiquitous as to undermine the balance between comedy and seriousness in the representation of everyday life, or to jeopardize the dialogue between the implied author and the reading public. Gadda’s romanticism of disillusionment (as Lukács would put it), instead, implies a Flaubertian awareness of the omnipresence of la bêtise, which in turn ends up compromising the alleged seriousness of everyday life, as well as widening the communication gap between the author and the average reader. This of transcendental comedy (or tragicomedy) becomes more and more evident in Gadda’s works from the early Thirties, from Un fulmine to L’incendio di via Keplero and most notably Cognizione; within this process, the nineteenth-century representations of bourgeois society and its laughable clichés are indeed a crucial stepping stone for Gadda.

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8 «They came to relax with the fine arts, after the anxieties of business».
9 «Si era discusso di mangiare, e si era fatto un grande sfoggio di citazioni. Avevamo tirato in ballo i pranzi di una volta, che non finivano più: si era sentito svolazzare financo il nome di Trimalcione, ed altri tipi del genere. Ma più che tutto era la “Scampagnata” di Renato Fucini che era ritornata a galla nella <...> a quegli spiriti: uno aveva citato un romanzo francese “Madame Bovary”, che parla di cent’anni fa, roba come si vede completamente giù di moda. Il romanziere, che è un certo Flaubert se ben ricordo, descrive il pranzo di nozze di un dottore di campagna. Non era Laennec sto tale, ma il pranzo era stato una cosa molto riuscita: un’ottantina di portate, dalle due e mezzo del pomeriggio alle nove di sera» (Gadda 2012: pp. 25-6).
3. FROM GRIFONETTO TO GONZALO: GADDA AND 19TH-CENTURY QUIXOTISM

The influence of European Realism in *Racconto italiano* is not limited to the representation of «l’insufficienza dell’ambiente», but also extends to Gadda’s portrayal of the isolated hero. Grifonetto is what Girard (after Stendhal) would call a «passionate being» (*être de passion*), as suggested by his political enthusiasm (as opposed to the liberal/socialist mediocrity of his environment) and even more clearly by his tormented love affair with Maria. The conflict between the hero’s vital energy and the pettiness of his context – between *passion* and *vanité*, to borrow Girard’s terminology – cannot but lead to an overtly tragic ending, following the character’s inclination to radical alternatives: «se nulla è possibile, tutto finisca» (SVP: 469). Grifonetto is actually in many ways similar to Julien Sorel, and more generally to Stendhal’s young heroes – i.e., characters who «think and feel in opposition to their time» (Auerbach 2003: 482), and whose «inevitable defeat in the struggle against the dominating forces of their age» leads to a state of «withdrawal from life» (Lukács 1964: 82). Small wonder, then, that a list of readings from the *Cahier* («Elenco delle letture da fare», 26 March 1924) includes «Rouge et Noir: (Stendhal) richiami di espressione» (SVP: 573); in addition to that, a note written on the same day clearly indicates Stendhal’s novel as a reference point for Grifonetto’s personality, as well as for the tragic epilogue of *Racconto*: «Grifonetto Lampugnani […] è un ipervolitivo (Gatti, Rouge et Noir): studio, ambiente intellettuale, mancanza del padre, non grande ricchezza. (Inserire forse qualche cosa del Rouge et Noir) (Forse no, perché l’epilogo potrebbe essere tale da far credere a una copia di Rouge et Noir)» (SVP: 398).

At the same time, the Stendhalian paradigm is fundamentally simplified by Gadda, as he yields to the manichaeism typical of the romantic lie. As already mentioned, *Racconto* is affected by a rigid separation between an idealised protagonist («buon tipo di razza») and a uniformly mediocre society – indeed, this dualism rather reminds us of what Stendhal defined as «romans de femmes de chambre» (Stendhal 2005, vol. I: 830), or of the stereotypical patterns of Decadentismo (not by chance, *Il trionfo della morte* and *Malombra* are also mentioned in Gadda’s notes, SVP: 400 and 573). Very little remains of Stendhal’s peculiar irony towards his hero, a faint echo of which can only be perceived when the narrator of *Racconto* seems to dissociate himself from Grifonetto’s vehement political statements:

“E quando sarà deputato potrà sputarci addosso quel che vorrà e cantare le lodi del liberalismo… fin che vorrà, del liberalismo che ha fatto l’Italia, che ha governato l’Italia… da Minghetti a… Orlando”. Non vogliano i nostri lettori far nostre le parole ed i pensieri dei concitati. (SVP: 583)
Gadda’s caveat to the reader can hardly conceal his sympathy for the character, but it does have something in common with Stendhal’s facetious footnotes to Julien’s and Fabrice’s boldest utterances:

Mais quant à moi, pensait-il, je serais bien dupe de vivre encore deux mois dans ce séjour dégoûtant, en butte à tout ce que la faction patricienne peut inventer d’infâme et d’humiliant* […]. [*footnote: C’est un jacobin qui parle] (Stendhal 2005, I: 787) J’ai vu cette grande image de l’Italie se relever de la fange où les Allemands la retiennent plongée* […]. [*footnote: C’est un personnage passionné qui parle, il traduit en prose quelques vers du célèbre Monti] (Stendhal 1952, II: 49-50)11

Aside from this exception, however, Grifonetto is completely immune to Stendhalian irony. Gadda’s awareness of this aspect of Stendhal’s poetics is far more evident in a 1932 review to Piero Gadda Conti’s novel Gagliarda, where he pays particular attention to La Chartreuse and its «vena parodistica»:

In Gagliarda direi che due modi arieggiano palesemente allo Stendhal: la tecnica descrittiva della presa di Capri e la vena parodistica del romanzo. Si ricordi il diciassettenne Fabrizio del Dongo a Waterloo, e quella ironizzazione quasi beffarda de’ casi bellici del «nostro eroe» […]. Quasi una vena di Cervantes. (SGF I:750)

A few lines later, Gadda will label Fabrice as a «Don Chisciotte diciassettenne», probably echoing Dumas’s famous definition of D’Artagnan as a «don Quichotte à dix-huit ans» (Dumas 1962: 7). The parallel with Cervantes is not unusual in the 20th-century reception of Stendhal,12 and had already been vaguely outlined in Racconto italiano; but while Grifonetto’s «Don Chisciottismo […] non caricaturale» (SVP: 470) implied an idealised and romantic take on both Don Quixote and Julien Sorel (in compliance with the manichaeism of Racconto), Gadda is now more sensitive to the combination of serious and ludicrous features in Stendhal’s heroes.

Not by chance, parallel to this shift in his interpretation of Stendhal, Gadda engages in a radical re-thinking of the polarisation between society and the individual, with the flawless hero now becoming a bizarre misfit. Gadda’s growing interest in Quixotic eccentricities as a reply to social standardisation is already evident in his short fiction from the early Thirties, from I viaggi di Gulliver, cioè del Gaddus and Il castello di Udine to La casa; only with La cognizione, however,

11 «“As for me, I would be a fool to live two more months in this filthy place, subject to every kind of infamy and humiliation that a patrician mind can devise”. Footnote: These are the words of a Jacobin». «“I had a great vision of Italy rising from the mud where she had been plunged into by the Germans”. Footnote: These are the words of a passionate man; he is just translating some verses by the famous Monti».

12 See, for instance, Benedetto Croce’s essay on Stendhal (1919): «ironico e donchisciotesco è quel proporsi che fanno i suoi personaggi un modello storico e letterario» (Croce 1964: p. 92).
is this pattern fully developed within a novelistic framework, resulting in a modernist combination of tragic and grotesque elements (Savettieri 2008: 135-69). Gonzalo’s Quixotism is confirmed not only by the narrator’s habit of referring to him as a «hidalgo», but also by a large set of quirks, phobias, and neurotic behaviours, ranging from childish regression to misanthropy and detachment from life. Not by chance, this new phase in Gadda’s representation of the isolated individual is also largely indebted to nineteenth-century models; only the main influence here is not Stendhal, but rather Dostoevsky. In the preparatory notes for the novel, prince Myshkin – one of the most accomplished examples of romantic-realist Quixotism\(^\text{13}\) – is openly mentioned as a model for Gonzalo’s puerile traits: «Puerilità psichica e bambocceria esteriore (anche idiota di Dostoiewski)» (Gadda 1987: 546). Further echoes from Dostoevsky can be detected with regard to Gonzalo’s fits of melancholy, such as the passage in which the human race is compared (via free indirect speech) to an inane «constellation of lice»:

Senza stagione la vita, e senza gioia: e la volontà di bene, la rinuncia, la pena profonda: vedute solo da Dio, dal fondo abissale di quel suo cazzioso caleidoscopio, dove le figurazioni si succedevano pazzamente une alle altre, come sempre rinnovate e deformanti costellazioni di pidocchì, preda d’un rapido annullamento, aggiudicatarie di un eterno gastigo. (Gadda 1987: 528)

As suggested by the word «gastigo», Gonzalo’s outburst is somewhat reminiscent of Crime and Punishment, and more precisely of Raskolnikov’s favourite metaphor for the pointlessness of the human condition: «I’ve only killed a louse, Sonia, a useless, loathsome, harmful creature; [...] a human being is a louse»; «I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man. [...] I am just such a louse as all the rest» (Dostoevsky 1989: 320, 322). More generally, as anticipated, Gonzalo is one of the several modernist heirs of the man of the underground\(^\text{14}\); his sense of being «one» as opposed to «everybody» («egli era uno», RR I: 728), as well as his pathological misanthropy and foibles, clearly bear the mark of the Dostoevskian archetype.

\(^{13}\) As stated by Dostoevsky in a famous letter, the «main idea» behind The Idiot was directly inspired by Cervantes’s novel: «The main idea of the novel is to portray a positively beautiful man. There is nothing more difficult in the world, and especially now. [...] I will only mention that of the good people in Christian literature, the most fully realized is Don Quixote; but he is good solely because he is ludicrous at the same time. Dickens’ Pickwick (an idea infinitely weaker than Don Quixote; but enormous all the same) is also ludicrous and that is just his appeal. There is compassion for the old man who is laughed at and who does not know his own value — and so there appears sympathy in the reader too. This arousing of compassion is the secret of humour» (Dostoevsky 1959: vol. II, p. 71; translation from Fanger 1998: p. 231).

\(^{14}\) On the Notes from the Underground as a seminal text for European Modernism, see in particular Krysinski (2003).
Dostoevsky’s influence in *La cognizione* mainly revolves around Gadda’s representation of the misfit’s solitude as a Quixotic mixture of grotesque and tragic/pathetic traits. After *Cognizione*, Gadda’s interest in Dostoevsky will shift towards other aspects, most notably the idea of guilt being a common burden rather than something ascribable to single individuals: «Al dogma della messa in comune de’ titoli di merito dei Santi per la comune salvezza, corrisponde, in reciproca, il riconoscimento dostoiewskiano del gravame comune delle colpe: si che la colpa di uno è colpa di tutti» (*L’Egoista*, SGF I: 656). This notion is fully explored, of course, in *Quer pasticciaccio*, where Gadda’s usual binary pattern becomes relatively less important; despite still featuring lonely misfits at odds with social standards (such as Liliana, Angeloni, and Ingravallo himself), the novel rather focuses on a dimension that is at the same time sub- and super-individual – suffice it to mention the depersonalising effects of Gadda’s *maccheronea*, as well as the «pandemonismo» (RR II: 235) of both Eros and Evil. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that (despite some occasional references to Manzoni, Tolstoy, or Zola) the influence of nineteenth-century fiction is not as paramount in *Pasticciaccio* as it was in the earlier works, since the conflict between society and the Self – which used to provide the basis for Gadda’s dialogue with the romantic-realist novel – now occupies a less prominent role.

In conclusion, the paradigm established by the realist tradition proves to be particularly important in a crucial period for Gadda’s formation as a novelist, namely the one spanning from *Racconto italiano* to *Cognizione*. Quite significantly, most of Gadda’s references to Dickens, Balzac, Stendhal, or Dostoevsky point towards both poles of a binary pattern underlying romantic realism as much as Gadda’s peculiar romanticism of disillusionment, i.e. the individual’s solitary opposition to a stifling society. As shown by the intertextual presence of Dickens’s and Balzac’s bourgeois, as well as of Stendhal’s and Dostoevsky’s isolated heroes or anti-heroes, Gadda’s early works often hark back to the nineteenth-century take on this pattern. On the other hand, the most distinctive feature of nineteenth-century realism (i.e. its ultimately serious representation of everyday life) is replaced by a highly polarised attitude, where no middle ground seems to exist between the farce of social life and the misfit’s Quixotic tragicomedy.

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15 *War and Peace* is overtly mentioned in chapter 4: «rileggasi in *Guerra e Pace* al libro terzo, parte terza, il capo 25» (RR II: 93). With regard to Manzoni’s presence in the novel, see for instance Ponticelli (2003), Pedriali (2007), and Bignamini (2012: 195-240); Bignamini (2012: 25-26) also notices a similarity between the sequence of Ascanio’s arrest in *Pasticciaccio* and an episode from Zola’s *Le ventre de Paris*. 
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