

Modernist Myths.

A comparison between *La cognizione del dolore* and *Ulysses*¹

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Following a typical scheme of the nineteenth-century novel, *La cognizione del dolore* begins in a traditional way by depicting the temporal, spatial and socio-economical background of the imaginary country Maradagàl. This traditional structure, however, is immediately contradicted by two digressions regarding the geographical location that deconstruct the consistency of the opening paragraph. Clearly, it is hard not to be distracted by such digressions. Some characters will return, even in secondary episodes, others will only live in these initial descriptions. A number of critics have given great importance to Gadda's decision to dedicate so much space to the story of Pedro Mahagones-Palumbo. Although different interpretations are quite convincing,² I believe one of the most important reasons for such a decision is represented by Gadda's relevance for our own times: he is, even if unwittingly, a modernist writer.

1. An earlier version of this essay has been published as *Fine dell'epifania tra l'«Ulisse» e «La cognizione del dolore»*, *Studi novecenteschi*, anno 2010, n. 1, gennaio–giugno.
2. I am referring, in particular, to Rinaldi's reading of the novel: the scholar exalts the crime novel's aspects of *Cognizione*, explaining that Gonzalo's and Palumbo's physical resemblance is the real cause of the mother's misunderstanding of her real killer. Rinaldi states that Palumbo is a double of Gonzalo and this also explains Gadda's digression in his war story; see R.S. Domsbroski, *Creative Entanglements: Gadda and the Baroque* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1999), 83–120 and R. Rinaldi, *La paralisi e lo spostamento. Lettura critica de La cognizione del dolore di C.E. Gadda*, (Bastogi Editore: Livorno, 1977), 107–156.

The narrative organization of the first chapter of *Cognizione*, with all the space reserved for the night vigil story, recalls other modernist beginnings. I am referring to *Ulysses* that opens with the description of Buck Milligan's morning wash. Or, a more extreme example, *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel whose first two chapters concentrate on Robert Cohn, a loser and a secondary character. It is improbable that Gadda intended to directly quote these twentieth-century literary masterpieces. I believe, instead, that the nineteenth-century atmosphere I was alluding to at the beginning rapidly disappears and is replaced by a 'caleidoscopico Novecento'.³

It could be interesting to read *La cognizione del dolore* as a modernist *quête*. An adventure in search of the origins of the protagonist's grief. Gonzalo would be a mysterious hero-seeker, afflicted by his 'male oscuro'⁴ and continuously humiliated the closer he gets to the cause of his inner disease.

Among the numerous literary references interspersed within the text, one of the most important is undoubtedly represented by *Hamlet*.⁵ Gonzalo, without a father and far from a mother that distributes her affection to the *others*, is a Shakespearian character, as has been confirmed by those critics that have analyzed the intertextuality of this work.⁶ However, I am not interested in looking into the connections between Gonzalo and Hamlet: this argument has been sufficiently investigated and Gadda's words in his preparatory notes to the novel seem explicit

3. C.E. Gadda, *San Giorgio in casa Brocchi. Romanzi e racconti II* (Garzanti: Milano, 2007), 658.

4. It is interesting to note that a year after the first publication of *Cognizione* in volume, Giuseppe Berto won both the Premio Viareggio and also the Premio Campiello for the novel *Il male oscuro*. It is not possible to study at length a comparison between these texts, but it is useful to remember that Berto's novel is a chronicle of the neurosis of a character after his father's death. The cardinal theme of this autobiographic work is the gradual approach of Berto to psychoanalysis. Gadda reviewed Berto's novel; see C.E. Gadda, *Saggi, Giornali, Favole e altri scritti I* (ed.), L. Orlando, C. Martignoni, D. Isella (Garzanti: Milano, 2008), 1200-1208.

5. See E. Manzotti, *La cognizione del dolore di Carlo Emilio Gadda. Letteratura italiana, le Opere* (Einaudi: Torino, 1996); R. Luperini, *L'allegoria del moderno* (Editori riuniti: Roma, 1996).

6. Emilio Manzotti, in fact, wrote: '[...] si può sostenere, schematizzando ma senza far troppa violenza alla verità, che la *Cognizione* si colloca nel campo di tre testi-modello, i quali intervengono in essa in modo diverso e complementare: e cioè, in ordine forse crescente di importanza, i *Karamazov*, *l'Amleto* e *i Promessi sposi*': E. Manzotti, 281.

enough: 'Nevrastenia: studiare e insistere, con misura, anche clinicamente (Amleto descrizione nevrosi).'⁷ Rather, the importance of Hamlet's character resides in the possibility of a comparison between *Cognizione* and one of the greatest modernist masterpieces: James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Contini's seminal essay which was published as a preface to the 1963 edition of the novel has almost become an integral part of *Cognizione*'s structure and it has already compared Gadda's novel to another modernist work: Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Instead, with regard to Joyce there are no such explicit references. It is important to remember examples such as Roscioni's interpretation that relates Gadda's symbolism with Joyce's;⁸ or Rinaldi's Junghian reading of the novel, in which the scholar does not hesitate to quote different *Ulysses* episodes seen as possible models for some chapters of Gadda's story.⁹ Manzotti and Dombroski have also compared *Cognizione* to *Ulysses* and have highlighted the way in which the underlying lyrical structure makes both these works exemplary of a modern character's epic.¹⁰

Shakespeare's influence, however, could offer the first real clue in order to study more closely this proposal of drawing comparisons between Carlo Emilio Gadda and James Joyce. It is important to note, in fact, that Hamlet's theme has obsessed Gadda from the very beginning of his literary experiments up to his full maturity. In *Abbozzi di temi per tesi di laurea*, dating back to 1925, Gadda lists a series of *Temi quasi letterari, per una tesina* in which his very first reflections on Hamlet's figure are collected. The writer gives particular attention to the theme of doubt considered as a 'giudizio [accurato] e proceduralmente corretto'.¹¹ Almost thirty years later the writer retained the Hamletic dilemma as a 'tema difficilissimo da risolvere'.¹² As Giuseppe Stellardi has aptly noticed, it is in *Cognizione* that this model is prominently active. Gonzalo's position in the plot is similar, Stellardi argues, to Hamlet's: just as the Prince of Denmark, Gonzalo is 'in possesso ormai di inoppugnabili certezze [...]

7. See C.E. Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, edited by E. Manzotti (Einaudi: Torino, 1987), 546.

8. G.C. Roscioni, *La disarmonia prestabilita. Studi sul Gadda* (Einaudi: Torino, 1975), 19.

9. Rinaldi, 45.

10. Manzotti, *ibid.*, 208; Dombroski, *ibid.*, 75.

11. C.E. Gadda, 'Abbozzi di temi per tesi di laurea', in *Quaderni dell'ingegnere. Testi e studi gaddiani* (ed.), R. Stracuzzi, n. 4, 62.

12. C.E. Gadda, 'Intervista a più voci'. *Gadda al microfono. L'ingegnere e la Rai 1950–1955* (ed.), G. Ungarelli (Nuova ERI: Torino, 1993) 175.

che esigono azione, si trova a dover attaccare le parvenze non valide; questo è ciò che la verità inesorabilmente richiede, che la sua anima esige per affermarsi come sostanza non valida [...].¹³ The affinities become more and more evident if we consider the role played by the mother figure that operates similarly in both stories: ‘La madre, in entrambi i casi, è al centro di una ragnatela di bugie che impediscono ai due protagonisti di vivere, e fanno della vita stessa una mostruosa commedia.’¹⁴

Even if Hamlet and Gonzalo do not directly commit matricide they both submit their mothers to outrage and offence, a necessary presupposition to the triumph of the truth.

It is possible to identify a similar working of the Shakespearean pattern in *Ulysses*. Stephen Dedalus, just like Gonzalo, is subjected to a Hamletic remorse with regard to his mother. From the very beginning of the Telemachus episode, the protagonist of the novel is accused by Buck Mulligan of indirectly killing his mother: ‘—The aunt thinks you have killed your mother, he said. That’s why she won’t let me have anything to do with you [...]. —You could have knelt down, damn it, Kinch, when your dying mother asked you, Buck Mulligan said.’¹⁵ The sense of guilt will be one of Stephen’s predominant psychological characterization: from the very beginning of the novel, he will in fact consciously imitate the behaviour and the clothing of the Prince of Denmark. Thanks to the insistent questions of Mulligan, the reader is also informed about Stephen’s complex philosophical theories that he has elaborated on the Hamlet figure which confirm the protagonist’s obsession with the Shakespearean model:¹⁶ ‘It is quite simple. He proves by algebra that Hamlet’s grandson

13. G. Stellardi, ‘Amleto...’, in PGE, *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, n. 1, third edition, 2008.

14. *Ibid.*

15. J. Joyce, *Ulysses* (*The Modern Library Edition*: New York, 1992), 6.

16. Kenner has perfectly underlined Stephen’s obsession with black clothes: ‘Accordingly no other novelist is so preoccupied with clothes [...]. Stephen will imagine a Shakespearean actor dressed in “the cast-off mail of a court buck” [...] Stephen wears a “Hamlet hat”’ (H. Kenner, *Joyce’s voices* (Dalkey Archive Press: London, 1978), 60. Joyce’s preoccupation with clothes is an interesting clue that highlights the importance of the Shakespearean model in *Ulysses*. Amazingly, Gonzalo is always dressed in a Hamletic black suit: ‘Vestito appena decentemente, con scarpe accollate di capretto, nerissime, a stringhe nere’ (Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, *Ibid.*, 70), ‘Le due scarpe a punte, lucide, nerissime, parvero due pepperoni neri, per quanto capovolti, puntuti’ (71), ‘L’alta figura di lui si disegnò nera nel vano della porta-finestra, di sul terrazzo, come l’ombra di uno sconosciuto’ (265). Besides Gadda also elaborated interesting reflections on the relation Hamlet-Shakespeare that are very

is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father.'¹⁷

At the beginning of this essay I defined the structure of *Cognizione* as a *quête*. It is without doubt a search destined to remain incomplete, but maybe it is in this open structure that it will be possible to recover other interesting elements common to Joyce's and Gadda's novels. Both *Ulysses* and *Cognizione* end with the impossibility of a real reconciliation between the protagonists. The encounter between Bloom and Stephen takes place, but the two men are described as disoriented and drunk in the dregs of Dublin. Even the epiphanic hallucination of Mr Bloom's dead son in the episode of Circe is just a mute shadow that will not be able to communicate with his father:

(Silent, thoughtful, alert, he stands on guard, his fingers at his lips in the attitude of secret master. Against the dark a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page.)

BLOOM

(Wonderstruck, calls inaudibly.) Rudy!

RUDY

(Gazes unseeing into Bloom's eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling. He has a delicate mauve face. On his suit he has diamond and ruby buttons. In his free hand he holds a slim ivory cane with a violet bowknot. A white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket).¹⁸

Provocatively we could also state that *La cognizione del dolore* has a disappointing ending. The adjective expresses the *diminuendo* tone that unites this novel to the endings of *Ulysses*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Trial*. In *Cognizione* the country's dawn image repeatedly thwarts our attempt to identify the real killer of Signora and the apparition of the sun leaves the reader in a suspended and indefinite atmosphere:

similar to Joyce's: 'Se no perché lo Shakespeare avrebbe chiamato Amleto il padre e Amleto il figlio? Forse era a corto di nomi propri?' (C.E. Gadda, *Scritti vari e postumi* [eds], A. Silvestri, C. Vela, D. Isella, P. Italia, G. Pinotti, Garzanti:Milano, 2008, 562). It is natural that both Joyce's and Gadda's games between biography and tragedy were based on the real figure of Hamnet, Shakespeare's dead son.

17. Joyce, 18.

18. *Ibid.*, 243.

L'ausilio dell'arte medica, lenimento, pezzuole, dissimulò in parte l'orrore. Si udiva il residuo dell'acqua e alcool delle pezzuole strizzate ricadere gocciolando in una bacinella. E alle stecche delle persiane già l'alba. Il gallo, improvvisamente, la suscitò dai monti lontani, perentorio e ignaro, come ogni volta. La invitava ad accedere e ad elencare i gelsi, nella solitudine della campagna apparita.¹⁹

If we proceed to a more specific textual comparison, it could be possible to confirm the interpretative hypotheses just presented. One of the most symbolic moments in *Cognizione* is represented in the sixth chapter, containing a long episode of Gonzalo's stream of consciousness: mother and son are finally together inside Villa Pirobutirro after they have chased each other during the course of the first part of the novel. They are now ready for dinner, but their real encounter is still destined to fail again: in this chapter Gadda chooses to focus almost completely on mental images, which are so vivid that they seem real.

The sixth chapter of *Cognizione* does not describe an encounter between two characters, but an impossible commentary of two interiorities. Signora never talks to Gonzalo, but she interweaves an unconscious dialogue with her son in search of the origins of his grief. It is exactly at this point that the novel, just like a psychoanalytic investigation, turns to Gonzalo's interiority. It is not possible to entirely quote Gonzalo's stream of consciousness. I will try to follow the cardinal points of a highly figural writing:

Maree d'uomini e di femmine! con distinguibile galleggiamento di parrucchieri di lusso, tenitrici di case pubbliche, fabbricanti di accessori per motociclette, e coccarde. [...] E poi ancora femmine, femmine, dopo lo zinco e la Recoleta; femmine! come barchi di cabotaggio rimessi a nuovo, stradipinte, col riso delle bassaridi aperto su trantadue denti fino agli orecchi; una sottanella gualcita, di mezza lana, a tegumentare d'un mistero da diez pesos [...]. Oppure, agli antipodi, i salumai grassi, come baffuti topi, insaccatori di topi; torregianti sul marmo alto, con mannaia, i macellai-scimitarra; o paonazzi sensali, nel foro, a bociare sobre el granado; o bozzolieri in marsina tumefatti dalla prosopopea delle virtù keltikesi al completo, con undici bargigli, se pure inetti a spiccare una sola zeta dai denti: elettronecni miopi come carciofi: preti (presbiteriani) in abito di ballo, droghieri brachischelici dalle brache piene di saccarina contrabbandata; ingegneri cornuti, medici delle budella, e dei rognoni, e specialisti del perepepè: guardie giurate, ladri, gasisti, ruffiane asmatiche, stuccatori e stuccatrici d'ogni risma! [...]

19. C.E. Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 226.

La sarabanda famelica vorticava sotto i globi elettrici dondolati dal pampero, tra miriadi di sifoni di selz. [...] Tutti, tutti! Turchi, frittellari, circassi, mendicanti ghitarroni d'Andalusia, polacchi, armeni, mongoli, santoni arabi in bombetta, labbroni senegalesi dai piedi caprigni, e perfino i Langobardòi di Cormanno, immigrati di Cormanno (Curtis Manni), a battere, anche nel nuovo mondo, il primato della ottusità e della mancanza di fantasia.²⁰

Comparisons, metaphors and hyperboles are structured in a very long catalogue that articulates the entire discourse. The quoted passage demonstrates how it is no longer possible to identify clear relations between listed elements: the images follow one after another in an aggregate in which everything is on the same level. People's behaviour is described in an intense and exaggerated way. There are no confines separating Gonzalo's delirium and the realistic descriptions of Villa. External and internal realities are on the same level and this is exactly one of the five unconscious characteristics listed by Freud in his *Metapsychology*. It is important to point out the loss of boundaries between different class members: disparate nationalities mingle and become 'la sarabanda famelica' and, at the same time, 'macellai, elettrotecnicì e santoni arabi' are drawn close to various types of animals and plants as much as they assume their behaviour and their features. All these delirious images are depicted in an absolute and motionless time. Rarely, as a counterpoint to this contest, the time of the story emerges and underlines how the external scene is always fixed in the inside of Villa Pirobutirro: 'La mamma, ora, dopo essere uscita e rientrata più volte, attendeva ella pure all'impiedi, quasi tremando, le mani ricongiunte sul grembo, che il figliuolo si mettesse a tavola'.²¹ These *intermezzo* are a way in which Gadda expresses the simultaneity of Gonzalo's mental images. The reader could have the impression of travelling among infinite contexts but the time in the novel is fixed: only a few instants elapse in the chapter. By the end of this chapter Gonzalo's thoughts analogically move toward images of men in a restaurant:

Camerieri neri, nei «restaurants», avevano il frac, per quanto pieno di padelle: e il piastrone d'amido, con cravatta posticcia. [...] Signori seri, nei «restaurants» delle stazioni, e da prender sul serio, ordinavano loro con perfetta sincerità «un ossobuco con risotto». Ed essi, con cenni premurosi, annuivano. [...] Dopo di che, oggetto di stupefatta ammirazione

20. *Ibid.*, 119–131.

21. *Ibid.*, 136.

da parte degli «altri tavoli», aspiravano la prima boccata di quel fumo d'eccezione [...] E così rimanevano: il gomito appoggiato sul tavolino, la sigaretta fra medio e indice, emanando voluttuosi ghirigori; mescolati di miasmi, questo si sa, dei bronchi e dei polmoni felici [...].²²

The numerous affinities with the Lyestygonian episode are quite surprising. I am referring to the sense of disgust in watching the animal voracity of the restaurant's customers that associates Leopold Bloom to Gonzalo, but also to Joyce's and Gadda's capacity of orientating their writings between mimesis and a high rate of symmetry:

Men, men, men. | Perched on high stools by the bar, hats shoved back, at the tables calling for more bread no charge, swilling, wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food, their eyes bulging, wiping wetted moustaches. A pallid suetfaced young man polished his tumbler knife fork and spoon with his napkin. New sets of microbes. A man with an infant's saucestained napkin tucked round him shovelled gurgling soup down his gullet. A man spitting back on his plate: halfmasticated gristle: no teeth to chewchewchew it. Choum chop from the grill. Bolting to get it over. Sad booser's eyes. Bitten off more than he can chew. Am I like that? See ourselves as others see us. Hungry man is an angry man. Working tooth and jaw. [...] Smells of men. His gorge rose. Spaton sawdust, sweetish warmish cigarette smoke, reek of plug, split beer, men's beery piss, the stale of ferment.²³

In the Joycean episode, the customers in the restaurants seem monstrous and cruel beings that eat their kind like cannibals. In an analogous vein, in *Cognizione* the act of eating is so characterizing that it transforms the characters described in the restaurant into 'manichini ossobuchivori'. It seems that the narration, focalized inside Gonzalo's delirium, creates a hyperrealism in which everything is potentially recordable, even the peristalsis of the fellow dinner:

mentre che lo stomaco era messo in giulebbe, e andava dietro come un disperato ameboide a mantrugiare e a peptonizzare l'ossobuco. La peristalsi veniva via con un andazzo trionfale, da parer canto e trionfo, e presagio lontano di tamburo, la marcia trionfale dell'Aida o il toreador della Carmen.²⁴

22. *Ibid.*, 140–145.

23. Joyce, 169.

24. Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 146.

The refined literary reference creates the effect of an entanglement because it is evocative of the description of the digestive process, an intimate and negligible particular of the everyday life that is superfluous from a purely literary point of view. It is the same literary effect that Joyce achieves with the description of Leopold Bloom in the Calypso episode: this illustrates how the modernist narrations of Joyce and Gadda are intimately related: 'Quietly he read, restraining himself, the first column and, yielding but resisting, began the second. Midway, his last resistance yielding, he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read, reading still patiently, that slight constipation of yesterday quite gone.'²⁵

The opening chapter of the Second Part of *Cognizione* is apparently the only symbolic passage of the text. The stylistic register moves on high and lyrical tones and the real protagonist of the story is finally introduced: Signora, Gonzalo's mother. The whole fifth chapter is focused on the description of the symbolic descent of the lady into the domestic nether world of the villa. The thought of the woman is constantly addressed to her first son, who died during the First World War, and who seems to accompany her during the diegesis. The darkness of the scene seems almost tangible: it is the blackness of the motionless present time. In Gadda's novel it is customary for expressions describing the stillness of time to be linked with black as a chromatic constant. Lighting a match, that for an instant brightens up the surrounding darkness, seems to be an objective correlative of thwarted hope. I believe that in this novel, even at such a dramatic moment, there is no space for epiphany that would have allowed the characters to recover their own past. The protagonists of *Cognizione* walk in the waste land of twentieth-century allegory where things are only things, the Montalian 'cocci aguzzi di bottiglia' are absent, and it is no longer conceivable to rip the dusty and dysphoric veil that lies on the surface of the text. I will define this kind of obscure allegory with the Gaddian periphrasis 'atti tutti adempiuti': it is no longer possible for the characters to critically recover their past in order to build a present identity. This writing is incredibly close, formally and thematically, to Joyce's literary solutions in the Third Part of *Ulysses*. If the smell of putrid cabbages was still able to penetrate Stephen epiphanically in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, showing him the emptiness of his own existence, the objects in the final part of *Ulysses* have a compact and impenetrable form: they are just catalogues according to which that laceration in the characters' interiority is not possible. In the Nighthtown

25. Joyce, 69.

section Joyce no longer seems able to constitute a dynamic relationship between objects: his description of reality is usually pulverized in long paratactic listings in which no object deserves to comment on the others. In *Ithaca*, for example, Stephen and Mr Bloom finally come home and this chapter appears to be completely objective. The whole episode is in fact structured on an empty series of questions and answers capable of creating a deeply disconcerting effect on the reader.²⁶

What did Bloom see on the range?

On the right (smaller) hob a blue enamelled saucepan: on the left (larger) hob a black iron kettle.

What did Bloom do at the range?

He removed the saucepan from the left hob, rose and carried the iron kettle to the sink in order to tap the current by turning the faucet to let it flow.

[...]

What concomitant phenomenon took place in the vessel of liquid by the agency of fire?

The phenomenon of ebullition. Fanned by a constant up-draught of ventilation between the kitchen and the chimney-flue, ignition was communicated from the faggots of precombustible fuel to polyhedral masses of bituminous coal, [...]²⁷

The binary structure of question/answer is overloaded by mathematics, physics and thermodynamic notions, expressed in the form of long lists. These unnecessary objects never open a laceration in the characters' interiority, the way they do, on the contrary, in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* as analyzed by Auerbach. Objects leave just traces of pure matter on the page, and they are described in an increasingly independent and impersonal language. The characters, placed within this non significant and non communicative context, are destined to explode in a multiplicity of contradictions. As we have seen, Gadda uses a similar literary technique when he describes Gonzalo's delirium. The mind images of the protagonist of *Cognizione* are violently unleashed on the page: objects, persons, animals are all the detritus of a death allegorical reality in which it is impossible to hypothesize any luminous epiphanic rip.

26. See F. Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (Verso: New York 2007), 167.

27. Joyce, 670–673.

It is Stephen himself that gives a definition of this new kind of art, so distant from the spiritual epiphany that Joyce was abandoning after his *Portrait*. In a dialogue with Mr Deasy, Stephen offers an allegory of a new poetics whose *radiance* is oriented only in contemplating things and their *quidditas*:

He came forward a pace and stood by the table. His under-jaw fell sideways open uncertainly. In this old wisdom? He waits to hear from me.

History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake. From the playfield the boys raised a shout. A whirring whistle: goal. What if that nightmare gave you a back kick?

The ways of the Creator are not our ways, Mr Deasy said. All history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God.

Stephen jerked his thumbs towards the window, saying:

That is God.

Hooray! Ay! Whttwhee!

What? Mr Deasy asked.

A shout in the street, Stephen answered, shrugging his shoulders.²⁸

Cognizione is not a novel that leaves much room for epiphanies. All the events have already taken place, the causes of Gonzalo's grief are not part of the story and even when they reappear in the present time, they do so through flashes and glimpses without mediation. The tense of memories, when a critical self-awareness would have been possible, or at least a dialectic confrontation with one's own past, is replaced by an almost motionless time where sudden traumas make their painful appearance. It is no longer an epiphanic time, but rather it is the time of the modern allegory, simply reduced to disphoric debris. Therefore *La cognizione del dolore* is a novel that has no evolving characters, just monads that are projected onto a motionless horizon where one no longer can recreate 'il tempo degli atti possibili' and live, critically, with one's own grief. In this literary context it is not possible to think of any sudden spiritual revelation. In Joyce's *The Dead*, for example, the sound of a melody during a Christmas party radically upsets the life of Gretta and Gabriel, bringing about the epiphanic re-emergence of the dead fiancé Gabriel Fury. Such a negative upheaval is no longer conceivable in *Cognizione*. Any attempt to recover the past—'favilla dolorosa del tempo'—is continuously destined to be thwarted by motionless time. Crucial evidence

28. *Ibid.*, 34.

of such a new poetics is contained in the penultimate chapter of the novel in which Gonzalo, surrounded by a group of *peones* that crowd the villa, abandons himself to his mental visions. Just like the model of *The Dead*, a childhood melody simultaneously connects past and present:

Una musichetta nasale veniva fuori dal perno del macchinone, secoli di musica e bisognava fare onore alla tradizione musicale, come se la Miseria avesse preso il raffreddore. Più tardi negli anni quella musica celestiale gli ritornò con gocce di luna tersissime, ed era la Norma....Ma allora dalla giostra gli pareva la musica del cenciume, del naso brodoso, della rivolta, dei torroni, dei colpi di gomito, delle frittelle, delle arachidi brustolite che precipitano il mal di pancia alle merde.²⁹

The epiphany, however, remains only a possibility and nothing else, it is annulled by the immense 'sciocchezzaio' of the past years. The passage quoted is a sample of paralysis without epiphany: the evoked images are just a 'scialo di triti fatti', dusty and empty, listed in a descendent hyperbolic movement that ends with the lowest degree: 'precipitano il mal di pancia alle merde.' Without time any recovery of lost circumstances is not conceivable. The Hamletic incapability of acting influences the entire structure of *Cognizione*: any recovery of classical and literary references does not lead to tragedy and is in explicit contradiction to modern life. Gadda's and Joyce's writings recall one another in their use of the myth as an authoritative model that at the same time has to be superseded.

This attempt to compare *Ulysses* and *Cognizione* is only the beginning of a critical discourse that should be examined more closely. Even if there is no biographical evidence of any type of contact between these two writers, I believe that their common attempt to overcome the symbol and the poetics of epiphany in order to embrace the obscure twentieth-century allegory brings them much closer than has ever been taken into consideration. It is evidently true as Di Martino writes, that 'Il bisogno di riscattare il valore etico della propria opera deve cioè aver spinto Gadda a rivendicare il suo legame col passato realistico ottocentesco, facendogli negare invece l'affiliazione con la scrittura moderna',³⁰ but it is an undeniable fact that in the long list of authors read and quoted by Gadda—

29. Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 180–183.

30. L. Di Martino, 'Gadda-Joyce', PGE, «The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies», n. 4, 69.

Shakespeare, Shaw, Dickens, Swift, Baudelaire and Dostoevskij—Joyce has a relevant place among them. I think it is suggestive that even if the stylistic differences between Gadda and Joyce are macroscopic, their literary trajectory follows similar aesthetic paths. These affinities are proof of what can still be unearthed on Gadda: a high modernist writer able to engage with the most important representatives of world literature.

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