Regeneration in Gadda's *Pasticciaccio*

Rodica Diaconescu-Blumenfeld

In his essay "Lingua letteraria e lingua dell'uso," Gadda writes:

I doppioni¹ li voglio, tutti, per mania di possesso e per cupidigia di ricchezza: e voglio anche i triploni, e i quadruplioni, sebbene il Re Cattolico non li abbia ancora monetati e tutti i sinonimi, usati nelle loro variegate accezioni e sfumature, d'uso corrente, o d'uso rarissimo . . . Non esistono il troppo né il vano per una lingua. (*I viaggi* 95)

Gadda's double is many things.² In the matrix of the *Pasticciaccio* the two's three moments cohere. We find in the double a model both of gender polarity and of mimesis, but the double's originary paradigm remains necessarily the self-reflexivity of consciousness itself. Every instance of the double calls forth an association to alter ego. To think is to become another self. Writing is such a process of self-reflection, and in the measure that self-knowledge is narcissism,³ Gadda forces proliferation. Greedy for reality, he coins the triples and quadruples, attempting to write his way out of the bind of self-awareness. It is the world he wants to express, the world he wants to get into words.⁴

The grotesque dynamism of ornamentation in these multiples has earned for Gadda the epithet 'baroque.' Gadda himself responded to this, saying, "barocco è il mondo, e il Gadda ne ha percepito e ritratto la barocagine" (*La cognizione* 482).⁵ Ego and alter ego, self and self reflected as world, then world and reflected world, a world become the stuff of self: mimetic alienation repeats the close of the *cogito*. In the space of the doubled self Gadda inscribes a world, itself the double of the world he wills to write. Further, mimesis (with its dynamics of both narcissism and sadism) can be shown to have in the *Pasticciaccio* a definite relation to the feminine. The women of the novel function as locus of the crisis of representation. Gadda declares that he will create woman from his own psyche,⁶ but the novel would seem to show Gadda reading his own narrative desire as violence. His attempts to represent feminine subjectivity, to represent its unrepresentability, force him to explore gender polarity at every level of textuality.

Multiplication begins with the double and for the world (as for the reproduction of the world), the "uomini . . . e donne" of Ingravallo's epistemology form the primary double. Thus Gadda's theme/motif of the double also is, in all its manifestations, a gender effect, a formulation and reformulation of the question, what is the difference between men and women?, the original double, and origin

of Gadda's question, what does it mean that a human being is double?⁷ A particular case of narrative and stylistic proliferation, the double presents itself throughout the novel. The *Pasticciaccio*'s plot centers around two crimes that are committed in the same building, the theft of Countess Menegazzi's jewels and Liliana's murder. The palace of the sharp-dealers has two stairways, A and B, with two apartments on each floor. After the crimes, various women living in neighboring buildings play the double number in the Naples lottery (which, by chance, comes out instead in Bari) (86), and then go on to play it, banking on the mysterious connection between crime and luck, "a le mejo rote" (141) around the nation. The dyeress/whore Zamira's workshop/tavern is located at Due Santi (associated by some locals with testicles). There, in this village, can be seen a faded mural of a saintly pair, marked by two strikingly phallic toes. In Maresciallo Santarella's house there are two plaster cats, both toms, "partoriti . . . da un maschio lucchese" (155). On special assignment to Milan, while pursuing two gentlemen, both of whom are named Salvatore, Santarella buys and brings home a radio with two valves.

Again, Maresciallo Santarella is matched to his subordinate, Brigadiere Pestalozzi (not by chance do these two rural centaurs tend to merge in the reader's mind), and together they form a half of the more important double of historiography. It is through Pestalozzi's reflections that the double historiography is introduced: the urban police, he thinks,

si ciba appunto di storie: in concorrenza coi carabinieri. Ognuna delle due organizzazioni vorrebbe monopolizzare le storie, anzi addirittura la Storia. Ma la Storia è una sola!⁸ (146)

Nonetheless, "sono capaci di spaccarla in due: un pezzo per uno: con un processo di degeminazione, di sdoppiamento amebico: metà me metà te" (146). The word *degeminazione* is haunted by its double. Here it means the production of duplicates. The *de-* intensifies duplication, but morphematically might as well undo it. The amoebae splits in two, but into two ones.

L'unicità della Storia si deroga in una doppia storiografia, si devolve in salmo e in antifona, s'invasa in due contrastanti certezze: il rapporto della questura, il rapporto dei carabinieri. (146)

Then there are the quasi-doubles of the novel, characters whose identities blur, whose specificities seem to dissolve in the tangled threads of the plot. Already introduced are the motorcycle-riding Santarella and Pestalozzi. Two maids, with hypersemanticized names, Virginia and Assunta, become difficult to hold distinct. Two suspected criminals, Enea Retalli and Diomede Lanciani seem, at times, to run together in the narrative.

One technique Gadda employs for such pseudogeminations is the liberal addition of interpretive red herrings. We note that Diomede has a brother Ascanio, who, as son of mythic Aeneas, relates Diomede to Enea. While the patterning of

Roman myth coheres in a general reading, at the level of specific interconnections, these resonances are surd.⁹ The pairing of Diomede and Enea exists for the pairing alone. There are other connections of this kind, ironic and mess-making, and this is really the nature of these blurrings. The so-called nieces/prostitutes of Zamira's "laboratory" (among whom, two cousins, Camilla and Lavinia Mattonari) double the so-called nieces of Liliana Balducci, establishing the double relation whore/Madonna between Zamira and Liliana. This use of blurring is continuous with the parallels between characters, such as, among the very many (major or minor), between the prostitute Ines Cionini and Commendatore Angeloni, both victims of institutionalized violence.

The double as subtext, again, is the site of closure and non-totalizability. Because the point about the double is that in it both sameness and difference operate. All genres of duplication, pairs, replications, oppositions thematize a 'metaphysics' of same and different. Thus, Assunta's dying father, in his own person, evokes the double: "Non si capiva s'era un vivo o s'era un morto: s'era un omo o una donna" (383).

A central and most flagrant example of the double, one that iterates the permeation gender and representation (the other double), and one that symbolizes the frustration of identity, is the dead chicken brought to the police station to stand in for the dead chicken stolen earlier. In a book filled with chickens and chicken metaphors, this is the first appearance of an actual chicken; its significance is thus emphasized. This original chicken was stolen by the derelict Ines from a woman vendor in Piazza Vittoria. She, "p'illuminà la polizzia," brings to the station "un pollo-campione . . . simile in tutto al collega resosi irreperibile tre giorni prima" (145). There is an absolute literalism in proposing to represent one dead chicken¹⁰ by another, and there is this representation's complete failure, since it is not the same chicken. And again, Gadda's gluttony makes for an added pleasure — yet another example of failure of identity: at the police station, a pair of shoes is also provided by another woman vendor to represent the pair stolen with the chicken by Ines: they are both lefts!¹¹

This last set of doubles links conclusively the problematic of representation to that of gender, specifically, to that of the difference of woman. Analeptically, the reader finds in this incident the closing of Gadda's meditation on representation begun with Ines. Her interrogation by a roomful of policemen, all staring at her disheveled but stupendous body and projecting onto her their desires and need of knowledge, is part of a series of instances of what could be called female resistance, theorized in the novel itself as female "non-confiteor" (127). Like Liliana in death, Ines ultimately resists objectification. In Brigadiere Pestalozzi's dream, the whore Zamira/Circe is portrayed as sexually impenetrable and represents the "tenebra . . . dove i nomi si diradano" (267). And finally, at the novel's close and offering a stronger closure than any solution to the crime, the furious "piega nera" in the brow of Assunta paralyzes Ingravallo, blocking his epistemic assault.¹²

Gadda's representation of the unrepresentability of women's integrity as desiring subjects inscribes his own resistance to the setting up of difference between men and women. Liliana Balducci is dead, Ingravallo's idea of Liliana is dead, and Gadda's own work, his doubling of the world, an impossibility, because there is no doubling, only the double, the triple, the quadruple, and so on into a mess of threads and differences.

Vassar College

NOTES

- 1 The Italian *doppione*, meaning "duplicate, double" and also "doubloon," is used by Gadda as a model for his own coinage of *triploni*, and *quadruplioni*.
- 2 Darby Tench in her 1985 essay offers a critique of a dualistic reading of the *Pasticciaccio*, asserting that in the novel the "process of polarization turns against itself." Here I would affirm her statements on the "duplicity" of duality, but argue that duality is not merely a trap for the "casual reader of Gadda's works," but the initiatory opposition against which every turn twists. Perhaps my interpretation of the novel might be understood as mediating between Carla Benedetti's reflections on representation and irrepresentability in *Una trappola di parole*, and Tench's criticism of Benedetti's fall into dialectic.
- 3 Gadda writes that he consciously takes care to avoid "ogni slittamento verso innovazioni meramente narcisistiche," but he admits "con orrore," that neither his life, nor certainly his writing, is exempted from narcissistic projections (*I viaggi* 21).
- 4 On Gadda's 'oral excess,' in relation to naturalism and experimentalism, see Ragusa 143.
- 5 In "L'Editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'Autore" that served as preface to the 1963 edition of *La cognizione del dolore*. I believe that Gadda's response would tend to undercut interpretation of Gadda as baroque in the technical sense. Maurizio De Benedictis mistakes the applicability to Gadda of Deleuze's category of "le pli".
- 6 "Un romanzo! Con dei personaggi femmine! Con quel po' po' di pratica che Cristo gli aveva fatto fare, tanto che non intorpidisse, della psiche umana! Della psiche! E anche della sua stessa" (*La cognizione* 420)
- 7 For a discussion about the *distinguo* between characters, and between men and women specifically, and for the modifications introduced in the text of the novel of 1957 in contrast to the earlier version of the chapters published in *Letteratura* in 1945-46, see Andreini 105-25.
- 8 If it were Gadda's claim that history is one, this would bear on the issue of an essential monism in his works, but since, as I believe, this is an instance of ironic citation of pseudo-intellectual activity (Pestalozzi's), then we have here precisely a critique of monism. On Gadda's "monism" and his use of Leibniz, see Roscioni; and Risset.
- 9 Tench gives a fine reading of the narrative blinds created by Gadda's doubles in the context of Roman mythology.
- 10 With this chicken, Gadda mocks his own concern with representing life: though dead, "se vede che j'aveva preso paura, forse, e aveva fatto la cacca . . . sur tavoluccio de Paolillo" (145).
- 11 In our conversations, Lucia Lermond suggested that this reflection on the nature of representation, is one among many Gaddian Leibniz jokes, here playing on the Identity of Indiscernibles.

- 12 The relation of the "piega nera" to the theme of castration at the sight of the female genitalia, while only suggested here by the Zamira/Circe connection, is powerfully present in the novel itself.

WORKS CITED

- Andreini, Alba. *Studi e testi gaddiani*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1988.
- Benedetti, Carla. *Una trappola di parole: lettura del Pasticciaccio*. Pisa: ETS, 1980.
- De Benedictis, Maurizio. *La piega nera. Groviglio stilistico ed enigma della femminilità in C. E. Gadda*. Anzio: De Rubeis, 1991.
- Deleuze, Giles. *Le Pli. Leibnitz et le baroque*. Paris: Minuit, 1988.
- Gadda, Carlo Emilio. *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. Milano: Garzanti, 1957. Critical edition in *Romanzi e racconti*. Ed. Dante Isella. Vol. 2. Milano: Garzanti, 1989.
- _____. *I viaggi la morte*. Milano: Garzanti, 1958.
- _____. *La cognizione del dolore*. Torino: Einaudi, 1963. Critical edition with commentaries and unpublished fragments by Emilio Manzotti. Torino: Einaudi, 1987.
- _____. *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*. Trans. William Weaver. Introduction by Italo Calvino. New York: George Braziller Inc., 1965.
- _____. *Acquainted with Grief*. Trans. William Weaver. New York: George Braziller Inc., 1969.
- Ragusa, Olga. "Gadda, Pasolini, and Experimentalism." *Narrative and Drama: Essays in Modern Italian Literature from Verga to Pasolini*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1976. 134-54.
- Risset, Jacqueline. "C.E. Gadda ou la philosophie à l'envers." *Critique* 282 (1970): 944-51.
- Roscioni, Gian Carlo. *La disarmonia prestabilita: studio su Gadda*. Torino: Einaudi, 1969.
- Tench, Darby. "Quel Nome Storia: Naming and History in Gadda's *Pasticciaccio*." *Stanford Italian Review* 5:2 (1985): 205-17.