Title

The Fold & the Limit: Baroque Revival & Anti-Fascist Resistance in Modern Italian Literature

Author

Tumolo, Joseph John

Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Fold & the Limit:

Baroque Revival & Anti-Fascist Resistance

in Modern Italian Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

by

Joseph Tumolo

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Fold & the Limit:

Baroque Revival & Anti-Fascist Resistance in Modern Italian Literature

by

Joseph Tumolo

Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Lucia Re, Co-Chair

Professor Jon R. Snyder, Co-Chair

The rediscovery of the Baroque at the turn of the twentieth century revolutionized Italian culture, and the Italian Novecento has been called a "new Baroque." The present study, *The Fold & the Limit: Baroque Revival & Anti-Fascist Resistance in Modern Italian Literature*, investigates how and why three major Italian writers—Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893-1973), and Anna Maria Ortese (1914-1998)—reimagined the baroque aesthetic. Engaging with an array of early modern art and architecture, these key modernist writers, I argue, made recourse to a version of what Gilles Deleuze has identified as an essential trait of the Baroque: "the fold." Building on the work of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Deleuze conceives of the baroque fold as linking together all of space and matter in difference; the baroque universe extends seamlessly and flexibly, bending and twisting into countless folds like a piece of cloth. As this "fabric" folds and unfolds, it continuously generates new figures and perspectives without ever fixing limits or borders, or tearing apart into fragments. Through their dialogue with the baroque visual field, and

by deploying versions of the differential fold in their texts, the writers examined in my dissertation reinvent the baroque model specifically in opposition to the limits violently imposed by the fascist regime on sex gender, class, race, and even on urban space. More broadly, thanks to their folded visions of the real, which subvert all normative boundaries of perception and representation, these authors come to expose and resist the oppression and violence of the modern logic of the limit.

This dissertation is motivated by three main objectives. While there is much excellent work on the neo-Baroque in Italian literature, studies to date have largely treated the topic in terms of shared forms, themes, and tropes. My first objective, therefore, is to understand whether, beyond these concerns, there is a broadly shared approach to artistic and literary representation that prompted the authors studied herein to return to the Baroque. Through careful analysis of Gadda's, Ungaretti's, and Ortese's writings on baroque artists and artworks, I show that they each came to conceive of the real and all it comprises as a fold that is essentially incommensurate with the finitude of representation. Second, I aim to understand how these authors—in various ways—revised and incorporated this fold into their practice of literary writing or in their articulations of their respective approaches to literature. Finally, with this study, I will probe why the visual art of the Baroque in particular appealed to the three modernists under examination. Against the prevailing stereotype of the Baroque as an aesthetic of power, these authors identified in *barocchismo* a kind of representational freedom and an aesthetic strategy for exposing and critiquing the purported "triumph" of a limiting, striating, and hierarchizing vision in modernity.

The dissertation of Joseph Tumolo is approved.

Thomas J. Harrison

Bronwen Wilson

Lucia Re, Committee Co-Chair

Jon R. Snyder, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks go out to the co-chairs of my dissertation committee, Professors Lucia Re and Jon Snyder, who consistently challenged me to grow and improve as a writer and researcher. I am ever grateful to them for their generosity and for the countless hours they dedicated to guiding me through publications, presentations, and especially this dissertation project. Alongside my co-chairs, I am fortunate to have had two highly attentive readers in my committee members, Professors Thomas Harrison and Bronwen Wilson. I am thankful to them for their insightful feedback and for the careful attention with which they read this study.

To my dearest friends, Nina and Magdalena, your sincere and loyal friendship has been a precious gift both on and off campus. You sustained me through the inevitable challenges, and multiplied my happiness as we celebrated our milestones.

The support of my family was and is still precious. I owe so very much especially to my parents; I am always more appreciative of the myriad opportunities they provided me to explore my interests, and for the equally important discipline necessary to discern in them a meaningful path forward. Lastly to Iryna: from Connecticut to California your steadfast work ethic has been an excellent model and your unwavering love my most vital support.

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

University of Connecticut 2016
M.A., Italian Literary and Cultural Studies
Graduate Certificate in College Instruction

Fordham University 2014
B.A., Major in Italian Language and Literature
Minors in Philosophy and Creative Writing

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

"Reflections on Photography & Race in Kym Ragusa's *The Skin Between Us*." *Italian American Review*. (Forthcoming).

"Reinventing the Baroque in Anna Maria Ortese's *L'Iguana*." *Italian Quarterly*. (Forthcoming).

"Towards a Feminist and Literary Neo-Avant-Garde: Carla Vasio's Experimental Fiction." *California Italian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2019) (Co-authored with Lucia Re).

"Arturo Bandini's Eclectic Identities in John Fante's *Ask the Dust*." *VIA: Voices in Italian Americana* 29, no. 1 (2018): 15-31.

AWARDS, HONORS, & GRANTS

Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA 2021
University Fellowship, Summer Research Funding, UCLA 2021
Giovanni Cecchetti Graduate Award, UCLA 2020
University Fellowship, Summer Research Funding, UCLA 2020
Giovanni Cecchetti Graduate Award, UCLA 2019
University Fellowship, UCLA 2019
John D. Calandra Italian American Institute Italian Diaspora Studies Summer School Fellowship 2019
Instructional Improvement Stipend, Office of Instructional Development, UCLA 2018
Graduate Research Mentorship, Yearlong Research Fellowship, UCLA 2018
Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Grant, UCLA 2018
The Casola Prize, Patrons of Italian Culture Los Angeles 2017
Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Grant, UCLA 2017
Regents Stipend, UCLA 2017
Departmental Fellowship, UCLA Department of Italian 2016
Mellon Fellowship of Distinction, UCLA 2016
Italian American Studies Association Annual Conference Travel Subsidy 2015
Graduate Award for Outstanding Scholarship (University of Connecticut) 2015

Member of Phi Beta Kappa 2014
Istituto Italiano di Cultura Award (Fordham University) 2014

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Papers Presented

"Anti-Fascism & the City in Anna Maria Ortese's *Il porto di Toledo*," Pacific Ancient and Modern Languages Association (PAMLA) Conference (upcoming) 2022

"The Baroque Fold in Anna Maria Ortese's *L'Iguana*," California Interdisciplinary Consortium of Italian Studies (CICIS) Conference 2021

"Race, Trauma, and the Image in Kym Ragusa's *The Skin Between Us*," MLA Convention 2021

"*Coincidentia oppositorum*: Baroque Aesthetics and the Castrati Singers," Canadian Association for Italian Studies Conference 2019

"Italian Modernism & Latin America: Carlo Emilio Gadda's Colonial Venture in Argentina," American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting 2019

"Giudizio: The Margins, Power, and Culture in Fellini's *Amarcord*," Pacific Ancient and Modern Languages Association (PAMLA) Conference 2016

"The Mafioso as Other: Mass Media, the Mafia, & the Displacement of Italian-American Alterity," Italian American Studies Association Annual Conference 2016

"A Conflicted Self: A Reading of Diverging Narratives of Values & Identity in John Fante's *Ask the Dust*," Italian American Studies Association Annual Conference 2015

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Fellow, University of California, Los Angeles 2017-2021

Teaching Associate Consultant, University of California, Los Angeles 2018

Teaching Assistant, University of Connecticut 2014-2016

Visiting Lecturer of Italian, Trinity College 2016

Introduction:
The Return of the Baroque

In 1888, Heinrich Wölfflin published his seminal *Renaissance and Baroque*, a study of post-Renaissance Roman architecture, and the first major scholarly work to treat the art of the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not as an aberration in the history of Western culture but as a subject worthy of substantive modern critical attention. Since the eighteenth century, the term "Baroque" had been overwhelmingly used to deride and dismiss artworks of the tardo Cinquecento-Seicento as "bizarre," "excessive," and "unsightly."[1] Following the publication of Wölfflin's monograph, all of this quickly changed. In Italy, in the following year, Gabriele D'Annunzio published *Il piacere* whose protagonist, Andrea Sperelli, is an *appassionato* of Rome's baroque art and architecture; in particular, D'Annunzio's narrator reveals that Sperelli "avrebbe voluto scrivere [un libro] sul Bernini."[2] Bernini soon became a figure of great interest and in 1898 a series of celebrations were organized in Rome to commemorate the 300th anniversary of his birth.[3] In the following years, a great many early modern artists whose importance today goes unchallenged emerged for the first time from centuries of obscurity. The year 1906 saw the first piece of scholarship published on Annibale Carracci;[4] in 1911, the young Roberto Longhi

[1] As early as 1797, the critic Francesco Milizia provided the following definition of "Baroque" in the *Dizionario delle belle arti del disegno*: "BAROCCO è il superlativo del bizzarro, l'eccesso del ridicolo." See Francesco Milizia, *Dizionario delle belle arti del disegno. Tomo primo* (Bassano, 1797), 90. In the Novecento. The most vehement and influential opponent of the Baroque was certainly Benedetto Croce who, in *La storia dell'età barocca in Italia* (1928) described the baroque aesthetic as "cattivo gusto," and argued that it was the sign of a society in a state of moral decay. See Benedetto Croce, *La storia dell'età barocca in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1967).

[2] For more on D'Annunzio's engagement with the Baroque, see Laura Moure Cecchini, *Baroquemania. Italian Visual Culture and the Construction of National Identity 1898-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 19-26 and Luca Cottini, "D'Annunzio, Bernini, and the Baroque Prelude of *Il Piacere*," *Forum Italicum* 51, no. 2 (2017): 335-355.

[3] Cecchini, *Baroquemania*, 36-44.

[4] Hans Tietze, "Annibale Carraccis Galerie im Palazzo Farnese und seine römische Werkstätte," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen* XXVI (1906-1907): 49-182.

completed his thesis on the works of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio; and, in 1916, the same Longhi published a path-breaking article on Artemisia Gentileschi. On April 20, 1922, only several months before the fascist March on Rome, the massive "Mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento" opened in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.[5] The exhibition, which collected over 1,000 artworks, was one of the highest profile cultural events of its time, with King Vittorio Emanuele III present at its inauguration. In the matter of just a couple of decades, the Baroque's reputation had been transformed. No more was baroque art a half-remembered object of scorn; instead it had become a much admired and widely discussed topic in the intellectual and cultural milieux of Italy and Europe more broadly.

In much of the scholarship at this time, there is a recurring claim that the art and culture of the Baroque are deeply relevant to modernity.[6] About halfway through his study, Wölfflin declares that, "One can hardly fail to recognize the affinity that our own age bears in particular to the Italian baroque. A *Richard Wagner* appeals to the same emotions: 'Ertrinken—versinken—unbewusst—höchste Lust!' His conception of art shows a complete correspondence with those of the baroque and it is not by coincidence that Wagner harks back to Palestrina: *Palestrina* is the contemporary

[5] For more on the exhibition see: Filippo Mucciante, Giada Policicchio, Mariella Stillitano, "La mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento. Rilettura e riscoperta di uno stile: il Barocco," in *Mostre a Firenze 1911-1942. Nuove indagini per un itinerario tra arte e cultura*, ed. Cristiano Giometti (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2019), 41-56.

[6] This is an enduring aspect of scholarship on the Baroque. Figures including Walter Benjamin (*The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*), Umberto Eco (*Opera aperta*), Gillo Dorfles (*Elogio della disarmonia*), Gilles Deleuze (*The Fold*), Christine Buci-Glucksmann (*Raison Baroque. De Baudelaire à Benjamin* and *La folie du voir. Une esthétique du virtuel*), and Omar Calabrese (*Il Neobarocco. Forma e dinamiche della cultura contemporanea*) have all suggested that the Baroque is, in varying ways, essentially modern. In turn, these thinkers may be seen as countering a longstanding tendency in the study of art to conceive of the Baroque as existing in opposition to modernity. As Paul A. Kottman points out, this view finds its origins in the writings of influential figures like J.J. Winckelmann, who, "faced with the [...] need to connect classical art to the demands of the present," saw only "historical discontinuity in Baroque Rome and its view of the classical past." See Paul A. Kottman, "The Claim of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy and Early Modern Artistry," in *The Insistence of Art. Aesthetic Philosophy after Early Modernity*, ed. Paul A. Kottman (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 11.

of the baroque style."[7] Likewise, in *Il piacere*, D'Annunzio suggests that Bernini's art is a kind of forbear to his own; Sperelli's book on the architect and sculptor, the narrator says, would be a "grande studio di decadenza."[8] Just a few years later, in 1894, the influential critic, Enrico Nencioni—D'Annunzio's mentor—gave a lecture in Florence entitled, "Barocchismo," in which he argued that, "Noi siamo tutti oggi un po' […] *barocchi*."[9] Longhi also saw in the Baroque a certain relevance to contemporary art, and famously compared Cubism and Futurism to the Renaissance and Baroque respectively: "Il problema del futurismo rispetto al cubismo," he wrote in 1913, "è quello del Barocco, che mette in moto le masse del Rinascimento."[10] The rediscovery of the Baroque, one of the most important cultural events of the first half of the Italian Novecento, was thus motivated in large part by the ways in which scholars and artists identified the culture of the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries as a predecessor to their own.

This dissertation examines how, in this context, three major modernist Italian authors—Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893-1973), Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), and Anna Maria Ortese (1914-1998)—appropriated and revised the baroque aesthetic in their literary writing. I have chosen these three writers in particular because each expressly identified the visual art of the Baroque as a model for their own work. While Gadda was famously devoted to the paintings of Caravaggio, which he likely first saw at the aforementioned 1922 exhibition in Florence, Ungaretti identified the baroque architecture of Rome as a key muse for his poetry. For her part, Ortese was interested in the Spanish

[7] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and* Baroque, trans. Katrin Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 87.

[8] Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il piacere*, in *Prose di romanzi*, Vol. I, eds. Annamaria Andreoli and Ezio Raimondi (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 156.

[9] Enrico Nencioni, "Barocchismo," in *Saggi critici di Letteratura italiana* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1898), 140. Emphasis in original. See also Cecchini, *Baroquemania*, 31-36.

[10] For more, see Laura Moure Cecchini, "Baroque Futurism: Roberto Longhi, the Seventeenth Century, and the Avant-Garde," *The Art Bulletin* 101, no. 2 (2019): 29-53 and the third chapter of *Baroquemania*.

Baroque, and especially in the images of El Greco and Diego Velázquez. In their dialogues with baroque art, I argue that each of these writers made recourse to a respective version of what Gilles Deleuze has identified as an essential trait of the Baroque: "the fold." Building on the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Deleuze conceives of the baroque fold as linking together all of space and matter in difference; the baroque universe extends seamlessly and flexibly, bending and twisting into countless folds like a piece of cloth. This universe can never be perceived in its totality, and that which the subject does not consciously perceive is merely folded away beyond its own field of awareness. As such, as this "fabric" folds and unfolds, it continuously generates new figures and perspectives without ever fixing boundaries or borders to its domain, or tearing apart into fragments. This element of Leibniz's thought, as Sjoerd van Tuinen and Niamh McDonnell point out, is especially interesting to Deleuze for the way in which it "challenges the ontology and the logic of the limit";[11] as I will argue, this is what motivated Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese to embrace the Baroque. If, as Benedetto Croce (incidentally one of the Baroque's most ardent detractors) famously wrote, "Il bisogno pratico […] conferisce a ogni storia il carattere di 'storia contemporanea,'" then the practical need that the authors in question address in their return to the Baroque is that of contesting the excesses of the modern logic of the limit, and specifically the limits violently imposed by the fascist regime.[12] These writers thus deploy the baroque fold to take aim at Fascism's lacerating and compartmentalizing ideology, and particularly the schemas and hierarchies that it sought to impose on the categories of gender, sex, race, class, and even urban space in Italy.

[11] Sjoerd van Tuinen and Niamh McDonnell, "Introduction," in *Deleuze and the Fold. A Critical Reader* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-24, 8.

[12] Benedetto Croce, *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (Bari: Laterza Editore, 1966), 11.

This may at first seem counterintuitive given that the art of the Baroque is still often stereotyped as a mere instrument of elite and state power. While scholars like José Antonio Maravall are certainly right to note the close relationship between wealthy, influential patrons and baroque artists, it is also important to account for what Jon Snyder has called the "the paradoxical situation of the Seicento, in which a radically transgressive aesthetic was often—although not always—in the service of those who held tightly to the reins of power."[13] Baroque art encompasses not only breathtakingly innovative palaces, churches, and *piazze* like Bernini's colonnade in St. Peter's Square or Borromini's Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza and San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, but also highly subversive works like Ferrante Pallavicino's *Il principe ermafrodito* (1640) or Giovan Battista Andreini's *Amor nello specchio* (1622) which challenge conventional assumptions about sex and gender; Virgilio Malvezzi's laconic *Tarquinio il Superbo* (1632), which is a thinly veiled critique of Spanish rule in Italy; and, in the visual field, paintings such as Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and Emmanuel Maignan's anamorphic frescos in the convent at Trinità dei Monti (1642) in Rome, which, though made for the Spanish royal family and the Church respectively, nevertheless challenge the principles of Aristotelian mimesis and call into question the very idea of a privileged point of view.[14]

[13] Jon R. Snyder, "The Other Voice: *Amor nello specchio*," in *Love in the Mirror* by Giovan Battista Andreini, ed. and trans. Jon R. Snyder (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5. John D. Lyons has also stressed the need to account not only the social and political aspects of baroque culture, but also the ways in which a radically new vision of the world impacted the arts: "Although Maravall mentions the unsettling effects of scientific discovery and religious discord, his concentration on financial, political, and demographic factors sometimes underestimates the challenges for perception and belief and the consequent aesthetic transformation that results. Beyond finances and demography, beyond the competition of nation-states remaking the political map, the very conception of the world was changing." See John D. Lyons, "Introduction: The Crisis of the Baroque," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. John D. Lyons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

[14] Ferrante Pallavicino, *Il principe ermafrodito*, ed. Roberta Colombi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2005); Giovan Battista Andreini, *Love in the Mirror*, ed. and trans. Jon R. Snyder (Toronto: Iter Press, 2009) (this edition includes the original text alongside Snyder's translation); Virgilio Malvezzi, *Tarquinio il Superbo*, in *Opere*, ed. Edoardo Ripari (Bologna: Casa Editrice Persiani, 2013), 121-189.

Because of its transgressive tendency, baroque art, despite having an "overt and often successful function in political persuasion," was not widely accepted by the Fascists as a model for their own propaganda, as Laura Moure Cecchini points out.[15] Instead, Cecchini explains, insofar as the Baroque resists the very idea of fixed categories, it is able at once to be the "icon" of absolutist rule "as well as an example of a critical view of such forms of power."[16] In turn, the fascist reception of the Baroque was largely—although not exclusively—negative.[17] It was, Cecchini says, essentially "out of place in a propaganda system that required univocal and clear-cut signifiers of nationhood and political identity."[18] This, as I will argue in the following three chapters, was what drew Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese to the Baroque. Taking up the infinite baroque fold in their works, they found a novel way to contest the regime's unyielding and suffocating ideological schemas.

I have chosen Deleuze's fold as the unifying theory across my three chapters for two key reasons. First of all, Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese each arrive at a reading of their preferred baroque artists that constitutes a remarkable anticipation of Deleuze's own poststructuralist analysis of these same figures. In some cases these authors—perhaps most especially Gadda and Ungaretti—are not merely interpreting a corpus of early modern artworks but actually creating their own artistic predecessors. The respective figures of Caravaggio and Michelangelo, who, for Ungaretti, was a baroque artist (a point to which I will return in chapter 2), play an exemplary role in this regard. Secondly, while there is no paucity of excellent research on the neo-Baroque in Italian

[15] Cecchini, *Baroquemania*, 239.

[16] Ibid., 240.

[17] See for example Cecchini's discussion of allusions to the Baroque in fascist architecture in *Baroquemania*, 160-195.

[18] Ibid., 240.

literature, studies to date have largely treated the topic in terms of shared forms, themes, and tropes.[19] The baroque fold allows me to articulate a broadly shared—but nonetheless definable[20]—approach to artistic representation that prompted the authors I examine to revisit a certain strand of early modern art. Despite the many and obvious differences between the writers and artists discussed in this dissertation, we will find that Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese each identified the baroque fold in early modern visual works, and in turn took it up in their literary writing for strategic purposes.

Of course, these authors each drew on many sources, naturally many of them literary; it is thus worth considering why they all sought to emphasize the visual field. As we will see, this question can be answered in part by looking to their specific interests and experiences. Gadda, for example, was generally interested in the visual arts and was an avid reader of Roberto Longhi's scholarship.[21] Ungaretti during the 1920s became fascinated with the urban spaces of Rome, which

[19] See for example, Daniela Baroncini, *Ungaretti barocco* (Rome: Carocci, 2008); Simonetta Chessa Wright, *La poetica neobarocca in Calvino* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1998); and chapter three of Jelena Todorović, *Hidden Legacies of Baroque Thought in Contemporary Culture Literature. Realms of the Eternal Present* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

[20] As a critical category, the Baroque has long been criticized as overly capacious. In early debates, Benedetto Croce found fault with Eugeni d'Ors who, in *Du Baroque*, identifies no fewer than twenty-two different kinds of Baroque. Scholars have continued to express reservations; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, for example, is generally skeptical of the category, and has criticized it as "on one hand too broad, and on the other not specific enough" (Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "Discomfited by the Baroque: A Personal Journey," in *Rethinking the Baroque*, ed. Helen Hills [Burlington: Ashgate, 2011], 89). Certainly the criticism of those like Croce and Kaufmann is not without merit; at times the greatest proponents of the Baroque have overextended the category. Deleuze himself, for example, declares towards the end *Le Pli* that the infinite fold "is seen not only in the masterworks of the Baroque period, but also in its stereotypes, in its standard formulas or its everyday productions. In fact, if we want to test the definition of the Baroque—the fold to infinity—we cannot not be limited to masterpieces alone; we must dig into the everyday recipes or modes of fashion that change a genre" (Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], 122). To argue in this way both that the Baroque is a "period" as opposed to a cultural movement and that its manifestations may be found in everything from "recipes" to "everyday productions" runs the risk of suggesting that everything contemporaneous to this "period" can be labeled "baroque." Yet, the seventeenth century is as much the century of René Descartes as it is of Leibniz, and one can certainly not argue that the former is in any way a baroque thinker. For d'Ors' monograph, see: Eugeni d'Ors, *Du baroque* (Paris: Gallimard: 1968).

[21] For an overview and analysis of Gadda's reading of Longhi, especially as it pertains to Caravaggio, see Micaela Lipparini, *Metafore del vero. Percezione e deformazione in Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 1994), especially chapter 5, "Da Longhi a Gadda. Per un dossier Manzoni-Caravaggio."

necessarily entails an engagement with the Eternal City's baroque architecture and urban plan. For Ortese, as Lucia Re has shown, the visual was a self-conscious and recurrent theme that was central to her poetics.[22] In addition to these individual concerns, it will emerge over the course of this study that these three writers also engaged in a critique of Western ocularcentrism, and more specifically of that dominant mode of vision that Martin Jay has called "Cartesian perspectivalism." This "scopic regime" is one of a "three-dimensional, rationalized space"; it purports to be "dispassionate," "realist," and is "in league with a scientific world view that no longer hermeneutically read the world as a divine text, but rather saw it as situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the […] eye of the neutral researcher."[23] This Cartesian vision is thus accompanied by a logic or ratio that striates, hierarchizes, and imposes limits to the visual field. Against this logic Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese engage in a reinvention of the baroque model of vision for modernity. Drawing on Wölfflin, Jay describes this latter model as "painterly," "multiple," and "open": "the mirror that it holds up to nature," he explains, "is not the flat reflecting glass […] of rationalized or 'analytic' perspective, but rather the anamorphosistic mirror, either concave or convex, that […] reveals the conventional rather than 'normal' specularity by showing its dependence on the materiality of the medium of reflection."[24] The writers discussed herein each

[22] Discussing Ortese's 1949 short story "Un paio di occhiali" (republished in 1953 in *Il mare non bagna a Napoli*), Re shows that the author opposes the notion of an equivalence between sight and knowledge or understanding. The protagonist, Eugenia, is severely nearsighted; her aunt generously agrees to buy her a pair of glasses, an extravagant expense for Eugenia's Neapolitan family. When the young protagonist finally receives her glasses, however, she is not elated but instead becomes physically ill. Metaphorically, Re explains, Eugenia's corrected vision constitutes a profound "disenchantment" and the loss of "an aesthetic view of reality." To see reality, in other words, is not so much a clarifying experience as it is the loss of creativity. See: Lucia Re, "'Clouds in Front of My Eyes: Ortese's Poetics of the Gaze in 'Un paio di occhiali' and *Il mare non bagna a Napoli*," in *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, eds. Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 65.

[23] Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality. Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 4, 8-9.

[24] Ibid., 17.

tenaciously oppose the alleged "reality" of a limited and conventional approach to vision, insisting instead that that which is most "real" transcends the finitude of logic, direct perception, and awareness. In chapter 1, we will see how for Gadda—who was deeply devoted to the philosophy of Leibniz—Caravaggio's paintings are, in effect, representations of the world as a fold; the author believed that these images depicted their respective subjects as merely one in a boundless chain of perceptions that fold and unfold into and out of the human mind. In the following chapter, I will show how Ungaretti came to understand the baroque churches, squares, and monuments of Rome as embedded in a fold that united the city's array of contrasting architectural styles in difference. Chapter 3 focuses on Ortese, who, in direct dialogue with the paintings of El Greco and Velázquez, articulates an alternative way of seeing that resists any kind of reduction to a single, fixed perspective; instead, for the author, the subject and the world are inscrutable mysteries that can always be seen anew and ascribed a fresh (if provisional) meaning. In this way, each of these writers, in line with the "baroque vision" that Jay describes, seeks to "represent the unrepresentable," or, more precisely, to allude to that which defies the limits of representation.[25]

To probe how each of these authors came to appropriate and revise the baroque fold in their writings, the three chapters of this thesis broadly follow a similar structure, and open with a discussion of the relevant parts of Deleuze's theory, before turning to how the authors in question understood their baroque sources. The second part of each chapter, drawing on major literary works and critical writings, explores how these authors' respective readings of the Baroque impacted his or her aesthetic and its force as a practice of anti-fascist resistance. As mentioned, chapter 1 focuses on the writing of Carlo Emilio Gadda. Though Ungaretti began publishing much earlier, the *ingegnere*'s writings serve as a helpful introduction to the present study for the way in

[25] Ibid.

which he grappled not only with Caravaggio's canvases, but also with Leibniz's philosophy. At the start of this chapter, I discuss Gadda's 1963 essay, "L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore," and his never completed *tesi di laurea* on Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais*. In the first of these texts, Gadda, in a move that may seem paradoxical, conceives of the Baroque—and his own writing—as highly mimetic.[26] A careful reading of Gadda's thesis will show that he came to this position in large part thanks to his understanding of Leibniz. In his analysis of the *Nouveaux essais*, Gadda compares Leibniz's ideas to Einsteinian relativity; in Einstein's physics, the lack of absolute rest or absolute motion means that there is no fixed point of reference in the universe, as is the case of the Leibnizian cosmos. In the historical context of fascist Italy, this can be seen as an implicit critique of the regime's totalitarianism, which held that the only "true" and absolute horizon of meaning is the state. Gadda, I will show, also applies these same ideas to the paintings of Caravaggio, producing a fascinating albeit idiosyncratic reading of some iconic canvases, especially the *Vocazione di san Matteo*. This painting for Gadda does not simply represent the well-known biblical scene; its content is not stable, but instead a fold in a potentially endless series of perceptions, which the author's mind cannot help but to unfold, one after another. As I will argue, despite the clear differences between Gadda's prose and Caravaggio's paintings, the writer's unique reading of the artist's images had a profound impact on his narrative fiction. Rife with detail and descriptions, the Gaddian narrator never recounts a linear story, but rather distracts, confuses, and challenges the reader through the presentation of fold upon fold.

[26] It should be noted that, while the historical Baroque certainly had a strong anti-mimetic tendency and regularly questioned the precepts of classicism, it would be too much to say that it is wholly anti-mimetic and anti-classicist as argued by Carlo Calcaterra in his influential study *Parnaso in rivolta*. Indeed, many of the great artists and thinkers of the Baroque understood themselves as working within a classicist paradigm, even if in dramatically innovative ways. See Carlo Calcaterra, *Il parnaso in rivolta* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1961).

All of this is, I contend, at the core of the anti-Fascism of Gadda's aesthetic as it is found in his major works, including *La cognizione del dolore* and *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. The first of these novels, set in the fictional South American nation of Maradagàl, has long been understood as an allegory for a fascist-era Lombardy. However, against the scholarly tendency to dismiss the novel's Latin American setting as merely incidental, I argue that the narrative was also inspired by Gadda's time in Argentina, during which he envisioned himself as an emigrant colonialist like those promoted in fascist rhetoric, which characterized the Argentine nation as a "colonia d'oltremare." Though not in any way a postcolonial author, Gadda, I will show, depicts Maradagàl as a *gnommero* or fold that can never be rationally ordered or subdued, in an allegorical gesture meant to lampoon Fascism's imperial aims.

In the *Pasticciaccio*, Gadda shifts his attention from colonialism to the regime's oppressive hierarchies of sex and gender. A bachelor who was deeply humiliated by the fascist taxation of single men, Gadda depicts the embarrassment of those who did not conform to the regime's heteronormative demands in the respective figures of the commendatore Filippo Angeloni and Liliana Balducci, the murder victim of this *giallo*. Angeloni, though a minor character, constitutes a highly significant literary portrait of Gadda himself. Like the author, the commendatore is a timid bachelor and possibly a homosexual; unable to embody the regime's ideal of hyper-virility, Angeloni finds relief in the shadows of the Roman church of San Luigi dei Francesi, where he sits by the Contarelli Chapel, admiring Caravaggio's three canvases housed therein—*The Calling*, *Inspiration*, and *Maryrdom of St. Matthew*. Though Balducci is only barely more present in the *Pasticciaccio* than Angeloni, she is equally as important. I read the childless Liliana's "mania" for motherhood in the context of the sexual politics of the Ventennio nero. Deeply ashamed at not having had the children the regime demanded of her, Balducci instead "adopts"—and discards—

her domestics in place of offspring. One of these maids, Assunta Crocchiapani, is probably the killer—a fact which Gadda's digressive narrator famously fails to confirm; if indeed Assunta is the culprit, then Balducci's death is indirectly caused by her own obsession with maternity. In turn, within the narrative, Mussolini's regime might be seen in allegorical terms as guilty of Liliana's murder: by denying the unfathomable complexity of her "folded" nature, fascist ideology foisted a univocal gender role on Balducci, ultimately driving her to her death.

In chapter 2, I turn my attention to Ungaretti, who first arrived in Rome in 1921, shortly before the fascist march on the city the following year. As Ungaretti recalls in an untitled essay on *Sentimento del tempo* (published in 1969), when he first arrived in the Urbe, he felt unable to perceive any kind of "unity" in the dense urban landscape thanks to the city's clash of architectural styles.[27] Over time, however, the poet came to "read" the city's baroque architecture as creating a kind of unity—which I will argue is a fold—that holds together the contradiction of the Roman urban space, interconnecting—without erasing—the binary opposites of secular and sacred, and ancient and modern. Interestingly, at the center of Ungaretti's reading of baroque Rome stands the figure of Michelangelo. I will not argue here that Michelangelo is a baroque artist (which, at the time Ungaretti was writing, was not an uncommon view); rather, I will show that, in a move reminiscent of Gadda's Caravaggio, the poet fashions a predecessor for himself through his own analysis of the artist. Ungaretti's Michelangelo, as I will explain, uncannily anticipates that of Deleuze. For the poet and the philosopher, Michelangelo's artworks depict their subjects as folds of a larger fold that unites them without canceling the difference they embody. This vision of Michelangelo's Roman architecture—and of Rome's baroque structures more broadly—entails a

[27] Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," in *Vita d'un uomo. Tutte le poesie*, ed. Carlo Ossola (Milan: Mondadori, 2016), 591-603.

deep albeit subtle political significance in the historical context in which Ungaretti took up residence in the Eternal City. In the years following the poet's arrival, after Mussolini's ascent to power, the Italian capital was subject to a series of drastic and disastrous *sventramenti* and building projects, which saw the destruction of myriad historical sites, including many baroque monuments. The objective of this reckless urban redevelopment was to create the "Terza Roma," or fascist Rome, the modern successor to the city of the emperors and that of the popes. As such, architects and builders sought to clear away the contradiction and confusion of the Urbe's spaces to make way for a clearly hierarchized spatial logic that conveyed univocal meanings celebrating the regime and its empire. In response to this, and to fascist ideology more generally, Ungaretti, inspired by the Roman Baroque, engaged in an implicit but thoughtful aesthetic resistance.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I examine Anna Maria Ortese's dialogue with the perhaps the most famous painters of the Spanish Baroque, namely Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco, and Diego Velázquez. The first of these two artists is the subject of Ortese's most important and revealing piece of writing on the baroque. Unlike Gadda and Ungaretti, Ortese does not address the Baroque in a critical essay, but rather in her fiction; her reflections on El Greco, as we will see, are found in her highly estranging Künstlerroman, *Il porto di Toledo* (1975). El Greco appears in *Toledo* allegorically, when the novel's protagonist, the young writer, Damasa, describes her approach to literary writing, which she learned from her teacher, the Conte d'Orgaz—a name intended to invoke the artist's renowned 1586 painting, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*. As we will see, Damasa suggests that the main objective of her writerly practice—which she calls "espressività"—is to depict her subject as irreducible, or, in Deleuzian terms, as a fold that can in turn always be further unfolded. Within *Il porto di Toledo*, Ortese deploys this in three key ways. First, like Ungaretti in Rome, Ortese was witness to a

dramatic redevelopment of her city, Naples, as the Fascists sought to frame it as both the capital of Southern Italy and a maritime gateway to the African colonies. In a rich and resolute critique of this, Ortese disguises fascist-era Naples as a fictional seaside Toledo, a mysterious and palimpsestic city that defies all schemas and cartographies. Ortese, however, was also deeply affected by the regime's policies concerning socioeconomic class and gender. The author, who grew up in poverty, was all too familiar with Fascism's explicit and unapologetic embrace of economic inequality. Faced with a society starkly divided along class lines, Ortese, through Damasa, posits that the other—whether rich or poor—is always equally unfathomable and irreducible to the logic of class hierarchy. At the same time, Ortese came of age during the Ventennio nero, and was subject to the same pressure that all of the women of her generation faced to marry and to reproduce for the benefit of the state. Against this, Ortese depicts maternity—whether actual or literary—as having the power to create transcendent "works" that push past all limits, including those imposed on women by Fascism. For his part, Diego Velázquez, I will argue, is a key point of reference for Ortese's 1965 novel, *L'Iguana*. Though *L'Iguana* predates *Toledo* by a decade, it is helpful to discuss this earlier work after the latter, in order to be able to read it in light of Ortese's analysis of the Baroque found in her later semi-autobiographical fiction. References to baroque culture abound in *L'Iguana*, and while there is no explicit citation of Velázquez, the careful reader will notice the author's subtly veiled references to his canvases. I argue that it is through her engagement with these works that Ortese develops a strategy of representation for her mysterious title character, whose visage continually mutates throughout the course of the novel (from young to old, from human to animal, etc.). The Baroque, in other words, inspired Ortese to represent Estrellita the Iguana—this colonial subaltern par excellence—as a narrative fold who is fundamentally irreducible to any one label or representation. Just as *Toledo*

must be analyzed in light of Ortese's formative years during the Ventennio, *L'Iguana*, as I will argue, should be understood in the context of the author's firsthand experience of fascist colonialism, the childhood years she spent in Italian occupied Libya. Moreover, it is essential to realize that these works are not merely retrospective; rather, Ortese composed each novel in the 1960s during a resurgence of a fascist sentiment in Italy exemplified by the rise of the far-right Movimento Sociale Italiano.

Together, these three chapters will show that Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese developed a kind of "baroque modernism," which distinguishes them from other significant artistic movements such as the historical avant-garde, Pirandellian modernism, and, later, postmodernism. For the writers examined in the following pages, the self, the other, and the real are not merely narrative constructs nor are they voids. Instead, they are essential mysteries that cannot be known totally or directly, but only partially and provisionally as folds that emerge into and fade out of consciousness.

1. "Barocco è il mondo": Gadda, Leibniz, and Caravaggio

"Ma il barocco e il grottesco albergano già nelle cose, nelle singole trovate di una fenomenologia a noi esterna [...] «barocco è il mondo, e il G. ne ha percepito e ritratto la baroccaggine»."

—Carlo Emilio Gadda, "L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore"

Introduction

In December 1922, Carlo Emilio Gadda departed Genoa aboard the *Principessa Mafalda*, bound for the Chaco province in Argentina, where he was to work as an engineer for the Compañia General de Fósforos.[1] By this time, following his bitter and traumatizing experience as a soldier in the First World War, Gadda, like many of his fellow veterans, had become a proud adherent to the Partito Nazionale Fascista and a proponent of its colonial aims.[2] Though Argentina was not subject to the kind of armed invasion that the Fascists carried out in Libya and later Ethiopia, it was, nevertheless, the focus of a concerted colonial campaign. Believing that the nearly two million Italian nationals living in Argentina could effectively establish a colony, the regime deployed propaganda in newspapers and even school books in order to realize "a nation outside of the Nation."[3] As Albert Sbragia has shown, Gadda understood his own "mission" in Argentina as a kind of conquest. In a letter to Ugo Betti, dated August 25, 1922, *l'ingegnere* detailed his travel

[1] For an overview of Gadda's time in Argentina and its impact on his writings see: Albert Sbragia, "Fear of the Periphery: Colonialism, Class, and the South American Outback in Carlo Emilio Gadda," *MLN* 111, no. 1 (1996): 38-57. Of key importance is Gadda's *Il quaderno di Buenos Aires*, available in: *I quaderni dell'ingegnere* 2, no. 7 (2011): 9-84.

[2] Gadda chronicled his time at the front and as a prisoner of war in a diary, which was published in 1955 as the *Giornale di guerra e di prigionia*. In addition to his captivity, Gadda also lost his younger brother, the aviator Enrico, who died at age twenty-two when his plane went down over the town of San Pietro in Gu. For more on the history of World War I veterans and Fascism, see Ángel Alcalde, *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), especially chapter 1 on Italy.

[3] David Aliano, *Mussolini's National Project in Argentina* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 13.

plans (which were later postponed): "Partirei verso la fine di ottobre. Volevo imbarcarmi sul 'Giulio Cesare', nome simbolico, ma, siccome costa di più, i 'tenaci liguri' che rappresentano la Società a Genova vogliono caricarmi con la mia scorta di ciabatte sul 'Re Vittorio'. Il vapore è meglio del re sciancatello di cui porta il nome."[4] Despite the letter's early date, this "symbolic" evocation of the Roman general and dictator and disdain for the Italian king make clear that Gadda believed he was partaking in a kind of conquest in line with the aims of the fascist party, which would rise to power only two months later.[5] Such was Gadda's enthusiasm that, once in Argentina, he participated in the establishment of the local Fascio di Combattimento, and became a member of the *direttorio*.[6]

Gadda, however, was soon dismayed to find that the Italians of Argentina were ambivalent or even hostile towards Fascism: "I giornali italiani di qui," he wrote in a letter to his sister Clara in Milan, dated September 1923, "sono fra i primi denigratori del fascismo." Even so Gadda suggests that he still had faith in the power of Italian nationalism: "Non ostante [sic] tutto,

[4] Carlo Emilio Gadda, *L'ingegner fantasia. Lettere a Ugo Betti 1919-1930*, ed. Giulio Ungarelli (Milan: Rizzoli, 1984), 68.

[5] Even as early as 1921, Mussolini regularly referred to the Italian immigrant populations in North and South America as "colonie di oltre Atlantico," and stated his aim to "valorize" these "colonies" "con istituzioni economiche e culturali con rapide comunicazioni." Immediately following the March on Rome in October 1922, the Duce intensified this rhetoric. In November, only weeks before Gadda's departure for Argentina, he declared: "La nazione deve giungere a quella grandezza verso cui la chiamano i suoi millenari destini. I sette milioni di italiani che vivono all'estero siano portatori e confessori della grandezza della nostra patria." Though Gadda did not partake in Fascist violence, he admired and closely followed the *squadristi*, and was certainly aware of this rhetoric. For Mussolini's comments the so-called "colonie oltre Atlantico," see: Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XVII. Dal primo discorso alla camera alla conferenza di Cannes (22 giugno 1921-12 gennaio 1922)*, eds. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1955), 178; "L'attuale memento politico," in *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XVIII. Dalla conferenza di Cannes alla Marcia su Roma (22 giugno 1921-12 gennaio 1922)*, eds. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1955), 222, 226; and "Alla colonia italiana di Ginevra," in *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XIX. Dalla Marcia su Roma al Viaggio negli Abruzzi (31 ottobre 1922-22 agosto 1923)*, eds. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1956), 36, 408.

[6] Gian Carlo Roscioni, *Il duca di Sant'Aquila. Infanzia e Giovinezza di Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), 195.

l'italianità trionferà di sé stessa, purgandosi, e degli altri, gelosissimi come sempre."[7] Despite this apparent confidence, in a matter of months Gadda gave up on Argentina, and, it would seem, on his faith in the inevitable triumph of *italianità*. In February 1924 he returned to Milan, where he began work on the never-completed *Racconto italiano di ignoto del Novecento*, and again took up the philosophical studies he had commenced at the Accademia Scientifico-letteraria in 1921.[8] Each project marked a milestone in Gadda's lifelong engagement with baroque art and thought, and specifically with the works of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Tellingly, *l'ingegnere* planned to dedicate the *Racconto italiano* "Al mio grande ed inarrivabile maestro Michelangelo Amorigi da Caravaggio," and went so far as to describe the text as a "romanzo psicopatico e caravaggesco."[9] At the same time, at the Accademia, which by 1924 had merged with the University of Milan, Gadda set out on a path of study that culminated, in 1928, with a plan to complete a thesis on Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais* under the direction of the antifascist philosopher, Piero Martinetti.[10] Though Gadda never finished this thesis, entitled *La teoria della conoscenza nei «Nuovi saggi» di G.W. Leibniz*, the draft we have of it shows that his encounter with the German philosopher's baroque thought had a deep impact on him that would prove to be lasting. The focus of this thesis, as Mario Porro explains, "è quello dei principi che permettono di costruire un'impalcatura del mondo, cioè di metterlo in ordine, di mostrare dunque

[7] Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Lettere alla sorella 1920-1924*, ed. Gianfranco Colombo (Milan: Rossellina Archinto, 1987), 86.

[8] For more on Gadda's philosophical studies in the years following his return from Argentina, see: Guido Lucchini, "Gli studi filosofici di Carlo Emilio Gadda (1924-1929)," in *Per Carlo Emilio Gadda. Atti del Convegno di Studi, Pavia 22-23 novembre 1993, Strumenti critici* 9, no. 2 , 75 (1994): 223-45. Also available at: https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/resources/archive/filosofia/lucchinistudifilosofici.php.

[9] Ibid., 411. The earliest fragments of the *Racconto* can be found in the *Quaderno di Buenos Aires*. See 31-40, 45-57. It was not until after his return to Italy that Gadda worked on the text with a more sustained focus, producing the notes collected today in *Scritti vari e postumi*.

[10] For more on Martinetti and his anti-Fascism, see: Giorgio Boatti, *Preferirei di no. Le storie di dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).

la consecuzione razionale delle cose; si ritrova così la questione che assilla il Gadda narratore-filosofo, 'organare il groviglio conoscitivo,' indagare sulle cause e le ragioni degli eventi. Il problema, sui cui già meditava la prima prova di romanzo, il *Racconto italiano* del '24, ritornerà nella *Meditazione milanese* che Gadda compone fra la primavera e l'estate del '28."[11] These concerns remained with Gadda throughout his career; in fact, decades later, in the very first pages of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, which first appeared in 1946 in *Letteratura* before the definitive 1957 Mondadori edition, the narrator describes Ciccio Ingravallo's elaborate theory of causality, which is distinctly Leibnizian.[12] It is thus no surprise to note that, during his 1968 interview with Dacia Maraini, when asked, "Qual è il filosofo che considera più affine?" Gadda's response was: "Leibniz."[13]

The project of building a new theory of interpretation, in dialogue with the Baroque, took on considerable importance for Gadda following the failure of his colonial venture in Argentina and the resultant—though not definitive—blow to his faith in fascist ideology.[14] In other words,

[11] Mario Porro, "Da Leibniz le ipotesi del «gran lombardo» su come organizzare il groviglio conoscitivo," *Il manifesto*, Nov. 2, 2006.

[12] Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, in *Romanzi e racconti II*, eds. Giorgio Pinotti, Dante Isella, and Raffaella Rodondi (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), 16-17.

[13] Dacia Maraini, "Carlo Emilio Gadda come uomo," in *"Per favore mi lasci nell'ombra". Interviste 1950-1972*, ed. Claudio Vela (Milan: Adelphi, 1993), 164.

[14] Throughout the 1930s, in fact, Gadda continued to write a series of articles on technical topics such as one on "metalli leggeri," which propagandize in favor of the regime's policies. Dombroski has analyzed these texts in the appendix to *Creative Entanglements*. *Gadda and the Baroque* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 117-134. Gadda himself notoriously gave conflicting accounts of his relationship to Fascism, and at times deceptively downplayed his once very enthusiastic support for Mussolini and the fascist party. For example, Giulio Cattaneo recorded a conversation with the author during which the former asked the latter, "Ingegnere, Lei è stato fascista?" Gadda replied, "Ma veramente fascista, no, non direi. All'inizio posso aver avuto, se non della simpatia, qualche indulgenza. Ma ancora prima del delitto Matteotti avevo capito di che si trattava" (Giulio Cattaneo, *Il gran lombardo* [Milan: Garzanti, 1973], 93). Strangely, when asked about his views of Fascism in his interview with Maraini, Gadda claims to have rejected it "solo nel '34 con la guerra etiopica" (Maraini, "Carlo Emilio Gadda come uomo," 168). The author thus revises the version of events he shared with Cattaneo, and states that he broke with Fascism a full decade after the murder of Giacomo Matteotti in 1924. What is more is that he misremembers the date of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, which occurred in October 1935. This has led scholars like Peter Hainsworth to dismiss the interview as "generally mendacious and bizarrely neurotic" and to argue that Gadda never really broke with Fascism until 1943

when the ideology of the regime began to appear inadequate to Gadda, he turned to baroque culture as his filter of choice for viewing and interpreting the world around him. Though the author engaged with a variety of prominent figures who are often associated with the Baroque—including Shakespeare, Quevedo, Alarcón, and Barbadillo—the impact of Leibniz and Caravaggio on his writings is, I will argue, the most consequential of any of these encounters. Moreover, his simultaneous interest in Leibniz's philosophy and Caravaggio's art was not incidental or coincidental. Indeed, whenever Gadda writes about one of these two, the other is never far from his thoughts. His thesis on the *Nouveaux essais* makes fleeting reference to Caravaggio; the

(Peter Hainsworth, "Fascism and Anti-fascism in Carlo Emilio Gadda," in *Carlo Emilio Gadda. Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Robert S. Dombroski and Manuela Bertone [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997], 221, 224). As I hope to show in the course of this chapter, it is important to stress that the author had harbored for many years highly contradictory views of the regime; a growing anti-fascist sentiment can be found in his writings well before 1943, though he likely did not fully and unequivocally reject Fascism until the war, as Cristina Savattieri has argued ("Il ventennio di Gadda," in *Scrittori italiani tra facsismo e antifascismo*," eds. Romano Luperini and Pietro Cataldi [Pisa: Pacini editore, 2009], 28). Hainsworth does not take note of this contradiction, and goes so far as to argue that the *Racconto italiano di ignoto del Novecento* and *La cognizione del dolore* lack an anti-fascist critique. He argues, for example, that the *Racconto*, while "lacking overt propaganda intent [... shows] an appreciation of the daring and decisiveness of Fascism as opposed to the opportunism of socialism and the bathos of liberalism" (Hainsworth 222). This view of the *Racconto* does not account for Gadda's unrealized plan, which I will discuss below, to have the novel narrate the disillusionment of the protagonist, Grifonetto, with Fascism's colonizing mission in Latin America. Hainsworth further claims that the *Cognizione* has been misread as an anti-fascist work because, in his view, the Nistitúos provinciales de vigilancia para la noche (a predatory night watch organization usually understood as a stand-in for coercive fascist politics) is a generalized "polemic" against bureaucracy as opposed to an indictment specifically of Mussolini's regime (Hainsworth 224). However, Gadda's use of Maradagàl, the *Cognizione*'s fictional South American setting, as a thinly veiled allegory for his contemporary Italy suggests that the bureaucracy he is criticizing is none other than that of the Fascists. Recent scholarship, such as Chiara Ferrari's *The Rhetoric of Violence in Fascist Italy*, makes the case that the *Cognizione* specifically constitutes an "unravelling" of Gadda's Fascism into anti-Fascism (See: Chiara Ferrari, *The Rhetoric of Violence in Fascist Italy. Mussolini, Gadda, Vittorini* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013], 79). While I certainly cannot excuse Gadda's less-than-forthcoming retelling of his views of Fascism to Cattaneo or deny the inaccuracies in his interview with Maraini, it is important to note that, as Rebecca Falkoff has shown, in at least the second of these interviews Gadda seems to have been genuinely disoriented (Rebecca Falkoff, "After Autarchy: Male Subjectivity from Carlo Emilio Gadda to the Gruppo '63," PhD diss., [University of California, Berkeley, 2012], 22). Then in the last years of his life, the author appears to be unaware of the date; Falkoff points in particular to a part of the interview where Gadda discusses the Nistitúos: "Deve tenere presente, ma questo non so se è bene che lo scriva," he says to Maraini, "che in questo libro ho creato una confusione narrativa, fra l'idea dei fascisti e l'idea dei vigili notturni. Non vorrei però avere dei fastidi. I vigili notturni insomma sono visti come fascisti. Crede che potrò avere delle noie?" (Maraini, 171). Bearing in mind that the interview dates to 1968, Gadda's reticence seems more indicative of confusion rather than an intent to mislead. Ultimately, the inconsistencies between Gadda's representation of his anti-Fascism and the historical facts are also in part due to the *ingegnere*'s profoundly conflicted relationship with fascist ideology. As we will see, Fascism at once attracted him by promising order and repelled him for making such a false promise.

"caravaggesque" *Racconto italiano*, as Porro notes, is informed by the same problems that are found in Gadda's study of Leibniz and the philosopher is cited twice in the text;[15] finally, when Gadda analyzes Caravaggio's artworks, he employs a distinctively Leibnizian logic. Caravaggio thus appears to have very much been a part of Gadda's attempt, along with Leibniz, to construct that "nuova impalcatura del mondo."

In this chapter, I will argue that Gadda, anticipating Gilles Deleuze, and in dialogue with Leibniz and Caravaggio, builds a new hermeneutical framework, envisioning the universe as a neo-baroque fold that transgresses all given limits of thought, perception, and representation. Engaging in what I will call a "decompounding of possibles," Gadda dismisses the existence of any stable and fixed meanings: the world in his view is fundamentally unknowable in its boundless and knotted entirety. This neo-baroque vision counters, in particular, the rigid schemas and certainties of fascist ideology, and is found throughout Gadda's oeuvre. For example, in the *Racconto italiano* and *La cognizione del dolore* (first published in installments in 1938-1941, with a definitive version appearing in 1963), Gadda allegorizes his own disappointment with the regime's nationalism and colonialism, and depicts each as a futile effort to impose meaning on the *gnommero* that is the world. In *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, *l'ingegnere* again takes aim at Fascism, this time criticizing its oppressive sexual politics in the figures of Liliana Balducci and the commendatore Filippo Angeloni. As I will show, the individual herself, in Gadda's view, is an irreducible fold of a folded world: to force upon her oppressive ideological categories—to impose political and cultural limits on her very being—is nothing other than a fatal act of violence. I will open my discussion with an overview of Gadda's understanding of the Baroque, focusing

[15] Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Meditazione Milanese*, in *Scritti vari e postumi*, eds. Andrea Silvestri, Claudio Vela, Dante Isella, Paola Italia, and Giorgio Pinotti (Milan: Garzanti, 2009), 448, 1280.

on two texts in particular, namely his essay "L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore" and his thesis on Leibniz. From his earliest exposure to the works of the Seicento, Gadda saw in them a transgressive quality that, adapted for the twentieth century, ran directly counter to fascist ideological narratives. In order to show how Leibniz and Caravaggio are effectively exemplars of the fold for Gadda, I will then turn to his well-known essay, the "Apologia manzoniana" and to the *Meditazione milanese*. The "Apologia" contains one of Gadda's three ekphrases of the *Vocazione di San Matteo* (1599-1600), his favorite of Caravaggio's paintings; his description, as we will see, constitutes a distinctly Leibnizian reading of the canvas. The *Meditazione* helps to clarify the philosophical underpinnings of the author's unique ekphrasis of Caravaggio's picture. Finally, I will read the abovementioned *Racconto italiano*, the *Cognizione*, and the *Pasticciaccio* as instances of *il gran lombardo*'s profoundly transgressive albeit idiosyncratic anti-fascist vision, which is inseparable from his turn to the Baroque.[16]

"Le singole trovate di una fenomenologia a noi esterna": Gadda's Baroque

While critics have traced the origins of Gadda's baroque stylistic to his earliest writings, namely the *Giornale di guerra e di prigionia* (written in 1915-1919, published in 1955), his first full-fledged encounter with the baroque aesthetic sphere itself was probably at the *Mostra della pittura italiana del 600 e del 700* held at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence in 1922.[17] As mentioned in the introduction to the present study, the enormous exhibition, which included over 1,000 artworks,

[16] Savattieri proposes referring to Gadda's politics as a "contro-fascismo" as opposed to more conventional and straightforward "anti-fascismo" (Savattieri, "Il Ventennio di Gadda," 28).

[17] For more on Gadda's early writings, and the emergence of his baroque aesthetic, see Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*, 20-42. The first critic to associate Gadda's writing with the Baroque was Giuseppe De Robertis, who, in his review of *Il castello di Udine*, described the *ingegnere*'s prose as a "barocco riccioluto, ricchissimo e fragile." See Giuseppe De Robertis, "Il Castello di Udine," *Pan* 2, no. 9 (1934): 142-144.

was one of the highest profile events in the art world at the time.[18] Private art collectors from across Italy and abroad sought to have their works included in the *mostra*, which was inaugurated by Vittorio Emanuele III.[19] Furthermore, the exhibition brought together countless major critics and art historians including Ugo Ojetti, Antonio Muñoz, and Roberto Longhi, who later became Gadda's favorite art historian.[20] The exhibition catalogue, a copy of which was found in Gadda's library, shows that numerous Caravaggio paintings were on display;[21] it was possibly at this very

[18] Filippo Mucciante, Giada Policicchio, Mariella Stillitano, "La mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento. Rilettura e riscoperta di uno stile: il Barocco," in *Mostre a Firenze 1911-1942. Nuove indagini per un itinerario tra arte e cultura*, ed. Cristiano Giometti (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2019), 42.

[19] Ibid., 43, 45-46.

[20] Longhi is cited in the biographies of painters Orazio Borgianni and Battistello and is thanked in the acknowledgements for having "dato in particolar modo suggerimenti e fatto proposte di nuove attribuzioni." Longhi was one of eighty-four experts charged with studying and attributing the works in the exhibition. See: Nello Tarchiani, ed., *Mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Casa Editrice d'Arte Bestietti & Tumminelli: 1922), 18, 30-31, 41-42 and Mucciante, "Mostra della pittura italiana," 45. The acknowledgements only appear in the second edition of the catalogue.

[21] See Tarchiani, *Mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento*, 49-51. There are two editions of the exhibition catalogue, with revised lists of Caravaggio paintings and possible attributions. In the information Andrea Cortellessa and Maria Teresa Iovinelli provide about the contents of the Fondo Gadda in the Biblioteca del Burcardo, it is clear that Gadda was in possession of the second edition of the exhibition catalogue. See "Il Fondo Gadda. Biblioteca del Burcardo," *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* (2001), https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/resources /catalogues/burcardoLM.php. This second edition lists sixteen paintings as works by Caravaggio, with seven possible attributions. The sixteen works that the catalogue credits to Caravaggio without question were: *La morte della madonna*; *Amore vittorioso*; *Amorino dormiente*; *San Matteo e l'Angelo*; *La vocazione di San Matteo*; *Il martirio di San Matteo*; *La Cena in Emmaus* (Pinacoteca di Brera); *David con la testa di Golia* (Galleria Borghese); *La Madonna dei Palafrenieri*; *San Girolamo* (Galleria Borghese); the now-disputed *Narciso* (Galleria d'Arte Antica); *La Madonna di Loreto*; *La conversione di San Paolo* and *Il martirio di San Pietro* (Santa Maria del Popolo); *San Francesco* (S. Maria della Concezione); and the Uffizi *Testa di Medusa*. In addition to that now-disputed *Narciso*, John Gash has argued that the *San Francesco* is not an original Caravaggio but a "good version" (See John Gash, *Caravaggio* [London: Chaucer Press, 2003], 18.). The seven paintings attributed to Caravaggio were: the Uffizi *Bacco*; *Suonatore di liuto* (Galleria Sabauda); *Cristo nell'orto* (destroyed in 1945, formerly held in in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin); *David con la testa di Golia* and *La Vergine e Sant'Anna* (Galleria Spada); *San Giovanni Battista* (Offentliche Kunstsammlung in Basel); and *L'incredulità di San Pietro* (Certosa di San Martino in Naples). Of these attributions, only two were later confirmed to be originals: the Uffizi *Bacco* and the *Cristo nell'Orto*. By contrast the *Suonatore di liuto* from the Galleria Sabauda in Turin is now attributed to Antiveduto Grammatica. It is also certain that the *David con la testa di Golia* from the Galleria Spada is not a Caravaggio. The Galleria Spada is in possession of two such paintings (the catalogue does not specify which one was on display). One version is now attributed to Orazio Gentileschi and the other to Gian Domenico Cerrini. Likewise, *La Vergine e Sant'Anna* from the Galleria Spada has now been attributed to Spadarino, a follower of Caravaggio. The Basel *San Giovanni Battista* in the exhibition is now attributed to Juan Battista Maíno. Finally, the *L'incredulità di San Pietro* from the Certosa di San Martino is almost certainly an error. The painting at the exhibition was likely *La negazione di San Pietro*, held in the same location, which is now attributed to François Duquesnoy.

mostra that Gadda saw, for the first time, his much beloved *Vocazione di san Matteo*. Caravaggio held a prominent place in the exhibition, which helped to foster the reevaluation and rehabilitation of his *oeuvre*, along with the art of the Baroque more generally. As Giada Policicchio explains, in the Palazzo Pitti's Sala delle Nicchie, which was dedicated to Caravaggio's works,

> "erano stati riuniti più di trenta dipinti tra i quali le pale delle chiese romane di San Luigi dei Francesi e di Santa Maria del Popolo. Opere come queste, solitamente invisibili nella penombra delle cappelle, furono molto apprezzate dai visitatori e dagli studiosi per la possibilità di ammirarle come non le avevano mai viste, in condizioni espositive ottimali così da permettere anche una più sincera rivalutazione dell'artista."[22]

Gadda, who once wrote that Caravaggio "desta in me una vera ebbrezza mista di gratitudine,"[23] may thus have been just one of the many visitors to the Palazzo Pitti who were transfixed by the Lombard artist's paintings. Although his understanding of these artworks, as we will see, is fairly anomalous, his great interest in them was broadly shared at the time.

Despite Gadda's fascination with baroque figures like Caravaggio and Leibniz, he rarely directly engaged, unlike contemporaries such as Giuseppe Ungaretti, with contemporary scholarly debates on the Baroque, or elaborated on his understanding of the aesthetic of the seventeenth century.[24] However, in the essay, "L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore," Gadda does provide us with his own unique definition of the Baroque, and gives his readers some sense as to his position on the ongoing scholarly controversy about it. Originally published in the appendix of *La cognizione del dolore*, the essay is an imagined dialogue between

[22] Mucciante, "La mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento del Settecento," 44.

[23] Gadda, *Meditazione milanese*, 805.

[24] For more on the connection between Gadda and Longhi's readings of Caravaggio, see Ezio Raimondi, *Barocco moderno. Roberto Longhi e Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 2003); Micaela Lipparini, *Le metafore del vero. Percezione e deformazione figurative in Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 1994). See also Eloisa Morra, "Visual Storytelling Gadda's iconographies from L'Adalgisa to Il Pasticciaccio," PhD. diss., (Harvard University, 2017), especially chapter 2.

Gadda and his editor about his novel, which addresses the subject of its "baroqueness." The Baroque, Gadda argues in the voice of the *editore*, is not a style or a cultural movement, but rather an attempt to describe the world as it is. He begins the passage in question with a discussion of how the author represents the world and society:

> "La sceverazione degli accadimenti del mondo e della società in parvenze o simboli spettacolari, [...] in moventi e sentimenti profondi, veridici, della realtà spirituale, questa cernita è metodo caratterizzante della rappresentazione che l'autore ama dare della società: i simboli spettacolari muovono per lo più il referto a una programmata derisione, che in certe pagine raggiunge tonalità parossistica e aspetto deforme: lo muovono alla polemica, alla beffa, al grottesco, al «barocco»: alla insofferenza, all'apparente crudeltà, a un indugio «misantropico» del pensiero. Ma il barocco e il grottesco albergano già nelle cose, nelle singole trovate di una fenomenologia a noi esterna [...] il grido parola «barocco è il G.» potrebbe commutarsi nel più ragionevole e pacato asserto «barocco è il mondo, e il G. ne ha percepito e ritratto la baroccaggine»."[25]

The author in question here is of course Gadda himself. Initially, his characterization of his writing process does not seem particularly original or innovative. In this passage he describes distinguishing the "accadimenti del mondo e della società" into symbols directed at expressing a "realtà spirituale" underpinning a critique ("derisione") of the world or of society. Gadda's position, however, becomes more radical as he insists that the Baroque and the grotesque—terms that he uses interchangeably—"albergano già nelle cose." Here the author appears to contradict himself. His writing does not merely translate what he terms "il mondo" (the world) into "baroque" or "grotesque" symbols in line with a literary strategy; rather, for Gadda it mirrors this world's ontological essence or "baroccaggine." Thus, the "realtà spirituale" that the author claims to describe in his work is nothing other than the "baroque" *gnommero*, which in Gadda's eyes is identical to, and coextensive with, reality itself. Though the Baroque and neo-Baroque are often

[25] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore," in *Romanzi e racconti I*, eds. Raffaella Rodondi, Guido Lucchini, and Emilio Manzotti (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), 759-760.

understood as rejecting Aristotelian mimesis, which holds that art is an imitation of nature, Gadda, in a seemingly paradoxical move, considered his own writing to be so highly mimetic that he saw his pyrotechnic prose as being folded into the very fabric of the real.

The author corroborates this when he takes a swipe at the ongoing scholarly debate surrounding the Baroque:

> "E chi, di certa scienza, ha ritenuto poter interpretare il barocco (a volte non meglio definito) come istanza irrevocabile di taluni momenti o indirizzi o tentazioni o mode o ricerche dell'arte o della creazione umana, una categoria del pensiero umano, potrebbe o dovrebbe forse riconoscere nel barocco, in altri casi, uno di quei tentativi di costruzione, di espressione che si possono meglio attribuire alla natura e alla storia, chiamando natura e storia tutto ciò che si manifesta esterno a noi e alla nostra facoltà operativa, alla nostra responsabilità mentale e pragmatica."[26]

The Baroque, according to Gadda, is therefore not confined to a specific artist or movement. Instead, he suggests here that the scholars involved in the *disputa sul barocco* have missed the point. In line with his view of the Baroque as inherent to the very essence of the world, here Gadda suggests that scholars ought to recognize it rather as an attempt at "construction" or "expression" that transcends the agency of individuals and cultures; it instead arises out of nature and history, that is, out of these apparently foundational categories of being. Gadda's baroque vision—always partial and provisional, never totalizing—seeks to reflect the innate "baroccaggine" that comes into view as nature and history manifest themselves around us. Baroque art and culture are therefore simply parts or folds of an infinitely larger "construction" or "expression." In opting for the terms "costruzione" and "espressione"—as opposed to "rappresentazione"—Gadda aims to close the gap between the real and representation, so that the Baroque is both an expression of reality *and* an integrated component of it, as opposed to its symbolic equivalent. This reveals that Gadda understood his signature logorrheic and digressive style in exactly the same way, and that

[26] Ibid., 760-761.

he effectively believed that the fold—which, as I will argue, is at the very core of his aesthetic—was indistinguishable from and embedded in the very workings of the universe.

A careful reading of Gadda's short, unfinished thesis on Leibniz shows that he began to develop these ideas long before the publication of "L'editore chiede venia del recupero" in 1963: it was through dialogue with the German philosopher that the author came to believe that the "world is baroque."[27] Though Leibniz is not cited by name in the 1963 essay, Gadda's characterization of his writing as having an "aspetto deforme" calls to mind his analysis of the *Nouveaux essais.* The term "deformazione," in fact, takes on a technical meaning in the author's thesis as he addresses the topic of movement in the Leibnizian cosmos. Specifically, Gadda posits the concept of the "deformazioni della materia," where "materia" refers to that which is perceived by a "soul," and the word "deformazioni" denotes what the author calls "mouvements, changements."[28] In other words, Gadda—like Leibniz before him—comes to see objects and events as always moving, changing, or unfolding. In fact, the author goes on to approvingly cite the philosopher's opinion on this matter: "«...Je soutiens qu'une substance ne saurait être sans action, et qu'il n'y a même jamais de corps sans mouvement...»," which simply put, means that there is no state that is not also an event.[29] Gadda, pointing to recent developments in science, recognizes this as a strikingly modern idea:

[27] The term "baroque" recurs twice in Gadda's thesis, both times in notes he left for himself about how to improve his arguments. In each instance, he uses it as an epithet. At one point he describes one of his arguments as digressive and "baroque" (31). Later, he criticizes Leibniz's belief that "a substance cannot naturally be without action" and that "there is never even any body without motion" as a "Tema barocco e stiracchiato [...] Assurdo" (33). Nevertheless, in the body of the thesis, as I will discuss below, Gadda is much less hostile to this idea. I do not mean to suggest in this chapter that Gadda embraced the term "baroque," but effectively embraced the thought and aesthetics of *the* Baroque in dialogue with Leibniz and Caravaggio. For Leibniz's arguments to which Gadda is referring, see: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Preface to the New Essays," eds. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 49-67, 54.

[28] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "La teoria della conoscenza nei «Nuovi saggi» di G.W. Leibniz," Iin *I Quaderni dell'Ingegnere. Testi e Studi Gaddiani* vol. 4, eds. Dante Isella and Riccardo Stracuzzi. Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 18.

[29] Ibid., 16.

> "Notiamo tra parentesi, per quel che riguarda i corpi, la fisica moderna è entrata in questo ordine di idee [...] La teoria della relatività [insiste] sul seguente punto: essere impossibile pensare a un sistema privilegiato di riferimento, a uno spazio fisso (privilegiato nel confronto di altri sistemi spaziali mobili rispetto ad esso), ci fa presumere che anche dal punto di vista della meccanica dei corpi finiti il riposo assoluto non è che probabilmente una nostra immagine-limite."[30]

In other words, because all bodies in the universe are moving, their movement is relative to one another. There is no stable, fixed, or privileged vantage point from which one can determine speed or direction; there are only relative points of view from which the motion of a body will always appear differently. Thus, when Gadda speaks of the "aspetto deforme" of his writing, which is itself a product of the "barocco e il grottesco che albergano già nelle cose," he means that there is no possibility of normative or transcendental mode of perception in post-Newtonian modernity; this, as we will see, explains his prose which always undermines a clear structure and in which the narrator continually loses focus. Gadda, in other words, believes that perception is always partial and provisional, as he acknowledges when he says that absolute rest is no more than "una nostra immagine-limite." Here the author suggests that the limits of our vision entail that any image that we have or create of our surroundings is, essentially, a fiction: it cannot account for the relativity inherent to all things and instead risks falsely implying the existence of an objective viewpoint. Significantly, this allows us to begin to get a sense of Gadda's critique of the dominance of a model of vision and of a logic that is closed or bounded, that privileges the limit, and it presents as real.

Written in the years following his return from Argentina during his slowly growing break with fascist thought, Gadda's thesis is not without profound, however implicit, political value. In 1927, the year before *l'ingegnere* drafted his arguments on Leibniz, Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile (whose contribution went unattributed) penned *La dottrina del Fascismo,* which was published in 1932 in the Treccani encyclopedia. In the first part of the essay, "Idee

[30] Ibid.

Fondamentali," written by Gentile, the Italian philosopher lays out his vision of Fascism as a "totalitarian" doctrine, an idea wholly incompatible with the relativity of Gadda's baroque and Leibnizian universe. Discussing the topic of "liberty," Gentile explains that Fascism endorses a more "serious" liberty than that espoused by an "individualistic liberalism." Fascism, he writes, "E' per la sola libertà che possa essere una cosa seria, la libertà dello stato e dell'individuo nello stato. Giacché per il fascista, tutto è nello stato, e nulla di umano e spirituale esiste, e tanto meno ha valore, fuori dello stato. In tal senso il fascismo è totalitario, e lo stato fascista, sintesi e unità di ogni valore, interpreta, sviluppa e potenzia tutta la vita del popolo."[31] It is precisely this absolutism that Gadda lampoons in works like the *Cognizione* and the *Pasticciaccio*. The notion that the state must be totalitarian—that it can contain and justify the value and existence of anything human or spiritual—clashes with the Leibnizian and neo-baroque principle that there is no privileged or normative framework of perception and interpretation. The state is merely a single fold in an endlessly folded universe and its alleged totalitarianism is a violent denial of the "true" nature of things. This philosophical vision is inextricably linked to Gadda's poetics, which, as noted, he also began to develop in the 1920s with works like the *Racconto italiano* and the *Meditazione milanese*. To understand the impact of Leibniz's thought on *l'ingegnere*'s art, it is necessary to turn to Gadda's studies of Caravaggio. In what follows I will show that Gadda fashions an artistic precursor for himself in the figure of the Lombard painter by reading the baroque fold into his paintings; these images, for the author, are essentially visual depictions of the transgression of every conceivable limit.

[31] Arturo Marpicato, Benito Mussolini, Gioacchino Volpe, "Fascismo," *Treccani*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/fascismo_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/.

"Il grande ed inarrivabile maestro"

In order to understand Gadda's rich if somewhat eccentric interpretation of Caravaggio's paintings, let us turn first to *Le Pli*, for therein Deleuze, like the *ingegnere* before him, articulates a Leibnizian analysis of Caravaggio's works. The French thinker discusses these images alongside those of Jacopo Tintoretto; specifically, he suggests that their paintings exemplify the fold because the dark backgrounds of their canvases represent the countless "folded" perceptions of the world of which the subject is unaware, while the visible figures in these artworks represent the very small number of "unfolded" perceptions of which the subject is conscious. This aesthetic, Deleuze argues, arises from a "new regime of light." "This is a baroque contribution," he writes,

> "in place of the white chalk or plaster that primes the canvas, Tintoretto and Caravaggio use a dark, red-brown background on which they place the thickest shadows, and paint directly by shading towards the shadows. The painting is transformed. Things jump out of the background, colors spring from the common base that attests to their obscure nature, figures are defined by their covering more than their contour. This is not in opposition to light; to the contrary, it is by virtue of the new regime of light. Leibniz makes the point in the *Profession de foi du philosophe:* 'It slides as if through a slit in the middle of shadows.' Should we be given to understand that it comes from a vent, from a thin opening, angled or folded, by intermediary mirrors, the white consisting 'in a great number of small reflecting mirrors'? More exactly, since monads have no openings, a light that has been 'sealed' is lit in each one when it is raised to the level of reason. A whiteness is produced through all the tiny inner mirrors. It makes white, but shadow too: it makes the white that is confounded with the illuminated area of the monad, that soon becomes obscure or shades towards the dark background, the *fuscum*, whence things emanate 'by means of shadows and fairly strong and well-handled colors.'"[32]

As Reidar Due points out, Deleuze understands Caravaggio's art as an anticipation of Leibnizian metaphysics. This new "regime of light" represents figures and colors as emerging from the obscurity that Caravaggio depicts with his "dark, red-brown backgrounds." Due contends that this "*chiaroscuro* technique [...] aims to paint the gradual emergence of form against the background

[32] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 31-32.

of increasing darkness and indifferentiation. The same holds true of our ordinary thoughts in Leibniz's monadology. They slide before us, partly illuminated in self-consciousness but quickly become absorbed into the darkness of unconscious perceptions."[33] In other words, the visible figures in Caravaggio's paintings are a representation of the few perceptions of which a monad is self-consciously aware at any given time. The darkness in the background represents the vast number of other unconscious perceptions folded within a monad, which Leibniz refers to as "petites perceptions."[34] In Deleuze's reading, Caravaggio's deployment of the fold thus constitutes a representation of the real as a myriad of folded perceptions of which we are largely unaware, out of which emerges a small quantity of conscious perceptions or what Leibniz refers to in the *Monadology* (1714) as "apperceptions."[35]

It is this Deleuzian understanding of Caravaggio's art that Gadda anticipates, thanks to the fact that he too embraced Leibnizian logic in his analysis of it. Within only two years of the 1922 "Mostra della pittura italiana" exhibition, the first reference to Caravaggio appears in Gadda's writing, in the *Racconto italiano di ignoto del Novecento* (1924). While I will discuss the *Racconto* itself in more depth later, for now it is useful to know that the end of the text contains two of the three ekphrases that Gadda based on the *Vocazione di san Matteo*. The first of these is found in one of Gadda's narrative sketches of the never-completed novel, while the second is located in its

[33] Reidar Due, *Deleuze* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 158.

[34] See Leibniz, "Preface to the New Essays," 54.

[35] See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "The Monadology," in *Leibniz's Monadology. A New Translation and Guide*, ed. and trans. Lloyd Strickland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 16. For more specifically on the mechanics of perception see Strickland's commentary on pages 110-115 of this same volume and also Lloyd Strickland, "The 'Monadology,'" in *Leibniz's Key Philosophical Writings. A Guide*, eds. Paul Lodge and Lloyd Strickland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 213-216.

appendix, in the earliest of the two versions of the "Apologia manzoniana."[36] The third ekphrasis is contained in the definitive version of this same text. In his notes on the earlier version of the "Apologia," Gadda clarifies that he is describing Caravaggio's painting from a photograph in his possession, though his ekphrasis is surreal and estranging.[37] As the title "Apologia manzoniana" suggests, the short essay is Gadda's idiosyncratic analysis of his favorite writer, Alessandro Manzoni, whom he saw as being intimately connected with Caravaggio by way of the *barocco lombardo*, the setting of *I promessi sposi* and the historical context into which the painter was born.[38] It is in imagining this baroque world in particular that Gadda reveals his understanding of Caravaggio's art, and helps us to appreciate how it in turn informed his writing.

Gadda himself described his analysis of Manzoni as essentially intuitive rather than a rigorously critical exercise.[39] It is, to borrow Gianfranco Contini's description, a "gaddizzazione di Manzoni"; in fact, in the essay, the author completely reimagines *I promessi sposi* and the Lombardy depicted therein.[40] In his reflection on the novel, Gadda invokes Fichte and Leopardi, before suddenly turning to Caravaggio. "Michelangiolo Amerighi veste da bravi i compagni di gioco di San Matteo," he writes in the essay's final version, describing the *Vocazione di san*

---

[36] See Gadda, "Racconto italiano," 590-599. For the later version of the "Apologia," see Carlo Emilio Gadda, "Apologia manzoniana," in *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*, eds. Liliana Orlando, Clelia Martignoni, and Dante Isella (Milan: Garzanti, 2008), 679-687.

[37] See Dante Isella et al., eds., *Scritti vari e postumi*, (Milan: Garzanti, 2009), 1294. It is unclear where Gadda obtained this photograph of the *Vocazione*. Neither edition of the exhibition catalogue of the *Mostra della pittura italiana* includes such an image.

[38] For more on Gadda's unique and "baroque" reading of Manzoni, particularly as it pertains to Caravaggio, see Raimondi, *Barocco moderno*, especially 140-146. As Raimondi explains, Gadda, in writing the "Apologia," "si comporta come uno scrittore che sta cercando e costruendo, a dirla con Borges, il suo precursore" (140). See also Fabio Pierangeli, "La *Vocazione* di Gadda: Apologia manzoniana e Caravaggio," in *Carlo Emilio Gadda. Indagine dolorosa* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1999), 41-54.

[39] See Dante Isella et al., eds., *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I* (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), 1335.

[40] Gianfranco Contini, *Quarant'anni di amicizia. Scritti su Carlo Emilio Gadda*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), 70.

Matteo; the author is specifically referring to the men surrounding St. Matthew, the bearded figure in black.

> "Mentre il Cristo comanda a Matteo che lo segua, un viso di adolescente, sensualmente distratto, chiede: «Chi cerca costui?». Il vino imporpora le sue floride gote ed egli si volge indifferente, con sorrisetto quasi bolognese. Una bella piuma ha nel cappello di velluto violetto e una sottile spada al fianco. Le gambe nervose si vedono di là dallo sgabello, come in riposo, dopo l'accorrere, dopo il rissare. Non vi è pena né pensiero. Rosse e fervide luci sono il termine della calda, verde pianura e nelle vene gioconde pulsa il fervido sangue dell'adolescenza. Il soldo è sicuro, lesta è la spada."[41]

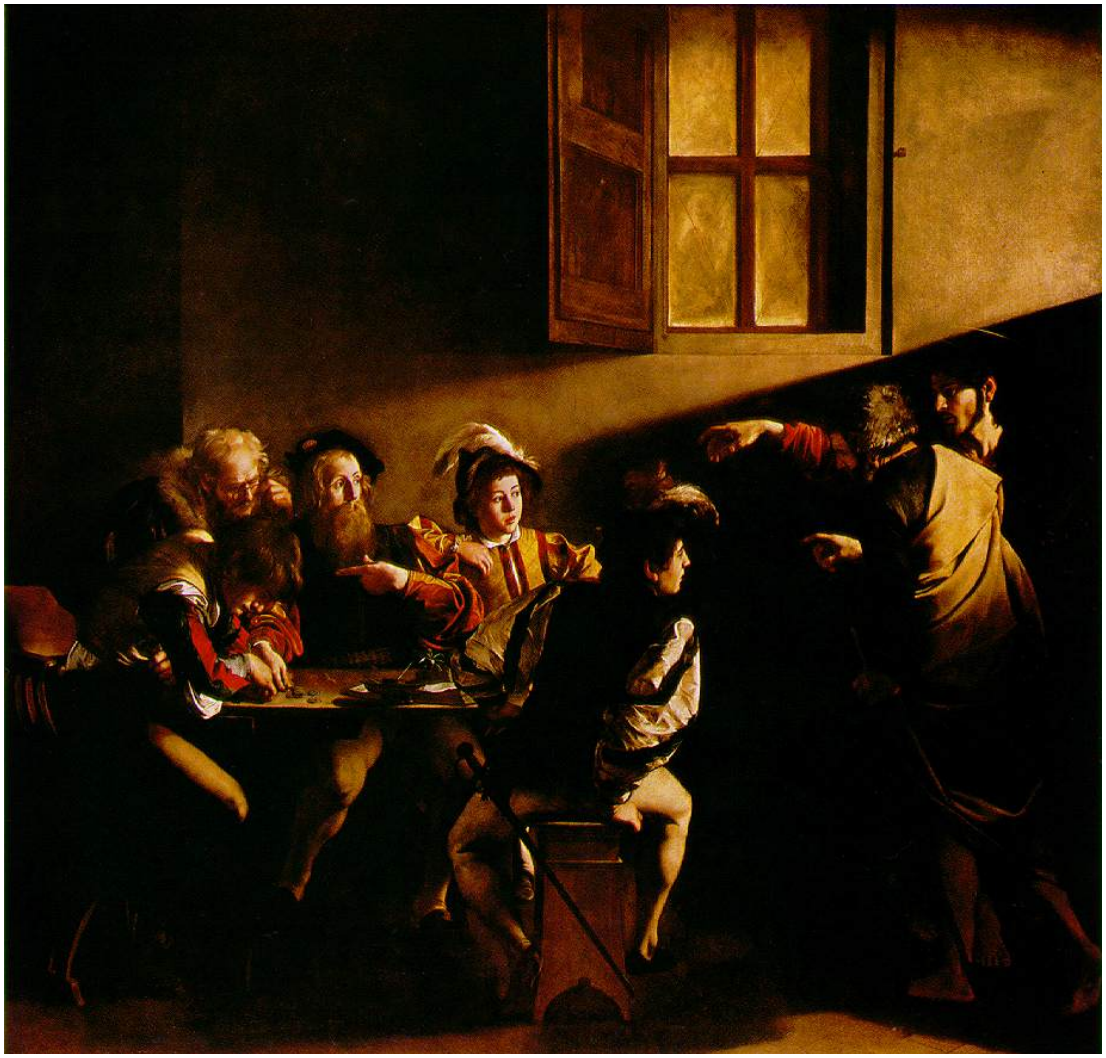

Fig. 1.1. Caravaggio, *La vocazione di san Matteo*, 1599-1600, oil on canvas, 322 x 340 cm, Chiesa di San Luigi dei Francesci, Rome. Image: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Calling_of_Saint_Matthew_by_Carvaggio.jpg.

[41] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "Apologia manzoniana," 681.

Up until this point, Gadda clearly is concerned with the *Vocazione*; the references to Caravaggio, Matteo's *compagni di gioco*, and Christ's command are unmistakable. However, a closer look at the painting shows that the author's ekphrasis is not a mere poetic description; it is also a reworking of the composition. Indeed, who is the adolescent boy to whom Gadda refers? The most obvious candidate is the boy next to St. Matthew, with the plume in his hat and the ruddy cheeks. Yet the viewer of Caravaggio's painting can make out only this figure's foot, not his "gambe nervose"; nor is it possible to see his sword. Rather than describing Caravaggio's figures, Gadda seems to be conflating two of them: the boy to the right of Matthew, and the young man sitting across from him—namely the figure dressed in black and white, seated at the table, whose back faces the viewer. That Gadda's ekphrasis is more a "repainting" of Caravaggio's canvas than a mere recounting of it only becomes clearer as the passage continues.

"Nei vicoli, sotto gli archi dei passaggi," Gadda writes, referring to an exterior scene that is obviously not visible in Caravaggio's painting,

> "passano ridendo i micheletti della ronda e qualche puttana si rimpiatta, inseguita da sgangherate risate. Poi, quando la ronda si perde con una cadenza lontana e la luna fa diagonali di ombra e di biancore sui quadri delle case e sui tetti, si può chieder conto, de' suoi diportamenti, a uno che passerà. Una spallata. E perché, e per come. Le voci son basse e concitate. Ma qualche finestra si apre e donne in camicia si danno a invocare la Madonna. Il soldo comanda e la spada lavora."[42]

At first glance, this passage does not even appear to be related to the *Vocazione*, though an attentive reader will notice the caraveggesque arrangement of the diagonal lines of shadow and moonlight. Furthermore, Gadda fits this outdoor scene into his ekphrasis of the *Vocazione* by way of the images of "il soldo" and "la spada." If in the *Vocazione*, "Il soldo è sicuro, lesta è la spada," here instead, "Il soldo comanda e la spada lavora." The author confirms that he is still meditating on

[42] Ibid., 681-682.

Caravaggio's painting when he explicitly cites Christ and Matthew: "Il Signore comandò che Matteo lo seguisse, lasciando nella taverna i dadi e i nummi del mondo. Il Caravaggio vide e dipinse il Signore e Matteo e poi giovinastri dalle turgide labbra, cocchieri, sgherri, garzoni. Meglio girare alla larga."[43] Gadda's peculiar insistence that Caravaggio *saw* and depicted Christ and Matthew is striking. It suggests that, in the author's reimagining of the canvas, Caravaggio is not merely depicting the calling of St. Matthew, which of course he never actually witnessed. Instead, the artist is *also* depicting what he did in fact see before leaving Milan for Rome in 1592: Spanish-dominated Lombardy at the very end of the Renaissance.

This point is corroborated by the earlier version of the "Apologia" from the appendix of the *Racconto italiano*. In the first version of the passage cited above, Gadda imagines a street scene filled with shouts in Spanish, evoking the same foreign-occupied Lombardy that Manzoni depicts in *I promessi sposi*: "Nei vicoli, sotto gli archi dei passaggi, passano ridendo i micheletti della ronda e qualche puttana si rimpiatta fra sgangherate risate. «Nombre de Dios! Si fuera para farrear!»"[44] In light of this, it becomes clear that Gadda is not only describing Caravaggio's painting; he is also imagining it as a part or fold of the larger society, time, and place that the artist intimately knew, namely the early modern Lombardy into which he was born (here Gadda seems to overlook the fact that by the time Caravaggio set to work on the *Vocazione*, he had already been living in Rome for several years). Thus, instead of simply concentrating on that which is visible in the painting, Gadda engages in an elaborate act of imagination of Caravaggio's homeland, as though it were figured just outside of the window that appears in the upper right of the *Vocazione*.

[43] Ibid., 682.

[44] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "Racconto italiano di ignoto del Novecento," in *Scritti vari e postumi*, eds. Andrea Silvestri, Claudio Vela, Dante Isella, Paola Italia, and Giorgio Pinotti (Milan: Garzanti, 2009), 593-594.

More specifically, Gadda, dialoguing with Leibniz and anticipating Deleuze, comes to think of Caravaggio's Lombardy and its innumerable perceptions as being *folded* into the painting's obscure background: the wall behind Matthew, his companions, and Christ is nothing more than an "immagine-limite"—that limited and therefore fictional vision—of the kind Gadda discusses in his thesis. This is precisely what sets Caravaggio apart for Gadda: in the author's estimation, the painter *self-consciously* presents this "image-limit" as a mere appearance behind which bustles all the perceptions of late-sixteenth-century Lombardy. The end result of this reasoning is an ekphrasis that completely reconfigures the artwork, but that also allows us to understand how Gadda is reading Caravaggio's baroque aesthetic. In other words, Gadda, like Deleuze after him, sees the painting as a representation of a few apperceptions (namely the calling of St. Matthew) set amidst a sea of *petites perceptions* (the baroque Lombardy that is not visible in the painting).[45] His narrating voice continuously unfolds these perceptions; this act of "unfolding" in Gadda is one and the same with the act of description: it is in describing these "previously unconscious" perceptions that Gadda "brings" them into our conscious minds.

We have already seen how, in his thesis on Leibniz, Gadda came to recognize the loss of a privileged viewpoint or perspective in modernity. In the *Meditazione milanese*, written between May and June 1928—the same year in which he wrote the draft of his *tesi di laurea*—Gadda takes a step further and posits a distinctly Leibnizian theory of perception.[46] Although not the main focus

[45] Gadda was aware of the concept of "petites perceptions" and addresses them in his thesis. While he agreed with the concept, he did not believe that these perceptions should be described as "little." He writes that, "Avverto qui che l'espressione quantitativa 'petites perceptions' ha un suo valore, un suo pregio, che vorrei veder trascurato: dicendo i fatti subcoscienti non si allude tanto alla loro piccolezzza quanto alla loro oscurità: ma oscura, per difetto di coscienza o d'intelligenza, può essere anche una 'perception' che non sia 'petite'. Il senso sociale p.e. manca o è deforme nei criminali. Un grande pericolo, che costituirebbe per la coscienza una percezione della massima intensità se fosse avvertito, è oscuro alla persona distratta o stanca, ecc." (23).

[46] The *Meditazione*, in fact, was possibly a series of preliminary notes for Gadda's tesi on Leibniz, or perhaps, as Christophe Mileschi conjectures, another draft of the thesis itself. For Mileschi's helpful overview of the *Meditazione*,

of this treatise, Caravaggio was not far from Gadda's thoughts as he composed the *Meditazione*. In fact, in chapter twenty-five, entitled "Il metodo," the *ingegnere* identifies Caravaggio as an exemplary artist for his remarkable attention to detail.[47] It is in the text's fourth chapter, however, "Il carattere estensivamente indefinito dei sistemi reali," that Gadda posits his "Teorema della necessità della ricostruzione del coesistente," which, I argue, motivates his singular reading of the *Vocazione*. This *teorema*, with its clear Leibnizian influence, holds that the human mind cannot think of any given object or entity without evoking an endless set of other interconnected objects or phenomena. Gadda succinctly defines his theorem as follows: "La considerazione di un oggetto finito costringe la nostra mente a riconoscere l'esistenza di tutto il noto, di tutto il pensabile ed altro ancora." Gadda anticipates his reader's objections, namely that "dall'oggetto 'meretrice' [non si risale] affatto all'oggetto 'macchina a vapore.'"[48] Nevertheless, he insists that these seemingly disparate entities are in fact connected, in a move that is not so unlike his ekphrasis of the *Vocazione*. The author offers his response in a series of wild and logorrheic examples:

> "Rispondo: intanto io parlo di oggetti reali e concreti cioè di relazioni esistenti: quella tale reale e vera meretrice […] non parlo di termini generali, astratti per comodità di pensiero […] Poi io non affermo che la mente dell'uno […] possa essa da sola, dall'osso del Dinosauro [sic], ricostruire il Dinosauro ed il mondo universo. Ma la meretrice avrà per amante un manovale delle ferrovie. E costui, per immaginarcelo, dovremo pensare anche a Giacomo Watt […] Topograficamente, noi siamo costretti a credere che al di là da questi monti vi saranno altre valli, come il leopardiano interlocutore della luna, l'errante e meditante pastore. E al di là delle valli altri monti, e così in infinito fino a chiudere la sfera, che è l'immagine geometrica, topografica dell'uno-tutto."[49]

---

see: "*Meditazione milanese*. Gadda filosofo: un percorso retrogrado," *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, no. 5 (2007), https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/journal/issue5/articles/mileschiprecursore05.php.

[47] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "Meditazione Milanese," 844.

[48] Ibid., 646.

[49] Ibid., 646-647. Gadda's *teorema* evokes Leibnizian characterizations of perception, such as that found in the *Monadology*. For example, in paragraph 61, Leibniz reasons that, because "all matter is interconnected […] every body is affected by everything that happens in the universe so much so that the one who sees all could read in each body what is happening everywhere, and even what has happened and what will happen […] But a soul can read in

If to think of a "meretrice" requires us to think of her "amante," a railroad conductor, which in turn induces us to think of James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine, then neither can we envision a mountain without imagining of the valleys beyond it and the mountains that arise still further on, toward and over the horizon. Gadda, in my view, conceives of the *Vocazione* in precisely this way, that is, as a representation of a singular fold in the endlessly interconnected Leibnizian cosmos. If the viewer follows this chain of interconnection, he will continue to unfold *petites perceptions* one after another, leading from Christ's calling of Matthew to Spanish Lombardy via the same thought-process that leads from a "meretrice" to James Watt. Gadda, in short, reads the fold into Caravaggio's painting.

For a reader accustomed to Gadda's meandering and inventive prose, the way in which he re-envisions the *Vocazione* may seem familiar; I argue that it is precisely this logic of representation that the *ingegnere* follows in the construction of his narrative fiction. In his foreword to William Weaver's English-language translation of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, Italo Calvino provides an excellent description of Gadda's prose that illustrates this point. Specifically, Calvino observes that Gadda's narrator is constantly distracted by the *petites perceptions* of the world he is attempting to represent, unfolding them to the point where they overtake his entire narrative. Drawing on the *Meditazione milanese*, Calvino notes that the *Pasticciaccio* was inspired in part by Gadda's reading of the philosophy of Leibniz, Spinoza, and Kant. "Quel che conta più," Calvino writes,

> "è come questa filosofia è riflessa […] nella composizione narrativa [di Gadda], in cui i minimi dettagli s'ingigantiscono e finiscono per occupare tutto il quadro e per

itself only what is distinctly represented there; it cannot unfold at once all that is folded in it, for this proceeds to infinity." Gadda here seems to reason that the "soul" in question could continually unfold the perceptions held within it by following the chain that interconnects them. For Leibniz's arguments, see "The Monadology," 26. Leibniz's reasoning here, as I will explain below, is also highly relevant to the *Pasticciaccio*.

> nascondere o cancellare il disegno generale. Così succede che in questo romanzo, in cui l'intreccio a poco a poco viene dimenticato: forse siamo proprio sul punto di scoprire chi ha ucciso e perché, ma la descrizione d'una gallina e degli escrementi che questa gallina deposita sul suolo diventa più importante della soluzione del mistero."[50]

What Calvino here refers to as a "minimo dettaglio" is, in Leibnizian terms, a *petite perception*. As in his description of the *Vocazione*, Gadda's narrator is always unfolding the *petites perceptions* as they arise in his imagination. Any reader of the *ingegnere* is familiar with this dynamic, whereby constant digressions distract and confuse, and give rise to narratives that are, as Robert Dombroski has pointed out, essentially plotless but filled with obsessive description or "descriptive folds."[51] However, while the *petites perceptions* of the world remain folded into the darkness of Caravaggio's painting, in Gadda's works, they catch the attention of his narrator, who becomes continually sidetracked and led into digressions by them. It is thanks to this Leibniz/Caravaggio matrix that Gadda ultimately developed a literary stylistic that is marked by an extravagance and excess that is not present in artworks like the *Vocazione*. However, the structure of Gadda's narratives, as Calvino describes it here, is characterized by the same dynamic that the *ingegnere* reads into Caravaggio. In imagining and describing the scene of the *Vocazione* and all that it evokes within him, Gadda is *creating* his "grande ed inarrivabile maestro," just as he creates his own version of Manzoni in the same essay. It is no mistake that the author describes the *Racconto*

[50] Italo Calvino, "Il *Pasticciaccio*," in *Italo Calvino. Saggi*, ed. Mario Barenghi (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), 1076-1077. Weaver's English translation of Calvino's foreword is found in Carlo Emilio Gadda, *That Awful Mess on the via Merulana*, trans. William Weaver (New York: New York Review of Books, 1965), v-xiv.

[51] Dombroski uses the term "fold" in a narrow sense, referring to the way in which Gadda structures his narratives. Specifically, citing Deleuze, he argues that Gadda has taken up the "paradigm for the baroque story [...] 'in which description replaces the object, the concept becomes narrative, and the subject becomes point of view or subject of expression.'" By way of example, Dombroski points to the opening of the *Cognizione*, where Gadda's narrator "begins [the novel] with what looks like an attempt to establish a frame of reference (the setting for action). Yet the described world of Maradagàl is so replete with objects that attract the narrator's eye that it cannot hold its own as the centre of attention" (7). Dombroski refers to this as a "descriptive fold." My argument differs from Dombroski's in that, more than a narrative device, I argue that these folds are actually a literary rendering of the hermeneutical framework that Gadda developed in dialogue with Caravaggio and Leibniz. For the entire discussion of these descriptive folds, see *Creative Entanglements*, 6-11.

italiano as a "romanzo caravaggesco" and dedicates it to the painter; indeed the Caravaggio that Gadda created for himself really was his *maestro*.

While the Gaddian version of Caravaggio is, no doubt, the product of a creative and unique line of reasoning, recent art historians have identified in the painter's signature tenebrism certain characteristics that suggest, in some way, that its significance is not all that different from the meaning Gadda ascribed to it. Troy Thomas, for example, has argued that, "Caravaggio's art shows the limitations of human knowledge, through murky spatial settings that stand as metaphors for human ignorance of the divine world or the theological heavens, the world beyond our immediate perception." Significantly, from 1597 to 1601, Caravaggio lived in the household and under the patronage of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte (1549-1627), who was interested in the sciences and whose brother, Guidobaldo, was a "strong supporter of the young Galileo Galilei."[52] It was during this time that the artist "developed his famous *tenebroso* technique. His obscure backgrounds," Thomas writes, "suggest an apprehensiveness about humankind's place in a universe that was, with respect to the theories then being disputed, unfamiliar and unknown."[53] Even if Caravaggio's dark backgrounds are not stand-ins for intricate chains of *petites perceptions*, as Gadda believed, Troy's analysis suggests that the author is correct in identifying the painter's aesthetic with a baroque conception of the universe as stretching beyond the range of conscious perception.

In depicting these aporias of uncertainty and incomprehensibility, Caravaggio's painting marks a significant break with the past, as Gadda's preferred art historian, Roberto Longhi,

[52] Troy Thomas, *Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2016), 167.

[53] Ibid., 166-167. Itay Sapir, juxtaposing the philosophy of Michel de Montaigne with Caravaggio's canvases, likewise reads these images as an expression of a fundamental uncertainty about what is visible, invisible, and knowable. See: "The Visible, the Invisible, and the Knowable: Modernity as an Obscure Tale," in *Seeing Perception*, eds. Silke Horstkotte and Karin Leonhard (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 198-215.

insightfully argues. Specifically, for Longhi the baroque painter's innovation was the representation of figures against that deep darkness and stark light that appear to act as elements beyond human understanding. In his 1951 essay, "Caravaggio e la sua cerchia a Milano," Longhi reflects on the implications of this aesthetic practice in a way that can help us to better articulate how Gadda takes this up in his writing. Specifically, in comparing Longhi's interpretation of the baroque painter's art to Gadda's literary stylistic, it becomes possible to see the *ingegnere*'s prose as a kind of "literary tenebrism." Longhi begins his description of Caravaggio's dramatic use of light and dark by juxtaposing the latter's art with that of his predecessors:

> "Contro il superindividualismo del Rinascimento e dei manieristi, contro il superuomo Michelangelo […] il Caravaggio pensa per la prima volta che il destino sentimentale della figurazione può essere indicato da un elemento esterno all'uomo, non schiavo dell'uomo. Per primo si avvede che non sempre la luce e l'ombra rivelano i corpi in quell'integrità fisica che è così comoda a mitologizzarsi, anzi qualche volta li disfanno per molta luce o li negano per molta ombra; qualche altra volta sembrano anche alternarne la sostanza, la materia apparente. Ma poiché per l'occhio è reale ciò che appare, non ciò che è […], che altro potrà rendere un pittore 'naturale' se non l'apparenza, l'impressione che ci danno le cose? […] Caravaggio non cerca più la forma dei corpi belli, ma trova 'la forma delle ombre' che incidono sui corpi, belli o brutti che siano; ora per esprimerli e affermarli in luminosa evidenza momentanea, ora per negarli e confutarli nel gorgo dell'oscurità."[54]

For Longhi, Caravaggio's dramatic play of light and dark—his signature tenebrism—reconceptualizes the process of the *figurazione* of the human body. In particular, Longhi makes a crucial point when he argues that this new practice of representation functions by exploiting an element that is external to the human figure, and not dependent upon it. By framing Caravaggio's art in this way, Longhi is led to conclude that his baroque style is not a representation of the human being as one in control of his environment, but rather as subject to it. More precisely, we might say that Caravaggio's human figures are inscribed in a baroque "regime of light" similar to the one

[54] Roberto Longhi, "Caravaggio e la sua cerchia a Milano," in *Da Cimabue a Morandi*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 883.

that Deleuze describes in *Le Pli*. Darkness and light do not serve simply to reveal the human figures in a given painting. Instead the excessive, dramatic light and dark in Caravaggio's paintings often "negate" or obfuscate them. In a sense, the human must struggle against blinding light or engulfing darkness (the "gorgo dell'oscurità") in order to emerge into the viewer's perceptual field. Likewise, in Gadda's narratives, as Calvino accurately points out, the plot "struggles" to take shape within the thick texture of detail that the narrator obsessively recounts. Thus, in the *Pasticcaccio*, the plot of the murder mystery is overwhelmed by narrative description, and only manages to come partially into view and without a solution. The most obvious difference between Caravaggio's visual tenebrism and Gadda's literary tenebrism is that the latter's plots are not battling against a regime of light and dark, but rather from an excess of description; it is, however, this tidal wave of detail that Gadda imagines as being folded into Caravaggio's obscure backgrounds, or at least that of the *Vocazione*. For Gadda, then, the *petites perceptions* take on a function analogous to that of Caravaggio's tenebrism, as they obfuscate the very thing that the artwork is "meant" to represent.

If Gadda saw Caravaggio as a highly mimetic painter who also sought to depict the "barocaggine" embedded in the world, he took one other key lesson away from his Lombard "predecessor," namely a belief that the function of art is to remind the reader or viewer that order is merely illusory and should be rejected or "negated" as such. A clear articulation of this position can be found in the seventh chapter of *La cognizione del dolore*, in which the narrator describes the protagonist, the hidalgo don Gonzalo's secret pride, his obsessive "negazione": "Nessuno conobbe il lento pallore della negazione," the chapter begins. Turning his attention to don Gonzalo, the narrator says: "La sua secreta perplessità e l'orgoglio secreto affioravano dentro la trama degli atti in una negazione di parvenze non valide. Le figurazioni non valide erano da negare e da

respingere, come specie di falso denaro."[55] The "figurazioni non valide" negated throughout the *Cognizione* range from bourgeois ritual to fascist ideology. In the course of the novel, it becomes clear that these "figurazioni" demystify any attempt to establish a stable core of meaning.

Dombroski recognized this passage as an important articulation of a fundamental function of Gadda's literary aesthetic, which he called the "negation of false appearances."[56] However, when considered in light of Gadda's versions of Caravaggio and Leibniz, it becomes clear that this is not so much a negation of false appearances—which would imply that there is a "true" appearance for Gadda—as it is an attempt to show how any given phenomenon, ideology, narrative, or custom is merely one fold amid the infinite folds of the real. Rather than a "negation of false appearances," we might call this a "decompounding of possibles," to borrow a phrase from the *Pasticciaccio*.[57] If Leibniz's fold guards against the threat of meaninglessness by compounding together all possibles, Gadda the modernist turns this on its head. The *ingegnere*'s fold is constantly undoing meaning as it continually unfolds in the text: he seeks to forestall any attempt to generate unity rather than difference. Traditional frameworks of meaning—ideologies, rituals, narratives, notions of a sovereign self—are themselves merely folds that cannot reduce the world (of which, in any case, they are a part) to any single or stable significance.

[55] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "La cognizione del dolore," in *Romanzi e racconti I*, eds. Raffaella Rodondi, Guido Lucchini, and Emilio Manzotti (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), 703.

[56] Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*, 78-79.

[57] In the original Italian, this is called a "decombinazione estrema dei possibili." See Carlo Emilio Gadda, "Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana," in *Romanzi e racconti II*, eds. Giorgio Pinotti, Dante Isella, and Raffaella Rodondi (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), 70. The translation of it is that of William Weaver. See Gadda/Weaver, *That Awful Mess on the via Merulana*, 84.

This revision of Leibniz is already present in the *ingegnere*'s thesis on the *Nouveaux essais*. There is, Gadda argues in this work, a sense of uncertainty that pervades Leibniz's philosophical system:

> "Che nelle espressioni di Leibniz vi sia sforzo e incertezza non mi par dubbio: se cessa l'appercezione, cioè la conoscenza riflessiva del nostro stato percettivo, cioè insomma l'attività dell'io accentrante la disperante varietà delle percezioni, cessa in fondo quest'io, quest'anima: viene a mancare la funzione tipica di essa che non è quella del semplice sommare le percezioni, ma di organizzarle."[58]

What Gadda refers to here is the very thing against which Leibniz seeks to guard: the possibility that, beyond the monad's organization of its own perceptions, there is no greater order that acts as a transcendental, permanent foundation for thought. Gadda, who never accepted Leibniz's metaphysical faith in a divine organizing mind, believed just this.[59] While for the latter there exists an objective view of the universe, namely the inaccessible vantage point of God, for the former there is instead only that "io" that finds itself within the web of a myriad of perceptions which it can place only into a purely subjective and thus illusory order. As such, in the absence of this self, when its "typical function" of organizing perceptions passes away, it leaves behind no order at all. If, as Gadda contends, Caravaggio's paintings are self-conscious representations of apperceptions set against a background of innumerable folded perceptions, then, in his view, these canvases must be representations of a lack or absence of permanence and stability: they are given to us only as

[58] Gadda, "La teoria della conoscenza nei «Nuovi Saggi»," 17.

[59] In the *Meditazione milanese*, Gadda is skeptical of the Leibnizian idea that human reason is a fold of divine reason. Instead, human rationality, he suggests, produces meaning in dialogue with "geniuses" who serve as the basis from which all other logic derives. As the *ingegnere* explains, "L'Inspiratore e il Depositario di questa più vasta ragione attuale non so se sia un Genio supersociale o superstellare (Leibniz, Bruno) o direttamente Dio. Ma io propenderei di più per la prima ipotesi, e cioè per l'idea di un sistema categorico superumano che non fosse ancora e subito Dio. Ché mi spiacerebbe di spendere Dio per così poco: e cioè di consumare l'Infinito Universo per dar ragione di quattro macachi che impidiocchiano la crosta ignominiosa della terra" (706). While the author does not outright negate the existence of God, he refuses to see him as a foundation for reason or meaning. Instead these are, at best, grounded in a purely subjective foundation: there are only great minds who exert a profound influence on the thinking of others. Meaning, in this sense, is a human construction.

depictions of the fleeting perceptions of the artist. These images, in other words, are presented to us merely as folds and thus may be seen as constituting a kind of "visual" decompounding of possibles.

At the end of his ekphrasis in the "Apologia," Gadda reaffirms just this. He returns to the imagined exterior scene beyond the wall in the background of the *Vocazione*, stating that,

> "Quivi dietro grate ingiuste e irremovibili pallidi visi, occhi cerchiati di rinunzie distruggitrici scrutano la sana vita degli altri e la luce, la perduta luce del mondo polveroso e rivoltato: del mondo ove sono le spade, le piume, le corse affannose: e a tarda notte la gioventù prorompente nei canti e nel sangue. Negli atroci silenzi la legge si fa irreale, perché nessun termine di giusto riferimento le è conceduto. Nulla esiste più, nulla è più possibile socialmente: soltanto sono reali gli impulsi di una fuggente individualità."[60]

Caravaggio's Lombardy is a world turned on its head, in whose "dreadful silences" the law itself has been made unreal for lack of a foundation. Gadda does not specify to which law he refers here. On the one hand, this early modern Lombardy, which belongs both to Caravaggio and Manzoni, has seen the rule of law upended by the tyranny of the Spanish occupiers. On the other, this is for Gadda deeper than a mere political crisis; it instead constitutes an epistemological one. For in the darkness of this world of "lost light," there is no objective framework for the law *or* the self: for the latter all that is left are the intermittent and "fleeting impulses" of individuality. We can better define Gadda's epistemological quandary in the context of his interpretation of Caravaggio's painting. If for Gadda the *Calling of St. Matthew* constitutes a few miniscule folds of an infinitely larger and ever unfolding fold, then this scene and its figures might be overcome at any point by *petites perceptions* that unfurl into the mind of the viewer. The pictorial image thus works to undermine the stability of the principles underlying both the socius and the single human subject, either of which at any moment could fall back into the shadows. Nothing is "socially possible" in

[60] Gadda, "Apologia manzoniana," 682.

Gadda's vision, for any basis for social action appears as just another fold among many. In short, the vast sea of unconscious perceptions threatens to subvert every conceivable narrative schema that seeks to organize human cognition and action, from a legal code to ideological belief systems, or even the plot of a novel.

In light of this, Ezio Raimondi's assertion that "per Gadda le opere di Caravaggio erano un'epifania di quelle che egli ha chiamato tante volte «le ragioni della vita»," is quite accurate.[61] Gadda's folded prose decomposes all those "parvenze" that falsely claim to be foundations. Whether it be don Gonzalo's obsessive and prideful rejection of appearances, or investigator Ciccio Ingravallo's vortex of causality that negates the narrative logic of the *giallo*, Gadda represents only a chain of causes and effects whose point of origin and *telos* are equally unknowable to us. Despite the clear differences between the respective worldviews of Gadda and Caravaggio, there can be little doubt that the former's literary works constitute a complex dialogue with the latter's paintings. In the following pages, I will discuss how these narrative fictions, thanks to their extraordinary stylistic fireworks, aim to undermine key tenets of fascist ideology.[62] As we

[61] Ezio Raimondi, "Gadda e le incidenze lombarde della luce," in *Il colore eloquente. Letteratura e arte barocca* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995), 87-109, 101.

[62] Caravaggio (unlike Michelangelo Buonarroti whom I will discuss in chapter two) was not the object of a propaganda campaign on the part of the regime. Fascist critics and artists did weigh in on the debate surrounding Caravaggio in the 1920s, but disagreed with one another about the merits of his artworks. In a 1921 issue of *Valori plastici*, dedicated to a debate about the Seicento in response to Giorgio De Chirico's polemic against it published in the same journal, Carlo Carrà, Cipriano Efisio Oppo, and Margherita Sarfatti—all adherents to the fascist party—each waded into the discussion surrounding Caravaggio's work. Carrà dismissed the artist's paintings, with the rest of the Baroque, as bereft of a "sentimento poetico" and as being characterized by a "turba fanatizzata e burlesca" (Carlo Carrà, "Il Seicento e la critica italiana," in *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte* [Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969], 78.). Sarfatti, who generally shared Carrà's disdain for the Seicento, surprisingly saw Caravaggio as one of the more tolerable artists of a century that she otherwise believed to be aesthetically bankrupt: "Caravaggio, nel naufragio della sintesi idealistica [del Seicento], si afferra alle tavole della realtà, della più quotidiana, plebea realtà, purché drastica di effetti e di colore di luce, drammatica nell'espressione del tipo e del soggetto, e la trasforma in pretesto lirico per sfogare l'esasperazione del suo temperamento senza equilibrio" (Margherita Sarfatti, "Il Seicento Italiano," in *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte* [Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969], 96). Oppo's view of Caravaggio was decidedly positive; he praises the painter as highly original, arguing that "si costruisce una sua atmosfera speciale mai usata prima e non copia il vero ma compone" (Cipriano Efisio Oppo, "Discussioni inutili," in *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte* [Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969], 90). For De Chirico's essay against the Baroque, see "La mania del Seicento," in *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969), 60-62. For more on the debate in *Valori*

will see, whether in mapping fascist Italy onto the fictional landscape of Maradagàl in the *Cognizione* or in lambasting Mussolini's sexual politics in the *Pasticciaccio*, the lessons of Leibniz and Caravaggio never seem to have been far from Gadda's thoughts and concerns.

"Ma il disordine c'è!": Fascism, Nationalism, & Colonialism

On March 24, 1924, only several weeks after Gadda returned to Milan from Argentina, the author set about drafting the *Racconto italiano*. From the very outset, it is clear that both Caravaggio and the fourteen months spent in South America were at the forefront of Gadda's mind as he wrote. Very early in his notes, the author invokes the painter's tenebrism as implicated in the writing process: "Dal caos dello sfondo devono coagulare e formarsi alcune figure a cui sarà affidata la gestione della favola."[63] The protagonist to whom Gadda entrusts the "management" of his "fable" is Grifonetto Lampugnani who, like the author, becomes involved in fascist colonialism. Lampugnani, Gadda's notes reveal, travels to South America as a proponent of a new "Fascismo americano."[64] His experiences in the New World, however, leave him disillusioned; the unrealized Argentine tract of the novel was to focus on "Il disgusto americano di Grifonetto," namely his loss of "fede nelle «colonie»" and his "disdegno e forzato ritorno" to Italy.[65] As Gadda's written plans indicate, this "disgusto americano" was to be one of a series of traumas and disappointments that lead Grifonetto to grasp the limits of his own cognitive powers. The continual psychological shocks that the protagonist undergoes erode his interpretative framework to such a

plastici, see Laura Moure Cecchini, *Baroquemania. Italian Visual Culture and the Construction of National Identity 1898-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 127-135.

[63] Gadda, *Racconto italiano*, 395.

[64] Ibid., 400.

[65] Ibid., 400, 469. See also Sbragia, 54.

degree that, like the *Cognizione*'s don Gonzalo after him, he can no longer find any stable basis for meaning or even for the self. In place of his formerly enthusiastic support for Fascism and colonialism, Grifonetto instead embraces a radical kind of skepticism. Significantly, Lampugnani most fully articulates this in direct dialogue with the work of Caravaggio, as he looks upon a photograph of the *Vocazione di san Matteo* and identifies himself as one of the figures in the painting. The *Racconto* thus marks Gadda's first literary attempt to resist the discursive limits imposed by Fascism, nationalism, and colonialism in dialogue with the Baroque.

Although the notes, narrative fragments, and revisions that comprise the *Racconto* at times make it difficult to discern a conventional plot structure, Gadda does leave the reader with a general sense of the narrative's contours. That the text was to focus on the series of traumatic events leading to Grifonetto's newfound skepticism is made clear in a note dated September 7, 1924. Gadda explains that as Lampugnani's every attempt at a coherent and methodical explanation of events fails, he adopts a nihilistic outlook that leads to his "catastrophic" decision to murder his lover, Maria de la Garde, at the novel's end.[66] Elaborating on how the novel will reach its murderous conclusion, Gadda writes,

> "Si potrebbe arrivare al delitto di Grifonetto per «analogia» e cioè: egli estremamente volitivo, ma non eccessivamente critico [...] incontra una serie di ostacoli e di more all'azione per cui si desta in lui il senso o impulso catastrofico: (realtà analogica di molti stati d'animo pre-criminali). Questa serie fatale di «choc» che desta in lui la suggestione analogica può essere: dalla ricchezza alla miseria per

[66] To be clear, Gadda abandoned this nihilism in his later works, though, of course, he always remained deeply skeptical. One undeniable example of Gadda's ultimate rejection of nihilism is his essay "L'egoista." In the text, he argues that individuals are inextricably interconnected, and must accept the condition of their "convivenza": "La vita di ognun di noi pensata come fatto per sé stante," the *ingegnere* argues, "estraniato da un decorso e da una correlazione di fatti, è concetto erroneo, è figurazione gratuita. In realtà, la vita di ognun di noi è 'simbiosi con l'universo.'" This symbiosis, Gadda continues, constitutes a "necessaria convivenza di tutti gli esseri" (654). While he always rejected any singular explanation or ideological certitude, here Gadda embraces the one thing he accepts as "reality": relationship. He therefore rejects any act that violates or denies our "simbiosi con l'universo." "Il narcisista," he writes, "finisce per *vedere* unicamente se stesso. Dimentica l'obiettivo reale dell'amore per cadere innamorato dello specchio" (655). See: Carlo Emilio Gadda, "L'egoista," in *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*, edited by Dante Isella (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), 654-667.

> cause non sue [...]; dalla vita alla morte di suo fratello: (nella guerra); dalla fede nella patria alla sozzura: (1919); dal sacrificio come fascista alla minaccia del carcere; [...] dalla patria all'esilio; dalla fede nelle «colonie» al disdegno e forzato ritorno: (intanto comincia già rivelarsi la stanchezza). Così alla potente delusione d'amore segue la folle tragedia: «Se nulla è possibile, tutto finisca!»"[67]

Any reader familiar with Gadda's life story will recognize that the shocks and disillusionments listed here are largely autobiographical. Grifonetto's loss of riches reflects the Gadda family's own financial struggles, an experience that shook the *ingegnere*'s sense of belonging to the Milanese bourgeoisie.[68] The demise of Grifonetto's brother was inspired, no doubt, by the death of the author's brother, Enrico, during the First World War, in April 1918. The war and the loss of his brother helped to undermine Gadda's faith in Italian liberal nationalism; although he had enlisted in the army believing he was serving a "dolorosa necessità nazionale," the author was left horrified by the conflict as human life suddenly appeared to him as tragically senseless.[69] Then, of course, as we have seen, Gadda's colonial venture in Argentina left him disillusioned with Fascism, the same ideology that he had hoped might restore order in the immediate postwar period.[70] Finally, the "impossibility" of Grifonetto's romance might reflect Gadda's own queer sexuality and his inability to conform to the gender roles prescribed by fascist ideology or, more generally, by patriarchal and heternormative Italian society. Each of these "shocks" is fictionalized and described in the *Racconto* as "ostacoli all'azione" because they embody the collapse of a

---

[67] Gadda, *Racconto italiano*, 468.

[68] "La povertà mi ha umiliato," Gadda once recalled, "di fronte al ceto civile borghese al quale la mia famiglia apparteneva, almeno nominalmente" (Roscioni, 81).

[69] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "Impossibilità di un diario di guerra," in *Romanzi e racconti I*, eds. Raffaella Rodondi, Guido Lucchini, and Emilio Manzotti (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), 142.

[70] I will discuss this point in more depth below; Gadda outlines his sorrow in disappointment in the war in texts like the aforementioned "Impossibilità di un diario di guerra," and especially in *Giornale di guerra e di prigionia*, which can be found in *Romanzi e racconti II*, eds. Giorgio Pinotti, Dante Isella, and Raffaella Rodondi (Milan: Garzanti, 1992), 431-867.

worldview that might justify or direct action. Without his bourgeois values, liberal nationalism, or Fascism, Grifonetto is left ideologically adrift, leading to his decision to commit murder and to the conclusion that "nulla è possibile": Lampugnani embraces nihilism. All of this suggests that had Gadda completed the novel, particularly the part narrating Grifonetto's fascist colonialism, the *Racconto* would have been a kind of indictment of Fascism and its incoherence as a total system of belief. If, as Gentile and Mussolini believed, the state encompasses all, the *Racconto* would instead reveal the shortcomings and lacunae of the regime's ideology.

Here it is important to recognize that Grifonetto's declaration that "nulla è possibile" very specifically invokes Gadda's take on Caravaggio. Let us recall that a similar phrase, cited above, recurs later in the *Racconto italiano*, in those pages that are the first draft of the "Apologia manzoniana" where Gadda discusses the *Vocazione*. "Nulla esiste più, nulla è più possibile socialmente," the author writes of Caravaggio's baroque Lombardy, "soltanto sono reali gli impulsi di una fuggente individualità."[71] This is exactly the problem that Grifonetto faces: having rejected any proposed foundation for social order as nothing more than a fleeting impulse or ephemeral fold, Gadda reasons that his protagonist's story can only end in an act of criminality. This is not to say that the author was a nihilist; indeed, his later protagonists, like Gonzalo, reject this kind of violence. However, in the context of the *Racconto*, Gadda concluded that Lampugnani must be the delinquent *par excellence*, for there is no other possibility for him. Grifonetto necessarily exists outside of both law and order, and is therefore doomed to delinquency.

In light of this, it is particularly telling that Gadda's dialogue with Caravaggio becomes most explicit in the text immediately after Grifonetto is found guilty of a different delinquent act, that of "contumelie alla chiesa." The scene starts *in medias res*, with the protagonist holding a

[71] Gadda, "Apologia manzoniana," 682.

written copy of his sentence: a fine of 250 lire and twenty days in jail. The reader discovers that the offending utterances had come about in a drunken dispute with a priest during which Grifonetto insulted both said clergyman and the pope.[72] Having re-read his sentence, Grifonetto folds the paper and dismissively thinks, "Quanta carta! [...] Viviamo in un mondo di carta." The narrating voice then goes on to describe the lamplight on a nearby table, in which is visible a photograph of the *Vocazione*. Grifonetto is captivated by the image, and identifies himself as one of the figures in it. "Sulla tavola un cerchio luminoso," the narrator beings,

> "l'intersezione del cono di luce d'una lampada appesa: e, dentro quel cerchio magico, delle carte e dei libri ed uno aperto, con meravigliose figure. I margini si perdevano nel buio, quasi attingendo dal buio la potenza misteriosa della significazione e una figura altra ed immota riceveva i raggi centrali del proiettore. [...] Il Cristo del Caravaggio rivolgeva a Matteo un muto rimprovero, un muto ordine. E il viso del Martire si illuminava di una tristezza tragica e di una gratitudine gioiosa, preludio terreno ai guadi impensabili della vera vita. Giovani stupiti ascoltavano, senza comprenderlo, lo strano ordine. Una spada al lor fianco, una piuma era nel loro cappello. Dopo i dadi, balzare nel mondo, nell'ombra del crepuscolo; come una saetta risfolgora la sottile lama, quante vesciche si bucano! Che vuole Costui? Che comanda, a chi dice? Ma [Grifonetto] riandava la gustosa scenetta e gli pareva d'essere quello, quello che guarda stupido, con tumide labbra, il Nazareno troppo buono (di troppo amore e senz'odio), e che tiene, ma pronta sempre, la sua lama al suo fianco."[73]

Critics have long understood that Grifonetto's recognition of himself in the *Vocazione* is highly significant. The figure with whom he identifies must be the one to the right of Matthew, who leans on his shoulder (figure 1.2). Indeed, there are only three figures in the painting that are looking at Christ. One is Matthew, whom we can exclude because his face "si illuminava di una tristezza tragica e di una gratitudine gioiosa" in contrast to the "guardare stupido" of the figure in whom Grifonetto recognizes himself. Likewise, the figure dressed in black and white sitting across the

[72] Gadda, *Racconto italiano*, 555.

[73] Ibid., 554-555.

Fig. 1.2. *La vocazione di san Matteo* (detail)

table from Matthew gazes at Christ, but we cannot see his "tumide labbra." The only possibility is therefore the figure in yellow who looks skeptically at Jesus. Micaela Lipparini argues that this *sguardo* is key, for it underscores Grifonetto's "sete di violazione dell'ordine costituito," and his rejection of "l'inerte perbenismo borghese, che obbliga a vivere in un 'mondo di carta', dove la parola della religione e della legge è mistificatoria e si presta allo sberleffo."[74] The delinquent Grifonetto, reflecting on Caravaggio, thus engages in that selfsame decompounding of possibles: by "placing" his protagonist in the *Vocazione*, that is, in this depiction of a baroque universe made up of countless perceptions, Gadda suggests that Grifonetto's skepticism and his rejection of Fascism, colonialism, and bourgeois ideology arise from his conviction that they fall short when faced with the problem of a limitless series of folds.

The author corroborates just this point in the passage above in his remarkable description of the photograph of the *Vocazione*. This description is distinctly and self-referentially caravaggesque, as Gadda's narrator "paints" an image of the "cerchio luminoso" of lamplight that

[74] Lipparini, 96-96.

illuminates the photograph of the painting while, simultaneously, the margins of the same picture are "lost" in the darkness. This image of the *Vocazione* appears in the conscious minds of the narrator and Grifonetto in much the same way as Caravaggio's painted figures emerge into the light from the deep shadows—the "caos dello sfondo"—that envelop them. Gadda, in other words, depicts the image of the painting as a fold of the folded narrative world that he created for the *Racconto*. When Grifonetto declares that, "Viviamo in un mondo di carta," he implies that all will inevitably prove to be a *mise-en-abîme* or a hall of mirrors, set on a groundless ground. To see Caravaggio's artwork as a fold of the fold suggests, for Gadda, that any artist must first and foremost conceive of himself and his work as folds. However, in the *Racconto*, this extends beyond art and into the realms of religion, class relations, and politics, which, I argue, explains why Gadda apparently intended for Fascism to factor so prominently in the text and why it became a central target of his ire in his later prose works. While other belief systems might provide frameworks that are merely inadequate to account for the complexities of existence, fascist totalitarianism expressly denies the "reality" of the fold in its central claim that the state is all-encompassing. In turn, it becomes clear that it is not at all incidental that the *Racconto* is both a would-be "romanzo caravaggesco" and an anti-fascist work, for it was Gadda's studies of Caravaggio, the "great and unsurpassable teacher," that helped the author to construct that new "impalcatura" or hermeneutical framework as he became increasingly disillusioned with the regime and the suffocating limits of its ideology.

All of this leaves us with a critical unanswered question: why did Gadda intend for colonialism to factor prominently in his semi-autobiographical representation of Grifonetto's loss of faith in Fascism? Without a draft of the narrative of Lampugnani's "Fascismo americano" or of his time in Argentina, we must turn to *La cognizione del dolore* to find an answer. In the

Cognizione, the author meditates at length on his experience in South America and takes aim at colonialism and nationalism, exposing each as a futile attempt to provide a transcendental logic for the flux of *petites perceptions*. If Gadda's colonialism in Argentina—which was guided by his belief in the inevitable "triumph" of *italianità*—was a way to put his fascist ideology into practice, *l'ingegnere* was forced to realize that his approach was incommensurate with a much more complex political and cultural reality.[75] Gadda allegorizes this complexity in the *Cognizione*'s setting, namely the fictional Spanish-speaking South American nation of Maradagàl. Critics have often dismissed Maradagàl and its hispanic culture as Gadda's "tenue spolverata creola [di] approssimative sembianze sudamericane sull'odiosamata topografia della più corrente villeggiatura milanese." In this view, it is nothing more than a thinly veiled Brianza.[76] I argue, however, that more than a "tenuous creole sprinkling" of Latin America onto Italy, Gadda's *allegorismo* offers a more profound political critique. In my view, the *ingegnere* was inspired by Argentina as much as he was by Italy, and uses this inspiration to depict Maradagàl as a disordered former colony, as well as a nation-state founded on an act of internal colonization. Despite the efforts of the European colonizers, the "reality" of Maradagàl is a boundless fold that remains unaffected by whatever order that political power attempts to force upon it. As Gadda drafted his novel between 1938 and 1941, he must have been aware of the political significance of this position. In 1936, following the colonial subjugation of Ethiopia, Benito Mussolini declared in the

[75] Gadda, *Lettere alla sorella*, 86.

[76] Gianfranco Contini, "Saggio introduttivo," in *La cognizione del dolore* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), 8. This essay is now available both in Gianfranco Contini, ed., *Quarant'anni di amicizia. Scritti su Carlo Emilio (1934-1988)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989) and online in the *Edinburgh Journal for Gadda Studies*: (https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/resources/archive/classics/continicognizione.php). Like Contini, Sbragia also argues that, "colonialism per se is a peripheral issue in Gadda's works" (Sbragia, 40).

"Proclamazione dell'Impero" that the Italian Empire would be "integra e pura."[77] Gadda, in a parody of this Empire, depicts colonization as little more than a futile and violent enterprise that fails to account for the infinite fold.

It is not all that surprising that Gadda came to this conclusion about colonization when we consider that, from the *Racconto italiano* to the *Meditazione milanese* and finally to *La cognizione del dolore*, he consistently analyzed the topic in dialogue with Leibniz and Caravaggio.[78] While Leibniz receives mention in the *Cognizione* with the use of philosophical terms like "apperception" and "monad," Caravaggio is never directly alluded to in the text.[79] Nevertheless, it becomes clear

[77] Benito Mussolini, "La Proclamazione dell'Impero," in *Scritti e discorsi dell'impero* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Editore, 1936), 117.

[78] Gadda's theory of colonization as articulated in the *Meditazione milanese* is found in chapter ten, "Removibilità dei limiti periferici della conoscenza." In the opening of the chapter, Gadda reflects on his time living on the "periphery," namely in Sardegna and in Argentina: "Vivendo in Sardegna alcun tempo e nel Governatorato del Chaco, nella repubblica Argentina, alcun altro," the chapter begins, "ho notato come il fuoco incrociato delle relazioni economiche, culturali, etiche, poliziesche, ecc. dei centri di vita (Parigi, Milano, ecc.) vada in tali lontane province come diradandosi: il tessuto sociale si anemizza e diventa derma o periferia" (698). As Sbragia has shown, this creates an ethical hierarchy between the periphery and the center. In the preceding chapter of the *Meditazione*, citing Leibniz by name, the *ingegnere* explains that goodness is born of a compounding of *relazioni*: "Io ho continuamente insistito sulla convergenza del massimo numero possibile o pensabile di relazioni necessarie a dare il bene, cioè la più reale realtà." This position is heavily influenced by the *Theodicy* (1710), which Gadda cites by name later in the chapter (705). In the text, Leibniz reasons that human persons "derive all being from God," but unlike the divine, are finite in their being. This finitude, he argues, is an "original imperfection in the creature"; because said creature "cannot know all [...] it can deceive itself and commit other errors" (*Theodicy. Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E.M. Huggard [Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1985], 136). The human person, in other words, possesses less being or "reality" than God who is infinite; as a result, humans are also less good. This brings us to Gadda's contention that the convergence of relationships gives rise to the most "real reality" that is goodness. Though the author did not share Leibniz's faith in God, each believed in the fundamental goodness—and therefore reality—of relationship. In a 1715 letter to Christian Wolff, Leibniz wrote that, "*Perfection* is the harmony of things, or the state where everything is worthy of being observed, that is, the state of agreement [*consensus*] or identity in variety" (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "D. From Leibniz to Wolff, 2 April 1715," in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989], 233-234, emphasis in original). In Leibniz's system, where all derives its existence from God, the divine is the highest expression of unity in variety, that is, of the network of relationships that is the fold. In this sense, Leibniz's God is fairly analogous to Gadda's "convergenza del massimo numero possibile o pensabile di relazioni necessarie a dare il bene." Despite Gadda's lack of religious faith, he did believe that reality *is* relationships, for it consists of interconnected chains of perception. Reality thus becomes more real and more good as we embrace and compound relationships. This position, as we will see, is modified in the *Cognizione*, wherein the colonial periphery of Maradagàl is depicted as no less chaotic and folded the rest of "reality."

[79] I will discuss the reference to "apperception" below. For the reference to monads, see Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 638. For more on Gadda's use of Leibnizian terminology see: Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, "'Splendid Little

that the painter remains a key point of reference for Gadda when we consider that Maradagàl was evidently inspired by the Lombardy into which the painter was born in the later sixteenth century. Maria Antonietta Grignani effectively makes this point when she shows that Maradagàl owes a great deal to the Lombardy of *I promessi sposi*. Spanish-dominated Lombardy, itself a stand-in (for Manzoni) for early nineteenth-century Italy, inspired Gadda to allegorize his contemporary Italy with his own imaginary Hispanic nation, a place that was also once colonized.[80] Maradagàl, in this sense, is evocative of the same complex scene that Gadda reads into the background of the *Vocazione*; it is therefore no surprise that the consciousness of the narrator of the *Cognizione* swarms with perceptions. In place of a linear narrative, the *Cognizione*'s narrator is constantly distracted by wave upon wave of perceptions flooding each and every page. This is clearly illustrated in chapter three of the novel, which comprises Gonzalo's examination at the hands of his physician, Dr. Higueróa (during which the protagonist launches into the renowned invective against pronouns). During their lengthy exchange, Higueróa attempts to convince the hidalgo to accept an invitation for an outing with his daughter, Giuseppina. Higueróa promises that Giuseppina would drive the couple, and Gadda's narrator suddenly veers off into a tangential and satirical story about her recent near accident with Recalati, a local cheese vendor, on a nearby road. When Higueróa references the story as an example of Giuseppina's superior driving skills, don Gonzalo, in a meta-literary moment, is distracted by the reference to Recalati, "quello dei formaggini. Il figlio," the narrator says,

> "dové concedere ai formaggini di entrare anche loro nel cerchio doloroso della appercezione. Era il bagaglio del mondo, del fenomènico mondo. L'evolversi di

Pictures': Leibnizian Terminology in the works of Samuel Beckett and Carlo Emilio Gadda," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 22 (2010): 341-354.

[80] See: Maria Antonietta Grignani, "L'Argentina di Gadda fra biografia e straniamento," *Il confronto letterario. Quaderni del Dipartimento di Letterature straniere moderne e comparate dell'Università di Pavia* 15, no. 29 (1998): 57-73. Also available at: https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/journal/issue0/articles/grignaniargentina.php.

> una consecuzione che si sdipana ricca, dal tempo: tra i fasti del campanone sottoscritto, oblato: (da òbfero, òbtuli). E le cose narrate dal tempo e dalle anime frànano giù nella evidenza del gioco, dal loro limbo sciocco: come la piena cornucopia cataratta maravigliosa di pomi, spaccarelle, fichi secchi. Li sistemò come poté, i formaggini, in quel campo oltraggioso di non-forme: in quel caravanserraglio d'impedimenti d'ogni maniera: cicale, cipolle, zòccoli, bronzi ebefrènici, Giuseppi paleo-celtici, Battistine fedeli lungo i decenni, gozzocretine dalla nàscita: tutto l'acheronte di mala suerte brodolato giù dal senno e dal presagio dei padri, che vi leggevano ilari, giulivi, in quel fiume di catrame, la cara normalità della contingenza, la ingenuità salubre del costume villereccio. E rivide in un suo giolito la bella scena rurale della gerla e del parafango, bel sogno d'arazzo: d'un Luigi quindici un po' ammodernato: «Les quatre saisons. L'été». Tutto falci, tutto gerle, tutto messi, tutto vacche, tutto villici: e la Giuseppina che gli arriva addosso in volata. Oh! quella così misurata e ragionevole accelerazione inferta—via deretani—al passo moroso della cocciutaggine!"[81]

Gadda's invocation of "apperception" at the beginning of this passage clearly refers to his readings of Leibniz, who, as mentioned, uses the term in the *Monadology* to describe those perceptions of which a knowing subject is aware. However, while Leibniz was Gadda's philosophical source concerning the potentially infinite string of *petites perceptions*, it was Caravaggio, as we have seen, who served as his inspiration for the artistic representation of these issues. In the above description of the hidalgo placing the "formaggini in quel campo oltraggioso di non-forme," the narrator paradoxically enumerates the various contents of this very same "campo," making it difficult at first for the reader to grasp why this field, with all of its excess, is one of "non-forms." Yet, in light of Gadda's understanding of Caravaggio's representation of perception, it becomes clear the author here seeks to represent the cheese against the darkness of the innumerable if transient *petites perceptions* that Gonzalo cannot possibly hold in his conscious mind. Gadda, in other words, sought to represent these *petites perceptions* in much the same way that he believed his favorite painter depicted (directly or indirectly) all unconscious perceptions. Thus, following the dynamic of perception that Gadda reads into the *Vocazione*, in the *Cognizione* the *formaggini*

[81] Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 627.

are a flickering apperception that arise from the "background" of "non-forms" or unconscious perceptions as Gonzalo's mind's eye envisions the story of Giuseppina and Recalati. This "campo" is outrageously unstable in the eyes of Gadda's narrator: the "main" subject of the story that he recounts—Giuseppina's near accident with Recalati—is at the mercy of a fold that threatens to envelop it entirely. As the chaotic lists in the passage above suggest, the jumbled fold that is Maradagàl comprises everything from cicadas to onions, and from hooves to hebephrenic bronzes.

For Gadda, this folded *groviglio* of Maradagàl, I argue, resists any univocal narrative or ideological *grand récit* like those of Fascism, nationalism, and colonialism—not so unlike Argentina as the author experienced it in 1922. In the *Cognizione*, Gadda takes direct aim at all three of these. It is important to note that to "decompound" colonialism, as Gadda does, is not to deny the inherent violence of colonization or the historical facts of the imperialist project. Rather, in the author's view, whatever narrative, ideology, or belief system is employed by the colonizer to justify violence is nothing more than a reductive and futile exercise that will fail to accomplish its aim, although not without doing a great deal of harm first to the colonized subjects. It is for this reason that, as Gadda's narrator recounts Maradagàl's history, he suggests that the country is the product of an act of colonization that is little more than a futile "pasticcio." This becomes apparent in the narrator's description of the great *maradagalese* national hero, the general Juan Muceno Pastrufacio. Pastrufacio's surname is significant; critics have argued that it likely derives from the Lombard dialect expression "pastrügn facere," meaning "fare pasticci."[82] We can begin to understand the mess for which Pastrufacio is responsible through a careful reading of the narrator's description of his role in the founding of Maradagàl. Pastrufacio is a nineteenth-century "libertador" and "[…] il vittorioso di Santa Rosa, terrore dei «gringos», disperditore degli Indios,

[82] Grignani, "L'Argentina di Gadda fra biografia e straniamento."

ricostruttore della città omonima; esaltato in versi stupendi come il Belgrano e il Moreno del Maradagàl, per quanto in altre occasioni poetiche lo abbiano anche paragonato a Giorgio Washington, Tamerlano, Garibaldi e Mazeppa."[83] Pastrufacio is, in other words, guilty of the "internal" colonial conquest that led to the birth of the state of Maradagàl. For this reason, the "libertador" is at once "terror" of the "gringos," that is the European colonizers, for he drove them out of the country, and the "disperditore" of the indigenous population, for he violently "dispersed" or oppressed them. Despite Gadda's satirical and unbecoming description of the Indios, the *ingegnere*'s characterization of Maradagàl's liberator as both terror of the Spanish colonizer and oppressor of the country's indigenous population suggests that the author had an astute and nuanced understanding of the construction of the nation in modern Latin America. As an enemy both of the Spanish colonizer and the indigenous people, Pastrufacio is evidently a representative of the *maradagalese* creole elite.[84] Walter Mignolo, for example, points out it was precisely this class of society that took control of the emerging nations of South America following their independence: "Creoles found themselves in power and no longer subalterns of the Spanish colonial elites," he writes, "They became, indeed, the postcolonial elite."[85] Gadda seems to have

[83] Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 589.

[84] Further analysis of Maradagàl's fictional national history corroborates that it is, in fact, a fully self-conscious allegory for Argentina on Gadda's part. For example, Gadda clearly refers both to Italy and Argentina in the figure of Carlos Caçonellos. Caçoncellos, the narrator says, was "il grande epico maradagalese che era venuto a mancare due giorni prima, piombando nella costernazione il mondo letterario e i poeti epici in particolare misura" (Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 589). *Il grande epico*, beyond a tongue-and-cheek reference to Gadda himself, also alludes to *il Vate* Gabriele D'Annunzio who died on March 1, 1938, the same year Gadda began work on the *Cognizione* (Gadda/Manzotti, 55). The narrator's further description of Caçoncellos, however, suggests that he is also meant to represent Alejandro Vicente López y Planes, president of Argentina and author of patriotic texts including the lyrics of the Argentine national anthem and the poem *El triunfo de Argentina*, which celebrates the nation's 1807 victory over its English invaders. Like Lopéz y Planes, Caçoncellos is also a patriotic writer: "Caçoncellos, come tutti sanno, fu l'aedo della Reconquista e della battaglia di Santa Rosa (14 maggio 1817-in giorno di domenica), il cantore di gesta del ciclo maradagalese del libertador" (Ibid.). The date of May 14 is significant; according to tradition, the *Himno Nacional Argentino*, with its lyrics by Lopéz y Planes, was first performed on May 14, 1813, four years to the day before the date Gadda ascribes to the *maradagalese* battle of Santa Rosa. Caçoncellos is thus clearly drawn from Gadda's experiences of Argentine culture and history as much as from his own Italian background.

[85] Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 64.

understood exactly this, for he depicts, however unsympathetically, the Indios of the *Cognizione* as impoverished and oppressed by the so-called *libertador*. The author must have concluded, during his stay in Argentina, that the liberation of the nation from Spanish control only gave rise to a different form of colonization.

This colonial exploit, I argue, is the "pastrügn" that Pastrufacio has authored. Here Gadda lampoons a colonizing, nineteenth-century nationalism, which, in the Italian context, constitutes a key point of continuity from the liberal state to the fascist regime. Pastrufacio's exploits are a "mess" for Gadda because they are rooted in a reductive nationalist ideology that is founded on violence and that claims to be an autonomous total system of meaning. That Pastrufacio is to be understood as a figure for nineteenth-century nationalism is confirmed when the narrator tells us that the great *maradagalese* poets have compared the general's military and political achievements to those of Giuseppe Garibaldi. All of this suggests that Gadda is allegorizing his own recent experiences with Italian nationalism, interwoven with the personally devastating recognition that this ideology does not accurately describe "reality" as it claims to do. As suggested above, the author was twice left deeply disappointed by Italian nationalism, first in the wake of World War I and then again following his fourteen months in Argentina. In the essay "Impossibilità di un diario di guerra," Gadda confesses that he supported Italian intervention in the First World War because he adopted his family's belief in the Kingdom of Italy as a "cosa viva e verace" and was convinced that "valeva la pena servirlo e tenerlo su."[86] In turn, he writes, "io ho presentito la guerra come una dolorosa necessità nazionale."[87] This painful national duty, however, did not unfold as Gadda believed it would—namely as a realization of Italy's greatness as a European power. Instead the

[86] Gadda, "Impossibilità di un diario di guerra," 141.

[87] Ibid., 142.

horror of the war and the traumatic defeat of the Italian army at Caporetto led Gadda to believe that "sono l'impreparazione, l'ignoranza, gli errori, la stupidità, il cinismo a muovere gli ingranaggi di una macchina che lui sognava perfetta."[88] In place of Italy's triumphant national destiny, Gadda in the *Giornale di guerra e di prigionia* laments the chaos of the war: "Ma il disordine c'è: quello c'è sempre, dovunque, presso tutti: oh! se c'è, e quale orrendo, logorante, disordine!"[89] This dynamic, as we have already seen, repeated itself in his sojourn in Argentina. In light of this, it becomes clear that Pastrufacio is the figure through which Gadda allusively depicts his disillusionment in the early 1920s with nationalism, colonialism, and, by extension, Fascism. The *pastrügn* for which the general is responsible is an act that does nothing to "tame" the metaphysical wilderness of Maradagàl. As we saw from Gonzalo's mental image of Recalati and Giuseppina's comical story, the country in which the protagonist lives is in no way more ordered because of Pastrufacio's colonizing efforts. In the figure of Maradagàl, Gadda thus fictionalizes his painful awareness that *italianità* will not triumph in Argentina, or that, in other words, the real inherently resists the ideological framework that the colonizer seeks to impose upon it.[90]

---

[88] Ernesto Ferrero, *Invito alla lettura di Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Milan: Mursia, 1974), 30.

[89] See Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, 571-572.

[90] Gadda's political critique is all the more vehement when we consider how, in the figure of Pastrufacio, he also satirizes Italy's *Risorgimento*. As we have seen, Pastrufacio is expressly compared to Garibaldi; in light of this it becomes clear that the allegory that is *maradagalese* history takes on yet another set of meanings. The Reconquista represents not only South American resistance to the Spanish colonizer in the nineteenth century, but also the Italian Risorgimento (Gadda/Manzotti, 9). In turn it becomes clear the Indios are meant to symbolize not only the indigenous peoples of Argentina, but also southern Italians, who once subjugated by the liberal state, lived like the Indios in "isolamento e miseria" (Ibid.). Though the Gadda could not be further from the Marxist politics of Antonio Gramsci, he seems to share his understanding of the dynamics of Italian unification, whereby, "La borghesia settentrionale ha soggiogato l'Italia meridionale e le isole e le ha ridotte a colonie di sfruttamento" (Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale* [L'Aquila: REA Edizioni, 2011], 27). Every attempt to bring order to Italy, Gadda suggests, from liberal nationalism to Fascism, has failed.

Despite the colonial critique of the *Cognizione*, it would be far too much to say that Gadda has taken here an anticolonial or even a postcolonial turn. Always present in Gadda's thinking is the paradox combining his desperate desire for order and his equally desperate belief in the impossibility of it. As the French and English colonies in Asia and Africa sought their independence in the years following World War II, Gadda declared that "'L'Inghilterra e la Francia dovrebbero fare una dichiarazione comune: questa roba è nostra e intendiamo tenercela.'"[91] Yet this same impulse is the source of the great mess that Gadda satirizes in the *Cognizione* via the figure of Pastrufacio. Despite the author's inaccurate and conflicting accounts of his own anti-Fascism, in light of this analysis of the *Cognizione* it is plausible that he came to reject the regime, as he claimed in his interview with Maraini, "con la guerra etiopica." This violent colonial invasion, Gadda says, made him understand "cos'era veramente il fascismo. E ne ho avvertito tutto il pericolo."[92] This "danger" is Fascism's intention to impose itself and its values, frequently through brute force, upon all those—nations, societies, peoples, systems of thought and belief—that exist outside of its supposedly total system and that refuse to be folded neatly into it.

"Una decombinazione estrema dei possibili": Fascist Sexual Politics in the *Pasticciaccio*

As in the *Cognizione*, the fictional world of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* is also a fold, a point that becomes clear in the first pages of this *giallo*. In describing the investigator/protagonist Ciccio Ingravallo's theory of crime and causation, the narrator reveals that

[91] Roscioni, *Il gran lombardo*, 91.

[92] Maraini, "Carlo Emilio Gadda come uomo" 168. Acknowledging the inaccuracies in the interview, Falkoff also accepts Gadda's account of his turning against Fascism in the wake of the Ethiopian campaign as "partially truthful" (22).

"reality" as depicted in the novel is structured according to a baroque metaphysics.[93] Ingravallo, the narrator says,

> "Sosteneva, fra l'altro, che le inopinate catastrofi non sono mai la conseguenza o l'effetto che dir si voglia d'un unico motivo, d'una causa al singolare: ma sono come un vortice, un punto di depressione ciclonica nella coscienza del mondo, verso cui hanno cospirato tutta una molteplicità di causali convergenti. Diceva anche nodo o groviglio, o garbuglio, o gnommero, che alla romana vuol dire gomitolo. Ma il termine giuridico «le causali, la causale» gli sfuggiva preferentemente di bocca: quasi contro sua voglia. […] La causale apparente, la causale principe, era sì, una. Ma il fattaccio era l'effetto di tutta una rosa di causali che gli eran soffiate addosso al molinello […] e avevano finito per strizzare nel vortice del delitto la debilitata «ragione del mondo»."[94]

Gadda surely modeled this vortex of causality on Leibniz's concept of universal plenitude (the "plenum"). In the *Monadology*, the philosopher argues that in this plenum, where all is interconnected, every "effect" reverberates through the folds of the real.[95] In line with the *Cognizione*, Gadda uses this *giallo* to subvert any notion that there can be a singular explanation

[93] In this novel, the narrator's giving voice to the baroque world of the *Pasticciaccio* makes him complicit in the continual violation of the conventions of detective fiction. JoAnn Cannon's insightful analysis remains a helpful point of reference: "Retrospective reconstruction of events, the device which allows the typical *giallo* to function," she explains, "is dismissed as fallacy. This ironic intervention on the part of the narrator is clearly aberrant: in classical detective fiction, the narrator is complicitous with the investigator. The story is often told from the point of view of a cohort of the detective, such as Watson in the Sherlock Holmes stories or Hastings in many of Christie's Poirot novels. The narrator, who though an accomplice of the investigator, is not so astute as his partner, recounts the process whereby the detective reconstructs the sequence of events leading to the crime. Thus he implicitly acts as an accomplice to the reader. Even if the story is told from an objective, third-person point of view, the narrative voice is expected to be supportive of the detective's enterprise. In the *Pasticciaccio*, however, the narrative voice works in opposition to the detective and, implicitly, to the reader, thereby undercutting any attempt to make sense of the puzzle." See JoAnn Cannon, "The Reader as Detective: Notes on Gadda's 'Pasticciaccio,'" *Modern Language Studies* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 41-50, 43-44.

[94] Gadda, *Quer brutto pasticciaccio de via Merulana*, 16-17.

[95] Here again paragraph 61 of the *Monadology* is highly relevant, just as it is to Gadda's *teorema* of perception from the *Meditazione milanese*, discussed above. Here in particular, Leibniz's concept of an interconnected universe or "plenum" is particularly helpful. "For the whole is plenum," Leibniz explains, "which makes all matter interconnected, and in a plenum every movement has some effect on distant bodies in proportion to their distance, such that each body is affected not only by those which touch it, and in some way feels the effect of everything that happens to them, but also by means of them it is affected by those which touch the former ones, the ones that directly touch it. From this it follows that this communication extends indefinitely. Consequently every body is affected by everything that happens in the universe, so much so that one who sees all could read in each body what is happening everywhere." See: Leibniz, "The Monadology," 26.

for a given phenomenon. The author, however, takes a step further in the *Pasticciaccio* by representing human subjectivity as intricately baroque. This is yet another position Gadda came to adopt through his encounter with Caravaggio's paintings, and is key to the novel's anti-Fascism; the *ingegnere* specifically criticizes the regime for compelling Italians to conform to rigid gender roles. In the context of the novel, this proves to be fatal, as evidenced by the death of Liliana Balducci, who was most probably killed by Assunta Crocchiapani, one of the "children/domestics" that she "adopted" and employed to alleviate the shame she felt because of her unrealized maternity, which is the notorious source of her "mania" for children.[96] I will first examine how Gadda, inspired by Caravaggio, came to envision human subjectivity as a fold, a point that the author discusses in the *Meditazione milanese*. I will then turn to the *Pasticciaccio* to show how Gadda depicts Liliana as a fold, and how fascist politics denies this complexity by attempting to force upon her a restrictive domestic gender role as mother. Finally, I will discuss the highly significant, however minor, character of the commendatore Filippo Angeloni, who is a literary self-portrait of Gadda. Like the author, Angeloni is a bachelor and possibly homosexual; he represents the author's own humiliation at being singled out for not conforming to the hyper virile, heteronormative, and reproductive masculinity that Fascism demanded of all Italian males. It is therefore highly significant that Angeloni is the closest we have to an explicit citation of Caravaggio in the *Pasticciaccio*;[97] in writings related to his novel, Gadda repeatedly insists that

[96] For more on the topic of matricide in the *Pasticciaccio* and Gadda's oeuvre more generally, see: Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, "Abjection and the Fear of Alterity: Matricide and the Trope of the Maternal in the works of Carlo Emilio Gadda and Samuel Beckett." *Italian Studies* 66, no. 1 (2013): 76-92 and Manuela Bertone, "Murderous Desires: Gaddian Matricides from *Novella seconda* to *La cognizione del dolore*," in *Carlo Emilio Gadda. Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Robert S. Dombroski and Manuela Bertone (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 111-131.

[97] Maria Antonietta Terzoli has argued that Gadda's description of Assunta's face is drawn from the face of Caravaggio's Judith in *Giuditta e Oloferne* (c. 1598-1599). This, she argues, suggests that Assunta is indeed the killer. Maria Antonietta Terzoli, *Commento a* Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana *di Carlo Emilio Gadda II* (Rome: Carocci editore, 2015), 860.

the commendatore is an *appassionato* of the baroque painter. Angeloni, whose being is incommensurate with the schemas of fascist ideology, is drawn to Caravaggio's canvases, I argue, because these paintings accept difference as the only possible "norm."

That Gadda was inspired by Caravaggio in representing his fictional characters finds support in the twenty-fifth and final chapter of the *Meditazione milanese*, entitled "Il metodo." In this chapter, Gadda lauds the baroque painter for his "attenzione a tutta la realtà complessa," which, he argues, is the result of an unimpeachable artistic method. Gadda uses the term "metodo" in the broadest possible way as he discusses everything from a method for second language instruction to one for making war. Any "metodo," he explains, is the "breviario o epitome, criticamente raggiunto dopo tentativi euristici infiniti, con cui il consolidato o il noto categorizza la materia o precedente logico identico e ne affretta la sua sistemazione per entro la centina o forma acquisita."[98] Method, in other words, is the organization of the knowledge derived from the many experiential or "heuristic" attempts to achieve a given objective.

Gadda goes on to theorize four "idee centrali sul metodo," the fourth of which, "la sensazione della complessità" is key for understanding how he came to see subjectivity. The author justifies the importance of this "sensation of complexity," arguing that, "Troppo poveramente si schematizza, troppo arbitrariamente si astrae dal monstruoso [sic] groviglio della totalità [... Il] trascurare qualunque fatto della vita o del mondo è menomazione della potenza e della certezza nella prossima sintesi che di questa vita o di questo mondo si farà."[99] No matter the subject, whoever organizes knowledge into a method must pay attention to every detail. This is also true for the "genio artistico o letterario," for whom "occorre aver attenzione a tutta la realtà complessa

[98] Gadda, *Meditazione milanese*, 835.

[99] Ibid., 842.

per operare buone sintesi."[100] The artist must therefore pay special attention to all of the details of the world and synthesize—or we might say fold—them in the act of representation. This does not mean, as Gadda comically indicates, that the artist must represent a massive quantity of details: "non intendo alludere ai baffi che un pittore può aver disegnato uno a uno sulla facciazza del vostro zio cardinale."[101] Instead, Gadda explains that he means to refer to the way in which an artist represents "dei minima logico-euristici, dei minima di espressione o di diversità che innalzano il suo scritto o la sua tela dalla prosa comune, o dal comune imbratto. I muscoli del Caravaggio son cosa vivente."[102] By "minima" Gadda means to refer to the most significant though minute units or component elements of that "vita" or "mondo" that the artist seeks to synthesize in representation. Yet, according to Gadda, the artist does not arrive at these "minima" on his or her own, instead inheriting a method that is constructed from the logic derived from those "tentativi euristici infiniti," hence the peculiar concept of the "minima logico-euristico." Of key importance here is that Gadda describes these minute units as "minima di diversità": he is calling on artists, in other words, to be highly attuned to the nuances of difference. Thus, when Gadda identifies Caravaggio as a model artist, he is specifically praising the way in which the latter makes use of the artistic method he has inherited in order to synthesize the interrelated *insieme* of human musculature in representation without, however, effacing the difference between its composite elements. Caravaggio conceives of human anatomy as folds within a fold, to put it another way, and then represents it as such. Of course, as we have already seen in Gadda's ekphrasis of the *Vocazione*, Caravaggio's "attenzione a tutta la realtà complessa" is just that: it is not limited to

[100] Ibid., 843.

[101] Ibid., 844.

[102] Ibid.

human figures, but is rather an attentiveness to the swarm of perceptions that may exist at or even beyond the limits of our consciousness. What is key here—particularly for understanding the anti-fascist critique of the *Pasticciaccio*—is Gadda's moral imperative for the artist. The subject of an artwork, in this case the human figure, must be synthesized in representation with careful attention to all the most important minima that it comprises, for not to do so risks denying the *gnommero* or the folded nature of reality.

That Gadda sought, in the *Pasticciaccio*, to imitate Caravaggio's attention to the complexity of the human figure can be seen in his description of the remains of Liliana Balducci. Her "folded" ontology comes to the fore in the novel's second chapter, when don Ciccio, having been informed of her death, rushes to the via Merulana apartment to find her body lying on the parquet floor in the dining room. Ingravallo, the narrator indicates, is profoundly disturbed by the site:

> "La bellezza, l'indumento, la spenta carne di Liliana era là: il dolce corpo, rivestito ancora agli sguardi. Nella turpitudine di quell'atteggiamento involontario—della quale erano motivi, certo, e la gonna rilevata addietro dall'oltraggio e l'ostensione delle gambe, su su, e del rilievo e della solcatura di voluttà che incupidiva i più deboli: e gli occhi affossati ma orribilmente aperti nel nulla, fermi a una meta inane sulla credenza—la morte gli apparve, a don Ciccio, una decombinazione estrema dei possibili, uno sfasarsi di idee interdipendenti, armonizzate già nella persona. Come il risolversi d'una unità che non ce la fa più ad essere e ad operare come tale, nella caduta improvvisa dei rapporti, d'ogni rapporto con la realtà sistematrice."[103]

In the last few lines of this passage, Gadda's narrator repeatedly alludes to the factors or "minima" that gave rise to Liliana's being. She was once a "compounding of possibles"; she constituted "interdependent ideas"; the "unity" she once was has now dissolved, for the "rapporti" that gave rise to it have collapsed. Here Gadda seeks to imitate that "attenzione a tutta la realtà complessa" that he ascribes to his favorite painter. The narrator imagines Liliana as a dense network of folds

[103] Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, 69-70.

that, operating in relation to one another, previously gave rise to her subjectivity. She was not an autonomous sovereign subject; rather, her being arose from and was constantly shaped through the interaction of systems of gender, language, class and much more. Her subjectivity, in this sense, was irreducible to any single limit.

It is Fascism's denial of an individual person's irreducibility, I argue, that makes the regime allegorically guilty of Liliana's murder in the novel. Living in Rome during the Ventennio, Balducci had the "duty," as a female subject of the fascist state, to marry and to procreate. In insisting that women could have no other role in Italian life than that of wife and mother, Fascism sought to reduce femininity strictly to a reproductive value. Mussolini himself outlined this pronatalist policy in the "Discorso dell'Ascensione," given on May 26, 1927—the same year in which Gadda set the *Pasticciaccio*. Threatening unmarried and childless Italians, the Duce declared, "Se si diminuisce, signori, non si fa l'Impero, si diventa una colonia."[104] Himself a childless bachelor, Gadda, as I will discuss below, was deeply insulted and humiliated by this rhetoric and by the policies that Mussolini outlined, which targeted both men and women. For the latter, fascist policy sought to enforce a "femminilità ridotta alla maternità." Luccetta Scaraffia has argued that women in particular,

> "costituirono [...] il perno della politica familiare del regime: l'ideologia fascista mirava a inculcare nella donna di casa, che era il principale responsabile del soddisfacimento dei bisogni all'interno della famiglia, il senso dei propri doveri nei suoi confronti. Il tradizionale spazio femminile del privato veniva così invaso dallo stato, che pretendeva di definire quali fossero i bisogni legittimi della famiglia e quali, in particolare, la donna dovesse soddisfare."[105]

[104] Benito Mussolini,"Discorso dell'Ascensione," in *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XXII. Dall'Attentato Zaniboni al Discorso dell'Ascensione (5 Novembre 1925-26 Maggio 1927)*, eds. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1957), 367.

[105] Lucetta Scaraffia, "Essere uomo, essere donna," in *Storia sociale delle donne nell'Italia contemporanea*, eds. Anna Bravo, Margherita Pelaja, Alessandra Pescarolo, Lucetta Scaraffia (Rome: Laterza, 2001), 63-64.

Fascist propaganda sought to enforce this vision of femininity by labeling women who did not conform as "donne-crisi" who "threatened Italy's health" by being insufficiently maternal.[106] The regime, however, did not stop at propaganda, and, in 1926, it outlawed both contraception and abortion.[107] As Italo Calvino has suggested, one can only understand Liliana Balducci and her "mania" for children in this context, when the "primo dovere degli italiani [...] era quello di dare figli e alla Patria," a time when "solo i padri e le madri prolifici erano considerati degni di rispetto."[108]

This fascist rhetoric and policy, I contend, explains why Gadda envisioned Liliana as having a mania for children, and why he describes her as being deeply embarrassed by her failure to reproduce. This unrealized maternity, in an Italy in which motherhood was an order issued from the highest level of government, was nothing short of a "torturous disappointment" for Balducci. Her cousin, Giuliano Valdarena, describes his late relative's distress when he is questioned by Ingravallo in connection with her death:

> "il vedersi passare gli anni a quel modo, gli anni belli, senza nemmeno la speranza… d'un frutto dell'amore… era, pe [sic] lei, era come una delusione torturante. Se sentiva umiliata, come se sentono tutte quando je va male er pupo: più ancora ch'er dispiacere è il dispetto, a pensà che l'artre donne trionfeno, e loro no. La più amara di tutte le delusioni della vita. Così, per lei, il mondo non fu altro che noia: non fu altro che un gran piangere. Un pianto che non le dava nessun conforto. Noia, noia, noia. Un pantano de noia. Da diventà matti."[109]

[106] Natasha V. Chang, *The Crisis-Woman. Body Politics and the Modern Woman in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 5.

[107] Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women. Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 48.

[108] Italo Calvino, "Il *Pasticciaccio*," 1081.

[109] Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, 112.

Valdarena, of course, stereotypes his cousin by suggesting that all women want to have children, and that Liliana was merely jealous of her counterparts who have them. He conforms, in other words, to the prevailing political logic of the Ventennio, a period that Gadda once called an "epoca sitibonda di prole," and reduces Balducci to fit one of Fascism's schemas.[110] The author, all too aware of the regime's reproductive politics, aims to counter this reductionism: Liliana's obsessive desire for children and deep shame in not having them is not the target of Gadda's misogyny (though it cannot be argued that the author was a feminist), but is instead meant to portray in a subversive light the social humiliations and overt or covert pressures that childless women faced in Italy in 1927. Liliana is tormented by the regime's violent denial of her own subjectivity through its policing of rigid gender roles.

It is for this reason that Gadda, by way of Liliana's probable murderer Assunta Crocchiapani, allusively suggests that Fascism may be seen as complicit in her death. This becomes apparent when we account for the fact that Assunta was merely the latest in the series of young maids that Balducci hired to fill the void created by her childlessness. The narrator, describing Ingravallo's inner thoughts as he is lunching with the Balduccis early in the novel, describes this coping mechanism: "La signora Liliana, non potendo scodellare del proprio… Così ogni anno: il cambio della nipote doveva di certo valere nel suo inconscio come un simbolo, in sostituzione del mancato scodellamento [...] D'anno in anno… una nuova nipote: quasi a simboleggiare nel cuore, i successivi natali della prole."[111] Unable to have any of the many children that Fascism demanded of her, Liliana instead adopts and discards these *nipoti-serve* like Assunta

[110] Carlo Emilio Gadda, "Il pasticciaccio," in *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*, eds. Liliana Orlando, Clelia Martignoni, and Dante Isella (Milan: Garzanti, 2009), 507.

[111] Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, 24.

in an attempt to sooth her anxiety at not embodying the regime's ideal of domesticized femininity. If Crocchiapani did indeed brutally cut Liliana's throat, then the latter's attempt to conform was fatal. Fascism, in this sense, is a crucial "causale" of Liliana's murder, for the limits placed on her as a woman and the psychological damage they caused led to the fatal decision to hire Assunta in the first place.

All of this helps to further unpack the significance of Gadda's representation of Liliana's murder, and particularly that key image of death as a "decombinazione estrema dei possibili." On one hand, this surely refers to the way in which Fascism severed the many folds that gave rise to Liliana as a subject by reducing her to a singular function and worth. On the other hand, it portrays the failure of this project: if Liliana was indeed a "realtà complessa," as the narrator insists, then the regime could never have succeeded in fitting her into its definition of femininity. Fascism's view of womanhood is, in this perspective, a mystification, incommensurate with the subject that it claims to describe. Meaning, in this sense, "dies" too, for it can only ever be partial, ephemeral, and incomplete; no representation can capture the totality of Liliana qua subject or any other "reality." Gadda thus posits the murder of Balducci as an allegory for his entire literary project.[112]

[112] The significance of Gadda's indictment of fascist sexual politics in the figure of Liliana Balducci only grows when we account for those readings of the novel that understand her to be a lesbian. It is through characters such as Don Corpi, Liliana's priest and confessor, that the author suggests that Balducci might have had a sexual relationship with one of her maids, Virginia. The original version of Corpi's testimony, printed in the novel's serial version from *Letteratura* (1946-1947) is fairly explicit. Referring to Virginia, Don Corpi says, "E l'aveva baciata sulla bocca, pe' fforza, stringendole er capo dietro, co l'artra mano, dentro tutti quei capelli, come che Liliana fosse er suo amante [...] Liliana, povera fijja!... a quel bacio aveva inorridito: forze le si era spalancato davanti il portone de l'Inferno, tutt'a un colpo: «aperient peccata portas Inferi»." See Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana (redazione di «Letteratura», 1946-47)*, in *Romanzi e racconti II*, ed. Giorgio Pinotti, Dante Isella, and Raffaella Rodondi (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), 405. The revision of this passage in the *Pasticciaccio* is still quite erotic though Corpi avoid using the term "amante": "La baciava come po bacià una pantera, dicennole: «Sora mia bella Liliana, voi site 'a Madonna pe mme!» poi, basso basso, in un tono di ardore anche più soffocato: «Ve vojo bene: bene, te vojo: ma una vorta o l'antra te magno»: e le strizzava il polso, e glie lo storceva, fissandola: je lo storceva come in una morsa, bocca contro bocca, de sentisse er fiato der respiro in bocca, l'una contro l'artra, zinne contro zinne." See Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, 137. As we will see shortly in our discussion of Filippo Angeloni, Gadda, in the *Pasticciaccio* crafts a veiled but nuanced response to the regime's persecution of homosexuals, charging the Fascists once again with violently denying the difference embodied by the other.

The author's experience of fascist sexual politics similarly factors into his novel in the figure of Filippo Angeloni, Gadda's self-portrait in the *Pasticciaccio*. A timid bachelor and an admirer of Caravaggio, Angeloni briefly appears in the *giallo* when he is questioned by Ingravallo in connection with the first crime narrated in the novel, namely the theft of the countess Menegazzi's jewels. Like the author, Angeloni was deeply embarrassed by the regime's abusive treatment of unmarried men. As was the case for femininity, Mussolini's vision of masculinity was oriented towards reproduction, and any non-reproductive masculinity—like that of Angeloni or Gadda—was condemned by the state. This was enforced in part by the so-called "frustata demografica" or the bachelor's tax that the regime enacted in December 1926.[113] The tax was modified continuously over the years, but was never inconsequential. It made use of a "sliding scale to make the youngest and most eligible [bachelors] pay the most, in addition to a flat rate of 25 percent from gross income [...] by 1936, a thirty-year-old bachelor had to pay double the normal income tax, plus 155 lire per year."[114] Gadda was outraged and humiliated by this tax, which he once described as a "multa infamante."[115] The discrimination the *ingegnere* faced under the policies of fascist pronatalism was only compounded by his queer sexuality, which impacted his depiction of Angeloni, as we will see shortly. Though Nazi Germany condemned and murdered more homosexuals than the Italian fascist regime, this does not, as Emilio Gentile has written, "attenua la gravità della persecuzione degli omosessuali nell'Italia fascista."[116] Instead, as Lorenzo

[113] Mussolini, "Discorso dell'Ascensione," 364.

[114] De Grazia, 69-70.

[115] Gadda, "Il *Pasticciaccio*," 507.

[116] In Germany, approximately 50,000 people were accused of homosexuality and between 10,000 and 15,000 perished in concentration camps. By contrast, in Italy, about 300 individuals were exiled for the specific charge of pederasty (a term more commonly used than "homosexuality" in Fascist Italy), while eighty-eight were exiled for homosexuality. See Emilio Gentile, "Prefazione," in *Il nemico dell'uomo nuovo. L'omosessualità nell'esperimento totalitario fascista* by Lorenzo Benadusi (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005), xi.

Benadusi has shown, gay men in Italy were subject to a "strategia dell'occultamento"—that is, their existence was denied as much as was possible—because the Fascists sought to "diffondere un'immagine del regime come regno della moralità, realizzazione di un alto fine etico, capace di costruire una nuova società virile senza macchia e peccato."[117] All of this entailed that those who had a queer sexuality were treated as non-people and effectively cast out from mainstream Italian society. As Benadusi puts it:

> "La violazione del canone di virilità prestabilite comportava dunque l'espulsione dalla società, per evitare che si diffondesse un esempio negativo per la collettività. L'omosessuale turbava l'ordine nazionale; metteva in discussione i valori fondamentali della nuova morale fascista; ledeva il prestigio nazionale con atti universalmente considerati perversi; rischiava di svolgere una pericolosa opera di corruzione nei confronti di chi lo avvicinava; metteva a rischio l'avvenire della patria, sottraendosi al dovere della procreazione che era il fondamento della potenza nazionale; minava la coesione interna del paese con la confusione dei ruoli sessuali."[118]

All of this was surely a significant blow to Gadda's faith in Fascism. In spite of his enthusiastic support for the regime that led him all the way to the Chaco province of Argentina, Gadda, by the mid-1920s, suddenly found himself singled out as less than human by the very party into which he had proudly enrolled in 1921.

It is in the figure of the commendatore Filippo Angeloni that Gadda provides a literary depiction of this deep disappointment and disillusionment. The commendatore, Gadda writes in his 1957 essay "Il Pasticciaccio," was specifically meant to represent the humiliation that unmarried men faced at the hands of the fascist party. Unable to conform to its oppressive vision of masculinity, Angeloni is melancholic and deeply uncertain about himself and his life. All of this

---

[117] Lorenzo Benadusi, *Il nemico dell'uomo nuovo. L'omosessualità nell'esperimento totalitario fascista* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005), 114-115.

[118] Ibid., 126

comes to light as Gadda explains why his alter ego is stopped and questioned about the theft of Menegazzi's jewels. "Se mi è permessa una battuta auto-esegetica," Gadda writes,

> "codesto fermo di un ghiottone solitario, celibe e malinconico, soggetto a crisi di ipotimia ciclica, codesto fermo risponde, pienamente, in misura un po' caricata, è vero, al clima eroico dell'epoca sitibonda di prole: epoca ove il celibe era schedato a spregio, fosse pure Gesù Cristo, Michelangelo, Beethoven o Mazzini Giuseppe: e pagava una speciale tassa, quasi una multa infamante, come se la condizione di celibato costituisse—dopo che una frode continuata nei riguardi del santo numero (quarantotto milioni, allora)—anche una fonte di reddito. In un mondo in cui bisognava «credere» per forza era proibito essere malinconici. Talché il ritrattino del commendatore prosciuttòfilo ridonda anche a uno scherno, da parte mia, di quel buonumore fresconello, di quel dinamismo scenico e meramente teatrale, di che lo zelo clamoroso dei commossi, o degli pseudo commossi, in ogni stagione della patria, s'è fatto vanga e zappa da tirar l'acqua al molinuccio. E poi, e poi: nessuna legge umana o divina inibisce a un cittadino italiano di amare i carciofini all'olio: e di essere malinconico e celibe come Nostro Signore e come l'apostolo e profeta Mazzini […] Tenete presente l'anno, 1946, in cui il *Pasticciaccio* è nato, e la sopra descritta urgenza esplosiva. Vale per me, come per altri la battuta di Tacito: 'per silentum ad senectutem pervenere.'[119] E dei sacrificati si deve scrivere «ad mortem». Non ho potuto esprimere se non una parte del mio sentire, la parte ovviamente «agnostica», o almeno quella che non avrebbe offuscato la faccia alla «gnosi», degli anni che vaporarono via dalla vita, fra il '24 e il '45."[120]

Against Mussolini's orders to "credere" and "obbedire," the "prosciuttófilo" Angeloni is a melancholic bachelor whose sadness arises from his doubt, that is, from his rejection of Fascism and especially its assertion of a total system of meaning for its subjects. In opposition to the convictions of mainstream society, Angeloni is meant to convey Gadda's mockery of those Italians—the "commossi" and the "pseudo commossi"—who, with varying degrees of sincerity, made theatrical displays of compliance and conformity. Yet, no matter the dictates of the regime, Gadda reasons that there is no law, whether human or divine, that prohibits an Italian citizen from enjoying food, from being single, or from harboring a sorrowful, ideological uncertainty. As the

[119] "To reach old age in silence."

[120] Gadda, "Il *Pasticciaccio*," 507-508.

author goes on to explain, this is no minor part of the *Pasticciaccio*, but rather constitutes his response to the "explosive urgency" that he felt at the end of the war and in the immediate postwar period. Earlier in the essay, Gadda calls this the "esplosiva urgenza del mio animo 1945-1946," but never further defines it; given the historical context, we can reason that he refers to the need he felt to address the unthinkable violence that resulted from Fascism's bellicosity and unshakeable faith in its ideology.[121] Gadda corroborates as much when he describes Angeloni as a key part of his critique of the "gnosis" that dominated Italy during the Ventennio: Fascism. However, the commendatore—and the author himself for that matter—must be prudent and therefore silent ("per silentum ad senectutem pervenere"), hence the pun on the term "agnostica." On one hand, Gadda here refers to his dissent from Fascism ("a-gnosi"); on the other, his commentary must be "agnostic," that is, "uncertain" or indirect to avoid censorship and persecution. Thus the reader of the *Pasticciaccio* is met with the figure of the commendatore who, by virtue of his very existence outside of the virile, reproductive, and heteronormative role that Fascism ascribed to men, stands as a veiled but pointed rebuke of the regime's mystification of human sexuality. This agnosticism, however, has one further meaning when placed in the broader context of our analysis of author's poetics and engagement with the Baroque: it is effectively the default position of that Gaddian perception of the omnipresence of the fold, which forever works to unravel all claims to stable meaning.

[121] Gadda lived in Florence during the war on via Repetti in close vicinity to the Campo di Marte railway station. As he records in "Il *Pasticciaccio*," he was witness to the carpet bombings of the city, and survived them only by chance: "Il mio misero terzo piano tre locali," he writes, "pieno di libri e di polvere, con le piastrelle già bilicanti da sempre sotto i passi, era stato rintronato a dovere: il tetto reso a crivello dai sassi, dalle schegge. Una scheggia di ventidue chili di ferro tutta sfrangiata, e tutta arricciolata la frangia dalla diruzione esplosiva, s'era posata sul letto ove avrei dovuto esser io, se non avessi preso il due di coppe la prima volta, voglio dire dopo il primo di codesti scherzi (23 settembre 1943)" (508).

This helps to clarify why Gadda continually insists in his writings related to the *Pasticciaccio* that Angeloni fostered a deep love for Caravaggio's canvases. The *ingegnere* first wrote of the commendatore's passion for the baroque painter in his screenplay, *Il palazzo degli ori* (circa 1947), which was based on his novel, before returning to the topic in the essay "Il *Pasticciaccio*."[122] In *Il palazzo degli ori*, Gadda indicates in his notes that Angeloni, unknowingly tailed by an investigator, "entra a San Luigi de' Francesi […] si fa accendere la lampada dallo scaccino nella cappella Contarelli […] e vi sosta estasiato davanti ai due stupendi e celeberrimi dipinti di Caravaggio, specie davanti alla Vocazione."[123] A decade later, in "Il *Pasticciaccio*," the author describes Angeloni as a "periodico visitatore, in ora chiara della cappella Contarelli a San Luigi de' Francesi a la Scrofa, dove le tre tele del Caravaggio sembrano vivere in un tempo sospeso, in un attimo eterno."[124] As yet another Gaddian literary character who remains skeptical of all fixed schemas, Angeloni, I argue, is a "periodico visitatore" to Caravaggio's paintings because it is in these artworks—and in the *Vocazione* in particular—that he recognizes, like Grifonetto before him, an interpretive framework with which he identifies. In the darkness of the Contarelli Chapel, in front of Caravaggio's paintings, Angeloni can meditate on his melancholic sense of uncertainty, in seclusion from a society in which the Duce himself banished doubt. All of this raises the contradiction at the heart of Gadda's neo-Baroque with its multiple folds. The constitutive uncertainty of Gadda's folded vision gives rise to a distressing sense of melancholy, and yet Angeloni, like the author, must embrace it, for the alternative—totalitarianism—is far worse, as Gadda confirms in depicting the death of Liliana Balducci.

---

[122] This project is distinct from Pietro Germi's 1959 *Un maledetto imbroglio*, loosely based on the *Pasticciaccio*, which had a screenplay by Ennio de Concini.

[123] 954. There are actually three of Caravaggio's paintings in the Contarelli Chapel: the *Vocazione di san Matteo*, *San Matteo e l'angelo*, and the *Martirio di san Matteo*.

[124] Gadda, "Il *Pasticciaccio*," 507.

There is, however, a final factor that may help to explain Angeloni's fascination with Caravaggio, namely the homoerotic content of his paintings. These are images, in other words, in which Angeloni (and Gadda) find a representation of their own sexual desire and difference. Neither this desire nor this difference are condemned as immoral or abnormal; rather, they appear as folds among the many represented in the image. Angeloni's queer sexuality emerges during his questioning by Ingravallo. During the exchange, Manuela Petacchioni, the *portinaia* of via Merulana 219, points a finger at "un maschietto co li pacchi" who regularly delivers food to Angeloni. The commendatore is publicly humiliated by her innuendos:

> "Tutti gli sguardi si puntarono sul commendator Angeloni. Il nominato si confuse:
> «Io? Garzoni?... Che presciutto?»
> «Sor commendator mio,» implorò la sora Manuela, «nun me vorrete fa sta partaccia de dimme che nun è vero in faccia ar commissario… Voi siete solo...»
> «Solo?» ribbaté il sor Filippo, come se il viver solo fosse una colpa.
> «E che ce sta forse quarcuno co voi? Manco er gatto...»
> «E che volete dì, che so' solo?»
> «Dico che quarchiduno che ve porti da magnà a casa, quanno piove, la sera, ce po esse puro, no?...no? nun ve pare?» Ebbe un tono conciliante, quasi ad ammiccargli: «ma che me vai combinanno, a cojone!»
> In apparenza, un pasticcio. La confusione der sor Filippo era evidente: quel balbettare, quel trascolorare: quegli sguardi così pieni di incertezza, a non credere d'angoscia. Un sospeso interesse era in tutti: tutti i casigliani lo guardavano a bocca aperta: lui, la portinaia, il commissario."[125]

Analyzing this same passage, Francesco Gnerre has argued that, "L'imbarazzo e il rossore del commendatore Angeloni [...] rivelano chiaramente i suoi sensi di colpa e la verità dei sospetti a cui allude [Manuela]."[126] In turn, it is not hard to imagine that the commendatore might have been drawn to Caravaggio's paintings for what Gadda would have understood as their non-judgmental depictions of homoerotic longing and desire. One need only think of the sensual solicitation of the

[125] Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, 42.

[126] Francesco Gnerre, *L'eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 2000), 96.
.

male figures in pictures like *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (c. 1593), *Bacchus* (1596), and *Amor vincit omnia* (1601-1602) to realize that sor Filippo's fascination with Caravaggio's canvases may constitute Gadda's allusive representation of his own queer sexuality. All of this suggests that the commendatore enjoys a sense of "gratitude" and "ecstasy" before these images because they represent the difference that he embodies without condemnation. As they imagine the fascist ideology of gender and sexuality being carried off into the darkness with all other manmade schemas, Angeloni—and Gadda—are left at once to mourn the silencing of their own difference and to gratefully meditate on these paintings that depict that limit, like all others, as transitory and illusory.

Conclusion

In analyzing Gadda's critique of Fascism as it was shaped by his study of Leibniz's baroque philosophy and Caravaggio's paintings, we cannot deny the paradoxes that continually emerge in the thinking and writing of *il gran lombardo*. He was originally drawn to Fascism for its promise to transform the very basis of human existence in the wake of the First World War and to realize Italy's "destiny." Yet he came to viscerally despise the regime because of its ideological rigidity, enforced through violence, and its willful ignorance of the provisional, partial, and enfolded nature of all truth. Likewise, Gadda's relationship to baroque culture is just as fraught. On one hand, he embraced Caravaggio's painting and Leibniz's philosophy because he identified in these the possibility of a logic and an aesthetic that can describe and represent that selfsame "barocco che alberga già nelle cose." Although Gadda sought to adopt these as part of a practice of resistance to totalitarianism, he had to acknowledge—not without regret—that the Baroque itself was sadly devoid of the permanence of meaning for which he longed. This is a clear break with Leibniz, who conceived of the fold as a philosophical attempt to guard against a fragmentation. Instead, for

Gadda, the fold is the very cause of this fragmentation or unraveling of totalizing systems of meaning. Still, it is important not to conflate this with a kind of nihilism: caught between the ideological prescriptions and absolutes of Fascism and the sorrowful agnosticism of his reinvented Baroque, the *ingegnere* chose the latter. Few writers in modern Italian literature have been more radical in their critique of the seductive totalization offered by the regime. In this sense, we might say that, in Gadda's hands, the neo-baroque fold has a dual and perhaps paradoxical function, for it mourns the loss of foundation in modernity at the same time as it guards against all those who want—through force, if necessary—to replace what has been lost with a new and univocal foundation for being. Gadda, however, was not the only major writer in Italy, who, in the wake of the First World War and upon of the rise of Fascism, turned to the Baroque for inspiration and to develop a new interpretive framework in the midst of a dizzying crisis of meaning in modernity. As we will see in the next chapter, in the same years that Gadda was studying and writing on Leibniz and Caravaggio, a fellow war veteran, the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti—much admired by the *ingegnere*—began his yearslong meditation on the baroque architecture of Rome, in which he came to identify an infinite fold.[127]

[127] In his brief article "I grandi uomini," Gadda praises Ungaretti alongside Eugenio Montale as "due poeti ch'io ritengo oggi, grandi, i due dioscuri nel cielo della poesia: per le ragioni che voi tutti sapete, veduto che li conoscete e li amate come me: Montale e Ungaretti: (li cito in ordine alfabetico)." See Carlo Emilio Gadda, "I grandi uomini," in *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*, eds. by Liliana Orlando, Clelia Martignoni, and Dante Isella (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), 978-979. Gadda's respect for Ungaretti was mutual, as evidenced by the latter's 1963 remarks, given on the occasion of a presentation on *La cognizione del dolore* in Rome. For Ungaretti's speech, see "Parole per Gadda," in *Vita d'un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, eds. Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 685-688. For more on their views of each other's writings, see Ernesto Livorni, "Gadda and His Fellow Poets: Some Reflections on Their Exchange," *Italica* 93, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 724-739.

2. "Una città di fondo barocco": Giuseppe Ungaretti's Rome

"È diventata la mia città quando sono arrivato a capire ciò che è il barocco, ciò che ha il barocco. Perché Roma è in quel fondo, è una città di fondo barocco."

-Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*"

Introduction

When Giuseppe Ungaretti first arrived in Rome in 1921, the city had yet to be subject to the massive building projects and disastrous demolitions that the Fascists pursued soon after taking power in October 1922. Instead, the Urbe would have appeared to Ungaretti much as it had been for centuries, namely a dense "agglomerato di quartieri che si erano stratificati nel tempo senza progettazione, crescendo gli uni accanto agli altri e inglobando le colonne, gli archi, le mura, le tracce della città antica."[1] Looking on this cityscape, which he later identified in an untitled 1969 essay as a key inspiration for the poems collected in *Sentimento del tempo*, Ungaretti concluded that it was uninterpretable.[2] The intermixing of styles—from the ancient to the modern and the secular to the sacred—prevented him from identifying any "unità" underlying the urban space.[3] What is more, in front of Rome's many ancient ruins, the poet records feeling only a vertiginous sense of *horror vacui* for, in a Benjaminian twist, the only meaning these *ruderi* convey is the weakening and decay of meaning itself.[4] As the epigraph above shows, it was only when he came to appreciate the city's myriad of baroque churches, *piazze*, and palaces that Ungaretti felt at home: he was finally able to grasp the unity of the Urbe that he had initially failed to detect. In the poet's

[1] Gabriella De Marco, "Mussolini e l'uso pubblico della storia: dalle demolizioni nel centro storico di Roma al complesso dell'E42," in *Immagini e forme del potere. Arte, critica e istituzioni in Italia fra le due guerre*, ed. Davide Lacagnina (Palermo: Edizioni di passaggio, 2011), 37.

[2] Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," in *Vita d'un uomo. Tutte le poesie*, ed. Carlo Ossola (Milan: Mondadori, 2016), 591.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 595.

view, as I will show, Rome's baroque architecture effectively creates a fold, imperceptibly uniting contradictory elements without canceling them. In this chapter, I will examine this vision of Rome and its impact on Ungaretti's subtle and intellectual anti-fascist resistance as well as on his poetics. I will argue that the poet, inspired by the Urbe, embraces the Roman fold. This fold seeks to guard against a fear of the void by weaving together imperceptible interconnections that unite all things and peoples in difference. This embrace of difference is not a trivial gesture on Ungaretti's part; born and raised in multicultural Alexandria, Egypt and having lived both in Paris and later Brazil, the poet was highly cosmopolitan and held deeply tolerant views of other cultures, races, ethnicities, and even sexualities.[5] He in fact long admired his place of birth for its vast linguistic and cultural diversity.[6] It is not incidental that, in 1923, the poet openly compared the Roman Baroque to the land of his birth in the article "Roma Africana," which parodied, no less, the regime and its colonial aims.[7] Ungaretti's reading of the Roman Baroque and the vision he derives from it are all the more significant given the Fascists' plan to rebuild Rome. As they remade the Urbe, Mussolini and his government attempted to impose a univocal definition upon the city as the center of a modern and fascist empire. Against the regime's nationalist, imperialist, and racist ideology, the poet instead finds in the Eternal City a baroque model of unity in difference, and takes it up as a part of his idiosyncratic practice of resistance to Fascism.[8]

---

[5] I will discuss Ungaretti's views on sexuality below. For his comments on the subject, see *Comizi d'amore*, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1965, Arco Film), online.

[6] In 1931, upon his return to Alexandria, Ungaretti wrote of the city: "Com'è disordinata questa città! Tutte queste lingue che s'incrociano; queste insegne, italiane, francesi, arabe, greche, armene, delle botteghe; l'architettura; il gusto! Quale Merlin Cocai s'è divertito ad inventarla? Non so quale rancore m'invade, d'amarla, questa mia città natale!" See: Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Per mare interno,"in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, ed. Paola Montefoschi (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), 33.

[7] Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Roma africana," in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, ed. Paola Montefoschi (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), 7-12.

[8] As I will explain in more depth below, I do not mean to deny Ungaretti's adherence to the fascist party. It is important to note, however, that scholars including Paola Montefoschi, Marco Onofrio, Carlo Ossola, Leone Piccioni, and Lucia

In order to appreciate the political significance of Ungaretti's analysis of the Roman Baroque, I will open this chapter with a discussion of the fascist vision of and plans for the Urbe, paying special attention to the regime's reception of the baroque architecture found throughout the city. I will then turn my attention to Ungaretti's essentially transgressive understanding of and engagement with the baroque aesthetic. As we will see, the poet, fully aware that the Baroque is transnational, embraced it even as prominent adherents to Fascism rejected it for its "foreignness." Moreover, the poet countered fascist rhetoric when, against today's widely accepted scholarly conventions, he came to identify Michelangelo Buonarroti and especially his Roman architecture as the greatest exponents of the baroque aesthetic. While I will not go so far as to argue that Michelangelo was in fact an exemplar of *barocchismo*, to label him as such during the Ventennio was to contradict narratives that framed the artist as a part of an austere classicist tradition passed on through the centuries from ancient Rome to fascist modernity. Finally, and most importantly, I will show that it is through Michelangelo and the Roman Baroque that Ungaretti comes to embrace the fold: in reading Michelangelo as a baroque artist, the poet effectively creates his own artistic predecessor, and in so doing anticipates Deleuze's poststructuralist analysis of Buonarroti. For Ungaretti and Deleuze, Michelangelo can be associated with the Baroque for the way in which, in their respective views, his works depict their figures as "manners" or folds of a larger continuum.

Re have long understood that Ungaretti's Fascism was essentially naïve and based on misunderstandings of Mussolini and his ideology. Recently, however, some like Claire Thomas have suggested that his adherence to the PNF was very deliberate (See: Claire Thomas, "A Colonial Eye on Egypt: Ungaretti's Writing for *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 1931," *Italian Studies* 71, no. 3 [2016]: 384-402). This chapter aims to further develop the former line of argumentation by suggesting that, even as he identified as a Fascist, Ungaretti consistently developed an aesthetic vision that ran counter to the PNF's imperialism. For more on Ungaretti's "naïve" Fascism, see: Paola Montefoschi, "Prosa di un nomade," in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, ed. Paola Montefoschi (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), xvii-xviii; Onofrio, *Ungaretti e Roma* (Rome: Edilazio, 2008), 25-32; Carlo Ossola, "Introduzione," in *Filosofia e fantastica*, ed. Carlo Ossola (Turin: UTET, 1997), 10. Leone Piccioni, *Vita di Ungaretti* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1979), 143-147; Lucia Re, "Alexandria Revisited: Colonialism and the Egyptian Works of Enrico Pea and Giuseppe Ungaretti," in *A Place in the Sun*, ed. Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 188-189.

In Ungaretti's view, it is thus Michelangelo who, through his Roman building projects, imbues the Urbe with that fold which profoundly shaped the modern poet's tolerant and anti-fascist vision of difference in unity.

La Terza Roma & the Legacy of the Baroque

On New Year's Eve 1925, only about four years after Ungaretti first arrived in Rome, Benito Mussolini stood in the Piazza del Campidoglio where he gave a speech describing a "terza Roma [che] si dilaterà sopra altre colli, lungo le rive del fiume sacro, sino alle spiagge del Tirreno."[9] This third Rome was to be the successor of the Rome of the Caesars and that of the popes, yet it was to be decidedly modern and fascist. Over the course of the Ventennio much of the Roman urban space was subject to drastic projects and demolitions to build the city of the Duce. In fact, "nella prima metà del XX secolo, nessuno stato ha investito di più, in termini sia economici sia di impegno nell'architettura pubblica di quanto abbia fatto il fascismo."[10] To this day, as Borden Painter explains, Rome "has a fascist imprint that has changed the way we experience the city [...] Many of Rome's monuments, from the Colosseum to Saint Peter's, have fascist settings. Beyond the historic center, there stand whole areas or 'cities' constructed by the fascists such as the Foro Mussolini, now Foro Italico, [...,] the Città Universitaria [...,] the Cinecittà [...,] and EUR, the Esposizione Universale di Roma, the fascist city of the future."[11] The regime's sweeping makeover of Rome was not lost on Ungaretti, who in 1969 pointedly recalled that,

[9] Benito Mussolini, "Per la grande Roma: Programma al Governatore," in *Discorsi del 1925* (Milan: Alpes, 1926), 280.

[10] De Marco, 35.

[11] Borden Painter, *Mussolini's Rome. Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), xv.

"Quando sono arrivato a Roma per stabilirmici, ero già stato in giro per l'Europa, ed allora Roma era diversa."[12]

As he sought to frame Rome as the center of his empire, Mussolini had to confront the city's dense layers of history embodied by its ancient ruins, medieval dwellings, baroque palaces and churches, and the modern structures and monuments built by the liberal state after Unification. It is well known that "most important to [Mussolini's] sense of [...] *romanità* was the Rome of the emperors."[13] If, by contrast, the Fascists generally reviled the period of the liberal state from 1870-1922, the intervening historical eras and cultural movements were, as Painter explains, viewed more ambiguously: "the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque [...] ended up somewhere between."[14] As we will see, the Baroque, for its part, was largely met with hostility. One project that is emblematic of this fascist vision of the Italian capital is the construction of the via dell'Impero, now the via dei Fori Imperiali. If the regime's plan was to make Piazza Venezia (site of the Palazzo Venezia, where, in 1929, Mussolini established his main office) "the indisputable geographic and symbolic centre of 'the third Rome,'" the via dell'Impero was to link this new imperial center to that of the ancient city, namely the Roman Forum.[15]

Likewise, throughout the Urbe, the Fascists sought to uncover and emphasize traces of the classical past. Engaging in what Gabriella De Marco has called a "poetica dei vuoti," the regime thus sanctioned the destruction of some of Rome's lower-class quarters in order to "liberate" the city's key monuments. "Mussolini," she explains, "con l'avallo di personalità quali Antonio

[12] Giuseppe Ungaretti,"Note a *Sentimento del tempo,*" 591.

[13] Painter, 3.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Aristotle Kallis, *La terza Roma* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 40.

Muñoz, Corrado Ricci, Gustavo Giovannoni, Armando Brasini e di Marcello Piacentini ridisegnò, arbitrariamente, il tessuto connettivo della capitale creando quei vuoti che ancora oggi percepiamo come una sorta di aura che 'spontaneamente' circonda quelli che, nell'opinione comune, sono ritenuti come i principali monumenti."[16] Unsurprisingly, many of these monuments were those of ancient Rome, including the Theater of Marcellus, the Colosseum, the Arch of Janus, and the Arch of Constantine. The end result is the creation of a "gerarchia sia nella percezione del paesaggio urbano, sia nella memoria della storia del passato."[17] In line with Mussolini's cult of *romanità*, this hierarchy elevates above all else the Rome of the Caesars. It is precisely this hierarchical, fascist "poetics of the void" that Ungaretti opposes in his reading of Rome; as I will show, for the poet it is the city's density and stratification that charges the urban space with meaning and inspires the aesthetic of the fold.

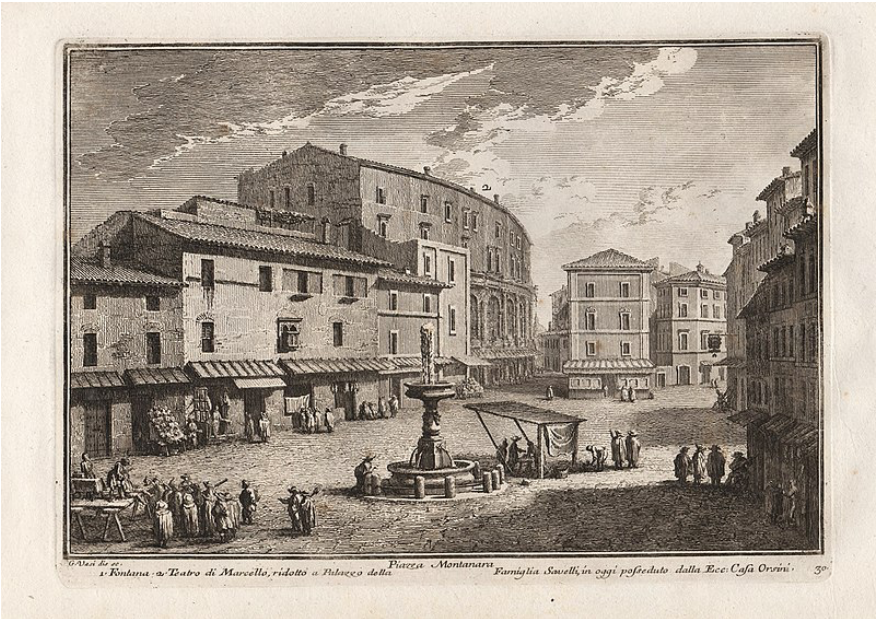

Fig. 2.1. Giuseppe Vasi, *Piazza Montanara*, c. mid-18th century, engraving, 40 x 29 cm, University of Maryland Baltimore. Image: https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/handle/10713/5859. The Theatre of Marcellus is visible in the background, on the left of the square, which was demolished by the Fascists.

[16] De Marco, 38.

[17] Ibid., 39.

Inevitably, many of the city's baroque sites fell victim to the demolitions. At Largo Argentina, the Fascists destroyed the church of San Nicola dei Cesarini to make away for their archeological excavations;[18] the obliteration of the Borgo Nuovo and the Borgo Vecchio in preparation for the via della Conciliazione eliminated the surprise effect of Bernini's setting of St. Peter's Square;[19] and the Piazza d'Aracoeli once "ricca di [...] colpi di scena," was opened up to isolate the Campidoglio, eliminating the square's illusory, baroque effect.[20]

Fig. 2.2. The Borgo Nuovo (left) and Borgo Vecchio (right) were demolished in 1936 to make way for the via della Conciliazione. This is how Ungaretti would have known the area before his departure for Brazil, also in 1936. In the background is Michelangelo's cupola atop St. Peter's Basilica. Image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Borgo_Nuovo_(Rome)#/media/File:PiazzaPia.jpg

[18] Painter, 7.

[19] As Giuseppe Nifosi explains, "Con la scelta di demolire i borghi vaticani prospicienti la Basilica di San Pietro, operazione necessaria per aprire una strada scenografica quale Via della Conciliazione voleva essere, Piacentini annullò completamente e irreversibilmente l'effetto sorpresa del grande spazio prospettico della piazza berniniana, cui si giungeva da due piccole strade laterali: un effetto che a Bernini era caro, e che contribuiva in modo significativo ad alimentare la meraviglia barocca." See: Giuseppe Nifosi, "Piacentini e l'urbanistica fascista," *Arte Svelata* (blog), March 29, 2021, https://www.artesvelata.it/piacentini-urbanistica-fascista/.

[20] Armando Ravaglioli, *Roma ieri e oggi: immagini a confronto* (Rome: Newton Compton Editore, 1982), 277.

To be clear, the fascist approach to the Baroque was not exclusively negative. At times, Rome's fascist urban planners attempted to preserve some of the city's seventeenth-century architectural treasures. Carlo Fontana's church of Santa Rita da Cascia (1643), formerly located at the foot of the staircase in front of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, was demolished in 1928 but subsequently fully reconstructed by Gustavo Giovannoni in 1940 in via Montanara. Likewise, San Lorenzo in Miranda in the Roman Forum, built within the ruins of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, was left intact as the Fascists furiously excavated the surrounding area. In short, for the regime's adherents, the Baroque was an occasional point of contention, though it was largely viewed in a negative light and thought of as disposable as well as an unsuitable model for fascist artists and architects.

This debate over *secentismo* is perhaps best encapsulated by the tension between architects Armando Brasini and Marcello Piacentini, as Vincenzo Fontana has argued. From the beginning of his career, Brasini was heavily influenced by the architects of the Seicento—particularly Borromini and Bernini—and completed monumental building projects in fascist Rome that evince the heavy influence of seventeenth-century aesthetics, including the Basilica del Sacro Cuore Immacolato di Maria (begun in 1923), the Complesso del Buon Pastore (begun in 1929), and the Palazzo dell'INAIL in via IV Novembre (begun in 1928). Brasini's work did not go unnoticed by Mussolini, who, in 1927, personally (though only partially) approved his Berninian plan for the never-realized via Imperiale, which was to connect the Pantheon with the Mausoleum of Augustus.[21] Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Marcello Piacentini, author of structures and sites including the via della Conciliazione, the Esposizione Universale di Roma, and the Città universitaria, was the most influential architect and urban planner of the Ventennio. His rationalist,

[21] For more information on this project, see: Laura Moure Cecchini, *Baroquemania. Italian Culture and the Construction of National Identity 1898-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 172-175.

monumental neoclassicism appealed to the regime's aims and is not unlike that fascist aesthetic of voids that De Marco describes. Explaining his approach to architecture in a 1917 essay, it becomes that clear that, even before Fascism, Piacentini aimed to highlight the monuments of the classical past: "Nessuna parodia dunque, nessun accompagnamento, come infine nessun temerario contrasto," he writes, "Ma costruzioni semplicissime [...] dove lo studio verrà portato nelle movenze delle masse, nelle loro proporzioni, nei profili sul cielo nel colore in armonia subordinata ai monumenti antichi."[22] No doubt, this emphasis on ancient structures later led Piacentini to receive some of the commissions that were to make him the most notorious architect of the regime.

Piacentini's predilection for an austere, modern neoclassicism was shared by others in Mussolini's inner circle, including Margherita Sarfatti. In particular, her preference for a conservative classicist aesthetic led her to vehemently reject the Baroque. In a 1921 article, she lambasted seventeenth-century art as "histrionic," anti-classicist, and fundamentally anti-Italian. "Procliamiamolo pure," Sarfatti wrote, "il Seicento fu in Italia un'epoca di scarsa probità, di scarso coraggio, di scarsa dignità morale: Spagna, tiranni, gesuiti e arcadia. E l'arte ne risente. Fu in gingillo e una maschera, tronfia come le parrucche dell'epoca, fastosa e irreale, e curò l'apparenza più che la sostanza—il *trompe l'oeil*—più che la verità [...] questi i tristi mali dell'Italia spagnolizzata e inaustricata."[23] For Sarfatti, then, not only is the Baroque problematic for its excess, "artificiality," and antirealism; it is also too closely associated with foreignness and a history of colonization in Italy to be an adequate model for the Rome that the regime aimed to build. Broadly speaking, artists were expected to "ispirarsi alla tradizione italiana intesa nella

[22] Marcello Piacentini, "Per la restaurazione del centro di Bologna," *Storia dell'Urbanistica* 5 (December 1983): 67-68.

[23] Margherita Sarfatti, "Il Seicento Italiano," in *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969), 95-96.

continuità Impero-Comuni-Risorgimento-Fascismo," clearly underscoring a direct lineage from the ancient empire to the Fascist present, with no interference from those less-admired parts of history like the decades of liberal government, or, for that matter, the Seicento.[24]

Sarfatti's take on the Baroque was no doubt influential, despite the relatively early date of her article; indeed, along with Ugo Ojetti, Giuseppe Bottai, Antonio Muñoz, Ettore Romagnoli, and Piacentini, she continued to influence Mussolini's approaches to urban planning in Rome and to the arts in general for many years.[25] In short, within fascist circles, it would not be too much to say that an anti-baroque bias was prevalent even if not universal. No matter the debate between individual party adherents about the merits of the Baroque, one can at least say that there remains a common thread: the regime's staunchly ideological approach to history and aesthetics. The fascist state sought to subsume much of the history sedimented in Rome's urban space into its ideology and deploy it as a part of a grand narrative to justify its power; whatever might interfere with this endeavor was simply to be cleared away. It is thus highly significant that Ungaretti, in this context, comes to the Baroque and identifies in it a completely different and profoundly subversive vision.

"Il soffio oceanico del Barocco": A Transnational Aesthetic of Resistance

It might seem counterintuitive that Ungaretti saw in the Baroque a highly transgressive potential. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the style of the Baroque was famously—though not only—a tool of state power, and the poet was well aware of this. After all, he lived in Rome, where religious orders, intent on missionizing in the New World, routinely vied

[24] Giuliano Manacorda, *Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista* (Milan: Principato Editore, 1974), 22.

[25] De Marco, 42.

for papal favor, and also Brazil from 1936 to 1942, where he admired the art of the colonial period.[26] The poet, nevertheless, came to recognize a certain element of transgressiveness to the Baroque not long after his arrival in Rome, as evidenced by a close reading of his 1923 article, "Roma africana." In this text, Ungaretti identifies the Urbe—and specifically the baroque piazza and church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme—with Africa in a veiled rebuke of the regime's colonialism. To understand why in particular this baroque setting prompts an anti-fascist commentary on the poet's part, it is necessary to account for select pieces of his writing on the topic of the Baroque; Ungaretti, as we will see, conceives of it as transgressive in three key ways. First, he fully understood that the Baroque was a global and transnational aesthetic, and, counter to fascist nationalism, adopted it as an inspiration.[27] Second, just as the regime engaged in efforts to fascistize and "Romanize" the figure of Michelangelo and claim him as a forerunner to its preferred austere classicist aesthetic, Ungaretti instead identified him with a dramatically innovative "classicismo forsennato," that in his view, was characteristic of the Baroque.[28] Finally, and most importantly, Ungaretti viewed Michelangelo's aesthetic as an expression of the fold, a vision that, as I will argue, embraces all difference in a striking resistance to the core tenets of fascist ideology.

In highlighting the ways in which Ungaretti's fascination with the Baroque contradicted fascist beliefs and narratives, I do not mean to deny the poet's adherence to the fascist party in the 1920s nor his close relationship with Mussolini. Rather, as is clear from his letters with Jean

[26] Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Brasile," in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, ed. Paola Montefoschi (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), 456.

[27] For more on the Baroque as a global aesthetic, see: Peter Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

[28] Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Le origini del Romanticismo italiano," in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, ed. Paola Montefoschi (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), 767.

Paulhan, early on at least he trusted the Duce[29]—though he did not always agree with him—and went so far as to ask him to write a preface for the 1923 reprinting of *Il porto sepolto*. However, as Lucia Re has noted, Ungaretti "subsequently had a change of heart, and Mussolini's preface was not included in any of the later editions (1931, 1936, and 1943)." In fact, Re points out that for years, "Ungaretti misread Mussolini completely. As late as 1927," she writes, referring to the poet's essay "Originalità del Fascismo," "he was still comparing [Mussolini] to Gracchus Babeuf and Karl Marx."[30] In light of this, Leone Piccioni's account of Ungaretti's Fascism is quite credible. "Ben presto," he writes, "e tanto più con l'alleanza con i nazisti, con la compagna contro gli ebrei, con la guerra, [il poeta] cambierà ampiamente opinione, ma non ripudierà mai quel punto di vista di allora, e difenderà sempre questa tesi: che, allora, era plausible pensarla così, sperare così. Del resto, il fascismo visto da sinistra fu errore ottico."[31] Ungaretti's Fascism was, therefore, paradoxical and naïve; it is not a stretch to imagine that, even as he held out hope that Mussolini might serve Italy's best interests, the poet developed, as he meditated on the art and architecture of the Baroque, a transgressive vision that defied the regime's rigid ideological categories.

The article "Roma Africana," in fact, is indicative of a kind of early, anti-fascist instinct on the poet's part, which he articulates in direct dialogue with baroque architecture. Ungaretti penned the enigmatic text in August 1923, hoping to publish it in either the *Idea nazionale* the short-lived *Corriere italiano* newspapers; the second of these had been established under the orders of

[29] See: Jacqueline Paulhan, Luciano Rebay, and Jean-Charles Vegliante, eds., *Correspondance Jean Paulhan-Giuseppe Ungaretti* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

[30] Re, "Alexandria Revisited," 189.

[31] Piccioni, *Vita di Ungaretti*, 145.

Mussolini himself.[32] The piece opens with an invitation to visit a sunbaked piazza di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome: "Le ore più luminose non sono le più chiare," Ungaretti's narrator says, "Avventurati, se hai coraggio, in piazza Santa Croce, e, alle dodici, t'accorgerai in che stato, di questi dì, sono ridotte le cose."[33] This piazza is dominated by the baroque façade of the eponymous basilica, designed by Piero Passalacqua and Domenico Gregorini in the early 1740s; this setting—a "barocca Roma Africana," to quote Paola Montefoschi[34]—is, as Ungaretti provocatively suggests, not only literally filled with light, but is also figuratively illuminating, for it will reveal that "these days"—less than one year after the Fascists took power—"things are diminished."

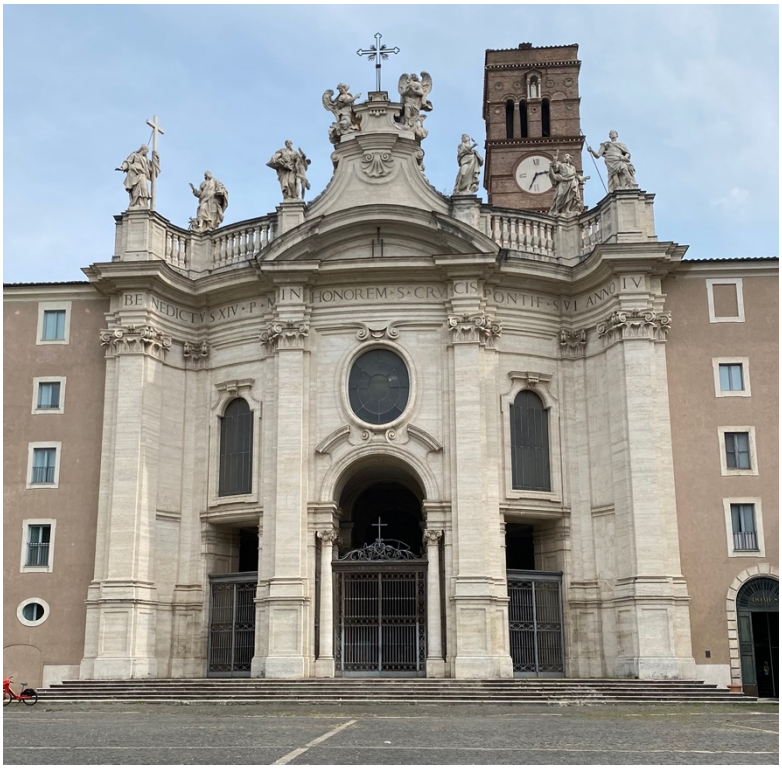

Fig. 2.3. The façade of the Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. Image: Joseph Tumolo.

[32] For more on the history of this article and why it was never ultimately published, see: Paola Montefoschi, "'Roma africana'. Prime avventure romane e un inedito," in *Ungaretti: La biblioteca di un nomade* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1997), 47-57, especially 50.

[33] Ungaretti, "Roma africana," 7.

[34] Montefoschi, "Roma africana," 55.

Strangely, and no less provocatively, this setting reminds Ungaretti of Africa, where he was born. The sunlight or "nebbia solare" in the square, he writes, "macina con tirannia invereconda. In remoti giardini, a vedere aggrada (ove tra sicomori, aranci e gelsomini, scherza custodita dal capelvenere, l'acqua innocente) sull'alabastro ingiallito, che s'annoiano, antilopi e ibi. (È l'Africa dei pascià.)."[35] In turn, Rome, in line with the article's title, "becomes" African in the fantasy of the poet.[36] As Paola Montefoschi points out, Ungaretti's oneiric vision of Rome-cum-Africa is a thinly veiled swipe at fascist colonialism: the very title "*Roma africana* [...] ribaltava irrispettosamente l'auspicata 'Africa romana' fascista."[37] Unsurprisingly, the article never appeared in either the *Idea nazionale* or the *Corriere italiano*. Montefoschi explains that its title, along with the text's "tono ingenuamente ludico erano inaccettabili per i giornali dell'epoca, e in particolare, per il 'Corriere italiano' che si impegnava a essere [...] 'un organo di perfetta aderenza all'azione del governo e di esatta interpretazione del pensiero di Benito Mussolini.'"[38] The subsequent part of the article likely only drew further ire. In it the narrator recounts a romance between Halil Mansur, a character whom the poet may have based on an individual he knew in Egypt, and his lover Giunone; this mysterious story, as Piccioni has argued, was likely meant as a

[35] Ibid.

[36] Montefoschi explains that this identification of Rome with Egypt appears highly paradoxical: on one hand, Ungaretti hails from "una «intensa» ma «friabile» ed effimera Alessandria d'Egitto, città «senza quasi un monumento che ricordi il suo antico passato», rapita nella calura di un sempre identico e implacabile clima" (47). By contrast, Rome is fundamentally marked by "Il barocco, sedimento del vario stratificarsi architettonico della città eterna, memoria monumentale e imperitura del passato" (Ibid.). Yet, Montefoschi explains, both Rome and Alexandria are united by the same "sentimento del tempo," or an anxious perception of time as a destructive force. Alexandria, with its unrelenting desert climate, gives rise to a "sentimento del tempo distruttore," that is, to a perception of the "lavorio di costante annientamento che il tempo vi produce." Rome—the city which inspired the poems collected in *Sentimento del tempo*—with its layers of history and myriad ancient ruins invites an overwhelming "orrore del vuoto," or a feeling of disorientation and fear of meaninglessness in time. For Ungaretti's characterization of Alexandria, see: Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Nota Introduttiva," in *Vita d'un uomo. Tutte le poesie*, ed. Carlo Ossola (Milan: Mondadori, 2009), 559. For his discussion of Rome, see "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 591-597.

[37] Montefoschi, "Roma africana," 50.

[38] Ibid.

parody of Benito Mussolini's affair with Margherita Sarfatti.[39] That Ungaretti should turn to his Egyptian upbringing to parody or critique the fascist regime's colonizing aims is not all that surprising. Scholars, in fact, have long understood that the twenty-four years that the poet spent in Africa "shaped his antinationalistic, anti-imperialist and non-racist vision of humanity."[40] However, to appreciate why the sight of the baroque façade of the Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme played a role in prompting the poet's critique of Mussolini and the regime, we must account for his understanding of the Baroque, which subtly countered fascist ideology and rhetoric.

Ungaretti, for example, recognized the Baroque as a global and transnational aesthetic and nonetheless embraced it as a muse within the historical context of the Ventennio nero, and against its detractors like Sarfatti. Following the poet's first engagement with urban Rome, he spent six years in Brazil from 1936 to 1942, where he taught Italian literature at the University of São Paulo, and where he was exposed to the baroque art of the New World. In fact, in South America, he came to deeply appreciate the ways in which colonial encounters in the Americas inspired the artists of Europe, and also began to think of "Baroque" as a relevant category for a strand of early modern art found in former European colonial possessions. In a 1941 *conferenza* from this period, entitled "Le origini del Romanticismo italiano," the poet argues that the Baroque would not have been possible had Europeans not made contact with the Americas. "Dicevo, parlando del Barocco," the poet begins, "che l'America era stata una causa principalissima di novità in Europa. Il buon selvaggio s'è detto." He continues,

> "Diremo di più: il soffio oceanico del Barocco non sarebbe passato travolgente per i nostri miniati paesi se l'occhio europeo non avesse potuto contemplare la

[39] Leone Piccioni, *Ungarettiana* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1980), 165-166.

[40] Re, "Alexandria Revisited: Colonialism and the Egyptian Works of Enrico Pea and Giuseppe Ungaretti," 170. In addition to Re's essay, see: Dora Marchese, "Ritorno alla terra natale. L'Egitto di Ungaretti e Marinetti," in *Geografia della modernità letteraria*, eds. Siriana Sgavicchia and Massimiliano Torrora (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2017), 395-404, and Nadine Makram Wassef, "Enrico Pea and Giuseppe Ungaretti: Matrices of Italian Identity and Literature across the Mediterranean," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 167-182.

> grandiosa natura di questi luoghi: osservare i suoi alberi, le sue conchiglie, la mole caotica dei suoi scogli, un'arca più piena e di una vita più varia e fantastica di quella portata a salvamento dal Noè dei nostri beati sogni fanciulleschi."[41]

One must acknowledge here that, in using the term "buon selvaggio," Ungaretti employs the problematic and patronizing language of colonial ideology. Nevertheless, to fully appreciate the poet's view, his contention must be placed in context. First, in 1941, with Italy at war and with fascist nationalism as the dominant ideology of mainstream culture, Ungaretti characterizes the Baroque—which originated in Rome—not as a "native" Italian style, but rather as an aesthetic that only came to be thanks to the encounter with the peoples, landscapes, and creatures of lands that exist far beyond the borders of what later became modern Italy. Second, we must account for the fact that, in later reflecting on his time in South America, Ungaretti overturns the hierarchy implied by a term like "buon selvaggio"; instead, he lauds the art of the Brazilian Baroque as equal or even superior to that of Europe. In a 1968 speech for example, reflecting on the years he spent in Brazil during the Ventennio, the poet fondly recalls "le chiese a Bahia o a Minas, chiese che pure sono incarnazioni bellissime del Barocco."[42] In this same speech, he also addresses the works of the architect and sculptor Antônio Francisco Lisboa (c. 1730-1814), better known as Aleijadinho, and suggests that his art is as great or greater than that of his European counterparts:

> "alle chiese di Minas non dava la sua opera l'Aleijadinho, lo scultore-architetto, il Michelangelo mulatto, mutilato delle mani di lebbra, e che scolpiva facendosi legare ai moncherini scalpello e mazzuolo? Può esserci un'arte più sconvolta dal vento Barocco, più travolta dalla disperata speranza di quella che agita nei suoi Profeti?"[43]

[41] Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Le origini del Romanticismo italiano," 770-771.

[42] Ungaretti, "Brasile," 456.

[43] Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Brasile," 455-456.

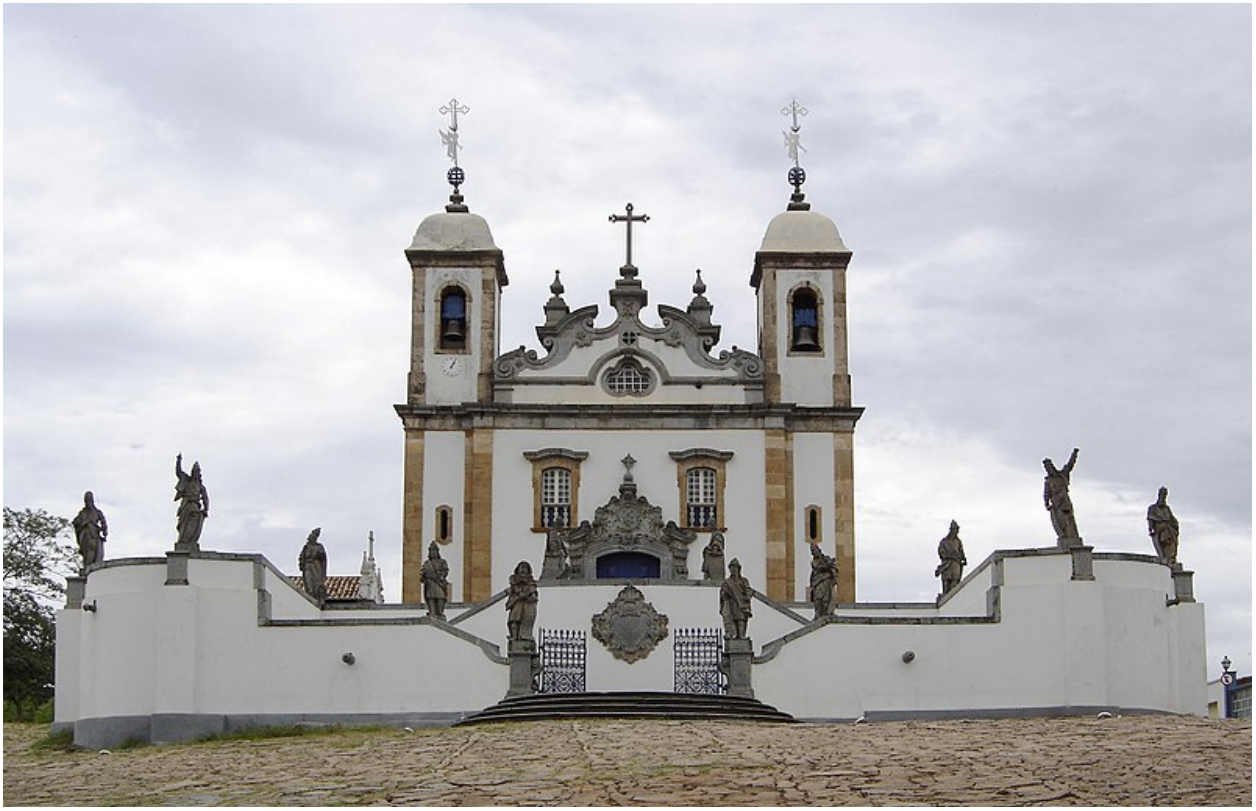

Fig. 2.4. Aleijadinho, *Twelve Prophets*, 1800-1805, Sanctuary of Bom Jesus de Matosinhos, Brazil. Image: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=Aleijadinho+Profetas&title=Special:MediaSearch&go=Go&type=image.

Here it is not necessary to understand why Ungaretti viewed Michelangelo as a baroque artist to grasp a key part of the significance of the comparison that he makes between Buonarroti and Aleijadinho. The poet understands the Baroque not as essentially Italian or European, but rather as a fundamentally global and transnational aesthetic that is relevant to both Michelangelo in Italy and Aleijadinho in Brazil. He anticipates, in other words, the views of contemporary scholars like Peter Davidson who has argued that the Baroque is "*permeable*. The Baroque of Cuzco," he writes, "is not a primitive imitation of the Baroque of Madrid, it is a localisation of a universal manner."[44] In a similar way, Ungaretti suggests that Aleijadinho's artistic creations, such as the sculptures of

[44] Peter Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 13-14. Emphasis in original.

the *Twelve Prophets* (1800-1805) at the sanctuary of Bom Jesus de Matosinhos in Congonhas, are in no way lesser facsimiles of the artworks of Lisboa's European counterparts; instead his art is equally as "sconvolta dal vento Barocco," if not more so. As these writings show, over the course of his long engagement with the Baroque, the poet came to see it as "permeable" and transnational; furthermore, against the nationalism of those like Sarfatti, the cosmopolitan Ungaretti embraced baroque art as a key poetic muse.

While Ungaretti's appreciation of the Baroque as a global phenomenon is in line with today's scholarly conventions, the poet's identification of Michelangelo Buonarroti as a baroque artist is no doubt unexpected by present-day standards. In the following pages, I will expand in much greater detail on how and why Ungaretti came to declare that Michelangelo "invented" the Baroque.[45] For now let us note that this evaluation of Buonarroti was not uncommon in the early part of the Novecento, and in fact originated in the writings of highly influential figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Heinrich Wölfflin.[46] Prominent exponents of fascist art and architecture took issue with this analysis of Buonarroti, and instead sought to frame his works as belonging to an essentially ancient Roman tradition. As Emanuela Ferretti has shown, architects like Vincenzo Fasolo, in academic writings, deployed a rhetoric meant to frame Michelangelo in particular as an heir to *romanità*. In 1924, in an article on the Cappella Sforza in Santa Maria Maggiore, Fasolo asserts that the structure is marked by "una romana austerità [che] si esprime dalla semplicità

[45] Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 597.

[46] In the second volume of *Human, All-Too-Human*, Nietzsche writes that, "Michael Angelo [is] the father or grandfather of the Italian baroque stylists." For his part, Wölfflin argued that, "If the fate of art in general can be said to rest in the hands of a single man, then the origins of this new art may be traced to none other than Michelangelo. Michelangelo is justly called the father of baroque." See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human. A Book for Free Spirits. Part Two*, ed. Oscar Levy and trans. Paul V. Cohn (London: Foulis, 1911), 75, and Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and* Baroque, trans. Katrin Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 82.

costruttiva sdegnosa d'ogni lenocinio di decorazione, che è affidata solamente al ritmo dell'unico dominante ordine composito, inquadrante, in giro, il perimetro dell'ambiente."[47] In Ferretti's analysis, Fasolo's rhetoric was meant to "spogliare questa architettura dagli elementi 'precorritori', cioè 'pre-barocchi' e rileggere Michelangelo in modo autonomo [...] ponendo le basi per una interpretazione ideologica dell'artista."[48] In other words, Fasolo not only frames Michelangelo as an heir to ancient Roman classicism, but also implicitly associates him with fascist aesthetics by divorcing him from the Baroque. Ungaretti clearly breaks with Fasolo's analysis when he associates Michelangelo's art with the baroque aesthetic; against the classicist austerity that Fasolo sees in Michelangelo's works, the poet instead associates them with the "classicismo forsennato" that for him is a key trait of *barocchismo*.[49] Far from reserved, for the poet, Michelangelo's works are instead marked by a highly innovative and awe-inspiring classicism.

All of this would seem relatively minor except for the fact that, in the 1920s and 30s, the regime enacted a concerted and highly visible effort to fascistize Michelangelo and his art. As Pierrette Marie Kulpa has shown, the Fascists sought to claim Michelangelo as "one of the great artists of 'nostra stirpe,'" that is, of the Italian "race."[50] These efforts began in 1925 with the restoration of the cupola at St. Peter's Basilica, and continued well into the next decade; in 1938, on Mussolini's order, the pavement of the Piazza del Campidoglio was redone according to

[47] Vincenzo Fasolo, "La cappella Sforza di Michelangelo," *Architettura e arti decorative. Rivista d'arte e di storia* 1 (1923-1924): 433.

[48] Emanuela Ferretti, "'La matematica del marmo'. Michelangelo fra storiografia e architettura nell'Italia del primo Novecento," in *Michelangelo e il Novecento*, ed. Pietro Ruschi (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2014), 86.

[49] Ungaretti, "Le origini del Romanticismo italiano," 767.

[50] Pierrette Marie Kulpa, "The Fascistization of Michelangelo and the *Libertà Espressiva* of the *Pietà* of Palestina," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 20, no. 2 (2017): 444.

Buonarroti's original design.[51] In the same year, the *Pietà di Palestrina*—then misattributed to Michelangelo—was removed from the church of Santa Rosalia in Palestrina (which resulted in the destruction of the baroque stucco canopy that housed it), and brought to the Circus Maximus where it was prominently displayed in the Mostra Autarchica del Minerale Italiano, held from November 1938 to May 1939.[52] This is all the more significant when we consider that Mussolini, who once declared Michelangelo the greatest of the Renaissance artists, personally ordered the state to purchase this *Pietà* sculpture.[53] In this way, Michelangelo's art was exploited by the Fascists in their efforts to create a narrative to justify their power and—considering their renovations at St. Peter's and the Campidoglio—to impose meaning and ideological certitude on the very cityscape of Rome.

This, for Ungaretti, is at best an extreme reduction of the profound meaning conveyed by Michelangelo's artworks. Already it is clear that the poet at least implicitly rejected the idea of Michelangelo as somehow an essentially Italian artist, or an exemplar of "nostra stirpe"; in associating him with the Baroque, which he admired both in Rome and in Brazil, Ungaretti suggests that Michelangelo was a practitioner of a fundamentally transnational aesthetic. However, to develop a fuller appreciation of just how subversive Ungaretti's "baroque" Michelangelo is, we must look to the poet's writings on his Roman architecture. It was Michelangelo's architecture that, in Ungaretti's analysis, connects the contradictory elements of the Roman cityscape revealing a harmonious unity—the fold—that underlies but that does not cancel them. In a twist reminiscent of Gadda's Manzoni and Caravaggio, Ungaretti thus fashioned for himself an artistic predecessor

[51] Ibid., 426-427.

[52] Ibid., 424.

[53] For more on Mussolini's involvement on the purchase of the *Pietà di Palestrina*, see Kulpa, 421-422. Mussolini's appraisal of Michelangelo was recorded by Sarfatti in her biography, *Dux*: "Bello, bello, Raffaello; bellissimo e vuoto. Come si fa a guardarlo, dopo Michelangelo?" See: Margherita Sarfatti, *Dux* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926), 263.

in the figure of Michelangelo. This understanding of Buonarroti's aesthetic as a fold entails an even deeper resistance against Fascism, for Ungaretti adopts it as a model of unity in difference, which stands in opposition to the hierarchies and schemas of the regime's discourse. The poet's Michelangelo is not an exemplar of the Italian "race"; rather, in his conviction that all beings and things are imperceptibly united, this "baroque" Buonarroti is a champion of difference .

Michelangelo & the Roman Fold

While today Michelangelo is not conventionally associated with *barocchismo*, for Ungaretti there was no doubt: Buonarroti was a baroque artist. As he wrote in the above-mentioned, untitled essay, published for the first time in 1969 in the notes to *Sentimento del tempo*, "È un grande, è Michelangelo che mi ha indicato la strada: è perché il barocco romano è nato da Michelangelo."[54] We have already noted that this was an influential opinion in the first decades of the *disputa sul barocco*; there are, however, three other factors that gave rise to Ungaretti's surprising analysis. First, the poet was particularly fascinated with Buonarrotti's late architectural works, structures that served as key models for the prominent architects of the Seicento. Second, in some cases, the structures that Ungaretti admired as Michelangelo's masterpieces were later drastically modified in the style of the Baroque. Finally, and most importantly, Ungaretti, in dialoguing with Michelangelo and the Roman cityscape, *creates* his predecessor. The end result is a "baroque" Michelangelo who anticipates the Deleuzian reading of the artist.

It is significant that of all of Michelangelo's many renowned artworks, Ungaretti was most drawn to his Roman architecture, to which the artist dedicated his final years. These late projects—structures like Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri (begun in 1562) and St. Peter's Basilica

[54] Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 591.

(which Michelangelo began work on in 1546)—became, as William E. Wallace argues, key models for seventeenth-century architects. While Wallace does not identify Michelangelo himself with the baroque aesthetic—instead, he says that Buonarroti was "chief among" Renaissance artists[55]—he also notes that the end of the *maestro*'s career was marked by "a significant evolution in his artistic practice [that] paved the way for the next generation of architects/entrepreneurs such as Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Francesco Borromini, and, further afield, Christopher Wren."[56] Michelangelo, in other words, was an important inspiration for baroque architects such as Bernini and Borromini who left an indelible mark on seventeenth-century Rome. Carolina Mangone has recently argued that Bernini in particular was profoundly influenced by Michelangelo. "By imitating Michelangelo's art and its principles," she argues, "Bernini constructed a theoretical foundation and vocabulary for his own art."[57] One such example is Bernini's fascination with Michelangelo's *figura serpentinata*, which the former cited as an inspiration for his mature sculptural works.[58] Importantly, in 1629, Bernini was appointed chief architect of St. Peter's, a position that Michelangelo, in his early seventies, had taken over some eight decades prior. It thus follows, as Mangone argues, that Bernini's architecture, like his sculpture, was centered on "adopting the working methods associated with Michelangelo's practice."[59] Thus, in identifying

[55] Wallace E. Williams, *Michelangelo, God's Architect. The Story of his Final Years and Greatest Masterpiece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 4.

[56] Wallace E. Williams, "Drawing Limits: Michelangelo Grows Old," *The Art Bulletin* 103, no. 1 (2021): 41. Some scholars have associated Michelangelo—particularly his poetry—with the Baroque. See: Sarah Rolfe Prodan, *Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and James M. Saslow *The Poetry of Michelangelo. An Annotated Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[57] Carolina Mangone, *Bernini's Michelangelo*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 1.

[58] Ibid., 25

[59] Ibid., 121.

Buonarroti with the Baroque, Ungaretti arguably recognized the shared forms, themes, and artistic approaches that characterize both Michelangelo's art and that of his successors.

In addition to being important models for subsequent generations, Michelangelo's architectural works were, by nature, heavily collaborative projects. St. Peter's Basilica can be seen as emblematic of this: it was one of many structures that would be completed only many years after the artist's death in 1564. As Wallace notes, in 1545, Michelangelo, then seventy years old, completed his last single-author work, the tomb of Pope Julius II in San Pietro in Vincoli.[60] Over the next nineteen years of the artist's life, "he was associated with more than a dozen architectural projects and was principally responsible for half of them." Construction continued on these monumental structures including the Campidoglio, St. Peter's, and Santa Maria degli Angeli for decades. The end result is that while Michelangelo left a lasting and often defining mark on these structures, the subsequent generations that saw these projects to completion added to and modified his plans. As such, many of these structures, despite their close association with Michelangelo, also feature prominent baroque contributions. One need only think of Bernini's colonnade or Carlo Maderno's façade at St. Peter's or Santa Maria degli Angeli whose interior was completely redone in by Luigi Vanvitelli in 1750. The latter is a particularly important example, for Ungaretti returns to it numerous times in his writing. Even before Vanvitelli, the basilica underwent decades of renovations and redecoration. Works such as Daniel Seiter's (c. 1642-1705) fresco in the apse (1681) or those of Luigi Garzi (1638-1721) in the Cappella dell'Epifania (completed sometime shortly before the painter's death) profoundly change the way in which we experience the space even today. In turn, as Alessandro Brodini has argued, "il progetto di Michelangelo mantiene per

[60] Wallace, "Drawing Limits," 38.

molti aspetti dei contorni [...] sfocati."[61] Thus, in some cases, especially when it comes to those late architectural projects, Ungaretti's association of Michelangelo with the Baroque is due to the prominent imprint that subsequent artists and architects left on these structures.

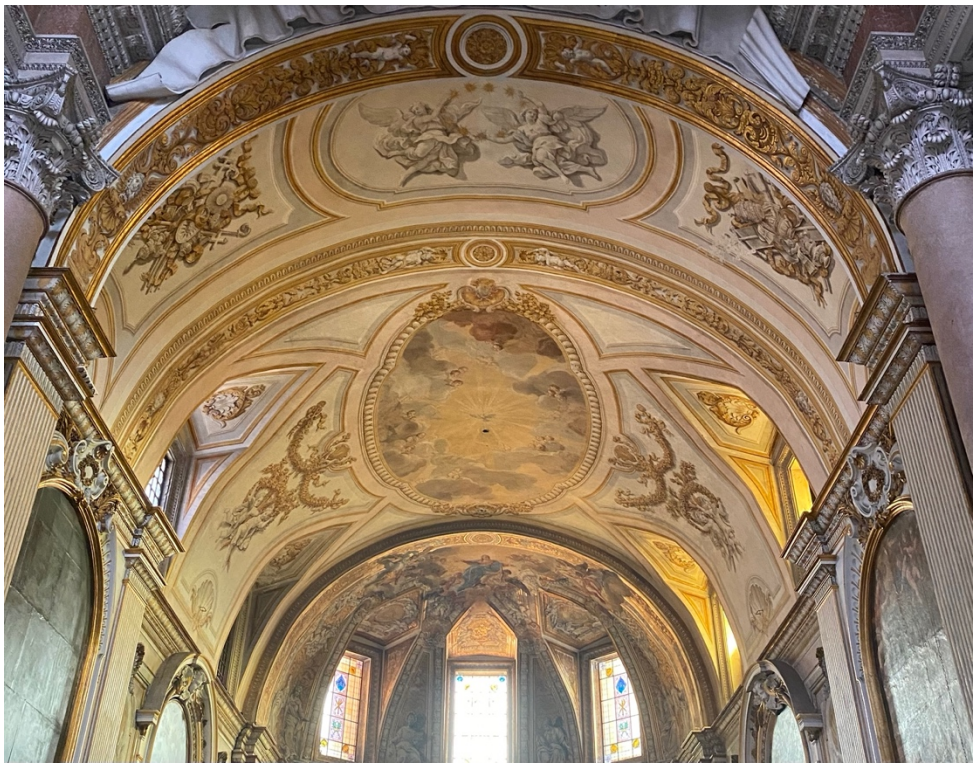

Fig. 2.5. Daniel Seiter, c. 1642-1705, fresco painting, Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri, Rome. Image: Joseph Tumolo.

Most importantly, however, there is a great extent to which Ungaretti is formulating an artistic precursor for himself in his inventive reading of Michelangelo, a gesture that, as I will explain below, carries with it deep political significance. In the first lines of his essay on *Sentimento*, Ungaretti, writing towards the end of his life, suggestively notes that he must now locate himself and his poetry in a tradition.[62] It is in articulating this tradition that Ungaretti most

[61] Alessandro Brodini, "Santa Maria degli Angeli," in *Michelangelo architetto a Roma*, ed. Mauro Mussolin (Milan: Cinisello Balsamo, 2009), 240.

[62] "La tradizione, poiché siamo giunti a doverne discorrere, fu una lenta conquista dei suoi valori durante gli anni nei quali incomincio la lentissima distillazione, mi si permetta il vocabolo, del mio *Sentimento del tempo*" (Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 591).

clearly proposes a reading of Michelangelo that anticipates that of Deleuze. Buonarroti receives only the barest mention in the opening pages of *The Fold*, but Deleuze developed a more thorough analysis in his lectures and in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981).[63] In particular, as Sjoerd van Tuinen has shown, the French philosopher closely associated Michelangelo with Leibniz, labelling each figure a "mannerist": "En effet [...] si vous pensez à la peinture dite maniériste," the French philosopher explained in a 1987 lecture, "c'est toute la philosophie de Leibniz qui sans doute est la philosophie maniériste par excellence. Déjà chez Michel Ange, on trouve [...] les traces d'un premier et profond maniérisme."[64] It is important to realize that Deleuze does not use the term "mannerism" here strictly according to its conventional meaning as a label for certain artworks of the Cinquecento that appeared after the Renaissance and before the Baroque. Rather, as becomes clear in *Le Pli*, the philosopher believed that the Baroque itself was essentially mannerist. In his study of Leibniz, Deleuze explains this distinctive conception of mannerism by juxtaposing it with "essentialism": "Essentialism makes a classic of Descartes," he explains, "while Leibniz's thought appears to be a profound mannerism. Classicism needs a solid and constant attribute for substance, but mannerism is fluid and the spontaneity of manners replaces the essentiality of the attribute."[65] Van Tuinen clarifies this point, explaining that, "in *The Fold* [...] Deleuze argues that monads are not Aristotelian or Cartesian essences but individuations of an inessential and ante-predicative world. Since each monad envelopes this infinite world

[63] In the first pages of the fold, Deleuze references the "funerary figures of the Basilica of Saint Laurence," presumably a reference to Michelangelo's tombs for the Medici family located in the Basilica di San Lorenzo in Florence. See Deleuze, *The Fold*, 11.

[64] Gilles Deleuze, "Sur Leibniz. Les principes et la liberté," (seminar, Cours Vincennes-Saint Denis: la logique de l'évènement, Paris, FR, April 8, 1987), https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/147.

[65] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 56.

according to its unique manner, Leibniz can be said to have introduced mannerism in philosophy."[66] For Leibniz, in other words, difference does not consist of individual properties that are essential to a being or subject. Rather, in his view, all subjects are folds in the same universe, and also have that entire universe folded into them in a unique way or *manner*.[67] Difference is therefore not an essential property but a way of being. Of particular importance here is that in making Leibniz the focus of his study of the Baroque, Deleuze suggests that mannerism itself is fundamental to it: "Mannerism," he writes in *The Fold*, is "a composite of the Baroque."[68]

In the above-cited 1987 lecture, Deleuze clarifies why he sees Michelangelo as a mannerist artist: "une attitude de Michel Ange n'est pas une essence. C'est vraiment la source d'une modification, d'une manière d'être." Michelangelo's works, in short, anticipate Leibniz's philosophy insofar as they depict their figures not as essences, but rather as manners—or perhaps folds—of being. Van Tuinen points to the conclusion of *Francis Bacon*, which corroborates and helps to develop a fuller understanding of this claim. At the end of the monograph, Deleuze affirms that Michelangelo is a mannerist, and points to the *Doni Tondo* (c. 1507) as an example:

> "In the history of art, it was perhaps Michelangelo who made us grasp the existence of such a fact most forcefully. What we will call a 'fact' is first of all the fact that several forms may actually be included in one and the same Figure, indissolubly, caught up in a kind of serpentine, like so many necessary accidents continually mounting on top of one another. Hence the *Holy Family*: [...] we witness the revelation of the body beneath the organism, which makes organisms and their elements crack or swell, imposes a spasm on them, and puts them into relation with forces—sometimes with an inner force that arouses them, sometimes with external forces that traverse them, sometimes with the eternal force of an unchanging time, sometimes with the variable forces of flowing time. [...] And here again the body

[66] Sjoerd Van Tuinen, "Michelangelo, Leibniz and the Serpentine Figure," *Deleuze Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 64.

[67] See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz,"The Monadology," in *Leibniz's Monadology. A New Translation and Guide*, ed. and trans. Lloyd Strickland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 15-16.

[68] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 57.

seems to enter into particularly mannered postures, or is weighed down by stress, pain, or anguish."[69]

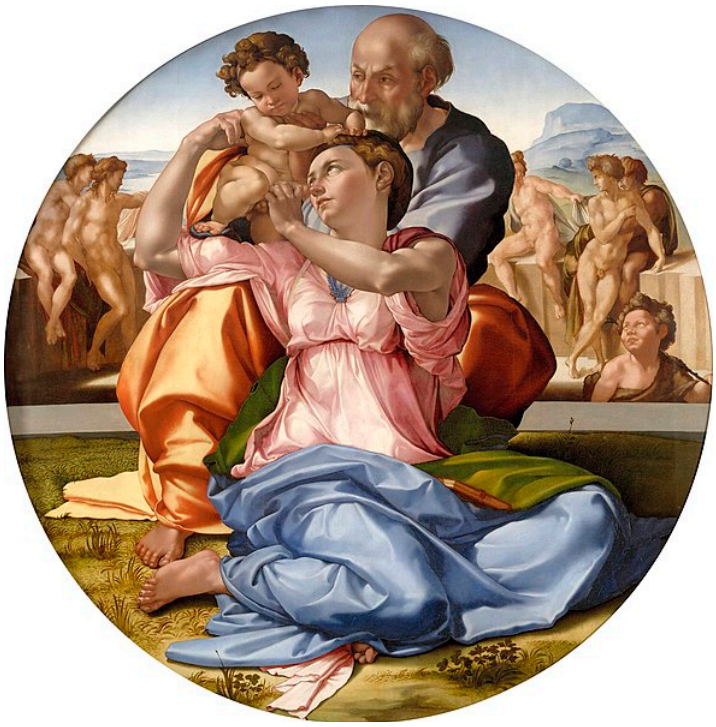

Fig. 2.6. Michelangelo, *Doni Tondo*, c. 1507, oil and tempera on panel, 120 cm diameter, Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Image: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tondo_Doni,_por_Miguel_%C3%81ngel.jpg.

For Van Tuinen, this passage serves to elucidate the Deleuzian theory of art as a "bloc of sensations" as it pertains to mannerism: "the serpentine figure" like that of the *Doni Tondo*, "folds [...] one bloc of sensation into another."[70] For the purposes of this chapter, I will instead focus on Deleuze's belief that the forms—the persons of the holy family—depicted in this image twist and meld into the same "Figure." It is this depiction of these forms melding together "indissolubly" that reveals "the body beneath the organism." The organism is the figures themselves; in Deleuzian thought, an "organism" is a "centralised, hierarchised, self-directed body."[71] Although an organism

[69] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum, 2003), 160.

[70] Van Tuinen, 71.

[71] John Portevi, "Organism," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 195.

for Deleuze is a kind of body, a body itself "need not have the hierarchical and dominating organisation of organs we call an 'organism.'"[72] It seems, then, that Deleuze means to argue that, beneath the hierarchies and organization of the organisms that are the holy family, there is a non-hierarchical body that is not striated in any way. This body unites the organisms who exist in a complex and multifaceted relationship with it as they "crack," "swell," and "spasm," at its mercy. They are thus "manners" of this body, which as Deleuze suggests in his seminar, might itself be thought of as being: these figures are *manières d'être*. This relationship between body and organism is strikingly similar to the relationship between the monad and the cosmos that Deleuze explores in *Le Pli*. In other words, it appears that, in writing his study of Leibniz some dozen years after *Francis Bacon*, the French philosopher conceived of this body as infinite and called it the fold. Thus, Michelangelo, we might say in the terms of Deleuze's Baroque, depicts the persons of the holy family as folds of the infinite fold.

If for Deleuze Michelangelo's great contribution to the arts was the introduction of those "traces d'un premier et profond maniérisme," Ungaretti likewise saw in the artist's works a style that distinguished him from his predecessors, particularly those of the Renaissance. The poet did occasionally make use of the term "mannerism" in relation to the Baroque, though he never applied it to Michelangelo. His fairly distinctive definition of the term emerges in a letter to Luciano Anceschi, dated March 1957, in which he outlined his idea of the Baroque and mannerism: "Per il Barocco? In ogni caso, il Barocco come l'intendo io è quello che appare già in Michelangelo, e si può dire che, come dramma perfetto, Michelangelo l'ha già esaurito. A Michelangelo, potremmo aggiungere, da noi, il Borromini e il Caravaggio, forse il Bernini, ma già è maniera, e in poesia

[72] Bruce Baugh, "Body," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 32.

Tasso, e forse il Marino, ma già è maniera."[73] Given the references to Bernini and Marino, it appears that, for Ungaretti, "mannerism" refers to those artists who today would be understood as exemplars of the very elaborate style of the high Baroque. Instead, Ungaretti argues that Michelangelo distinguishes himself from the Renaissance by breaking with its preference for "le proporzioni idealizzate, la mirabile grazie, la leggiadrìa, la serenità irradiante, la compostezza animosa, la freschezza [e] la naturalezza vivace;" all of this for Michelangelo, as the poet claims, "non basta più."[74] Instead, the problems that the artist faced, Ungaretti writes, "Sono problemi che, in pieno Rinascimento, non potevano portare se non ad un impazzimento del mestiere. Nelle musculature che si tendono o si torcono, nei corpi che si divincolano ciclopici, è entrato uno spasimo nell'anima: pietà!"[75] The poet thus recognized, as did Deleuze later, an aesthetic and epistemological break with the past in Michelangelo's dramatic, twisting, and tormented figures. This might explain, in part, the poet's attraction to the Sistine *Giudizio universale*, which he identified as one of Buonarroti's great "baroque" works.[76] Nevertheless, for the poet, the Roman cityscape remains the central point of reference for his dialogue with the Baroque and as such Michelangelo's architectural works in the Urbe are key. In fact, it is primarily through Michelangelo's Roman architecture that the modern poet effectively comes to see the artist's works as an instance of that "baroque mannerism" that is the fold.

This point becomes clear through a careful reading of Ungaretti's 1969 essay on *Sentimento*. In order to grasp his analysis of Michelangelo's architecture, it is necessary to first understand why Rome seemed so alien to the poet when he arrived there in 1921; he elaborates on

[73] The text of this letter is available in Baroncini, *Ungaretti Barocco* (Rome: Carocci editore, 2008), 194-195.
[74] Ungaretti, "Le origini del Romanticismo italiano," 766.

[75] Ibid.

[76] For Ungaretti's discussion of the *Giudizio*, see "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 591-592.

this at the beginning of the text in question. "La difficoltà che avevo da principio da sormontare," he writes, "era di arrivare a vedere come ci fosse un'unità nella città."[77] As the poet clarifies in the course of the essay, the difficulty he had in identifying a "unity" in the Urbe was thanks to the city's superimposition of architectural styles from every period, which he describes as, "Quegli elementi venuti da ogni dove, per non lasciare un briciolo di spazio, di spazio libero, per tutto riempire, per non lasciare nulla, nulla di libero."[78] As we have seen, Rome as Ungaretti knew it in the 1920s was even denser than the city we know today, for the urban space had not yet been subject to the fascist demolitions that obliterated, among others, the area surrounding Colosseum, the neighborhoods that once stood in the place of the via dei Fori Imperiali, the medieval and early modern structures of Largo Argentina, and the Borgo Nuovo and Borgo Vecchio where via della Conciliazione presently runs. This thick, crowded urban layering or lack of "unity" can be understood as the absence of a singular identity or history: Rome is at once the city of the Caesars and of the popes, of the liberal state and then the fascist government, marked as it is by an intermixing of ancient, medieval, Renaissance, baroque, and modern structures. The city's stratification was, to say the least, inconvenient for fascist narratives of the Urbe. While the regime, in its transformation of Rome sought "to impose on the spatial form of the city a singular set of meanings, a perceptible order, and sense of hierarchy that both commemorates and celebrates the common history and evolving brilliance of the nation,"[79] Ungaretti implicitly recognized the futility of this project. He recognized, in other words, what John Agnew has identified as the "main problem" that impeded the fascist makeover of the Italian capital: "the presence of so much past

[77] Ibid., 591.

[78] Ibid., 595.

[79] John Agnew, "The Impossible Capital: Monumental Rome under Liberal and Fascist Regimes, 1870-1943," *Geografiska Annaler* 80, no. 4 (1998): 229.

in Rome [...] got in the way of offering singular interpretations of what it all meant."[80] It is important to note, however, that Ungaretti's description of Rome as a city filled with "quegli elementi venuti da ogni dove" is not only an observation about the Urbe's long history and irreducible identity. Rather, the poet ascribes to this architectural stratification and overlapping of styles a specific function: it is meant to ensure that there is "nulla di libero." In Ungaretti's view, in other words, Rome's architecture is meant to prevent any tear in the continuum of the urban fabric which might yield a glimpse of an underlying emptiness or absence of sense and, together with it, a potentially disquieting experience of *horror vacui*.

This fear of the void, Ungaretti explains, is connected to a disorienting "sentimento dell'eterno," which arises in him in front of the city's many ancient ruins like the Colosseum. "Una città come Roma," he writes,

> "negli anni durante i quali scrivevo il *Sentimento*, era città dove si aveva ancora il sentimento dell'eterno e nell'animo nemmeno oggi scompare davanti a certi ruderi. Quando si è in presenza del Colosseo, enorme tamburo con orbite senz'occhi, si ha il sentimento del vuoto. A Roma si ha il sentimento del vuoto. È naturale, avendo il sentimento del vuoto, uno non può non avere anche l'orrore del vuoto. [...] Quell'orrore del vuoto, si può sentirlo a Roma infinitamente di più, e nemmeno nel deserto, che in qualsiasi parte della terra."[81]

Faced with a feeling of the eternal, the poet writes, we also face a fear of the void, that is a fear of meaninglessness. Because the eternal, by definition, is incommensurate with human comprehension or perception except in any partial or fragmentary way, in its totality, it is beyond the limits of semiosis, and therefore threatens the established meanings of a semiotic system. In the poet's view, the anxiety and disorientation provoked in the observer by the prospect of senselessness was central to the Baroque. In his 1969 interview with Ferdinando Camon, he

[80] Ibid., 237.

[81] Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 595.

associates the Baroque with a *orrore del vuoto* that results from a breathtaking collapse of meaning. "Il barocco, Ungaretti explained,

> "[...] scaturisce [...] dalla necessità di manifestare un senso di catastrofe. Il barocco nasce anche e soprattutto dal sentimento che ormai tutta l'esperienza antica fosse esaurita, e lo fosse anche l'esperienza cristiana, almeno quella storica temporale, del Cristianesimo, essendo ormai scoccata l'ora del tempo apocalittico. E non è *il sentimento della catastrofe implicito nel sentimento del nulla* e nell'*orrore del vuoto* [...]?"[82]

Here Ungaretti outlines a part of the great epistemological crisis that characterized much of the early modern world. On one hand the authoritative model of classical thinkers and artists no longer appeared to be sufficient. Figures like Giordano Bruno and Galileo, for example, fundamentally challenged Aristotle and demonstrated that his preeminent, centuries-old theory of a finite cosmos was false.[83] Likewise, in the arts, writers, painters, and sculptors, though still indebted to a classical model, strove for an awe-inspiring originality, exemplified in Italian literature by Giovan Battista Marino's *poetica della meraviglia*.[84] On the other hand, the transformative discoveries of the early modern period severely undermined another pillar of western culture, namely Christianity. It is important here to understand that when Ungaretti says that in the Baroque "[è] scoccata l'ora del tempo apocalittico," he does not mean to say that there was an expectation of an imminent apocalypse. Rather, in an analysis evocative of Walter Benjamin's, the poet means to suggest that there was a fear that the time had come, but the apocalypse would not happen, that history and all

---

[82] "Intervista con F. Camon," in *Vita d'un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, eds. Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 841. Italics in original. For more on the Baroque as a response to catastrophe, see John D. Lyons, "Introduction: The Crisis of the Baroque," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. John D. Lyons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1-23.

[83] See: Giordano Bruno, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi* (Montevarchi: Harmakis Edizioni, 2018) and Galileo Galilei, *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo*, ed. Antonio Beltán Marí (Milan: BUR, 2003). For more on the impact of science and discovery on baroque culture see also the essays in: Ofer Gal and Raz Chen-Morris, eds. *Science in the Age of Baroque* (New York: Springer, 2013).

[84] For a discussion of Marino's "paradoxical" anti-classicism, see Jon R. Snyder, *L'estetica del Barocco* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), 34-36.

its violence would go unfulfilled and unredeemed.[85] The poet is clear on this point in the essay on *Sentimento*: "Michelangelo e alcuni uomini dalla fine del '400 sino al '700 avevano in Italia, quel sentimento, il sentimento dell'orrore del vuoto, cioè dell'orrore di un mondo privo di Dio."[86] Michelangelo and these other unnamed figures feared, in other words, an indecipherable world that could no longer be understood as divinely created and thus analyzed through the lenses of faith, religious teaching, or scripture. Likewise, the fear of the void that Ungaretti experiences in front of the Colosseum arises from his inability to interpret in any clear, stable, or complete way, the eternity that it signifies.

Thus, Ungaretti's logic again recalls that of Benjamin, particularly his theorization of the centrality of the ruin in seventeenth-century culture. "The Baroque cult of the ruin," Benjamin explains, is connected to a conception of history "as a process of incessant decline."[87] Benjamin broadens the implications of this statement from history to all meaning, when he argues that, "Allegories," which are the defining trait of the *Trauerspiel*, and which always redirect conventional signs to signify something else, "are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things."[88] In other words, in constantly undermining or undoing established signs, allegories are a kind of "ruin" that depicts meaning itself in a state of endless decay. In front of the ruin, and faced with the eternal, Ungaretti experiences this dizzying decomposition of meaning. This is a strikingly political statement on Ungaretti's part, even if only implicitly. As we have seen, in Mussolini's designs for Rome, the city's ruins take on quite the opposite function: they were to

[85] As Benjamin writes in *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, "There is no Baroque eschatology." Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 70.

[86] Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 597.

[87] Benjamin, 188.

[88] Ibid.

become clear and temporally stable signs, a kind of structural proof of the "legitimacy" of fascist power and imperialism. This is precisely why these structures, as De Marco reminds us, were "highlighted" by the monumental "aura" or open space created by the demolition of the surrounding area. Where the Fascists perceived—or perhaps imposed—certainty, Ungaretti was met only with doubt.

All of this leads the poet to propose a solution to this doubt: a type of artistic creation, which is best exemplified by Michelangelo and the Baroque. "Lo credo: dall'orrore del vuoto nasce, non la necessità della riempitura dello spazio con non importa quale elemento, ma tutto il dramma dell'arte di Michelangelo," the poet writes.[89] This drama consists of what he characterizes as a breathtaking "fusion"—or what I will argue is really a kind of folding—of contradictory elements that he believed characterized Michelangelo's contributions to Roman architecture before the disastrous fascist interventions and *sventramenti*. This fusion revealed to the poet that the contradiction or absence of sense that he initially perceived in Rome was illusory. Instead, underlying all of the city's seemingly incongruous elements is that unity that the poet says he failed to perceive when he first arrived in the Urbe. This point comes to the fore as Ungaretti reflects on some of his favorite works by Michelangelo in Rome. "Le Terme di Diocleziano, la chiesa di Santa Maria degli Angeli, il Campidoglio con la Rupe Tarpea, ed anche il *Giudizio* della Sistina," Ungaretti writes,

> "Sono opere dove Michelangelo mescola tutto, mescola la natura, mescola Platone con i discepoli di Plotino del suo tempo, sente Cristo con disperazione e, nel medesimo tempo, sente la carne con la stessa disperazione. Tali elementi, che presentano una costante ferita, un costante strappo nella loro fusione, sono gli elementi che Michelangelo ha fuso nella sua opera che ritroviamo dovunque a Roma, dal giorno che vi terminò il suo passaggio terreno."[90]

[89] Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 595.

[90] Ibid., 591.

In this reading, Michelangelo's architectural works are defined by the way in which they constantly bring differences to coexist together into one work, those "elementi venuti da ogni dove." As the poet affirms elsewhere, "Il Barocco [...] è preannunziato da Michelangelo quando mescola, in Santa Maria degli Angeli, in Campidoglio elementi antichi con elementi nuovi e dal loro contrasto trae armonia."[91] The *coincidentia oppositorum* depicted by these works melds a feeling of the flesh with the sense of the divine, the modern (Santa Maria degli Angeli and the Campidoglio) with the ancient (the Baths of Diocletian and the Tarpeian Rock), without suppressing or obfuscating the differences and the painfulness, revealing that in their seeming clash or contrast there is actually beauty and harmony. Michelangelo's artistic and paradoxical "fusing," in other words, points to an interconnection hidden beneath Rome's apparent disorder: the fold. The fold detected by Ungaretti at once reveals that unity underlying Rome while still presenting itself as a "costante ferita." In this way, following a Leibnizian logic, Ungaretti comes to see the Urbe as harmonious and ordered albeit in ways that defy the limits of human logic or direct perception.[92] It is precisely this conviction—namely, that art can reveal a latent structure of meaning where otherwise it appears there is only chaos—that serves as the basis for some of Ungaretti's most important poetic

[91]Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Leopardi alla Columbia University," in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, ed. by Paola Montefoschi (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), 1116-1117.

[92] Strangely, Ungaretti makes very few references to Michelangelo's poetry in his prose writings, though he was surely aware of how the Renaissance artist's verse is filled with a similar *coincidentia oppositorum*. Examples from the *Rime* include poem 7, "legato e stretto, e son libero e sciolto?/ Se tu incateni altrui senza catena,/ e senza mane o braccia m'hai raccolto,/ chi mi difenderà dal tuo bel volto?"; poem 57, "tanto più chi m'uccide mi difende,/ E più mi giova dove più mi nuoce"; and poem 279, "La mia allegezz' è la malinconia,/ e 'l mio riposo son questi disagi." Michelangelo's frequent use of paradox in his verse is one of a few qualities that have led some scholars to identify it as baroque or as forerunner to the Baroque. See in particular: Robert J. Clements, "Michelangelo as Baroque Poet," *PMLA* 76, no. 3 (1961): 182-192. For a discussion of the ways in which Ungaretti's poetry may have been informed by that of Michelangelo, see: Cecilia Gibellini, "Michelangelo e i poeti del Novecento," in *Ut pictura poesis. Intersezioni di arte e letteratura*, eds. Pietro Taravacci and Enrica Cancelliere (Trento: Università degli studi di Trento, Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia, 2016), 77-100. Michelangelo's poetry is collected in Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Rime e lettere*, eds. Antonio Corsaro and Giorgio Masi (Milan: Bompiani, 2016).

texts such as “Danni con fantasia” (1928) and “Folli i miei passi” (1943-1944). In each poem, the real is depicted at once as an unsettling threat to meaning and as an overabundant source of inspiration. The latter, significantly, is the only one of Ungaretti’s poems to expressly name Michelangelo. In “Folli i miei passi,” the poet’s focus is on Rome, where he returned in 1942 following the declaration of war between Brazil and Italy; in the text, he recalls a mournful, directionless walk through the streets of the Eternal City: “Le usate strade,” he recalls, “Ora più svolgersi non sanno in grazie/ Piene di tempo/ Svelando, a ogni mio umore rimutate,/ I segni vani che le fanno vive.” Suddenly, however, the sight of Michelangelo’s cupola atop St. Peter’s Basilica—that “cupola/ febbrilmente superstite”—provides the poet with the sense and direction that he thought was lost in the Urbe: “Appresero così le braccia offerte,” he writes, “Quell’umile speranza/ che travolgeva il teso Michelangelo/ A murare ogni spazio in un baleno.”[93] If Ungaretti rejects “la necessità della riempitura dello spazio con non importa quale elemento,” then this image of “walling every space in flash” is meant to convey the conviction that Buonarroti’s art does not merely cover over the void; rather his artworks reveal that the void is an illusion, and that in its place an overabundance of meaning that, in its totality, defies the boundaries of our perceptual field.

Though Ungaretti’s Michelangelo is undoubtedly distinctive, his nuanced understanding of the baroque aesthetic outlined here is, in many ways, not so unconventional. For example, his contention that baroque architecture creates a kind of relationship or fold with the other elements of the urban space is very similar to analyses advanced by both the eminent architect and theorist Paolo Portoghesi and by Deleuze. Pointing to the work of Francesco Borromini, particularly

[93] Giuseppe Ungaretti, “Folli i miei passi,” in *Vita d’un uomo. Tutte le poesie*, ed. Carlo Ossola (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), 263-264.

Sant'Agnese and San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane, Portoghesi explains that the curvature of these churches' façades "sbocca direttamente nello spazio urbano, la sua forza coinvolge lo spazio circostante e diventa frammento aperto una oscillazione continua, punto in cui si rivela la vera natura dello spazio come mobilità e divenire."[94] Thanks to a reconception of space as fluid and ever-unfolding, baroque architects like Borromini designed façades that were not intended to delineate or separate a structure from its surroundings so much as they were meant to place it into relation with the ever-changing, surrounding area. Deleuze, for his part, recognized a similar relationship between urban space and the façade, which for him is one of the ways in which the infinite fold appears in architecture: "architecture discovers a frame in the façade," he explains, "but the frame itself becomes detached from the inside, and establishes relations with the surroundings so as to realize architecture in city planning."[95] The baroque façade, in other words, is always acting to establish relationships with the adjacent urban area; the structure is never static and is instead always dynamic. This continual dialogue between a given structure, space, and other edifices entails that we are faced with an example of that "infinite work" that Deleuze identifies at the heart of baroque culture: "The problem," he explains, "is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity."[96] In suggesting that Rome's baroque architecture reveals a continuity underlying all of the seemingly incongruous elements of the cityscape, Ungaretti, not so unlike Portoghesi and Deleuze, suggests that a given baroque structure is not a sovereign part of the urban landscape so much as it is self-consciously engaged in the development of an ever-unfolding relationship with its surroundings.

---

[94] Paolo Portoghesi, *Roma barocca* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1978), 6.

[95] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 123.

[96] Ibid., 34.

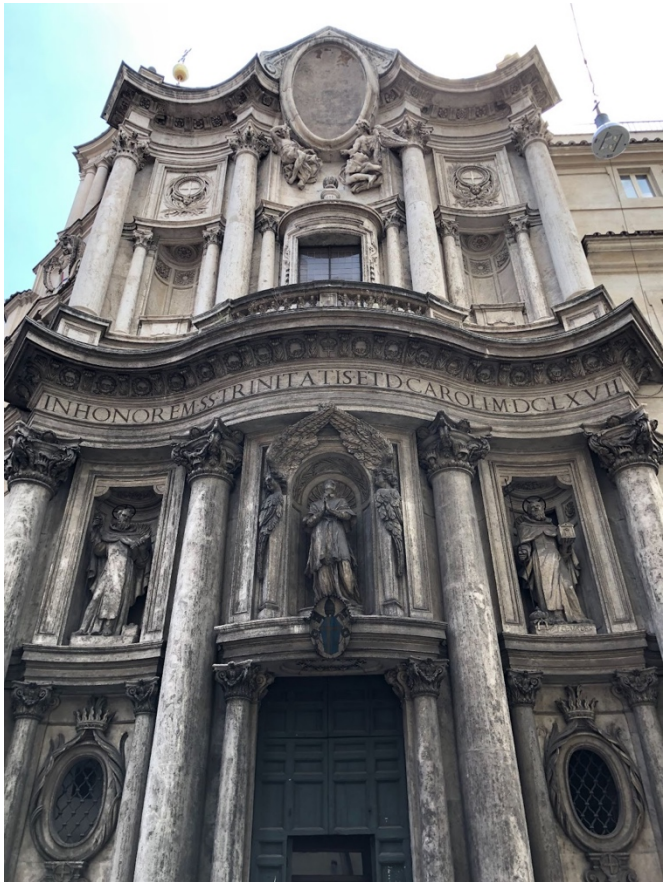

Fig. 2.7. The façade of San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane, completed in 1680, Rome. Image: Joseph Tumolo.

In a similar way, Ungaretti was astute to recognize—against contemporary theorists like Carlo Calcaterra—that baroque artists, however innovative, still essentially worked within the paradigm of classicism, which the poet suggests by pointing to Michelangelo's "baroque" works like Santa Maria degli Angeli that combine the structures of pagan antiquity with those of Christian early modernity.[97] Even an architect like Borromini, who is so closely associated with the baroque

[97] Ungaretti expressly states that he views the Baroque as classicist in an essay entitled "Secondo discorso su Leopardi": "I maestri contavano ancora, le regole contavano ancora; esisteva ancora un'autorità di regole prestabilite, un prestigio di archetipi [...] i Barocchi sono gli atleti della regola ricevuta, [...] i titani della regola: una regola spinta al limite, una regola portata bruscamente a spezzarsi in quanto aveva più di saldo, nella sua verità che così poteva diventare un puro calcolo, poiché si riedificava ipso facto, vertiginosamente, con elasticità somma; una regola ormai fatta per meravigliare gli amanti di destrezze da pesi massimi." See Giuseppe Ungaretti,"Secondo discorso su Leopardi," in *Vita d'un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, eds. Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 453. For Calcaterra's study, see: Carlo Calcaterra, *Il parnaso in rivolta* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1961).

aesthetic, filled his works with "references to examples of ancient architecture, particularly from Hadrian's era," as Giuseppe Bonaccorso explains.[98] These references, Bonaccorso writes, "actively participate in the construction of complex and engaging spaces."[99] The above-mentioned San Carlino is just one example; despite Borromini's dramatic innovation, the church nevertheless contains references to the architecture of antiquity, as evidenced by the "intrados of the [structure's] dome."

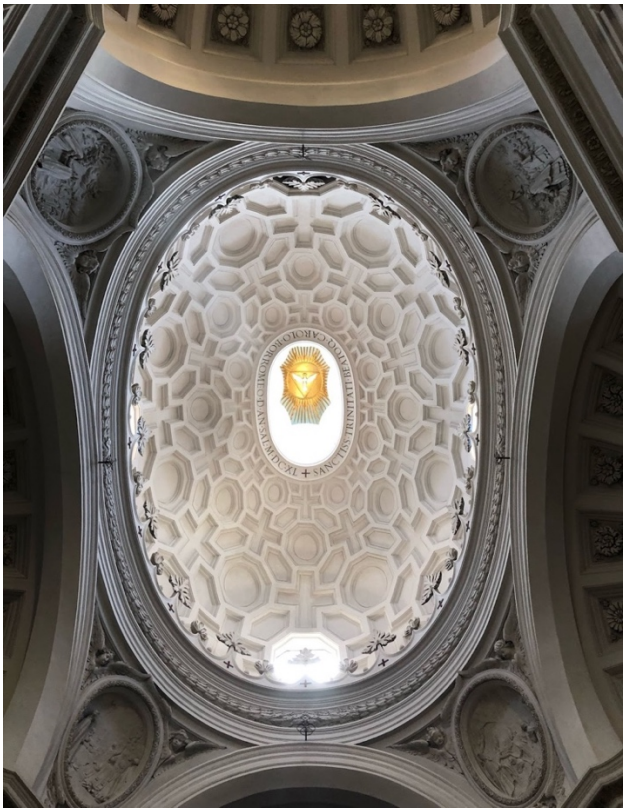

Fig. 2.8. The dome of San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane. Image: Joseph Tumolo.

This "design with crosses and hexagons is present in various ancient buildings, from the floors of the Palace of Diocletian in Split to Sebastiano Serlio's 1544 representations of the Tempio di

[98] Giuseppe Bonaccorso, "Unclassical Forms of Late Roman Architecture and the Roman Baroque. Francesco Borromini and the new classical tradition," in *The Routledge Handbook on the Reception of Classical Architecture*, eds. Nicholas Temple, Andrzej Piotrowski, Juan Manuel Heredia (New York: Routledge, 2019), 394.

[99] Ibid.

Bacco decorations."[100] Though Ungaretti, as we have seen, viewed Borromini as "già in maniera" as opposed to an "ideal" example of the baroque aesthetic, the poet—no doubt thanks to his years in Rome—fully appreciated the Baroque's close and consistent engagement with the model of the classical past.

Of particular importance to this discussion, however, is the way in which Ungaretti argues that Michelangelo, through that interconnection of contradictory elements, ultimately reveals to him the great mystery at the heart of the Baroque. As he goes on to explain in the essay on *Sentimento*:

> "Michelangelo mi ha rivelato, dunque, il segreto del barocco. Non è una nozione che si possa definire con proposizioni logiche. È un segreto di vita interiore, e la lunga intimità con quel barocco, che mi era poco prima tanto estraneo, mi ha abilitato all'accettazione di tutte le differenze, di tutte le tensioni interne, di tutti quegli apporti che l'uomo può pervenire a fondere nel suo genio, se ne avessi."[101]

For Ungaretti, if Michelangelo is able to design a cohesive and beautiful structure that folds together the ancient and modern, the secular and sacred, the pagan with the Christian, then these elements are united in a continuum that, nevertheless, eludes our conscious perception or logical capacity. Of paramount significance in this passage is that Ungaretti argues that this baroque fold enables him to "accept all differences." The unity that Michelangelo's art reveals to the poet does not cancel difference; instead it shows him that difference is "manneristic," that everything is a fold in a continuum. This marks the key way in which the poet's reading of Rome opposes Fascism and its vision of the city. Against the *fascio littorio*, the Roman axe that is the symbol of the regime, Ungaretti embraces the fold. "The *fascio*," Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi explains, "in which rods were fastened together into a bundle and became indistinguishable, iconographically portrayed the

[100] Ibid., 396.

[101] Ungaretti, "Note a *Sentimento del tempo*," 592.

desired unity of Italians under the leadership of Mussolini."[102] Ungaretti instead champions a solidarity that does not reject or suppress differences but rather accepts and highlights them.

This "baroque" vision of tolerance would prove to have a lasting impact on Ungaretti, as evidenced in particular by his comments made over the years on the topics of ethnic and racial diversity as well as sexual difference. Ungaretti's accepting views of race and ethnicity are particularly prevalent in his recollection of his time in Brazil, where, as mentioned he lived from 1936 to 1942. It is telling that the poet deeply appreciated the Brazilian Baroque, and in the previously cited 1968 speech, went so far as to declare it a key part his own poetic inspiration: "Voglio insomma confessare che devo al Brasile se ho capito il Barocco che tanto tormento dà, da lunghi anni, alla mia ispirazione e alla mia tecnica espressiva."[103] It is thus not so surprising that, following a logic reminiscent of his reading of the Roman Baroque, the poet comes to identify modern Brazil as a model of difference-in-unity. Brazilians, he says, have done away with the crushing "peso assurdo" of bigotry:

> "Ecco perché amo il Brasile come una mia patria, perché nella sua terra è sepolta la parte più pura di me; perché il suo popolo fatto di tante stirpi, avendo potuto riaccostarsi al segreto primitivo della natura, non perdendo nulla di essenziale delle civiltà che portava a fondersi con l'autoctona, ha potuto perderne i pregiudizi e ritrovare quello slancio di solidale simpatia verso il proprio simile che non viene dalle teorie sociologiche, che possono anche essere pungoli d'odio, ma potersi scrollare di dosso il peso di millenarie croste di convenzioni il peso fattosi ormai troppo assurdo, mortalmente schiacciante."[104]

Without losing "anything essential" of the cultures that came together to comprise modern Brazil, Ungaretti argues, the Brazilian people live in solidarity: difference remains intact and yet, the

[102] Stefania Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 96.

[103] Ungaretti, "Brasile," 455.

[104] Ibid., 456.

"stirpi" of the modern nation are "melded" together. Their solidarity is not derived from sociological theories, but from that "primitive secret of nature," which, in light of Ungaretti's reading of the Baroque, must be none other than the fold. While we certainly cannot deny that this image of Brazil is romanticized, we must not fail to appreciate that this all-embracing, non-racist, and anti-imperialist vision of unity, which the poet most fully articulated in dialogue with the Roman Baroque, continued to develop in important ways during the six years that he spent in Brazil during the Ventennio nero. It was during those years, no less, that the fascist regime enacted a series of overtly racist policies: in 1937, interracial marriages and *madamato* were outlawed in Italy's African colonies, while in 1938, the first of the *leggi razziali* was passed, stripping Italian Jews of their basic rights.[105] It is therefore highly significant that, in these years, as he became acquainted with Brazil, its culture, and its rich baroque art, Ungaretti continued to foster the dream of an ideal society where difference is embraced as essentially harmonious, effectively suggesting that this country, a former colony in the New World, could be a model for modern Italy, then ruled by the colonizing Fascists.

A similar baroque logic is apparent in the poet's thinking on issues of sexuality, as becomes apparent in the interview he gave to Pier Paolo Pasolini in the documentary film *Comizi d'amore* (filmed in 1963, but released in 1965). A careful consideration of Ungaretti's characterization of his own sexuality—particularly as it is found in his recollection of his adolescence in Egypt—suggests that his interest in the works of Michelangelo may have been driven, in part, by the artist's non-normative, romantic interest in men. In turn, it is not a stretch to surmise that Ungaretti's thinking on sexual difference was shaped by the baroqueness that he associated with his favorite

[105] For an overview of racism in fascist Italy, see Francesco Cassata, *«La Difesa della razza». Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008).

visual artist. The poet claims, from a young age, to have had an essentially accepting and tolerant view of love and sexuality. Describing his early romances in Africa, the poet once said that, "Erano amori grandi. Erano amori corrisposti che non avevano barriere. Quel certo senso della barriera che noi abbiamo in Europa, questo non c'era: era una cosa fluente, una cosa insaziabile."[106] While in fascist ideology the limit was central to romantic relationships and gender relations as we saw in chapter one, long before the Ventennio, the poet claims to have had positive experiences of a kind of love that was "fluente" and limitless. Similar to the way in which Ungaretti later finds a model in Brazil, in Africa he therefore discovers an ideal of love that, in his view, is missing Europe; in this way he also holds up Egypt as an example, a move that runs counter to the colonizing narratives of both liberal Italy and, later, of the fascist regime. This is all the more transgressive, however, when we account for Ungaretti's striking recollection of his powerful feelings for his childhood friend from Alexandria, Aclide Barrière:

> "Il primo batticuore è il batticuore verso un ragazzo che aveva tutte quelle doti che io non avevo, le doti esterne, le doti fisiche, era bello come un angelo. Io avevo un viso… ero sempre col muso così… insomma, con un musaccio da canaccio… ero sempre pieno di malinconie, pieno di rodimenti, ma mi illuminavo quando lo vedevo, e poi si stava insieme a lungo, si giocava. Insomma m'è sempre presente negli occhi come una specie di angelo."[107]

Thus Ungaretti's "first amorous passion as an adolescent," as Re writes, "seems to have been for another boy in his school."[108] My aim is not that of labelling Ungaretti's sexuality, but rather to point out how the poet's recollection here of his own romantic experiences defies a neat categorization. Perhaps this kind of fluid conception of love and sexuality ultimately motivated his

[106] Piccioni, *Vita di Ungaretti*, 46.

[107] Ibid., 29.

[108] Re, "Alexandria Revisited," 184.

interest in Michelangelo's art, for the artist was known to have had romantic feelings for other men. The best evidence we have for Michelangelo's same-sex attraction is the (at least) thirty-one poems that he dedicated to Tommaso Cavalieri (c. 1512-1587).[109] Ungaretti was surely familiar with these texts, such as the sonnet "S'un casto amor." It is in *Comizi d'amore*, however, that Ungaretti most clearly invokes the kind of all-embracing baroque difference that he associated with Michelangelo and Rome. Asked by Pasolini, "Ungaretti, secondo Lei esiste la normalità e la anormalità sessuale?" the poet responds, and, following the logic of the fold, challenges the dichotomy between "normal" and "abnormal":

> "Ogni uomo è fatto in modo diverso. Dico, nella sua struttura fisica è fatto in un modo diverso. È fatto anche in modo diverso nella combinazione spirituale. Quindi tutti gli uomini sono a loro modo anormali. Tutti gli uomini sono in un certo senso in contrasto con la natura. È questo sino dal primo momento, l'atto di civiltà che è un atto di prepotenza umana sulla natura, è un atto contro natura."[110]

Taking aim at enduring and common prejudices against homosexuality as "abnormal" or "against nature," in the interview with Pasolini, Ungaretti instead argues that there is no norm, there are no ideological schemas, or categories that can truthfully claim to describe "correct" human sexuality. Instead, paradoxically, abnormality is the one element that unites all people across their differences. In this sense, sexual difference can be conceived of as "manners of abnormality," a distinctive version of the "continuum by variation" that Deleuze identifies in Leibniz's philosophy, and that Ungaretti saw in the art of Michelangelo.[111] It was, no doubt, deeply subversive for the poet to recognize any kind of sexual tolerance of non-heteronormativity, however violently suppressed it was, in Italian culture, in the figure of Michelangelo, and in the Baroque; that Rome,

---

[109] Christopher Ryan, *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Introduction* (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), 99.

[110] Pasolini, *Comizi d'amore*.

[111] Deleuze, *The Fold,* 19.

the heart of the fascist empire, played a key role in the poet's meditation on this topic, suggests that is all the more pointed a political critique. Against the fascist limit, Ungaretti points to the fold, championing tolerance and embracing the difference that is all too often the target of repression in modernity.

Conclusion

Though the anti-fascist vision that Ungaretti articulated in dialogue with Rome, Michelangelo, and the Baroque is nuanced and certainly not explicit, it nevertheless runs directly counter to the logic of the limit underpinning the ideology of the regime. The fold as Ungaretti perceives it in Rome and in the works of Michelangelo, however, marks a significant break from the fold as Gadda understood and deployed it in his works. For his part, in times of crisis, marked by that "sentimento di catastrofe," Ungaretti found inspiration and reassurance in the works of Michelangelo and in Rome's cityscape for the way in which they reveal that "folded" mystery that grounds all meaning. In this way, and unlike Gadda, Ungaretti's revival of the baroque fold is more faithful to what was articulated by Leibniz. While for Gadda the uncertainty inherent to the modern world remained principally a source of anguish, Ungaretti, in spite of his own *orrore del vuoto*, expressly embraced it instead. Even so—and despite the vast stylistic difference that distinguishes Gadda's logorrheic prose from Ungaretti's laconic poetry—these writers' respective approaches to the Baroque bear important similarities. In their reinventions of the fold, the irreducibility of the real reveals the falsity of Fascism's claims on a monopoly of meaning. Furthermore, neither saw a folded world as grounds for nihilism. While Gadda is profoundly disturbed by the violence resulting from the regime's imposition of its own truths, Ungaretti, against Fascism's brutal repression of the other, embraces difference in all its forms by acknowledging that there are no "norms," but only "manners." In depicting the real as incommensurate with any singular or stable

meaning, both writers also challenge Fascism's grandiose imperial project. For Gadda, as we saw in chapter 1, this is not driven so much by a concern for the colonized other as it is by his lack of belief in the possibility of order and permanence. Ungaretti, for his part, engages in a more indirect critique of the regime's colonialism, but is clearly driven by a concern for the subaltern whose difference transcends the schemas of the regime. In light of all of this, the most essential and significant similarity in Ungaretti's and Gadda's respective dialogues with the Baroque is their critique of the dominance of the limit in fascist modernity; both of them understood that it is the limit itself which makes possible violence and oppression, and that a different way of thinking and writing could help to weaken the claims that sustain Fascism. In the following chapter of this study, we will see how Anna Maria Ortese—who identified Ungaretti as one of her favorite modern authors and who once described Gadda's *Cognizione* as a book that left her "sbalordita da tanta grandezza"—takes up a similar critique of the regime, as she revises the baroque fold in unique ways and in dialogue with the art of the Spanish Baroque.[112]

[112] For Ortese's comments on Ungaretti, see: Ludovico Greco, "Anna Maria Ortese, littrice," *Belvedere* 1, no. 4 (1939). Reproduced in Luca Clerici, ed. *Per Anna Maria Ortese*, *Il Giannone* 4, no. 7 (January-December 2006), 44. For her comments on the *Cognizione*, see Franz Haas, "La cacciata del purgatorio: Anna Maria Ortese e Napoli," *Belgafor* 62, no. 3 (May 2007): 341. All three writers were present at the 1953 Premio Viareggio, where Ortese and Gadda were recognized for *Il mare non bagna a Napoli* and *Novelle dal ducato in fiamme* respectively. Ortese and Ungaretti were photographed together at the event.

3. "Contro il soffocamento del limite": Anna Maria Ortese, El Greco, & Velázquez

"La vecchia natura delle cose non mi andava. Inventai dunque una me stessa che voleva un'aggiunta al mondo, che gridava contro la pianificazione ottimale della vita. Che vedeva, nella normalità, solo la menzogna. Che protestava contro il soffocamento del limite."

-Anna Maria Ortese, preface to *Il Porto di Toledo*

Introduction

In February 1939, as the Spanish civil war raged, the republican government reached an agreement with the International Committee for the Salvation of the Treasures of Spanish Art to evacuate the Prado Museum's artworks for safekeeping in Geneva. In total, 1,842 crates of art—including forty-three works by El Greco and forty-five by Diego Velázquez (among them *Las Meninas*)—were carried out of Spain on seventy-one trucks bound for Switzerland. Following the end of the war on April 1, Francisco Franco demanded the return of the art to Spain; it was agreed that the works would be sent back to the Prado, but only after an exhibition of them at Geneva's Musée d'Art et d'Histoire.[1] The exhibition, entitled *Les Chefs-d'Oeuvres du Musée du Prado*, ran from June until August 1939. Anna Maria Ortese (1914-1998), then a young journalist, was sent by her employer, *Il Gazzettino*, to cover the historic event; it was there that she first saw the works of Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco, and Diego Velázquez. Well before 1939, both painters had been rediscovered by critics and scholars, so that by the time of the exhibition, their works were among the most famous on display.[2] For her part, Ortese recorded her

[1] For more on the exhibition and its organization, see Peter Anderson, "How the Spanish Republic saved the Prado's masterpieces," *The Art Newspaper*, May 31, 2016 and Judith Ara and Isabel Argerich, eds., *Arte protegido. Memoria de la junta del tesoro artístico durante la Guerra civil* (Madrid: Ministero de Cultura, 2009).

[2] Though renowned during their lives, El Greco and Velázquez were largely forgotten after their deaths in 1614 and 1660 respectively. While scholars in Spain began to take note of Velázquez again in the late eighteenth century, El Greco remained in obscurity for almost another one hundred years. Velázquez, interestingly, first caught the attention of Spanish Enlightenment thinkers like Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, who praised the painter's "naturalism," and "made him a hero of Spanish art" (María de los Santos García Felguera and Javier Portús Pérez, "The Origins of the Museo del Prado," in *Manet/Velázquez. The French Taste for Spanish Painting* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], 126). By the middle of the nineteenth century, Velázquez's paintings enjoyed increased visibility outside of

immediate fascination with both painters in the article she composed for the *Gazzettino*. To El Greco she ascribed an almost mystical quality: "Egli si serve della pittura come di un velo bruno dietro il quale palpita la luce di un altro mondo."[3] Velázquez likewise captivated her attention; his paintings, she wrote, "svelano la potenza di un occhio penetrato nella vita e capace di rivelare ogni aspetto con epica grandezza. Velasquez è il descrittore portentoso e innamorato della vita."[4] Ortese's interest endured for many years following the exhibition; her 1965 novel, *L'Iguana*, makes subtle but repeated references to the work of Velázquez, especially *Las Meninas* (1656). Her extraordinary Künstlerroman, *Il porto di Toledo*, published in 1975 but started around 1969, is filled with explicit citations of both painters, most especially El Greco and *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586)*,* painted and located in Toledo. Toledo in Ortese's novel, however, is a fantastically hispanicized version of the city of Naples, where Ortese spent most of her youth. In

Spain. In 1857, Théophile Thoré praised the artist as "the most painterly painter" and, in the same decade, Éduard Manet began copying his works (See Gary Tinterow, "Raphael Replaced: The Triumph of Spanish Painting in France," in *Manet/Velázquez. The French Taste for Spanish Painting* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], 3-66). Another noteworthy development took place in 1888, when Carl Justi published his influential *Velázquez and His Times*, which was translated early on into both English and Spanish (prominent Italian art historians were well aware of Justi's work, although the text in question did not appear in an Italian translation until 1958). Just as Manet's interest in Velázquez exemplifies the painter's relevance to the concerns of modern art, the rediscovery of El Greco was likewise connected to the ways in which he appeared as distinctly pertinent to the culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As early as 1864, Thoré connected El Greco to the Impressionists when he published the disputed claim that Manet's *The Dead Christ with Angels* was an imitation of Theotokopoulos (Théophile Thoré, "Au salon de 1864," in *Manet: Raconté par lui-même e par ses amis* [Geneva: P. Cailler, 1953], 126-128). Whether Thoré was correct or not, El Greco's visibility slowly increased in the following years; in 1885, the Spanish painter caught the attention of Paul Cézanne who produced a copy of a copy of *Lady with a Fur Wrap* (which has since been reattributed to Alonso Sánchez Coello). However, the most decisive development happened some years later, in 1910, with the publication of Julian Meier-Graefe's *The Spanish Journey*. The volume is a diary of sorts, written by Meier-Graefe during his time in Spain where he had traveled to study Velázquez for his book-in-progress entitled *The Precursors of Impressionism*. However, upon seeing some of El Greco's paintings both at the Prado and in private collections, Meier-Graefe shifted the focus of his studies to Theotokopoulos who, he argues, should be thought of as a predecessor to painters like Renoir and Cézanne. Moreover, Meier-Graefe also favorably compared El Greco to artists such as Michelangelo, Tintoretto, and Ruebens, effectively solidifying his place in the canon. For more on the revival of El Greco's reputation and works, see Eric Storm, *The Discovery of El Greco. The Nationalization of Culture versus the Rise of Modern Art*, trans. Marjolihn de Jager (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2016).

[3] Anna Maria Ortese, "Maestri spagnoli alla mostra di Ginevra," in *Da Moby Dick all'Orsa Bianca. Scritti sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, ed. Monica Farnetti (Milan: Adelphi, 2011), 24.

[4] Ibid., 21.

this chapter, I examine how Ortese's reading of these Spanish artists' works impacted her literary writing. Specifically, I argue that the author came to see each painter's canvases—despite the many and obvious differences between them—effectively as instances of the baroque fold.[5] In her writing, Ortese incorporates and revises this fold in a gesture meant to critique the logic of fascist ideology, and especially to contest the limits and hierarchies that the regime enforced on class, gender, race, and—as we will see in *Il porto di Toledo*—on urban spaces.

Unlike Gadda and Ungaretti, Ortese never produced a critical essay on the Baroque. Instead, her most important piece of writing on the topic is found in *Il porto di Toledo*, wherein the narrator-protagonist allegorically articulates an analysis of El Greco's painting. In order to understand how the author effectively comes to identify the painter's aesthetic and baroque art more broadly with the fold, this chapter opens with a discussion of Deleuze's interpretation of El Greco before turning to *Toledo* and Ortese's reflections therein on the works of this early modern painter. I will then consider how this informs the novel's anti-fascist political critique. While most scholarship tends to downplay the text's political engagement, I will argue that it is of central importance to the narrative. Ortese, in fact, does not shy away from criticizing Benito Mussolini himself in her novel through his stand-in, the ruler of Toledo, Don Pedro. It is crucial to remember

[5] The first to suggest an affinity between *L'Iguana* and the Baroque was Piero Citati in his afterword to the 1986 Adelphi edition of the novel. Citati describes the text in terms that are highly evocative of El Greco: "L'unico culto celebrato nei [libri di Ortese] è quello di Cristo morto, come nelle chiese della profonda, lugubre, esausta Controriforma, come nelle chiese della Spagna o dell'America spagnola, dove il sangue di Cristo si è fuso con quello di altri dèi morti" (Piero Citati, "La principessa dell'isola," in *L'Iguana* by Anna Maria Ortese [Milan: Adelphi, 1986], 200). Since Citati's afterword, Flora Ghezzo has suggested that "baroque" may better describe Ortese's writing than Massimo Bontempelli's magic realism (Flora Ghezzo, "Anna Maria Ortese and the Red-Footed Angel," in *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, eds. Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015], 9). Furthermore, Lucia Re has shown that Ortese's drama *Il vento passa* (likely written between 1967-1969) can be read as a Benjaminian, baroque *Trauerspiel* (Lucia Re, "Il vento passa. Anna Maria Ortese e il colonialismo europeo," in *La Grande Iguana. Scenari e visioni a vent'anni dalla morte di Anna Maria Ortese. Atti del convegno internazionale*, ed. Angela Bubba [Canterano: Aracne editrice, 2020), 57-71]). Inge Lanslots has also discussed the influence of baroque art and culture on *L'Iguana*, particularly Velázquez and Leibniz (Inge Lanslots, "Beasts, Goblins, and Other Chameleonic Creatures," in *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, eds. Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015], 295-322).

that, over the course of the 1960s, as Ortese was writing *Toledo*, Fascism in Italy was once again on the rise. Between 1948 and 1972, the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) managed to increase its share of the national vote from just over two percent to over nine percent, making it the fourth most popular party in the country, which is not insignificant given Italy's multiparty system and fragmented electorate.[6] The MSI performed particularly well in the south; Ortese was surely disturbed when, in the 1972 elections, the party came in close third in the city of Naples with 26.3 percent of the vote, just barely behind the Partito Comunista (27.8 percent), and the Democrazia Cristiana (28.4 percent). *Toledo*, and, for that matter, *L'Iguana* as we will see, are not merely retrospective works, but are rather intended to address the ever-present threat of a return to a variant of Fascism.[7]

Following my discussion of *Il porto di Toledo*, I will address *L'Iguana*. Though published ten years prior, it is instructive to analyze *L'Iguana* in light of Ortese's discussion of El Greco from *Toledo*. This helps us in particular to appreciate how the author saw Velázquez's images as imbued with the fold, which informed her depiction of the colonial other, Estrellita the Iguana, whose physiognomy mysteriously transforms throughout the text from old to young and human to animal. I will argue that, in dialogue with Velázquez, Ortese came to think of her Iguana as a narrative fold whose appearance can never be reduced to a fixed resemblance. This, on Ortese's part—I contend—is an indirect critique of fascist imperialism. As the regime brutally relegated the other in its African colonies to the status of subaltern, Ortese—who lived in Italian Tripolitania (today's western Libya) from 1924 to 1927—suggests through Estrellita that the colonial subject

[6] Election results are available at: "L'Archivio," Eligendo, accessed July 27, 2022, https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/.

[7] In addition to addressing themes pertaining to the fascist regime itself, Ortese may thus be seen as broadening her critique to what Umberto Eco called "Ur-Fascism." See Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995.

can never be reduced to the limits that her oppressors seek to force upon her. As we will see, Ortese, in her encounter with the Baroque, and against prevailing stereotypes of it, grasped the possibility of an oppositional aesthetic with the potential to challenge power.

The Ideal Baroque Fold: Deleuze and Ortese's El Greco

Since Max Dvořák's 1920 lecture, "On El Greco and Mannerism," the Cretan-Spanish painter has been more commonly identified as a mannerist as opposed to a baroque artist.[8] It was Heinrich Wölfflin who first suggested in *Principles of Art History* (1915) that El Greco was a baroque painter, as he repeatedly identifies the artist's works as examples of the "painterly" style that for him was a defining trait of the Baroque.[9] With Wölfflin as one of his important sources, Gilles Deleuze embraced this characterization of El Greco, going even a step further; it would not be an exaggeration to say that, in the philosopher's view, El Greco is one of the most important artists of the Baroque. Deleuze's most in-depth analysis of the painter's aesthetic is found in his discussion in *Le Pli* of the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, which focuses on what he identifies as the canvas' "upper" and "lower" levels. As Deleuze explains, the image is "divided in two by a horizontal line. On the bottom, bodies are pressed leaning against each other, while above a soul rises, along a thin fold, attended by saintly monads, each with its own spontaneity."[10] Here the "horizontal line" in question is most certainly the one formed by the heads of the figures attending the count's burial and the clouds immediately above them. A few pages later, he returns to this

[8] Max Dvořák, "El Greco and Mannerism," in *German Essays on Art History. Winckelmann, Burckhardt, Panofsky, and Others*, ed. Gert Schiff (New York: Continuum, 2004), 191-205.

[9] Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History. The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, trans. Jonathan Blower (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 113, 141, 260.

[10] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 30.

distinction between the upper and lower levels and helps the reader to better grasp his meaning. "Baroque art is abstract art par excellence: on the lower floor, flush with the ground, within reach, the art comprehends the textures of matter […] But abstraction is not a negation of form: it posits form as folded, existing as only a 'mental landscape' in the soul or mind, in upper altitudes; hence it also includes immaterial folds."[11] The bottom half of El Greco's painting, then, can be seen as a depiction of the "pleats of matter," where form is represented as folds embodied within the material, while the upper part of the image represents form that is immaterial and mental, or, in Deleuze's words, form that is "no longer effected by the creases that matter brings to life."

Fig. 3.1. El Greco, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586, oil on canvas, 480 x 360 cm, Iglesia de San Tomé, Toledo. Image: Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El_Greco_-_The_Burial_of_the_Count_of_Orgaz.JPG

[11] Ibid., 35.

All of this grants a special function to that above-mentioned horizontal line, which "renders visible a movement" not "between form and formlessness," as Claudia Blümle has argued, but rather between matter and the immaterial.[12] It is this line that Deleuze identifies as "the ideal fold," and, drawing on Martin Heidegger's thought, he calls it "the *Zwiefalt*, a fold that differentiates and is differentiated."[13] He goes on to explain that, "When Heidegger calls upon the *Zwiefalt* to be the differentiator of difference, he means above all that differentiation does not refer to a pregiven undifferentiated, but to a Difference [sic] that endlessly unfolds and folds over from each of its two sides, and that unfolds the one while refolding the other, in a coextensive unveiling and veiling of Being, of presence and of withdrawal of being."[14] In El Greco's painting, then, the *Zwiefalt* is not merely a dividing line; rather, it is a representation of the production and proliferation of difference. It mediates the unfolding of matter into the upper level of the image—that immaterial, mental space—and vice versa, into the lower level depicting the material. It is this movement between the upper and lower levels of the painting that Deleuze describes as that folding and unfolding "on each of its sides." In this way, we can think of El Greco's painting as representing the act of representation itself: it depicts the material world unfolding into the immaterial space of the artistic mind by way of perception, and the opposite motion, which occurs by way of the artist's works. This means that El Greco does not present his forms and figures as fixed resemblances of a subject; rather he presents them as folds that can always be *un*folded. They are therefore always radically other and can never be reduced to a likeness.

[12] Claudia Blümle, "Infinite Folds: El Greco and Deleuze's Operative Function of the Fold," in *On Folding. Towards a New Field of Interdisciplinary Research*, eds. Michael Friedman and Wolgang Schäffner (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016), 77.

[13] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 30.

[14] Ibid.

As Flora Ghezzo has argued, Ortese, from a young age, also understood that there is no resemblance or sameness. The focus of Ghezzo's analysis is a passage from the essay "Dove il tempo è un altro" (1980) where Ortese describes a childhood memory of the sea voyage she took with her family at age thirteen to return to Italy from Libya. Pointing to Ortese's characterization of the space of the sea, Ghezzo shows that the author subscribed to a vision of difference that is evocative of the one Deleuze outlines in *Difference and Repetition* (1968).[15] "Varcando il mare per rientrare in Italia," Ortese writes,

> "[...] mi colpì in modo intenso il duplice moto risultante dalla nave che solca l'acqua azzurra che, pur non essendo più la medesima di un attimo prima, si presenta come la medesima. Il medesimo luogo, pensavo, non vuol dire l'identico tempo e situazione […] Così c'era questo problema del tempo—delle dimensioni e luoghi dove le cose passavano. Così, *le cose passavano*! Perciò *tutto quanto accadeva*, se la sua parte seconda era il non esistere più, era cosa illusoria."[16]

Here the young Anna Maria looks out from the stern of the ship carrying her and her family to Italy, and is mesmerized by an apparent contradiction: the water that is parted by the forward movement of the vessel always appears the same, though, in actuality it cannot possibly be so, for the ship continues onward. The appearance of sameness is therefore always just that, an illusion. Even that which seems to be completely identical is, in fact different. In turn, Ortese's writing, as I will show, is dedicated to resisting this illusory sameness and to unfolding the difference that it obfuscates. It is for this reason that, throughout *Il porto di Toledo*, the author repeatedly states that the novel is not so much a representation, but an "addition." As Ortese writes in the preface to the text's 1998 edition, which she apparently completed only days before her death on March 9 of that

[15] Flora Ghezzo, "On the Ruins of Time: *Toledo* and the (Auto)fiction of the Ephemeral," in *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, eds. Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 248-249.

[16] Anna Maria Ortese, "Dove il tempo è un altro," in *Corpo Celeste* (Milan: Adelphi, 1997), 66. Emphasis in original.

same year, "*Toledo* non è, non vuole essere una storia vera, ma un' 'aggiunta' alle cose del mondo."[17] *Toledo*, in other words, is not meant as a likeness of the world, so much as it is—in a move reminiscent of Gadda's conception of his prose discussed in chapter 1—self-consciously a part or a fold of the world. In this way, we can begin to see how, as with the Deleuzian version of El Greco, Ortese does not conceive of her works as creative imitations, but rather as "creations" of difference itself.

In *Il porto di Toledo*, Ortese, through her narrator-protagonist, Damasa Figuera (also called Dasa and Toledana), who is a writer and a stand-in for the author herself, makes explicit that El Greco was one of her most important artistic points of reference, a significant admission given the vast array of other sources cited throughout the novel.[18] This becomes apparent when Damasa identifies her greatest literary mentor as a mysterious figure called Giovanni Conra, il Conte D'Orgaz (also referred to as the "Maestro d'Armi"). Ortese's narrator invokes the painter through the name "Conte d'Orgaz," and expressly compares her maestro's physical appearance to that of the homonymous figure at the center of the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*.[19] Fairly early in the text, as she reflects on her mother (whom she calls Apa), her brothers (Rassa and Albe García), and her lover (Professor Lemano), Dasa states that she owes her greatest debt to her teacher: "Io devo a Conra, cioè D'Orgaz, come a Rassa, devo a Conra gran parte dell'anima mia. Altre parti sono di Apa, altre del Professor Lemano, di cui dirò avanti, altre di figure varie e dilette, tra cui Albe

[17] Anna Maria Ortese, "Anne, le aggiunte e il mutamento," in *Romanzi I*, ed. Monica Farnetti (Milan: Adelphi, 2002), 355.

[18] For more on Ortese's other sources, see Vilma De Gasperin, "Appunti sulla citazione ne *Il porto di Toledo* di Anna Maria Ortese," *Esperienze letterarie* 1, no. XXXIV (2009): 57-77.

[19] Ortese writes of Conra: "lo vedevo con gli occhi bassi, come il Conte suo omonimo nel gran dipinto toledano, e tutto vestito di ferro, che era, questo ferro–pieno di incisioni colorate–, la sua medesima espressività" (Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 432).

García: ma la parte più acuminata mi fu data, come una spada, da Conra."[20] Thus Ortese informs her readers that El Greco's painting had the most significant impact on her literary vocation. Exactly how El Greco in particular informed the author's approach to literature is disclosed a little later in the novel, in the sixth chapter, in an epistolary exchange between Damasa and the Maestro d'Armi. In one of his letters to Toledana, whose contents the novel's narrator summarizes, Conra/D'Orgaz outlines his poetics of "espressività," which is effectively Ortese's reading of El Greco's artistic practice. "Espressività," Dasa explains,

> "sebbene ci apparisse solo [...] un tentativo continuo e affannato di esprimere l'immagine che l'uomo s'è fatta del mondo, e perciò potesse apparire al profano, o superficiale, un semplice *riflesso* di tale mondo, era, in realtà, *un secondo mondo* o *seconda realtà*, una immensa appropriazione dell'inespresso, del vivente in eterno, da parte di morituri; e ciò, non già al solo fine di *esprimerlo* [...] bensì di costituirsi, tale inespresso finalmente rivelato, come una seconda irreale realtà; non tanto irreale, poi, se vedevamo la realtà vera disfarsi continuamente, al pari di un vapore acqueo, e la realtà irreale dominare l'eterno."[21]

Ortese's narrator-protagonist is clear: "expressivity" is not an attempt to represent the world through mimesis. Rather, it seeks to push past any restrictive notion of the image as a reflection of reality to the ends of revealing the immensity of the "unexpressed," namely that "irreale realtà" which may emerge if we are able to see the "realtà vera" as continuously in the process of undoing itself. This vision of the "realtà vera" as ephemeral raises a crucial point; namely, it inverts the dichotomy between real and unreal, so that the "irreale realtà" of expressivity turns out to be "not so unreal," while the "realtà vera" evaporates. Damasa indicates here that the ephemerality of the reality surrounding her entails that she can only ever have a momentary and fragmentary perception of it: this "realtà vera" becomes unreal because its appearance is transitory and ever changing. Any one glimpse of it is immediately invalidated as it folds and unfolds. By contrast,

[20] Ibid., 398-399.

[21] Ibid., 470.

the "irreale realtà" as revealed by *espressività* is more real because it is lasting, it "appropriates" and "dominates" the eternal. The aim of *espressività*, then, is to allude to the irreducible and folded essence of the subject of representation that is all too often obscured through a misguided attempt at achieving resemblance, that is, by fixing what is no more than a fleeting and partial vision. In Deleuzian terms, expressivity attempts to unfold a perception that is found in that "mental space" of baroque abstraction—the mind of the artist—and to present this perception to readers in order to help them see a given artistic subject in a new and estranging way. Expressivity thus posits form as something that may only be perceived in ever new ways. For Ortese's Dasa, like Deleuze, a given form therefore has folded within itself potentially infinite perceptive possibilities. The artist, she suggests, should always make recourse to representation in such a way that the viewer or reader is made aware of the irreducibility of the form displayed. By implication, then, the reader or viewer is also made aware of an artwork's inability to capture the unfathomable difference embodied by its subject.[22]

In "Dove il tempo è un altro," Ortese effectively helps us to better understand this baroque *espressività* and its impact on her writing. Seeking to explain her literary practice, the author notes that she aims to break away from commonplaces and stereotypes in order to restore a sense of mystery. Her art, she says, is motivated by her desire to "*rendere*, nei miei scritti, il sentimento della *stranezza*." In order to do this, she must challenge the categories through which we see most everything and everyone: "L'uomo applica i suoi cartellini col prezzo e, occorrendo, le

[22] It is unclear what art historical sources may have informed Ortese's reading of El Greco. By 1914, prominent art historians in Italy including Roberto Longhi had taken notice of the Spanish painter's works. In that year, Longhi published a short piece, "Il soggiorno romano del Greco," *L'Arte* XVII (1914): 301-303. This was followed by a growing body of scholarship that, following the lead of figures like Meier-Graefe, identified El Greco's images as essentially modern. For more on the rediscovery of El Greco and specifically in the Italian context see, Davide Lacagnina, "Il Novecento del Greco. Ricezione critica, storiografia artistica, memoria visiva," *Critica d'Arte* LXIII (2011): 69-84.

informazioni sulla merce, sull'uso dovunque. Questo è un *campo*, questo è l'*oceano*, questo è un *cavallo*, questa è la propria *madre*, questa la *bandiera nazionale*, questi sono due *ragazzini*. Ma per il fanciullo, e l'adoloscente, e anche per un certo tipo d'artista […] non è così! Dovunque egli s'inoltri, tutto risplende di una luce senza origine." In contrast to labels, Ortese declares that the "natura" and "il senso" of "tutte le cose nel mondo e fuori [...] sono insondabili."[23] As she outlined in a 1977 interview with Dario Bellezza, to acquiesce in the belief that the world is comprehensible would be to put humankind at risk. "Quando [...] dai il mondo come spiegato [...] ci edifichi sopra le cose degli uomini. Quando lo dai come inspiegabile [...] e lo definisci come visione del fuggevole—ci edifichi l'uomo. Non è una differenza da poco. Edificare l'uomo è gratuito. Edificare le cose (dell'uomo *e* sull'uomo), porta compensi molto alti, non solo economici. Ma perde l'uomo."[24] In *Il porto di Toledo*, the narrator-protagonist Dasa rejects all fixed categories, particularly those of class and gender, and protests even the normative limits of perception in her depiction of the mysterious Toledo, a palimpsestic city of strange and fleeting visions. As we will see in the second part of this chapter, in *L'Iguana*, it is the novel's title character who suffers under the oppression of *cartellini* such as "beast," "devil," and "servant." It is thus the subaltern Estrellita whom Ortese aims to defend by representing her essence as unfathomable and unexplainable; it is through the Iguana that the author seeks to "rendere il sentimento della stranezza" by depicting her in such way that suggests that she is a fold.

[23] Ortese, "Dove il tempo è un altro," 60.

[24] Anna Maria Ortese, interview by Dario Bellezza, in *L'Iguana* (Milan: Adelphi, 1986),193-194.

Il porto di Toledo

Il porto di Toledo. Ricordi della Vita Irreale is a fictionalized autobiographical account of Ortese's life in Naples from the age of thirteen until the Allied bombings of the city, most of which took place in 1943.[25] Her literary alter ego, the aforementioned Damasa—whose name in Arabic, the language of Ortese's sister-in-law, means "to hide, conceal, disguise"[26]—begins to write upon the death of her brother Emanuele Carlo, also known as Rassa. *Toledo* follows the development of Damasa's literary career, and the narrator-protagonist often shares and comments on samples of her writing (many of which are revised versions of the stories collected in Ortese's own *Angelici dolori*) invoking, as critics often point out, Dante's *Vita nuova*.[27] Alongside her artistic development, Damasa recounts her personal growth, including her romance with A. Reyn Lemano, a relationship that, significantly, is consummated during the destruction of Toledo at the hands of the "Uccelli Turchi," or the Allied bombers. As I will show, *Toledo* constitutes an attempt on Ortese's part to recuperate something of this formative time in her life—specifically a vision of the world as a fold. In this way, the author places herself in the position of contesting all oppressive schemas, especially those of the fascist regime given the historical context of Ortese's childhood and young adulthood. A careful reading of the novel shows that this was a fully self-conscious project on Ortese's part; not only does she explicitly state that Dasa is meant to "protest the limit,"

[25] There were 181 air raids conducted over Naples throughout the course of the Second World War. The Ortese family home on via Piliero was heavily damaged by the carpet bombing of the port on December 2, 1942. The house, Ortese recalled, "Non era crollata, ma inabitabile. E intorno non vi erano più che rovine e desolazione." See Luca Clerici, *Apparizione e visione. Vita e opere di Anna Maria Ortese* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 65.

[26] See Ghezzo, "On the Ruins of Time," 259.

[27] For more on *Toledo* and genre—especially how it pushes the boundaries of autobiography—see chapter 2 of Vilma De Gasperin's *Loss and the Other*.

she also sets her narrator-protagonist in opposition to Don Pedro, a literary portrait of Benito Mussolini.

It is in the 1998 preface to *Il Porto di Toledo* that Ortese describes Dasa as an essentially oppositional character: "La vecchia natura delle cose non mi andava. Inventai dunque una me stessa che voleva un'aggiunta al mondo, che gridava contro la pianificazione ottimale della vita. Che vedeva, nella normalità, solo la menzogna. Che protestava contro il soffocamento del limite."[28] What exactly Ortese refers to when she describes the "optimal planning of life" and the "suffocation of the limit" becomes clear throughout the course of the narrative. Early on, Dasa suggests that this idealized planning is essentially an ideological worldview that justifies the imposition of restrictions with the promise of some kind reward or gain in exchange. Describing her adolescent views of the Church, for example, Dasa juxtaposes her suspicion of organized religion with her mother's deep devotion. "La visione che ella aveva di questo Altissimo," Toledana recalls referring to her mother,

> "—vera esistencia, realidad, bontà,—era, credo, giusta; ma, poiché questo Altissimo, tramite la Chiesa del Papa, si presentava a noi come terrore e castigo, unicamente terrore e castigo del vivere da Lui stesso ordinato, i miei sentimenti per Lui erano violenti e muti, e presto, aggruppandosi, generarono la sedizione. […] Tale perdita, o abisso, che mi aspettava sarebbe stata la moneta con cui avrei pagato la mia indipendenza morale (questa parola, però, allora ignoravo, dirò dunque di scelta). Non volevo che alcuno mettesse limiti alla mia necessità di sperimentare."[29]

Dasa could not be more clear: she rejects any institution or teaching that would stifle her thinking or restrain her from choosing how to live, no matter the justification, even if it is alleged to be salvific. Her rejection of the limit here is so visceral that she also refuses to respect the "boundaries" of the Italian language, instead opting for the Spanish terms "esistencia" and

[28] Ortese, "Anne, le aggiunte e il mutamento," 354.

[29] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 373.

"realidad." Placed in the historical context that *Toledo* is meant to allegorize, it becomes clear that this gesture carries with it a political significance as a resistance to fascist attempts to "purify" Italian by suppressing dialects and banning foreign loan words. It is thus not surprising, when, much later in the novel, Dasa identifies Don Pedro, Mussolini's literary counterpart, as the one most responsible for the tremendous suffering of a war-torn Toledo, a suffering he wrought by violently foisting ideological categories on the world.

Dasa's critique of Don Pedro is found towards the novel's conclusion, as the narrative builds to the climatic aerial bombardment of Toledo. Amid the upheaval and devastation of the war, Dasa reflects on "tutto questo grande morire, o svanire," and feels the need to "scoprire [...] un colpevole." In a characterically enigmatic passage, she muses that this task is not at all simple:

> "Oh, che avrei dato per riconoscere ancora, nel male mortale di questa vita, El Rey o Don Pedro, la storia, la politica, o il comando sugli uomini. Ma ciò non era. Ecco, El Rey stesso e Don Pedro venivano trasportati. L'uno fragile e piccolo, l'altro cupo, deciso. Ciò non li salvava dall'essere trasportati. E da che? Ancora il Tempo! Tu, Tempo, Durata! Fanciulli, erano certo ignari, buoni. Poi crebbero, la Durata li perse. Ora, scorgo solo il secondo. Quella testa monumentale, quel forte naso, quel pallore, gli occhi grandi malati di potere. Responsabile. Dicono il responsabile. Egli, infatti, in questa vecchia arca europea, agli Alemanni si unì; insieme con gli Alemanni dichiarò la guerra al mondo delle Americhe. Egli, contro le antiche regole del viceream e, ideò, volle, impose l'età dei violenti rifacimenti. Egli, tuttavia, non voleva il male; solo che questa società si rinnovasse, aprisse anche ai figli di nessuno. Ma non vide chiaro; operò, non vedendo chiaro, il male. Ed ecco che ora anche noi, figli di nessuno, moriamo. Per questo errore, moriamo."[30]

To grasp the meaning of this passage, it is first key to untangle the images of "Tempo" and "Durata," which Ortese accuses of "transporting" and "losing" El Rey—a clear reference to Vittorio Emanuele III ("fragile e piccolo")—and Don Pedro, whose description unquestionably invokes Mussolini. Ortese almost certainly drew these terms from the philosophy of Henri Bergson, and specifically from his writings on time and "la durée" or duration. In *Time and Free*

[30] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 935-936.

Will, Bergson posits "duration" as an internal consciousness that cannot be measured or quantified. It is, he writes, "A qualitative multiplicity; with no likeness to number; an organic evolution which is nevertheless not a growing quantity; a pure heterogeneity in the heart of which there are no distinct qualities."[31] By contrast, "time," at least as Ortese is using it here, would refer to an "external," homogenizing, and allegedly objective experience, namely that of a scientifically "measurable time."[32] Thus, when Dasa says that, in growing up, the "Durata" "lost" Don Pedro and El Rey, she means that they have lost touch with an earlier, youthful consciousness that has not been tainted by the striation or "cartellini" of mainstream culture. It is specifically this vision that, in "Dove il tempo è un altro," Ortese associates with childhood: alongside that "certo tipo d'artista" for whom "tutte le cose nel mondo e fuori [...] sono insondabili," there are also "il fanciullo" and "l'adolescente," who likewise resist the commonplace and quantifying labels that society applies to most everything.[33] In light of this, it becomes clear that, to be "transported" by time, as Dasa claims happened to El Rey and Don Pedro, entails becoming immersed in a limited and schematic vision that violently imposes categories on the world.

Following this reflection, Dasa turns her attention squarely to Don Pedro ("Ora, scorgo solo il secondo"). Her comments are deeply revealing about the nature of Ortese's anti-fascist position, which might offend some readers; indeed, Damasa declares that Pedro "did not want evil," and instead wanted to renew society and open up it to the "figli di nessuno," that is to the poor and disenfranchised. Nevertheless, a careful reading shows that, in Ortese's view, Mussolini's politics were a form of the "pianificazione ottimale della vita," for he justified his policy with the

[31] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will. An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957), 225.

[32] Ibid., 228.

[33] Ortese, "Dove il tempo è un altro," 60.

promise of improving society; he instead only achieved those "violenti rifacimenti," or the destruction wrought by imposing stifling and rigid schemas. In turn, it becomes clear that Dasa's view of Don Pedro is not an apology for Mussolini's actions; instead she criticizes here the ways in which fascist tyranny masqueraded as virtue. Damasa, in fact, does not excuse the dictator: Don Pedro "operò [...] il male."

In light of this, it is clear that *Il porto di Toledo* is a political novel, a point that critics often overlook. In fact, the critique at the center of the narrative was largely inspired by Ortese's experience of fascist oppression, and Dasa's protest is aimed at the logic underpinning fascist ideology. Ortese's anti-Fascism manifests itself in at least three ways throughout the course of the text. The first is in her transformation of Naples into the eminently allegorical and literary space of Toledo. During the author's formative years, she was witness to the dramatic urban redevelopment that the Fascists pursued in the *città partenopea*, an imperialist project aimed at framing the city as a maritime gateway to the colonies in Africa. Against this "rifacimento" of the Neapolitan cityscape, Ortese's Dasa depicts Toledo as a place in which meaning only ever proliferates, an urban space that can never be a univocal signifier of the fascist empire. Fascist "renovation," however, also extended to a restructuring of society itself, as Ortese was all too aware. In particular, in *Toledo*, the author overturns fascist hierarchies of class and gender. A family of modest means, the Orteses were profoundly harmed by the regime's policy on social class and wealth distribution, which unabashedly embraced inequality. Through Dasa, Ortese turns this on its head, suggesting that dividing society by class entails denying that difference itself can take any form. At the same time, coming of age during the Ventennio, Ortese was acutely aware of the stifling model of maternity extolled by the regime. Against this, Ortese, through Toledana, makes clear that to be a mother is to be the author of "works" greater even than the suffocating

power of the limit. All of this, I argue, indicates that *Il porto di Toledo* is very much an anti-fascist novel.

The Polysemous City of Toledo

Ortese inscribes her anti-Fascism into the very setting of *Il porto di Toledo*, the mysterious Toledo, a literary place that can only be fully understood in the historical context of the city that inspired it: Naples during the Ventennio nero. When a young Anna Maria first arrived in Naples from Libya with her family in 1927, the most prominent of the regime's building projects had not yet begun, though the city held an important significance for the Fascists and their imperial aims. As Alfonso Morone explains, "All'avvento del fascismo Napoli assunse un ruolo preciso nella strategia, sia nazionale che internazionale, del regime, quello di rappresentare la principale porta verso le coste meridionali del Mediterraneo. Il disegno coloniale si esprimeva attraverso il duplice ruolo attribuito alla città: quale capitale del Mezzogiorno d'Italia e grande scalo marittimo aperto verso le sponde dell'Africa."[34] During the 1930s, the urban renovation projects that the regime pursued completely transformed entire sections of the city, disorienting locals and visitors alike. In a letter dated summer 1936, Jean-Paul Sartre records his shock at what the Fascists had done, decrying their work as "the death of the old Naples":

> "Nous voulions chercher la Poste et un hôtel. L'hôtel se trouvait, d'après un guide, dans la rue des Florentins. Mais la rue des Florentins et beaucoup d'autres petites rues parallèles ont disparu: on a abattu des murs. Il reste à leur place des terrains vagues et des palissades. C'est le commencement de la mort du vieux Naples. Les fascistes bien sûr n'auront pas besoin de plus de vingt ans pour le transformer en une ville carrée aux rues qui se coupent tout droit, avec de grands immeubles sains à dix étages. C'est ce qui nous l'a rendu plus touchant encore, car c'est quelque chose qui ne peut plus vivre. S'il restait longtemps comme il est, c'est le choléra et le typhus qui se chargeraient de le détruire. Mais, en réalité, Mussolini le détruira

[34] Alfonso Morone, *La fabbrica dell'innovazione. Gli arredi del Palazzo delle Poste. Napoli 1936* (Siracusa: LettereVentidue, 2017), 27.

> bien plus vite que le choléra. Ainsi, est-il entre ces deux périls de l'épidémie et du fascisme."[35]

Thus Sartre acknowledges that the fascist redevelopment of Naples is a dramatic and ideologically driven revision of the cityscape and an erasure of its long and layered history. His testimony is especially relevant to this discussion of *Il porto di Toledo* for the area of the city he is describing—near the via dei Fiorentini—is located only a few hundred meters from where the Ortese home stood on the via del Piliero (today Corso Cristoforo Colombo, disguised as the via Pilar in *Toledo*), and is in the immediate vicinity of one of the regime's most prominent building projects, the Piazza della Regia Posta (today Piazza Matteotti). These were not the only renovations to take place near Ortese's residence; the port of Naples, directly across from her home, also was drastically altered by the Fascists, as Vilma De Gasperin points out. The demolitions in the port, in fact, are mournfully depicted in Ortese's short story, "Pellerossa," which she revised and included in *Toledo* as one of Dasa's stories under the title "Piel Roja e il fanciullo apasa (comanche)." The story was inspired by the death of Ortese's brother, Emanuele (the real life counterpart of *Toledo*'s Rassa), and is an allegorical depiction of the experience of this loss. Though addressing the original version of the text, De Gasperin's comments remain pertinent to its revision in *Toledo*; she explains that, "At the end of the story, news of [the narrator's] brother's death [...] appears to cause the final demolition of the old haven," that is, their neighborhood, adjacent to the port.[36] Describing the crumbling port, the narrator of "Piel Roja," writes, "Non resiste il Faro, e crolla. Invano le finestre si allargano come grandi occhi. Che pallore, nel cielo!"[37] Ortese, De Gasperin reminds us, really

[35] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et à Quelques Autres. 1926-1939*, ed. Simone de Beauvoir (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1983), 73.

[36] De Gasperin, *Loss and the Other*, 37.

[37] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 426-427.

did witness the fall of the lighthouse—the Lanterna del molo—which the Fascists removed in 1934 (the same year "Pellerossa" was first published in *L'Italia letteraria*) to make way for the Stazione marittima (1936). This structure in particular was likely visible from the windows in Ortese's bedroom, a space that appears in *Toledo* under the name "Stanza dell'Angolo." All of this is to say that Ortese was deeply affected by the fascist renovations of the *città partenopea*.[38]

In a city as dense and as old as Naples, fascist building projects inevitably resulted in the destruction of myriad historical sites. To make way for the new Piazza della Regia Posta, for example, a substantial part of the Rione Carità was subjected to a *sventramento* in the early 1930s which saw the demolition of the Chiesa di San Giuseppe Maggiore (1500, destroyed in 1934) and the church and cloisters of the Complesso di san Tommaso d'Aquino (erected in 1503, and demolished in 1932). Between 1936 and 1940, in place of these structures, the new piazza took shape with the completion of the Palazzo delle Poste (inaugurated in 1936), the Palazzo della Provincia (1936, today called Palazzo Matteotti), Palazzo Troise (1936), the Casa del Mutilato (1940), and the Palazzo della Questura (1940). The design and decoration of these structures left no doubt: they were intended to inscribe into the urban landscape itself a series of meanings that celebrated the fascist regime and its aims. Even today the main doors of the Palazzo della Questura are decorated with fasces and *aquile romane*, and above the doors the word "QVESTVRA" appears in Latin script, all of which yokes the structure's modern, rationalist façade to the symbols of an imperial Roman past. The much more famous Palazzo delle Poste also participated in the piazza's propagandistic program, for architect Giuseppe Vaccaro covered the structure's façade in

[38] For more on the building projects in the area of the port, see Benoit Jallon and Umberto Napolitano, eds., *Napoli. Super Modern* (Zurich: Park Books, 2021), 133-143.

Travertine marble at a great expense—and under pressure from the regime—in order to celebrate the autarchy.[39]

If the Fascists believed that the Neapolitan urban space could simply be demolished and remade to suit the regime, Ortese's representation of the *città partenopea* transforms the city into a baroque allegory, that is, into a site of myriad, ever unfolding meanings. In fact, the very gesture of using Toledo as a signifier for Naples generates a whole series of interpretative possibilities for the novel. This hispanicization of the city, for example, is a critique of fascist xenophobia, and particularly of the regime's revulsion for the long periods of Italian history marked by foreign domination, including at the hands of the Spanish who controlled Naples for centuries. Moreover, the city of Toledo was the subject of propaganda in both Spain and Italy following the victory of Francisco Franco's forces at the 1936 siege of the Alcazar. This episode was at the center of Augusto Genina's 1940 fascist film, *L'assedio dell'Alcazar*, which went on to win the Coppa Mussolini. In this way, Ortese's allegorization may be seen as a rebuke of this ideological and instrumental reduction of both the *ciudad imperial* and Naples. Toledo, however, also invokes Ortese's esteem for El Greco, who had lived in the Spanish city from about 1577 until his death in 1614. The painter famously produced many depictions of his adopted city, including two images entirely dedicated to it: *View of Toledo* (c. 1596) and *View and Plan of Toledo* (1608); the latter, as I will argue, is especially helpful to understanding Dasa's depiction of her home. Ortese's literary transformation of Naples becomes only more complex when we account for how she masks the city's many sites under a "Toledan" toponymy so that "Rua Ahorcados" stands in for vico Leone, "Plaza Guzmano/Plaza del Quiosco" refers also to Piazza Giovanni Bovio, and "Plaza

[39] Sofia Nannini, "The silence of modernity," in *The Routledge Companion to Italian Fascist Architecture. Reception and Legacy*, eds. Kay Bea Jones and Stephanie Pilat (New York: Routledge, 2020), 279. For more the Palazzo della Posta and surrounding structures see Jalon and Napolitano, *Napoli. Super Modern*,144-153.

Theotokopoulos" is analogous to Piazza Municipio.[40] This is no empty, cryptographic exercise on Ortese's part; as names like "Theotokopoulos" suggest, this toponymy charges the urban landscape with meaning.

Ortese had long been fascinated with Spain and Spanish culture, thanks not only to her family's background (her father traced his roots to Catalonia), but also to the "forte e barocca ispanicità di Napoli."[41] The *città partenopea* fell under the yoke of Spanish rule a number of times throughout its history. Notably, from 1503 to 1714 it was a possession of the Spanish empire; in 1735 Charles III of Spain was crowned king of Naples as Charles VII; in 1738, a cadet brand of the Spanish Bourbons took over and ruled the city until Italian unification in 1861 (save for the period from 1806 to 1816). During Spanish imperial control in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Naples was governed by a series of viceroys, including the prominent Pedro de Toledo y Zuñiga, who lent his name not only to Ortese's fictional city, but also its ruler, Don Pedro. Furthermore, Ortese repeatedly identifies the *rey* of her Toledo as a "Borbone,"[42] a name which she drew, no doubt, from the Spanish Bourbons who governed the city. For the author to insist on representing fascist-era Naples as a foreign and specifically Spanish city is a pointed gesture given the regime's nationalism and its visceral distaste for Italy's history of foreign rule. Indeed, a central tenet of fascist imperialism as outlined in the "Dottrina del Fascismo" was to foster in Italians those sentiments most adapted to a people "che risorge dopo molti secoli di abbandono o di servitù

[40] See Ghezzo, "On the Ruins of Time," 283-284. Other attempts have been made to identify the Neapolitan counterparts of the places of Toledo, notably Claudio Cajati and Yolanda Tungbang, "Indice dei luoghi di Toledo," in *Romanzi I*, ed. Monica Farnetti (Milan: Adelphi, 2002) 1136-1151.

[41] Giuseppe Mazzocchi, "Anna Maria Ortese e l'ispanità," *MLN* 112, no. 91 (1997): 90-104, 91.

[42] In the novel's opening lines, Damasa writes that her story unfolded in "la città di un Borbone. Il tempo, quello in cui un Borbone, forse l'ultimo, giaceva sommerso sotto il piede del giovane secolo attuale" (363).

straniera."[43] Having dominated not only much of the *Mezzogiorno*, but also Lombardy, Spain had been, at least since *I promessi sposi*, taken up in Italian nationalist discourse; it is not surprising, then, that it was at times specifically targeted in fascist rhetoric. As we saw in chapter 2, figures like Margherita Sarfatti saw nothing of value in the art and culture of those periods when Italy was controlled by foreign powers, and she rejected the Baroque in particular as a "trist[e] mal[e] dell'Italia spagnolizzata."[44] At the same time, nationalist accounts of Italian history, such as Valerio Di Tocco's *Ideali dell'indipendenza in Italia* (1926), sought to trace an Italian "national sentiment" that resisted Spanish rule during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Di Tocco's monograph, as Gianvittorio Signorotto explains, "è costruita in gran parte sulle lamentazioni e le invettive contro la monarchia spagnola provenienti da varie parti dell'Italia 'afflitta.'"[45] The result of Di Tocco's work, Signorotto writes, is "un'immagine parziale e distorta, [che isola] le espressioni di un sentimento nazionale."[46] For her part, Ortese avoids just this kind of simplistic and nationalistic fervor, suggesting with her "Neapolitan" Toledo that Naples can never be a mere expression of fascist nationalism; instead it remains a storied crossroads between cultures, a city that will always be marked by its Spanish past.

Ortese's Toledo, however, also constitutes a distinctly artistic resistance to Fascism, as becomes clear when we account for the fact that it alludes to El Greco and his paintings of his

[43] Arturo Marpicati, Benito Mussolini, Gioacchino Volpe, "Fascismo," *Treccani*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/fascismo_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/.

[44] Margherita Sarfatti, "Il Seicento Italiano," in *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969), 96.

[45] Gianvittorio Signorotto, "Dalla decadenza alla crisi della modernità: la storiografia sulla Lombardia spagnola," in *Alle origini di una nazione. Antispagnolismo e identità italiana*, ed. Aurelio Musi (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003), 323.

[46] Ibid., 324.

homonymous city. Scholars have already discussed the importance of the 1596 *View of Toledo* in interpreting Ortese's novel;[47] I believe that the 1608 *View and Plan of Toledo* is just as critical.

Fig. 3.2. El Greco, *View and Plan of Toledo*, c. 1608, oil on canvas, Museo del Greco, Toledo. Image: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vista_y_plano_de_Toledo,_de_El_Greco.jpg.

In invoking this image, I argue that Ortese provides a meta-artistic statement and interpretive guide for her readers. At the center of this painting is a surreal depiction of Toledo beneath a gray and blue sky in which the artist depicts a religious vision comprising the Virgin Mary, St. Ildefonsus, and a group of angels. Suspended in front of the city on a cloud is the Tavera Hospital, a placement that, as the artist explains in an inscription on the lower right, was chosen in order to avoid blocking the sight of the city gate, the Puerta de Bisagra. Also on the lower right of the canvas, a young man gazes out into the space of the viewer as he holds in his hands an extraordinary street map of

[47] See Flora Ghezzo, "Chiaroscuro napoletano. Trasfigurazioni fantastiche di una città," *Narrativa* 24 (January 2003): 85-104; Monica Farnetti, "Toledo o cara," in *Tutte signore di mio gusto: profili di scrittrici contemporanee* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 2008), 159-171; and Monica Farnetti, "Guida di Toledo," in *Romanzi I*, ed. Monica Farnetti (Milan: Adelphi, 2002), 1133-1136.

Toledo. Ortese seems to have drawn on each of these elements in her novel. Like El Greco's Toledo, Dasa's city is found beneath an otherworldly gray-blue sky ("il grigio diventa blu, cioè tramonto di Toledo");[48] her house, not unlike the Tavera Hospital, often appears suspended in the clouds ("sempre immersa in queste tristi nuvole").[49] At the same, the skies over Dasa's Toledo are visited by quasi-religious visions, such as when the narrator-protagonist and her friend Jorge witness "una croce di sangue, altissima, con rose al posto dei chiodi."[50] The literal "truth" of this apparition is immaterial for Ortese; instead what is key is how this event suggests that her Toledo, like that of El Greco, defies the limit and challenges reductive or normative perceptions of the city space. Nevertheless, the most significant feature of this painting—at least in this discussion of Ortese's novel—is the street map. Juan Calduch Cervera points out that this map's "quality and accuracy are outstanding," and concludes that El Greco consulted mathematics and topography experts in order to complete it.[51] This street plan, Cervera continues, might be seen as "the *objective* image of the city, the *real city* represented within the most suitable graphic systems for that purpose." Yet, this representation of Toledo works with the painting's other elements—especially with the cityscape that constitutes the canvas' central subject—to "[offer] a polysemous vision of Toledo [... We] are faced with the synthetic, simultaneous and superimposed appearance of a '*view*' and a [...] '*plan*' […] None of these different meanings cancels or supplants each other, but they coexist without diminishing their own specific [interpretive] field."[52] Ortese was certainly

[48] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 389-390.

[49] Ibid., 365.

[50] Ibid., 711-712.

[51] Juan Calduch Cervera, "El Greco Cartographer: View and Plan of Toledo (1608-1614)," E*xpresión Gráfica Arquitectónica* 17, no. 19 (2012): 68-77, 74.

[52] Ibid., 74.

well aware of this complex interplay between the plan and the view. As an author who often in her prose presents narratives within the narrative, she surely would have taken note of the way in which the map—the "objective" image of Toledo—is given to the viewer as a representation within a representation. The most "realistic" rendering of Toledo, then, is given self-consciously as a depiction: it is no more "real" than El Greco's cityscape. In this way, Ortese might have recognized in *View and Plan of Toledo* another point of reference for her *espressività*, where the "irreale realtà" becomes more real than the "realtà vera." This is all the more plausible in light of a highly significant scene, early in *Il porto di Toledo*, when Dasa—in direct dialogue with a map—reveals that her city is essentially a place of imagination that cannot be charted in any conventional way. Instead, and in resistance to the fascist attempt to fix the Neapolitan urban space, Dasa's Toledo only ever folds and unfolds into and out of the mind's eye.

The scene in question centers on Dasa, who, devastated by the death of her brother Rassa on the faraway island of Esperancia (a stand-in for Martinique where Emanuele Ortese died), creates a map to measure the distance between Toledo and Rassa's grave in a "cimitero marino" (a name that recalls Paul Valéry's *Le Cimetière marin*).[53] At first the young protagonist strangely asserts that the distant island is within the immediate vicinity her house, which she calls the "casa marine [sic]":[54] "Nella carta che traccia le mie approssimative deduzioni di ieri circa la collocazione di Toledo e della casa marine rispetto ai movimenti del sole, Esperancia è data come vicinissima, addirittura di fronte e forse a un tiro di fucile dalla nostra morta Toledo e soprattutto dal balcone di Apa," that is, Toledana's mother.[55] Nevertheless, Damasa goes on to contradict

[53] See De Gasperin, "Appunti sulla citazione," 69-70.

[54] "Perché avevo scritto sempre *marine*," Ortese writes in a 1983 Nota appended to *Toledo*, " —in luogo di *marinaio*, di *marina*, o *cosa della marina*—mi era difficile intendere." See Anna Maria Ortese, "Nota," in *Romanzi I*, ed. Monica Farnetti (Milan: Adelphi, 2002), 1000.

[55] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 393.

herself, dismissing this as a deception. "Che inganno! Quanto incommensurabili erano invece quelle distanze, nudi e stranieri quegli spazi, ostili e malinconici quei territori, e quanta, quanta sarebbe stata, se mai avessimo potuto percorrerla, forse in sogno, la strada che ci separava dalla ormai quieta e dimenticata tomba del marine [Rassa]."[56] Yet, just as suddenly as she rejects her map as an illusion, Dasa goes on to assert that Rassa's grave "truly" had drawn near to Toledo. "Eppure, a un certo momento," she elaborates, "quella tomba, o squallida pietra, non dissimile da alcun'altra di quell'isola, e quello stesso cimitero marino, [...] si erano avvicinati veramente a Toledo, ai cancelli del porto, e nel breve spazio che ora divideva le due coste—spazio talora turchino e fitto di tondi legni dorati, ora nudo sotto opprimente cielo—cominciavano a muoversi, come detto, i miei pensieri. E non solo i miei."[57] In each of these three passages, Ortese, through Dasa, subverts the idea of a map as an "objective" depiction of a "real" space. For example, as she describes the location of Esperancia as being a "stone's throw" from Toledo, and particularly close to her Apa's balcony, the reader realizes that Dasa is not referring to a geographic space, but rather to a symbolic one. Rassa's tomb is "near" Toledo, because his loss weighs so heavily on his family, and his grave is especially close to Apa for she mourns his death most dramatically throughout the opening of the novel. Nevertheless, when Dasa unexpectedly rejects her map as an "inganno," it is tempting to believe that she has come to accept that, geographically speaking, an entire ocean separates Toledo from Rassa's tomb. Yet, a close reading reveals that the narrator-protagonist describes not "large" but "incommensurable" distances: she is concerned that the gulf separating her from Rassa eludes all mapping or representation, that the deep pain of loss can never be depicted. It is at this point, however, that Dasa concludes that her *carta* is "accurate": the tomb

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 393-394.

"really" did approach Toledo. The key here is that this happens in that "breve spazio" where Toledana's "thoughts began to move." In other words, the narrator-protagonist is able to close the distance between Toledo and Rassa through acts of imagination. Thus the most "accurate" map of Toledo is one that posits the city not as a geographic location that can serve as the basis for a facsimile, but one that depicts it as a mental space that is always moving and evolving. To reject the possibility of a conventional map of Toledo in this way, within the context of the Ventennio, carries with it a political implication, for a map entails the imposition of names, directions, uses, and hierarchies on space. Ortese thus rejects the very idea that the Fascists could ever stabilize, through the logic of cartography, Naples' dense and layered cityscape.

The author reiterates this very point with the toponymy she invents for Toledo, which charges the city with meaning and places it into dialogue with other artworks and artists. There is, for example, the above-mentioned Plaza Theotokopoulos, which redoubles Toledo's links to the Cretan-Spanish painter. Nearby is Corso Velázquez, perhaps a stand-in for Naples' via Toledo, which invokes Ortese's other major baroque interlocutor, Diego Velázquez. Ortese, however, does not only invoke her most famous and treasured artistic predecessors; in fact, the places of her Toledo also engender an intertextual exchange with her own works, including *L'Iguana*, which is subject to one of the subtlest and yet richest references of the fictional urban landscape. Early in *Il porto di Toledo*, Dasa describes a "piazzetta," which, she pointedly notes, is located near Plaza Guzmano (the aforementioned stand-in for Piazza Giovanni Bovio). The name Guzmano calls to mind the Guzman brothers of *L'Iguana*, who are the chief oppressors of the novel's title character. Referring to this little square found near Plaza Guzmano, Dasa says that, "in una piazzetta oscura e infame, soggiornava perennemente una giovane infelice chiamata Mamota. Era un mostro: col corpo tutto rattorto da non so che malattia o origine malata, eternamente vestita di nero, il viso

grande e cereo illuminati da immensi e dolorosi occhi neri, che scendevano spalancati verso le tempie."[58] This monstrous, female other Mamota leaves no doubt: the reader has come face-to-face with Estrellita the Iguana who now peers out from the pages of *Il porto di Toledo*. Even her eyes—large, black, and almost non-human—recall those of Estrellita, which are described in *L'Iguana* as "un lago di luce nera."[59] It is through just these sorts of intertextual and interartistic references that, as Siriana Sgavicchia argues, "lo spazio reale di Napoli [...] tende a caricarsi di connotazioni simboliche, dando forma [...] a un 'luogo' del testo, che supera il 'confine', che si apre verso 'l'altro.'"[60] By layering meaning so that each street and plaza of Toledo has a Neapolitan counterpart and an artistic referent, the author creates ever new interpretative possibilities for her novel. In this way, and in opposition to the fascist model, Ortese's Toledo is a place where meaning is only ever compounded and never reduced.

"Un universo più fluido": Class and Gender in *Toledo*

The central importance of class and gender in *Il porto di Toledo* is made explicit in Ortese's aforementioned 1998 preface to the novel, entitled "Anne, le aggiunte e il mutamento." In the text, Ortese elaborates on the story of Anne Hurdle, to whom she dedicated her novel. The author learned of Hurdle from Benjamin Constant's *Cahier Rouge* (1807), and was deeply moved by the story of the twenty-three-year old Londoner, who, in her desperate poverty, had taken to counterfeiting money. At her trial, Hurdle never spoke: "non aveva la voce per difendersi," Ortese writes, "Stette sempre zita. Solamente quando *lo vide*—vide il monumento alla purezza del

[58] Ibid., 375.

[59] Anna Maria Ortese, *L'Iguana*, in *Romanzi II*, eds. Andrea Baldi, Monica Farnetti, and Filippo Secchieri (Milan: Adelphi, 2005), 188.

[60] Siriana Sgavicchia, "Spazio reale e testuale nel «Porto di Toledo» di Anna Maria Ortese," *Avanguardia*, no. 21 (2002): 96.

vivere—gettò un lungo grido, il solo della sua vita. Si addormentò così."[61] It is in response to Anne's terrible plight, Ortese goes on to explain, that she wrote *Il Porto di Toledo* as a "reato," as a narrative whose protagonist "gridava contro la pianificazione ottimale della vita."[62] The author here reveals who is victim of this "optimal" planning, and insists, as Cosetta Seno Reed has argued, that we read her novel in light of the social condition of those like Anne or Damasa or, for that matter, Ortese herself: a condition of poverty and oppressed femininity.[63] In fact, a careful reading of the opening of the novel reveals that the *espressività* that Dasa will develop is meant, above all, for the subaltern. It is thus through expressivity that Dasa comes both to overturn Fascist hierarchies of class and to contest the limit that the regime placed on women and particularly on maternity.

Given the prevailing stereotype of Baroque art as supporting the power of the early modern state, for some readers it is certainly surprising to realize that Dasa's reinvention of it is squarely focused on the powerless. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the very first lines of *Toledo* shows that Ortese depicts her narrator-protagonist as self-consciously developing an approach to literature focused on the "figli di nessuno," or the disenfranchised. The incipit begins with a simple declaration, "Sono figlia di nessuno." Dasa continues on to explain,

> "Nel senso che la società, quando io nacqui, non c'era, o non c'era per tutti i figli dell'uomo. E nascendo senza società o bontà io stessa, in certo senso non nacqui nemmeno, tutto ciò che vidi e seppi fu illusorio, come i sogni della notte che all'alba svaniscono e così fu per quelli che mi stavano intorno. Non importa, così, dove nacqui, e come vissi fino agli anni tredici, età a cui risalgono questi scritti e confuse composizioni. So che un certo giorno mi guardai intorno, e vidi che anche il mondo nasceva; nascevano montagne, acque, nuvole, livide figure."[64]

[61] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 353.

[62] Ibid., 354.

[63] Cosetta Seno Reed, *Anna Maria Ortese. Un avventuroso realismo* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2013), 84.

[64] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 363.

In expressly identifying herself as an oppressed "daughter of no one," Dasa gives the reader a key to understand her cryptic statement that society "non c'era" when she was born, at least not for all of the "figli dell'uomo." Society did not exist for Dasa and the children of no one because they had been cast out from it: dispossessed and voiceless, they were reduced to the status of non-persons ("non nacqui nemmeno"). It is only at age thirteen, Dasa tells us—when she began to write "questi scritti e confuse composizioni"—that suddenly the world around her was "born"; Toledana, despite the interdiction of a patriarchal culture and the obstacle of her poverty, discovers a means to express herself. As we have already seen, this is none other than *espressività*, the literary approach that allows the narrator-protagonist to assert, depict, and validate her subjective perceptions of everything around her in the midst of a society that sought to deprive her of this very ability. Dasa, under the guidance of the Conte d'Orgaz, therefore invents *espressività* to be a poetics for the subaltern. Because she developed expressivity in dialogue with the baroque aesthetic, Ortese effectively contests the prevailing and highly influential theory of it first articulated by José Maravall, who saw the Baroque exclusively as an expression of power on the part of the *ancien régime*.[65] For Dasa, the opposite is true; her neo-baroque *espressività* is unrelentingly oppositional and is meant to "elevare proteste alle mura."[66] In *Il porto di Toledo*, Dasa's protest comes into stark relief as she reflects on issues of class and gender, each of which I will address in the following pages, beginning with the former and concluding with the latter.

[65] See José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque. Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

[66] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 476.

The Ortese family was all too familiar with poverty, as the author repeatedly makes clear through Dasa, who describes her own life as "misera."[67] Ortese herself admitted that, from her childhood, her family struggled desperately to make ends meet. As a young girl in Potenza, where she had moved with her family shortly after birth, Ortese remembered that, "non ho mai avuto un giocattolo. Me li facevo da sola: una bambola, il teatrino… Mia nonna ci chiamava di nascosto, a turno, per darci un pezzo di pane. Non ce n'era per tutti… Del resto, non sapevamo cosa fosse la carne, né, tanto meno, cosa fossero i dolci."[68] For a family in this circumstance, fascist rhetoric about socioeconomic class was certainly nothing short of a humiliating affront. In the "Dottrina del Fascismo," in fact, Mussolini and Gentile affirm what they describe as, "la disuguaglianza irrimediabile e feconda e benefica degli uomini che non si possono livellare attraverso un fatto meccanico ed estrinseco com'è il suffragio universale."[69] This rhetoric was backed by aggressive policies aimed at reinforcing the Italian class hierarchy, such as Alfredo Rocco's 1926 Legge sindacale, which nationalized labor unions.[70] In turn, any effort on the part of workers to organize had to be approved by the same state that openly embraced inequality. In response to this logic and policy, Ortese, in *Il porto di Toledo*—and in direct dialogue with El Greco—articulates a radical rethinking of class difference, and encourages her readers to embrace otherness no matter the form it takes.

This rethinking of class difference emerges following the narrator-protagonist's epistolary exchange with Conra when, during a walk through Toledo, she explicitly credits the Conte

---

[67] Ibid., 471.

[68] Guido Arato, "La mia Iguana è nata in cucina," *Il Secolo XIX* (September 1986). For more on this period of Ortese's life see Luca Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, especially 40-69.

[69] Marpicati, Mussolini, Volpe, "Fascismo."

[70] For more see Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism, 1915-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 178-186.

D'Orgaz with making her more aware of class. Looking at her urban surroundings, Dasa remarks that Toledo really seems to be two cities, "la città alta, o Reale," and that of the "porto toledano." Though no physical barrier separates the two, the discrepancy between them could not be greater: "E là [...] vi era [...] il sole, mentre qui nubi; là rosee facciate e giardini settecenteschi, mentre da noi tuguri e, battute dalla pioggia e il vento, viscide pescherie."[71] It is at this point that Dasa tells the reader that she became "newly aware" of this inequality thanks to her *maestro*: "In certo senso l'arrivo dei [sic] D'Orgaz mi aveva nuovamente reso edotta, ma ora in modo sbalordito, ammirante, dell'esistenza di queste due caste presenti nel Regno: che erano da una parte i lazzarilli (marine e altro), dall'altra i principi, notabili vari, ecc. E questi erano sempre bellissimi e gentili, con un che di nefasto. I preti, tra le due caste, e i soldati regolavano il rapporto."[72] Certainly Ortese's own experience of poverty was fundamental to her views on socioeconomic issues and Italy's class divide; it was, however, El Greco's paintings that made her acutely aware of the fold and the limit. Through Dasa, in fact, Ortese makes clear that she views any kind of hierarchization or categorization of people on the basis of their respective wealth or poverty as a reduction of an unfathomable other. This point is corroborated a little over halfway through the novel when Damasa becomes angry with her wealthy and beautiful friend Aurora Belman (a literary disguise for Ortese's beloved confidante Adriana Capocci Belmonte who lost her life to tuberculosis in 1944 at age twenty-six).[73] Damasa is deeply in love with the aforementioned A. Reyn Lemano, who, at the time, is Belman's lover, though he reciprocates Toledana's interest. When Dasa shares one of her short stories or "rendiconti" with Belman, she is enraged to discover that Aurora in turn

[71] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 462.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Sergio Lambiase has published a biography on Belmonte. See *Adriana. Cuore di luce* (Florence: Bompiani, 2018).

passed the story on to Lemano, a move that the narrator-protagonist views as an attempt to sabotage their romance. Ruminating on these events, Dasa ascribes Belman's actions to the unfeeling nonchalance of the wealthy. Referring to Aurora, Dasa writes:

> "Poi capivo che per quell'anima (e così molte altre), cresciuta al di là delle mura spirituali di Toledo, delle mura d'oro che separavano la Toledo di tenebre dalla Toledo emblematica dei viceré, la vita era così: un ozio, un perdimento, un sorridere e distruggere continuo, serbandosi incantevoli, gai. Che esse—mi pareva capire—erano poi già distrutte, avendo in ogni cielo volato, da mille e più anni, e tutto, per esse, malgrado la radiosità delle membra e musicale patrimonio dei vari Jorge e Góngora, tutto, da tempo, era definitivamente consumato, annerito."[74]

The narrator-protagonist could hardly be more harsh; despite the education and privilege of the upper class which allows it access to great art such as the poetry of Jorge Manrique[75] and the baroque verses of Góngora, Dasa declares that they possess a nihilistic view of the world as dark and worn out. In describing these feelings, however, Toledana quickly adds that, in looking back, she feels deep shame at them. "Di questi sentimenti ho vergogna anche ora, nel rievocarli medesimo," she confesses,

> "Ma la mia durezza sostanziale, e freddezza tetra, riguardo agli estranei—vere stelle, talora, come Belman—non ho voluto nascondere. Seppi presto, poi, che il tempo era venuto perché non fossi più me medesima, perché mi aprissi non più solo a soavità fanciullesche, a tremanti attese di unificazione [...] ma anche allo straniero, il diverso, il povero diverso che io sempre avevo escluso—o limitato a Mamota—ed era pure questa Belman: alla comprensione [...] di un universo più fluido."[76]

It seems odd at first that Ortese should make her literary alter-ego describe herself as "cold," "dark," and "hard" towards the "estraneo" given that the author's concern for the other pervades all her literary writing. Yet, at the end of this passage, Dasa reveals that she had unwittingly forced

[74] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 775.

[75] For more on Ortese's citations of Manrique's poetry, see Mazzocchi, "Anna Maria Ortese e l'ispanità."

[76] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 775-776.

a limit on difference itself, assuming that it only pertained to the subaltern like Mamota—poor, monstrous, female—and not also to those who are not subaltern but different nonetheless. Dasa thus comes to conceive of otherness as comprising, in addition to the "poor" or the "foreigner," also the rich and attractive Belman. Contextualized within Ortese's experience of poverty during the Ventennio, Dasa's bitterness towards the privileged is certainly understandable. Yet Ortese refuses to allow Toledana to reduce the other to her class: Dasa declines to replicate the classism that oppresses her in order to use it against Belman. This is not to say that the author—who suffered deprivation—denies the reality of economic disparity; rather, Ortese, following the lesson of El Greco and anticipating Deleuze, concludes that there is only difference and that it is not contained in predetermined boundaries. Hence Dasa's exhortation to open herself not only to "soavità fanciullesche," but also to the "comprehension" of a more fluid universe, one that by virtue of its fluidity contests schemas, like those of the Fascists, that define the individual on the basis of her class.

Ortese, however, suffered not only the regime's oppressive policies towards the poor; she was also a member of a generation of women who were subject to Fascism's strict policing of gender. As we saw in chapter 1 in our discussion of gender in the works of Carlo Emilio Gadda, the Fascists violently reduced femininity, and maternity in particular, to having a singular function for the state, that of producing offspring in order to build an empire. This instrumental and exploitative view of mothers and their children was devastating to a family like the Orteses, who lost two sons in the service of the regime. The first was Ortese's brother Emanuele who died in 1933. In a letter addressed directly to Mussolini appealing for a pension compensating his son's death, Anna Maria's father Oreste describes Emanuele as a "nocchiere scelto della Regia

Marina."[77] Seven years later, in December 1940, Antonio Ortese, Anna Maria's twin brother, was killed in Albania where he was serving in the war as a sub-lieutenant in the Regia Guardia di Finanza.[78] By age twenty-six, Ortese was thus twice witness to the fatal and destructive consequences of a politics that relegated maternity and the lives it produces to the service of the state's imperialism. It is in opposition to this that, in *Il porto di Toledo*, Ortese suggests that femininity and maternity are much more than the domesticity that the Fascists promoted. Dasa, in fact, explicitly declares her aversion to marriage and hints that she will become a mother not by way of actual children, but through her art. In so doing, Toledana posits that maternity, whether actual or literary, entails becoming the author of works that are irreducible to any limit.

It is early in the novel when Dasa informs the reader that she has no intention to marry. Describing her first romantic experiences, the narrator-protagonist recalls an unsettling exchange with a young man, Pter, who appears in the narrative only by way of his letters, which, Dasa says were sent "da una città della costa di cui capitale è Marsilia."[79] The letters themselves, she writes, "Erano brevi, un po' tristi, con un sapore terribile."[80] The worst, however, is that Pter's missives lead Dasa to believe that he is interested in marriage:

> "Mi pareva di avvertire in Pter nei miei confronti, ecco la cosa grave, non so che intenzioni—dirò in breve, di sposarmi—che mi riempivano gli occhi di lacrime, tanto ingiuriose di quell'illimitato—e forse immortale, chi sa?—divenire che deve essere lasciato ai fanciulli, e a un apasa maggiormente. Non tanto la libertà, quanto la libertà di superare il destino che era necessario a un apasa, e ciò Pter non sentiva."[81]

[77] Letter cited in Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 24.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo,* 399.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 400-401.

Striking in this passage is the way in which Dasa describes her reaction to the possibility of marriage: Pter's intentions, she says, are "insulting" to that "unlimited becoming" that must be preserved for children and especially for those whom she calls "apasa." Right away it is clear that Dasa, in the context of her allegorized fascist-era Naples, understands that marriage entails a restriction: her "becoming" will no longer be unobstructed, but will instead be reined in by the demands of domesticity, a point that helps to explain why the narrator-protagonist insists especially on the freedom of the "apasa." An "apasa," Dasa explains in a footnote of the kind that recur throughout the novel, is not an entirely clear term: "*apasa*, in breve, non so che volesse dire, se non, forse (dal nominativo della casa), abitante di case dirute e sole."[82] If "apasa" derives from a term meaning "casa," then we can take it to roughly mean "domestic," a point corroborated by the fact that Dasa refers to her mother with a similar word, "Apa." "Apasa," in other words, refers to those women who, subjugated by a patriarchal society, have been denied the freedom to define themselves and choose their own future. It is perhaps for this reason that Dasa declines to provide a clear meaning for "apasa," as she realizes the danger of constructing a category for the other.

For as much as Dasa refuses marriage, a careful reading of *Toledo* shows that she is much more amenable to maternity, albeit not in a literal but rather artistic form. From the start of the novel, in fact, the narrator-protagonist connects her writing to motherhood, and especially the figure of Apa, whom she credits for having prompted her to begin writing in earnest following the death of Rassa. This comes to the fore as Dasa recalls Apa's profound grief at the loss of her son: "Voleva vederlo, subito, glielo portassimo, anche consumato dalle maree, ma glielo portassimo," Toledana writes.[83] It is at this point that Apa turns specifically to her daughter for help. "Si

[82] Ibid., 401.

[83] Ibid., 392.

rivolgeva a me come a persona assai potente, responsabile," Dasa recalls. "'Tu, Dasa mia,'" Apa cries, "'che ami la tua Mater, soccorrimi, fa' presto!'" Dasa soon discovers what her power to help is when her family obtains an article published in the "Journal de l'Île," presumably a newspaper from Esperancia. The text—which is never directly "cited"—was written in French by a priest, Padre Chabrin, and is described as a "pietoso saluto della cittadina di Fort al marine Carlo." Apa is overjoyed, for in her eyes, thanks to this piece of writing, "Rassa [...] era nuovamente vivo!"[84] This then helps the young Dasa to better understand her writerly vocation: "Capii che quel vuoto," she says referring to the emptiness left by the loss of Rassa, "bisognava colmare con parole di luce."[85] Toledana has just this opportunity when she is tasked with responding to Padre Chabrin. Though the exact content of Dasa's letter is never disclosed, Apa's reaction to it is telling. Toledana's written response, it turns out, is ultimately published in the same newspaper, a development that delights Apa. As the news of Dasa's publication spreads, the narrator-protagonist writes that, "Apa, per la complessità di tali sentimenti—gioia, perché si parlava non più di uno solo, ma di due dei suoi figli, sorpresa perché uno tornava a vivere, l'altro cominciava ora—, sembrava, lei così forte, svenire."[86] This passage raises two important points to understand Ortese's depiction of Dasa's literary calling. First is that as much as Dasa owes to her *maestro* Conra, she also owes a large debt to her mother, who, in her sorrow, encouraged her daughter's writing, leading to this early publication. In this way, Dasa's writing can be seen as having a kind of maternal origin. Second is Apa's claim, which Dasa seems to accept, that Rassa or the dead in general might be resurrected in art. This in turn suggests that Toledana's writing is life-giving: it

[84] Ibid., 394.

[85] Ibid., 395.

[86] Ibid.

is not only maternal in its inception, but also in its function. Clearly this is not a literal claim on Dasa or Ortese's part, yet it is only later in the novel, after the encounter with the Conte D'Orgaz, that the narrator-protagonist helps the reader to understand what she means. In so doing, she articulates a conception of maternity that overturns that of the Fascists.

Dasa's view of her art as having an essentially maternal power emerges, interestingly enough, in direct response to a reflection on class. Thinking back over her exchange with Conra, Toledana fears for those, like her family, who lack access to artistic expression; specifically, she worries that they might vanish without any record of their lives or of who they were. Her concern is allayed, however, when, in an extraordinary passage, she posits a vision of the relationship between the real and representation that is highly evocative of Leibniz's philosophy:

> "Di poi, ripensandoci, mi parve sì questa vita tutta irreale, come aveva detto D'Orgaz, ma non irreale l'anima dell'uomo e dei viventi tutti; e perciò la Espressività scritta *solo* una testimonianza dell'uomo; ma, oltre e sopra questa Espressività *come Testimonianza*, vive una Espressività Totale, o Continente dell'essere, i cui periodi, le cui pagine e la stessa interpunzione risultano formati dalla infinità di tutto quanto è vivente, e suoi moti e azioni, che perciò non muore se non allo sguardo di altri sguardi fuggenti—in realtà resta, in luogo ignoto, come resta il mare che salutiamo approdando, l'astro che vediamo scomparire all'alba, ecc. Solo ciò, io pensavo, aveva più realtà e immortalità di tutto: l'essere e il pensare o sentire muto: mentre l'Espressività che si documenta, tanto cara a noi, cioè D'Orgaz e Toledana, era solo un momento dell'Espressività universale."[87]

In order to unpack this passage, it is first key to understand what Dasa means when she declares this life to be "completely unreal." The answer to this question can be found by looking back to the narrator-protagonist's articulation of *espressività*, and especially the way in which she inverts the dichotomy between the "irreale realtà" and the "realtà vera." As we have already seen, that which is less real for Dasa is the latter of these two, which, despite its paradoxical label, is unreal because it is essentially transitory, continuously undoing itself like "un vapore acqueo." Dasa, in

[87] Ibid., 472.

other words, describes "questa vita" as "irreale" because she perceives it to be fleeting, a point she expressly confirms: "Ecco perché la vita mi appariva sempre tremenda: non perché fossi giovane e misera, ma perché di ogni cosa io avvertivo sempre la fugacità, l'irreale."[88] By contrast, then, "l'anima dell'uomo e dei viventi tutti" is not unreal because it is eternal. This eternity, however, necessitates that "Espressività scritta"—literature—can only be a partial and imperfect witness to an "Espressività totale," which is itself like an infinite book, comprising the actions, movements, sentences, pages, and even punctuation which are the product of all that is living. None of these elements of this so-called "Continente dell'essere" ever ceases to exist, Dasa tells us, "se non allo sguardo di altri sguardi fuggenti": they merely elude our finite ability to knowingly perceive them. Instead, the infinite "moti" and "azioni" that this "Continente" comprises extend into and remain in that "luogo ignoto," beyond our field of consciousness, like the star that vanishes at dawn. Though it has not been conclusively established whether Ortese was familiar with Leibniz, all of this strikingly similar to his concept of the "plenum," which we first discussed in chapter 1. This plenum, or universal plenitude, "makes all matter interconnected," and, therefore, "every movement has some effect on distant bodies."[89] A given movement, then, reverberates endlessly throughout the cosmos; it never ceases to exist but merely folds and unfolds into and out of our conscious mind. Thinking of Dasa's "Espressività scritta" in these terms, we realize that its function is to unfold the soul's "moti e azioni," to bring them back into our conscious mind—to give testimony to them—even if this constitutes only a fleeting and fragmentary witness to that which is incommensurate with representation. It is precisely in this way that Toledana gives "life"

[88] Ibid., 476.

[89] G.W. Leibniz, "The Monadology," in *Leibniz's Monadology. A New Translation and Guide*, ed. and trans. Lloyd Strickland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 26.

to her deceased brother in her art: she testifies to Rassa's enduring impact on her following his death.[90]

One of the early "rendiconti" that Dasa shares with her readers helps to illustrate this approach to depicting her brother. The story, entitled "Per uno di Toledo (Marinero)," is a revised version of a text entitled "Manuele," that Ortese published in *L'Italia letteraria* in 1933. The narrative is very brief, and, as always, highly allegorical. Dasa prefaces the *rendiconto*, saying that it, "Rievocava Rassa."[91] The narrator of "Per uno di Toledo"—also called Dasa—depicts herself mourning and remembering her lost brother, and specifically describes him as "buono e lieto."[92]

[90] The parallels with Leibniz's philosophy become all the more remarkable in the following paragraphs, as Dasa muses about "reality": "Sì—pensai—tutto si esprime, anche se non in documento; l'uccello canta, e perciò si esprime. La vela si apre, e perciò si esprime. Apa invoca il suo Rassa e perciò si esprime. Vi è una *realtà*, di cui fanno parte Apa, la vela, l'uccello. Tale realtà è già cosa espressa, in quanto manifestata, è quindi realtà indistruttibile; la sua materia essendo unicamente l'invisibile pensiero, quando vedi questa materia o mondo, vedi questo vivente pensiero: che perciò, come i pensieri, muta e si distanzia, ma non si perde, e sempre altri pensieri produce. Dunque, realtà, come cosa pensata è moto di pensiero, Apa è un pensiero, Rassa un pensiero, D'Orgaz un pensiero che a sua volta pensa. [...] Sentivo che la vita era opera di una mente sublime, in cui tutto, esprimendosi, era nell'atto stesso immutabile, eterno. La Espressività scritta, quindi solo una visione limitata che noi avevamo di tale *immutabile* o *eterno*" (472-473). Here Dasa reasons that, by virtue of its existence, anything—be it her mother, a bird, or sail—expresses itself. Each of these is a part of a "reality" which itself is "already expressed" insofar as it too exists. This "realtà," however, is not external or material, but rather mental; it is an "invisible pensiero," a claim that can be understood by analyzing it in light of Toledana's *espressività*. If there can be no direct engagement with or depiction of reality, as Dasa's reading of El Greco's aesthetic indicates, then it stands to reason that our experience of "realtà" unfolds within the mind: it is always mediated by perception and thought. Hence the narrator-protagonist's claim that to witness "questa materia o mondo"—terms which she uses interchangeably with "realtà"—is to see a "vivente pensiero." All of this entails that everything—Apa, "la vela," the bird—is, in kind, a thought. However, each of these has an agency ("l'uccello canta,"; "la vela si apre"; "Apa invoca il suo Rassa"), and therefore does not exist only in the mind of another, but instead, like D'Orgaz, is "un pensiero che a sua volta pensa." Thus "reality," that "invisible pensiero" is coordinated between the minds of these "thinking thoughts," apparently by the "mente sublime" that the narrator-protagonist identifies as the author of life ("la vita era opera di una mente sublime"). This "realtà," Dasa tells us, is "indistruttibile," and though this "invisibile pensiero" may change or become distant, it is never lost; instead like a Leibnizian compounding of possibles, it only ever produces more "pensieri." The extraordinary similarity between all of this and Leibniz's pre-established harmony suggests that, more likely than not, Ortese was familiar with the German philosopher. Indeed, over two and half centuries before Ortese, Leibniz posited that "Monads have no windows through which anything could enter or depart from them" ("The Monadology," 15). All the monad's perceptions, therefore, are internal to it; reality as it is expressed by these perceptions is harmonized between all monads by God's divine mind. That Ortese, in her own way, posits the idea that everything is a fold within a given mind, which itself is a fold in the mind of the other, leads one to believe that the author had read texts like the "Monadology."

[91] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 388.

[92] Ibid.

In a dizzying flourish, Dasa—this time as the narrator of *Il porto di Toledo*—adds a footnote to her story clarifying that her brother, in actuality, was never happy: "Qui si vede già," she explains, "come la sua immagine andasse alterandosi (mai era stato lieto) nella mia mente."[93] "Per uno di Toledo," then, is not an attempt to create a likeness, meant to commemorate and fix Rassa's image. As we have already seen, Rassa's essence, his "anima eterna"—along with everything else—is incommensurate with a fixed resemblance. Instead, Dasa reveals, "Per uno di Toledo" is meant only to record what she calls Rassa's "note minime," or what we might call an echo that reverberates across the fold. All of this is revealed as Toledana—now speaking as the narrator of "Per uno di Toledo"—describes how her profound sorrow gave way to a "stupore." "Poi venivano (nel corso dell'espressivo) note minime," she writes. "Ricordavo, per esempio, certi passi di notte, nella nostra casa, quando il silenzio sembra definitivo e tutti sembrano dormire. Cauti passi del nostro Rassa che attraversa furtivo el despacho per andare a dormire, oppure è già coricato, e sento io sola, Dasa, il suo calmo respiro."[94] Here Dasa's "Espressività scritta" gives witness to the "Espressività totale"; she cannot possibly represent the eternity to which Rassa now belongs, but she can evoke it through her art, by depicting these "minimal notes," that is, by allowing herself in a mental space to hear once more her brother's footsteps and his breath in the silence of the night. For Dasa—and against all limits be they of perception, representation, or those imposed by the regime—Rassa is eternal.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., 389.

A Narrative Fold: *L'Iguana*

Published a decade before *Il Porto di Toledo*, in 1965, *L'Iguana* can be seen as an earlier iteration of Conra and Damasa's poetics of *espressività*. The novel is also critical of Fascism, albeit less directly, and with a focus particularly on the issue of colonization. The narrative follows protagonist Don Carlo Ludovico Aleardo di Grees, the count of Milan—also known as Daddo—as he embarks on a sea voyage in search of real estate and lands on the small island of Ocaña. The island's inhabitants include its colonizers, the marquis don Ilario Guzman and his brothers, as well as their servant, Estrellita the Iguana, who is the "epitome of the subaltern."[95] These characters and Ocaña itself are seemingly enchanted, for on this island, appearances, spaces, and time itself violate all norms. In particular, Estrellita's appearance undergoes multiple mutations over the course of the novel—from little girl to old woman, human to iguana, and bird to monkey. These peculiar transformations, I argue, can be understood in the context of Ortese's dialogue with the Baroque. The author, in fact, underscores the importance of the Baroque to her novel with her repeated citations of baroque art. For example, *L'Iguana*'s enchanted island setting with its shape-shifting characters recalls Armida's island of illusions in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), Giovan Battista Marino's Cyprus in his *L'Adone* (1623), and the remote Mediterranean island of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-1611). *The Tempest*, in fact, is one of *L'Iguana*'s crucial hypotexts, and the Iguana herself is arguably modeled on Caliban.[96] Furthermore, in an important metaliterary moment, the novel's narrator suggests that Daddo, exasperated by the puzzling and tragic events he has witnessed, is living out a baroque tale: "Il

[95] Gian Maria Annovi, "'Call Me My Name': The Iguana, the Witch, and the Discovery of America," in *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, eds. Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 338.

[96] See Annovi, especially 333-336.

conte si sentiva stanco, ormai, parendogli questa una storia del Seicento spagnola, pazzesca nella nostra epoca tanto chiara."[97]

Despite Ortese's many and important sources, a careful reading shows that Diego Velázquez is nevertheless the most crucial, at least for understanding the Iguana's metamorphoses. The author's references to Velázquez are subtle, but, as we will see, deeply revealing about her approach to the representation of Estrellita. Though his paintings differ significantly from those of El Greco, I will show that Ortese nonetheless identified Velázquez's works also as exemplars of the baroque fold. Inspired particularly by *Las Meninas*, the author conceives of her title character as a narrative fold, who is fundamentally irreducible to any single image, resemblance, or signifier. The Iguana's physiognomy thus "unfolds" each time she appears, so that she always assumes a different form, which paradoxically is all that the reader can ever know of her. Her multiplicity constitutes a mode of resistance to the limits that are imposed on her being by other characters in the novel who would subjugate her to their colonial ideology, dismissively labeling her as a servant, beast, or iguana. Ortese incorporates key elements of the baroque aesthetic into her fiction, in other words, as a way of weakening and even destabilizing the univocity that the Iguana's oppressors try to assign to her and her significance. It is also in this way that Ortese, through Estrellita, takes aim at fascist colonialism—of which she had firsthand experience—and resists the violent reduction and subjugation of the colonial other.

Ortese's Velázquez

Unlike in *Il porto di Toledo*, with its express citations of El Greco, in *L'Iguana*, the references to Velázquez are more indirect. Nevertheless, as Inge Lanslots has shown, an attentive

[97] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 100. For an in-depth discussion of the many citations of baroque art found throughout *L'Iguana*, see Joseph Tumolo, "Reinventing the Baroque in Anna Maria Ortese's *L'Iguana*," *Italian Quarterly*, forthcoming.

reader will notice his influence, especially that of *Las Meninas*.[98] It is particularly telling that one of the many names that Ortese invents for the Iguana is "menina."[99] The author seems to have recognized some version of Estrellita in Velázquez's canvases very early on, at the aforementioned 1939 exhibition in Geneva. At the time, she was particularly struck by the dwarves in *Las Meninas* and in *The Jester Don Diego de Acedo* (1631).[100] Looking at the second of these paintings, she described the court dwarf as a "figura di una tragica e dolce bellezza,"[101] terms that could easily apply to Estrellita, who, furthermore, is "alta quanto un bambino."[102]

For her part, Ortese was well aware of Velázquez's approach to the art of painting. At the same exhibition, Ortese concludes that, in *Las Meninas*, Velázquez "dipinge sé stesso mentre, al cavalletto, sta ritraendo l'Infante Margherita e le damigelle d'onore di lei."[103] In this way, Ortese recognized that *Las Meninas* constitutes a meta-artistic statement on Velázquez's part as a representation of the act of representation, which in turn informed her choice to portray Estrellita in such a way as to suggest that she is a fold. If we assume, with Ortese, that the subject of Velázquez's *depicted* canvas, which is turned away from the viewer of the actual painting, is in fact the Infanta and her maids, then we might say that the basis of the artist's meta-representation

[98] Lanslots, "Beasts, Goblins, and Other Chameleonic Creatures," 298-299.

[99] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 43, 95, 140.

[100] In her article, Ortese only identifies the painting by its subject's nickname, "il Nano Primo." On its own this might cause confusion as to which painting she is describing, for the identity of El Primo is disputed. While some argue that El Primo is Sebastián de Morra—who appears in a 1644 portrait by Velázquez—others point to Diego de Acedo. However, the exhibition catalogue confirms that Ortese was looking upon the 1631 canvas. See M. Marius Noul et al., eds., *Les chefs-d'oeuvre du Musée du Prado* (Geneva: Ville de Genève, 1939), 17.

[101] Ortese, "Maestri Spagnoli," 22.

[102] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 23.

[103] Ibid., 21

is his own gaze as it is figured in the painting, for the perspective that the he paints himself as having on the scene is different from the one that he provides the viewer in the finished canvas.

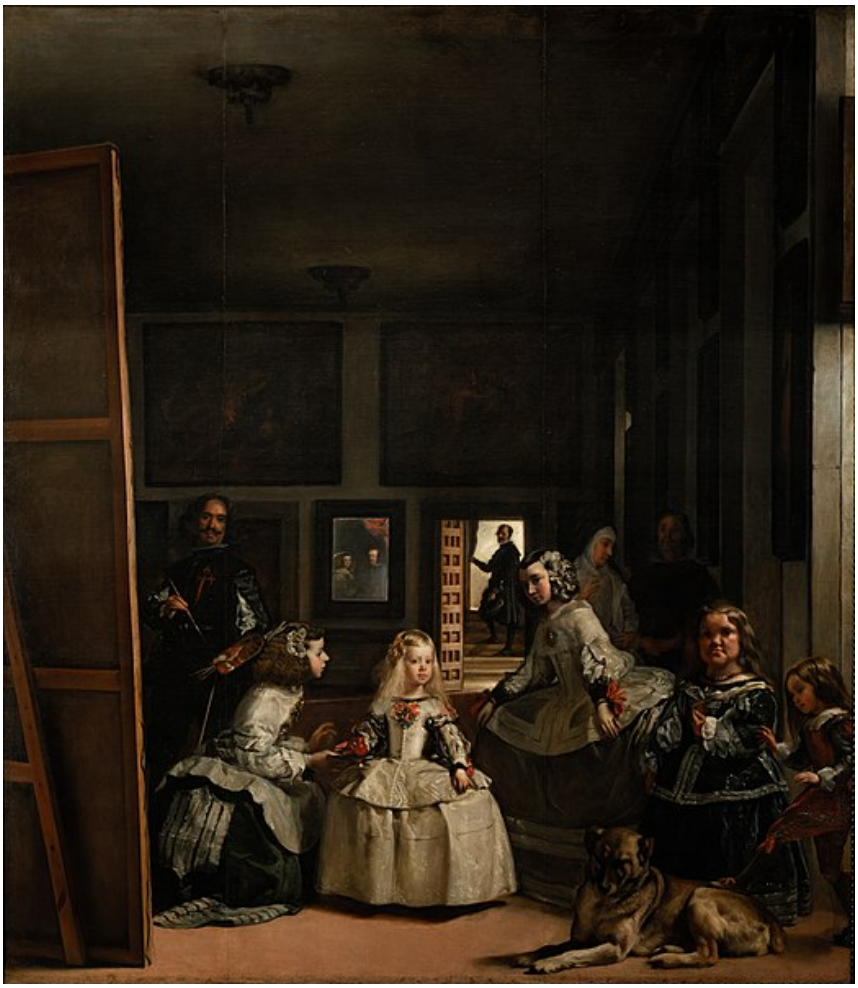

Fig. 3.3. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656, oil on canvas, 318 x 276 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid. Image: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Las_Meninas,_by_Diego_Vel%C3%A1zquez,_from_Prado_in_Google_Earth.jpg.

He suggests, in other words, that the same scene could have been perceived from a different vantage point and that the finished product is merely one of many possible points of view of the Infanta Margarita and her maids of honor. In turn, the painting is not posited as a resemblance: as with El Greco, it is not an "objective," "realistic," or "accurate" rendering of the scene, but rather a rendering of the artist's subjective perception and aesthetic choices. The mirror in the painting's background, to the right of Velázquez, only increases the image's complexity in a way that was

clearly not lost on Ortese. This mirror famously reflects the images of Philip IV and Mariana of Austria as though the king and queen were present in the space of the viewer. If the Infanta and her maids are presented as a depiction of a subjective perception, the king and queen's appearance in the painting is mediated by their reflection. This baroque flourish on Velázquez's part might help to explain the significance of the seemingly magical mirror that appears in chapter seven of *L'Iguana*. As night falls, Daddo spies the marquis don Ilario from behind as he stands on a balcony, gazing at himself in the ornate mirror. Though unable to directly see Ilario's face, Daddo can make out its reflection, and is shocked to find that his visage is transformed: "Le rughe e gli affanni che le avevano causate, completamente cancellate, sparite."[104] Though Ilario's reflection is still a likeness of sorts—Daddo, after all, recognizes him—here Ortese rejects the notion that even a "mirror image" fully resembles the subject it reflects.

All of this indicates that, for Ortese, there is no direct imitation of the real in *Las Meninas*; instead, in the author's view, the painting's subject is mediated through perception, reflection, and even other artworks, if we account for the many paintings that Velázquez includes on the walls in the background. In Deleuzian terms, the painter indicates that these figures—and indeed the entire scene—are folds that will always appear differently from different perspectives and in different representations. Their totality will always elude the artist who must necessarily select what to depict. Though Deleuze himself wrote relatively little about *Las Meninas* (Velázquez, surprisingly, is not even mentioned in his study of the Baroque), and never expressly connected it to the fold, it is telling that his writings on the painting almost always pertain to the Foucauldian analysis of the

[104] Ibid., 67.

canvas. In fact, it was in *Foucault* (1986) that Deleuze first described the concept of the fold, two years before his monograph on Leibniz.[105]

It is the aesthetic of the fold as it is found in *Las Meninas*, I argue, that inspired Ortese's depiction of Estrellita in *L'Iguana*. From the very first encounter with the Iguana, the careful reader will notice that she is never presented directly to our gaze: her ever-mutating appearance is always presented as a representation of a representation or of a perception. The unreliable narrator of *L'Iguana* only adds to this complexity, for just as Velázquez gazes out from his canvas, she frequently addresses the reader, making her presence in the text as conspicuous as possible.[106] Moreover, it is even suggested that *L'Iguana* has more than one narrator, such as when, at the end of the text, the narrative voice asks the reader's forgiveness and refers to herself with a first person plural direct object pronoun—"perdonaci, Lettore"[107]—indicating that the narrated events are told from multiple points of view. Given this unreliability and multiplicity, the narrative voice—or voices—of *L'Iguana* reveal that, like Velázquez, their perspective is far from stable, fixed, or privileged. Instead, as we will see, Ortese rejects any kind of realism that claims to portray the "true" essence of the Iguana; rather, through her narrator, she claims that it is impossible to speak of her directly.

---

[105] Deleuze's writings on Foucault's reading of Velázquez can be found in *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 57-58, 80-81 and in his seminars dating to November 12 and December 17 of 1985 (see Gilles Deleuze, "Foucault/04," The Deleuze Seminars, trans. Mary Beth Mader, https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/foucault/lecture-04 and "Foucault/08," The Deleuze Seminars, trans. Samantha Bankston,https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/foucault/lecture-08). He also briefly discusses Velázquez in reference to Francis Bacon. See *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum, 2003), 53-54. For more on the fold as it relates to Deleuze's analysis of Foucault, see Nicolò Seggiaro's *La chair et le pli* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2009), 30-31 and Simon O'Sullivan's brief essay, "Fold," in *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 107-108.

[106] Lanslots was the first to note the connection between Velázquez's representation of himself in *Las Meninas*, and the positioning of Ortese's narrator in *L'Iguana* (298).

[107] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 188.

In this way, it becomes clear that Ortese, not unlike Michel Foucault after her in *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966) , saw *Las Meninas*—and, as we have seen, art more broadly—as lacking any "foundation," that is, any "true" relationship with the subject it depicts. In the Foucauldian reading—unlike Ortese's—the mirror is the key to understanding Velázquez's painting, for it reveals "the centre around which the entire representation is ordered: it is [the king and queen] who are being faced, and towards them that everyone is turned."[108] This creates a tension with the fact that the monarch and his wife are not present in the image, except by way of their reflection in the mirror: the very figures the painting claims to depict are not present in it. This, at the very end of his essay, leads Foucault to conclude that the painting's foundation has disappeared. Both its subject, the king and queen, and its artist—who share the same space external to the image—are absent. There is no longer any relationship between the painting and "the person it resembles or the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance."[109] In place of the artist and subject, there is "an essential void." *Las Meninas* is thus "representation in its pure form," for it "has been finally freed from the relation that was impeding it."[110] As we have already seen, Ortese came to a similar conclusion in her reading of El Greco; she differs, however, in one important way from Foucault's postmodern analysis. If, for the philosopher, underlying representation is that "essential void," for Ortese, instead, there is no correspondence between art and its subject because of the unfathomable difference that is the "true" nature of things. As I will argue in the following pages, Ortese, this time in dialogue with Velázquez, develops a strategy for the representation of Estrellita that is meant to resist the illusion of sameness by continually producing difference. In turn, *L'Iguana* is

[108] Michel Foucault, *On the Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1994), 14.

[109] Ibid., 16.

[110] Ibid.

directed at exposing and critiquing the limits that are imposed upon Estrellita. Throughout the course of the novel, we discover that the Iguana is inherently irreducible and therefore resists all fixed "cartellini" or categories, which her colonial oppressors employ to deny her the freedom of her limitlessness.

The Colonial Other

There can be no doubt that colonization is a central concern in *L'Iguana*. The Guzman brothers, in fact, proudly trace their heritage to seventeenth-century colonial expansion, evoking, once again, baroque culture.[111] Though they were not born in Portugal, the brothers still identify as Portuguese: "tale almeno era la nostra famiglia, quando da Lisbona, nel '600, si traferì qui," Ilario Guzman explains, referring to his island home.[112] At the same time, the Guzmans are engaged in a modern-day practice of colonization. Not only do they continue to relegate Estrellita to the status of subaltern, but Ilario's fiancée and her wealthy family are twentieth-century colonizers, "representatives of the capitalistic first world," who, along with the clergyman don Fidenzio, conspire "to seize and change Ocaña," which will become a tourist destination.[113] In all of this, it is important to remember that Anna Maria Ortese was no stranger to colonization, and in fact lived in Italian dominated Libya for three years as a child.

[111] European imperialism at this time carried baroque art and culture across the globe from Mexico City to Goa, and from Lima to Manila, making the Baroque transnational and the first global aesthetic in history. As we saw in the introduction to this dissertation, and again in chapter 2, scholars such as Peter Davidson have argued that the Baroque's transnationalism was one of its defining traits. See Peter Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 2.

[112] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 21.

[113] Adria Frizzi, "Performance, or Getting a Piece of the Other, or in the Name of the Father, or the Dark Continent of Femininity, or Just like a Woman: Anna Maria Ortese's 'L'Iguana,'" *Italica* 79, no. 3 (2002): 387.

When the Orteses arrived in Libya in 1924, it had already been under Italian control for about thirteen years, and ruled as two separate colonies, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. Ortese and her family initially stayed in Tripoli, before settling on property conceded by the government, about forty kilometers outside of the city.[114] In a 1973 interview with Dacia Maraini, Ortese admits that she was very young at the time, and says that it was only later, at age twelve when she was already in Naples, that she was "nata alla vita."[115] Even so, when Maraini asked Ortese to describe her time in Africa, the latter responded that it was "molto importante."[116] One especially significant event, at least in the context of this discussion, is that Libya was where Ortese experienced her first romantic feelings. As the author told Maraini, it was at age twelve, shortly before leaving Tripoli, that "Mi sono innamorata di un ragazzo arabo. Lo guardavo camminare. Mi piaceva il suo corpo, minuto, leggero. Era la prima volta che scoprivo la magia di un'altra persona."[117] Years later, as an adult, Ortese must have realized that this attraction, in the context of Italy's African colonies, was highly transgressive. In 1937, in fact, the regime outlawed romantic or sexual relationships between Italians and African colonial subjects. Initially, this expressly applied to Italian East Africa; as Andrea Tarchi has shown, the status of such relationships in Italian Libya was more ambiguous until June 1939 when Mussolini issued the order, "Sanzioni penali per la difesa del prestigio della razza di fronte ai nativi dell'Africa Italiana," which "erased any possible doubt or disagreement regarding the application in the Libyan territories of the 1937 law."[118]

[114] Clerici, *Apparizione e visione*, 45.

[115] Ortese, interview by Dacia Maraini, 28.

[116] Ibid., 26.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Andrea Tarchi, "A 'catastrophic consequence': Fascim's debate on the legal status of Libyans and the issue of mixed marriages (1938-1939)," *Postcolonial Studies* (2021): 13.

Although this policy was opposed by the governor of Italian Libya, Italo Balbo, his aims were no less racist; he opted instead for a "demographic colonization," designed to "outnumber Libyans to irrelevance."[119] All of this was accompanied, no less, by unrelenting propaganda that depicted the people of Libya as "backwards" and the "beneficiaries" of Italian modernization.[120] If for Ortese the encounter with the other is marked with an intense interest, attraction, and "magia," by contrast the Fascists brutally treated the colonial subaltern as inferior and as a threat to the "purity" of the race. Against this logic, Ortese depicts her Estrellita as an ever unfolding mystery as her visage continually changes.

The Menina: Estrellita the Iguana

Even when she is first introduced to readers at the beginning of the novel, the Iguana's appearance, like Velázquez's figures, is already highly mediated, alluding to her folded irreducibility. The narrator first presents Estrellita through Daddo's fundamentally unstable perception of her. Before setting foot on Ocaña, the count spies a group of people on the island from his yacht, the *Luisa*, including "una vecchia (tale sembrava) intenta a fare la calza."[121] Upon arriving on the island, however, Daddo is shocked to discover that this woman is instead the Iguana: "quella che egli aveva preso per una vecchia, altri non era che una bestiola verdissima e alta quanto un bambino, dall'apparente aspetto di una lucertola gigante, ma vestita da donna."[122] Not only does the Iguana's appearance shift in Daddo's eyes from human to animal, but also from

[119] Ibid., 6.

[120] For more on the image of Libyans in Italy during the Ventennio, see Gabriele Bassi, *Sudditi di Libia* (Milan: Mimesis Editore, 2018).

[121] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 18.

[122] Ibid., 23.

old to young. When he first speaks to Estrellita, he addresses her as "nonnina," only to realize "che la creatura che aveva chiamato nonnina era in realtà ancora meno di una ragazza, essendo un'iguanuccia di non più di sette otto anni."[123] With comments like "una vecchia (tale sembrava)," the narrator suggests that she knows more than the reader and Daddo; she is at least aware that the Iguana's appearances are precisely that. However, in this first meeting with Estrellita, the narrative voice declines to depict her directly; in a move reminiscent of the regime of representation and perception that Velázquez stages in *Las Meninas*, Estrellita first appears to the reader as the narrator's description of Daddo's subjective vision of her. True to the aesthetic of the fold, each glimpse of the Iguana reveals yet another one of the potentially infinite series of her appearances.

This reaches a dizzying level of complexity when the Iguana appears for the first time as Perdita, who is presented through superimposed layers of perception, representation, and memory. Despite a few early hints, it is only much later in the novel that the reader definitively grasps that Perdita and Estrellita are one in the same, a point I will discuss below. For now, let us note that Perdita is first introduced to the reader in a painting of the Guzman brothers' mother. Ortese's narrator describes her as she appears in the image, namely as a "minuscola e oscura creatura" whose "muso non si vedeva."[124] Daddo, unable to see the figure's face, believes that "si trattasse di un uccello" until don Ilario tells him that she is a "scimmietta, di nome Perdita, [che] era molto cara ai suoi genitori e cresciuta con lui come una sorella."[125] Perdita is thus presented to the reader through the narrator's description of the painting, which is in turn mediated by Daddo's vision and Ilario's memory of the little creature: her appearance is given as a representation of a

[123] Ibid., 25.

[124] Ibid., 39.

[125] Ibid., 40.

representation, mediated through perception and memory. Each layer of mediation changes her visage from an obscure, minuscule, and faceless creature to a bird, and from a bird to a little monkey. In the space of a few lines, Ortese remarkably depicts her Iguana as a fold over a fold over a fold.

Naturally, in this first introduction to Perdita, the reader suspects that she might be the Iguana, as both are shapeshifting creatures. Yet the narrative voice, oddly enough, never comments on this unusual, shared trait. Instead, the definitive revelation that Estrellita is Perdita comes through reported dialogue later in the novel, further confirming that the narrator, like Velázquez in *Las Meninas*, is neither objective nor omniscient. Towards the novel's end, the narrator describes the appearance of a figure who is undoubtedly Estrellita. Daddo, she says, "*la* rivide. Non era una Iguana e nemmeno una regina. Era una servetta come ce ne sono tante nelle isole."[126] This undoubtedly refers to Estrellita, who now appears not as an iguana but as an ordinary servant. The most telling revelation, however, comes from Daddo's dialogue. When he sees the Iguana, he addresses the creature as "«Perdita!»," confirming that the *scimmietta* and the Estrellita are the same individual.[127] That this critical information is not reported directly by the narrator suggests that she has a different perspective on and knowledge of the events she is narrating with respect to the novel's characters; in this case, Daddo realizes something that she does not, which shows that she is an imperfect witness. On one hand, read in light of Ortese's textual dialogue with the baroque aesthetic, it becomes clear that the narrator by her very nature cannot do otherwise, for if Estrellita is a fold, there is no possibility of a fixed way of seeing or depicting her. On the other hand, here the novel's core political critique begins to emerge: the other is always incommensurate with the

[126] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 181.

[127] Ibid.

labels that we ascribe to her. As becomes clear in the course of the narrative, power and oppression are justified by denying this very point, something the author certainly realized as she reflected back on her childhood years in Italian Tripolitania.

It is precisely for this reason that Ortese, through Daddo, takes an expressly anti-realist stance early in the novel. In a conversation with Daddo about his poetry, Ilario raises the topic of realism: "«Sentii parlare di realismo. Che cos'è questo?»" he asks. Daddo responds that realism, "«Dovrebbe essere [...] un'arte di illuminare il reale. Purtroppo non si tiene conto che il reale è a più strati, e l'intero Creato, quando si è giunti ad analizzare l'ultimo strato, non risulta affatto reale, ma pura e profonda immaginazione».”[128] For Ortese, realism can never live up to its promise, for it presupposes that the real possesses a definitive set of traits that the artist, in turn, can accurately represent. Instead in this novel there is only layer ("strato") upon layer—or perhaps fold upon fold—leading to a final, jolting revelation: what lies at the end of the narrative process has nothing to do with reality or objective truth. Beneath the "intero Creato" with its endless "strati" or folds, we will always encounter only acts of imagination—whose perspectives are always radically subjective and ungrounded. Because the real cannot be experienced in its totality, any attempt to account for it can only ever be mediated by the creative mind, with all of its powers and all of its limits. As the author goes on to reveal, to try to reduce the Iguana to any kind of realist portrayal, or, in other words, to formulate an answer to the question of identity that she poses, runs the risk of relegating her to the status of subaltern. To illustrate this very point, at the end of the novel, Ortese provides her readers with the most "realistic" depiction of Estrellita in the entire text.

In this description of the Iguana, the title character no longer appears as a shape-shifting and hybrid creature; instead she is sadly dismissed as nothing more than an unpleasant servant. In

[128] Ibid., 56.

a telling move, this portrayal of Estrellita constitutes a representation of a representation: we encounter the Iguana through a letter written by a French tourist, Mrs. Rubens, who is staying at the Piccolo Hotel di Ocaña: the enchanted island has been transformed into a resort destination. Complaining to her husband about her stay at the Piccolo Hotel, Rubens writes,

> "«c'è anche una ragazzetta che non mi piace punto: l'età può essere molta, o nulla. Non si vede a causa di come si pettina. Uno sgarbo istintivo, e qualche trasognatezza, annullano tutte le qualità (improbabili) della sua personcina. Quando ti guarda—e gli occhi, per la verità sono un lago di luce nera, sono fissi e dolci—può sembrare anche buona, ma poi capisci che non guarda te, guarda qualcosa, dietro di te, che non ritornerà, e ciò fa una cattiva impressione. Più che deficiente [...] a me sembra matta, uno di quei disgraziati impasti di orgoglio e cattivo carattere, che fanno la inguaribile miseria di queste isole.»"[129]

Mrs. Rubens' name tells us all we need to know. It is no accident that she shares a surname with a major baroque painter. She is not describing the Iguana "as she is"; rather, Mrs. Rubens is like an artist whose canvas/text represents a perception of Estrellita. In this case, her "realistic" description is clearly reductive and dismissive. Placed at the end of the novel, this letter marks a stark contrast with the protagonist as the reader has come to know her. Rubens fails to appreciate the essential mystery of Estrellita and her terrible suffering as a subaltern; instead, she dismisses her as an unpleasant *ragazzetta* employed at the hotel. Yet Ortese conveys perhaps a small degree of optimism in this letter, for even Rubens' text—a narrative within the narrative—is unable to entirely dispel the enigma surrounding the Iguana. She does, in fact, struggle to discern Estrellita's age, and though she takes the Iguana to be a girl, the latter's "fixed" eyes—"un lago di luce nera"—seem other than human. If anything, this is a testament to the unwavering resistance that the Iguana's very essence wages against the labels and depictions that rob her of her dignity and worth.

[129] Ibid., 188-189.

For her part, Ortese's nameless narrator seems to become aware both of the risks of representation and of her own limitations. When she introduces Mrs. Rubens' letter to the reader, the narrator finally admits that she cannot speak directly of Estrellita. "Ma qualcosa—perdonaci, Lettore—forse il sapere quanto il conte l'aveva amata, e quanto la povera anima fosse passata curva tra i silenziosi orrori di questo mondo—c'impedisce di parlarne direttamente, e ci contenteremo perciò di riferire qualche tratto di certe lettere che la signora Rubens, moglie di un gioielliere di Lilla, mandò [...] al marito rimasto in Francia."[130] Of course, Ortese has been at pains to establish that there can be no "direct" depiction of an artistic subject; the key in this passage is that the narrator suggests that directly speaking of Estrellita is made impossible by her suffering ("quanto la povera anima fosse passata curva tra i silenziosi orrori di questo mondo"). In other words, the narrative voice indicates that to acquiesce in the belief that there can be a direct representation—that a given depiction or perception is "real"—is to oppress the represented subject. Here the colonial violence that Ortese portrays merges with the problem of the violence of representation; *L'Iguana* is directed both at exposing the logic of colonial oppression and at seeking a way to depict the other that does not do violence to her. The latter is the issue at the core of Ortese's appropriation of the baroque aesthetic in this novel as it relates to the ethics of literature. If on one hand, "the subaltern cannot speak,"[131]—indeed the Iguana is illiterate, "has no access to writing, and thus [is] incapable of self-expression"[132]—on the other, Estrellita "di fronte alla [sua]

[130] Ibid., 188.

[131] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 104.

[132] Annovi, "'Call Me My Name,'" 342.

cancellazione e riscrittura [oppone] una resistenza irriducibile."[133] As Alberica Bazzoni argues, Estrellita's resistance consists of her being "la figura onirica dell'ambivalenza, della compresenza e dell'instabilità."[134] This is to say that the Iguana's very being—that unstable, baroque fold—allows Ortese to represent the subaltern without erasing her, for the author never univocally defines Estrellita. Instead, Ortese presents her title character to the reader as fold upon fold, mediated through the shifting and unreliable perceptions of the narrator and the novel's characters.

Like the narrator, Daddo comes to understand that it is precisely in forcing categories or definitions upon the Iguana that her oppressors justify their violence against her. In fact, Daddo—who over the course of the novel falls in love with Estrellita, recalling Ortese's own early romantic feelings for that unnamed colonial other in Libya—declares his intent to save Estrellita from these labels. This emerges on the heels of a significant scene when Estrellita unsuccessfully attempts to take her own life by throwing herself down a well. Daddo contemplates saving her only to shockingly abandon the scene: "Salì sull'orlo del pozzo, ma poi, mutata l'idea, in quanto sentiva di essere stato ingannato, tornò in sala."[135] This might be seen as an unthinkably callous gesture on Daddo's part. Yet, I argue that Ortese invites her readers to see her novel not as a conventional romance wherein a heroic nobleman rescues a maiden from danger. Instead, she suggests through Daddo that the "rescue" of which the Iguana is truly in need is from the labels that oppress her. Immediately after presumably leaving Estrellita in the well, Daddo—who at this point is falling into an ultimately fatal delirium—returns to the Guzman brothers' house, armed with a gun. When

[133] Alberica Bazzoni, "Anna Maria Ortese e 'il problema dell'esistenza. Quando la bestia parla,'" in *La Grande Iguana. Scenari e visioni a venti'anni dalla morte Anna Maria Ortese. Atti del convegno internazionale*. *Roma, biblioteca Tullio de Mauro, 4-6 giugno 2018*, ed. Angela Bubba (Rome: Aracne editrice, 2020), 67.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ortese, *L'Iguana*, 165.

Ilario notices Daddo's presence, the latter is quick to reassure the marquis that the gun is not meant for him: "«No… non di questo devi temere»," Daddo says referring to his weapon, "«non di questo, Ilario, ma del tuo stesso animo, come io del mio. Vi è qualcosa che ignoriamo, che non vogliamo sapere, vi è qualcuno, nascosto, che c'impedisce di guardare… Vi è un inganno a danno di persone deboli… Vi è nella nostra educazione, qualche errore di base, che costa strazio a molti, e ciò io intendo colpire»."[136] What exactly this "inganno" and "errore" constitute is revealed a few pages later as the protagonist, still delirious, thinks back over his voyage to Ocaña and comes to believe "che non ci sono Iguane, ma solo travestimenti, ideati dall'uomo allo scopo di opprimere il suo simile e mantenuti da una terribile società."[137] In turn, one could say that Daddo, when he enters the Guzman home armed, is taking aim at the "cartellini," stereotypes, or commonplaces that prevent us from seeing the irreducibility that is the "true" nature of things. He has come to learn, in other words, what Ortese herself took away from her encounter with baroque art: that which appears "real" instead "[si disfa] continuamente al pari di un vapore acqueo."[138] The Iguana is never simply an iguana or a servant or monkey or a devil or a beast. Just as Ortese must have understood as she later reflected on her first romantic feelings for that young man in Libya, these labels—like the racism and imperialism of the Fascists—merely serve to obfuscate and violently deny the other's "folded" nature, that "magia di un'altra persona."

Conclusion

In the Baroque, Ortese evidently recognized the possibility of an oppositional poetics that was deeply relevant to modernity, and particularly to issues of class, gender, and imperialism. Like

[136] Ibid., 167.

[137] Ibid., 178.

[138] Ortese, *Il porto di Toledo*, 470.

Carlo Emilio Gadda and Giuseppe Ungaretti, she posits in her works a fold that, because it is unknowable in its totality, overturns all schemas and categories and the oppressive limits that they enforce. While in Ungaretti's conception of it, the fold imperceptibly unites everything in difference, Ortese reminds her readers that the denial of the folded and irreducible totality of the other and the world is itself the logic underpinning the violence and oppression of power. Each writer, furthermore, saw in the Baroque a way to contest the fascist revision of Italian urban spaces, suggesting, each in his or her own way, that cities like Rome or Naples are far richer than the regime's monumentality would suggest. At the same time, despite the clear differences between them, Ortese's literary project and approach to the Baroque are reminiscent of Gadda's. Though Gadda believed his writing was mimetic while Ortese rejects the very possibility of mimesis, each issues a stark warning about the dangers of art that reduces its infinitely complex subject. Furthermore, Ortese's work, like that of Gadda, evokes Walter Benjamin's baroque *Trauerspiel*. Gadda's novels, as I argue in chapter 1, like the German drama that Benjamin analyzes, mourn a breathtaking loss of meaning. Likewise, as Lucia Re has shown, Ortese's work can be seen as "posto sotto il segno della rovina, della perdita e del lutto," which are defining traits of the mourning plays.[139] In the case of *Il porto di Toledo* and *L'Iguana*, the object of sorrow is the disenchantment of the world: the loss of mystery that leads to the destruction of Toledo beneath the "Uccelli Turchi," and to the heartrending plight of the Iguana. Ortese's response to this suffering is, once again, not so unlike the mourning play. If German baroque drama can allegorically evoke "truth" which, as a "unity" cannot be broken down into a direct representation,[140] Ortese's works, in a similar gesture, always point to the fold that defies depiction

[139] Re, "Il vento passa. Anna Maria Ortese e il colonialismo europeo," 62.

[140] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 5.

in its totality. It is in this way that she hopes to restore in her readers some sense of the mystery and irreducible complexity that have been lost, and to remind them, in the midst of the ever-present threat of the return of Fascism, of the suffering that ensued when the limit was imposed in its place.

Conclusion:
A Baroque Modernism

From the narrative logorrhea of Carlo Emilio Gadda to the laconism of Giuseppe Ungaretti, and from the former's embrace of mimesis to Anna Maria Ortese's rejection of any possibility of resemblance, at first glance it may seem that the many and important differences between these authors would suggest that they share little or no common ground. Yet, in something of a self-referential twist, all these differences are ultimately connected through engagement with the baroque fold. Reflecting broadly on Gadda's, Ungaretti's, and Ortese's respective revivals of the Baroque in their writing, there are three points to consider in concluding my study. First, we must account for why the baroque aesthetic, which was so closely associated with power (while also at times contesting it) in early modernity, was not appropriated by the Fascists—unlike both classical and Renaissance art—for their propagandistic aims, and was instead embraced by opponents of the regime, as I have shown for the three authors in question. This in turn will help us to understand how it came to be that the Baroque was so relevant to Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese as specifically *modernist* writers. Finally, with these authors' embrace of modernism in mind, I will discuss some of the ways in which their respective works broadly relate to other major contemporary figures in Italy, as well as their place in the context of the literature and culture of the Novecento.

As I acknowledged in the introduction to this dissertation, the radically transgressive baroque aesthetic was often and successfully placed in the service of power, be it the Counter-Reformation Church or absolutist monarchy. Given its history as a frequent instrument of the ruling elites, we must ask why, in the twentieth century, was it "not massively disseminated in Fascist propaganda?"[1] Addressing this question, Laura Moure Cecchini provides a series of helpful

[1] Laura Moure Cecchini, *Baroquemania. Italian Visual Culture and the Construction of National Identity 1898-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 239.

answers: the Baroque's close association with Catholicism, its "slipperiness as a concept," its fundamental transnationalism, and its appeal in the Novecento to a middle-brow or highbrow public, as opposed to a wider audience, largely made it unattractive to Mussolini's regime.[2] The present study of Gadda's, Ungaretti's, and Ortese's respective appropriations of the Baroque—and especially their engagement with the baroque visual field—sheds further light on this query, and allows me to propose one further answer to it. In particular, I suggest that we consider the relationship between power and the limit in the historical Baroque and in the Novecento respectively. The early modern period saw various long-acknowledged and long-accepted cognitive and cultural limits drastically undermined: colonial expansion vastly expanded the known world; cosmological discoveries made with the telescope definitively invalidated the notion of a finite universe that had prevailed since antiquity; and the first microscopes radically transformed the perception of even the smallest visible elements of life. As John D. Lyons has written,

> "Global, cosmic, and microscopic space thus expanded and untethered from received notions [spurring] the people of the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries to massive innovation and consolidation in almost every domain of life. It is not surprising that the Baroque is described sometimes as a period of confusion and uncertainty and at other times a period of dogmatic authoritarianism. It was necessarily both, and we find these tendencies in all domains and in all lands."[3]

Thus, on one hand, there arose in response to the age of discovery what Lyons calls "a culture of amazement,"[4] or a culture that Giovanni Careri describes as "the ultimate manifestation of a

[2] Ibid., 239-240.

[3] John D. Lyons, "Introduction: The Crisis of the Baroque," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. John D. Lyons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.

[4] Ibid., 2.

civilisation that explosively expanded the boundaries of reality."[5] On the other hand, states and institutions sought to consolidate their position in the face of this upheaval. As Jon Snyder explains, the "widespread sense of cultural decentering and dispersion that accompanied this paradigm shift in knowledge was not met […] without resistance from those who had the most at stake in preserving the status quo."[6] In this context, baroque art can be understood as both an expression of awe at the exciting but subversive newness perceived in an increasingly decentered world, and of the power that sought to sustain its privileges in the midst of this same change; the sponsors of baroque art, in other words, found themselves in the position of needing to make their authority appear as limitless as reality itself suddenly seemed to be. This would explain why, at least for a time in the early modern period, the Cartesian model of vision and the reasoning associated with it was challenged by the "multiplicity" and "openness" that Martin Jay associates with the baroque model of seeing,[7] whose logic favored the fold rather than the grid.

By contrast, in the context of modern Italy, from the Risorgimento to the Ventennio, this dynamic between power and the limit, I argue, was turned on its head: the Cartesian model, which favors a "lucid, linear, solid, fixed, planimetric, [and] closed form," was clearly favored by centralized power.[8] Nationalism, which was a key component of the ideologies of both the liberal state and the fascist regime, is symptomatic of this. As we have seen, fascist nationalism striated, hierarchized, and imposed borders, boundaries, and limits on language, sex, gender, class, race,

[5] Giovanni Careri, *Baroques* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 7.

[6] Jon R. Snyder, "The Other Voice: *Amor nello specchio*," in *Love in the Mirror* by Giovan Battista Andreini, ed. and trans. Jon R. Snyder (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5.

[7] Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality. Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 16.

[8] Ibid.

and on urban space. To be clear, I do not believe that the Cartesian model is inherently authoritarian, just as I do not view the Baroque as merely a vehicle for the propaganda of the *ancien régime*. My intention is to point out that, in the Novecento, powerful institutions focused on imposing rigid hierarchical limits to the order of representation: the dominant model in modern Italy is anything but baroque. Instead the Baroque, with its prevailing aesthetic of the fold, was simply too antithetical to Fascism and its nationalist ideology for the regime to appropriate it. In fact, as scholars like Peter Davidson have suggested, a kind of anti-nationalist tendency is one of the Baroque's defining traits: "The nation state is the enemy of the Baroque," he writes.[9] That the Fascists sought to establish a totalitarian state could only exacerbate this inherent tension with the cosmopolitan and international tendencies of baroque art. With a fundamental shift in the way in which power justified itself, in the twentieth century the Baroque's propagandistic value for fascism was greatly diminished; what instead survived in its revisions and reinventions was its profoundly transgressive function, its capacity to subvert the logic of the limit, as evidenced by the writings of authors like Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese.

In this way, it becomes clear that these authors' works take aim not only at Fascism; rather, they also constitute critiques of the logic of modernity on which the regime staked its power. If modernism is, as Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni have argued, "the network of cultural responses

[9] Peter Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 25. As is by now clear, the Baroque was essentially transnational. Moreover, it was the first global esthetic in history; Peter Davidson describes it as "supra-confessional," and "an international system of communication in all the arts." Davidson further argues that, "For all that is the style which served the *ancien régime* and the era of absolutism in religion (reformed as well as Counter-Reformation), Baroque is not intrinsically authoritarian: rather Baroque is a manner susceptible of almost infinite local adaptation and naturalization. *It is permeable*. The Baroque of Cuzco is not a primitive imitation of the Baroque of Madrid, it is a localisation of a universal manner" (13-14). This permeability and universality entail the inimical relationship between the nation state and the Baroque that Davidson describes. He further explains that, "specifically, the traditions of historiography and cultural criticism fostered by the nation state are intensely hostile to those elements in the early modern world which were clearly supra-national and common to almost all territories." Among these elements are "international Latin literature" and an "international language of symbol and image" (25).

[…] which reflect on, react to, and seek to articulate alternatives to the triumph of the institutions of modernity," we might say that, beyond a direct resistance to Fascism, Gadda's, Ungaretti's and Ortese's respective works take aim at the purported "triumph" of the logic of the limit.[10] For each of these authors, this specifically entails challenging and subverting the alleged objectivity of any claim to provide a finite, fully coherent vision of the real. Gadda thus insists that that all unified understandings will be decompounded as the *gnommero* continues to fold and unfold; Ungaretti embraces a unity that connects all things in difference; and Ortese tells us that whatever appears to be real will, in its finitude, vanish like "water vapor." Each in turn reveals that the limit is always only a mere appearance, not grounded in the real, but rather the product of a flickering and intermittent subjectivity: to lose sight of this leads invariably to the failure underpinning the violence and oppression of fascist modernity.

As such, in taking up and revising the Baroque, these writers, in varying ways, align themselves with Leibniz's critique of the Cartesian structure of perception, particularly as it pertains to questions of difference. To understand this, we must first recall that for both Leibniz and Descartes, perception is at the foundation of ontology and epistemology. From its inception in Descartes' philosophy, this is specifically restricted. "Distinct perceptions" are all that can be known, and the most important of these is the individual consciousness: "Cogito ergo sum." This claim entails, on one hand, that the Cartesian subject is rooted in itself and in sameness; on the other hand, all that can be known of the world stems from this same foundation, that is from whatever can be assimilated into this singular, sovereign, and knowing mind. Leibniz, by contrast, outright rejects the Cartesian emphasis on self-consciousness. "And it is here that the Cartesians

[10] Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni. "Modernism in Italy: An Introduction," in *Italian Modernism. Italian Culture between Decadentism and the Avant-Garde*, eds. Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 12.

have fallen far short" he writes, "as they have given no thought to perceptions which are not apperceived."[11] The problem that Leibniz identifies here is that, in restricting perception to the contents of the subject's consciousness, Descartes does not sufficiently consider difference. As the German philosopher explains in the *Monadology*, monads, which are simple substances and therefore have no parts, must be differentiated by an internal state, namely perception. It is perception that introduces into monads "a plurality of affections and relations" that distinguishes them one from another. In other words, if there is a multitude of different minds, they must each have different distinct perceptions, for otherwise there can be no difference between them. From this it follows that those perceptions that are fully distinct in one mind will be indistinct in others. For Leibniz, then, there is no sameness or privileged vantage point on the universe (with perhaps the exception of the super monad, that is, the divine); there is no limit and therefore, in its stead, there are infinite variations of difference. This helps us to grasp why, as modernists who take aim at the limit, Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese ultimately reject sameness as an illusion, whether consciously (Ortese and Ungaretti) or unconsciously (think of Gadda's rejection of fascist colonialism).

With all of this in mind, it is worth taking time to locate these writers within the broader scope of the Italian literature and culture of the Novecento. On one hand, Gadda's, Ungaretti's, and Ortese's specifically literary resistance to Fascism indicates that they can be seen as working in a vein similar to that of other modernist *prosatori* and poets such as Eugenio Montale, Paola Masino, or Ennio Flaiano, each of whom developed a practice of literary writing that contests the

[11] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "The Monadology," in *Leibniz's Monadology. A New Translation and Guide*, trans. and ed. Lloyd Strickland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 16.

ideological certitude of the regime.[12] However, the writers examined in this dissertation take a distinctly different view of the self and other with respect to another key school of modernism, that of Luigi Pirandello. If for Pirandello there is no essential self but only one mask after another, each of which is as false as the one before, then Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese posit respective formulations of the individual not as something false but rather as unknowable in her or his totality.[13] In their view, as we have seen, to fail to grasp this, or, to try to reduce the other to a label or category, constitutes a violent and potentially fatal act. In turn, we might say that these authors take up a kind of "baroque modernism"; they reject voids, meaninglessness, and any notion that there is a lack of truth in favor of a vision of plentitude, of ever-compounding meaning, and of a truth that cannot be fully mediated in language or representation, a realization that so often is as sorrowful as it is liberating.

In claiming these authors as modernists, it is important to address some of the striking parallels between their work and that of the postmodernists—think of Gadda's rejection of any possibility of reading the word in unities, or Ortese's insistence that there is no guaranteed correspondence between an artwork and the subject it purports to represent. Despite these similarities, the authors discussed herein cannot be understood as exponents of postmodernism precisely because they reject the idea that underlying all narratives and representations is only a

[12] On Montale see, Jared M. Becker, "'What We are Not': Montale's Anti-Fascism Revisited," *Italica* 60, no. 4 (1983): 331-339 and Giuseppe Gazzola, *Montale, the Modernist* (Florence: Leo Olschki Editore, 2016); on Masino, see Marella Feltrin-Morris, "Visions of War: Universality, Dignity, and the Emptiness of Symbols in Paola Masino," *Italica* 87. No. 10 (Summer 2010): 194-208, Louise Rozier, "Motherhood and Maternity in Paola Masino's Novels 'Monte Ignoso' and 'Nascita e morte della massaia," *Italica* 88, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 245-261, Lucia Re, "Polifonia e dialogismo nei romanzi di epoca fascista: censura, autocensura e resistenza," in *Paola Masino*, ed. Beatrice Manetti (Milan: Mondadori: 2016), 163-176; and on Flaiano see Lucia Re, "Italy's first postcolonial novel and the end of (neo)realism," *The Italianist* 37, no. 3 (2017): 417-435.

[13] As Pirandello wrote in his 1908 essay, "L'umorismo": "Ciascuno si racconcia la maschera come può—la maschera esteriore. Perché dentro poi c'è l'altra, che spesso non s'accorda con quella di fuori. E niente è vero! Vero il mare, sì, vera la montagna; vero il sasso; vero un filo d'erba; ma l'uomo? Sempre mascherato, senza volerlo, senza saperlo" (Luigi Pirandello, "L'umorismo. Parte seconda. Essenza, caratteri e materia dell'umorismo," in *L'umorismo e altri saggi*, ed. Enrico Ghidetti [Florence: Giunti, 1994], 141).

void. Instead, they embrace the enigmas of the fold that by definition will elude the limits of any individual artwork, setting them apart from a postmodern approach to literature.[14]

These three modernist authors are further distinguished by the relationship that each establishes with the tradition, specifically in the form of a "return to the Baroque." In fact, they each may be seen as breaking with a prevalent—perhaps even hegemonic—classicist tendency in Italian culture. We have seen, for example, how Ungaretti, faced with Fascism's neo-classicist architectural programs for Rome and its exaltation of the ancient imperial past above all else, emphasized the city's baroque monuments as a counterweight to the regime's transformation of the Urbe. Furthermore, in their literary works, Ungaretti, Gadda, and Ortese clearly differentiate themselves from precursors like Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli, or Gabriele D'Annunzio who, in differing ways, drew upon the art and literature of antiquity, often to nationalist ends that the authors discussed in the present study ultimately reject. If figures like D'Annunzio, as Somigli and Moroni have argued, could not "conceive of literary modernity outside of the context of Classicism," then to turn to the Baroque as an alternative tradition—or at least as a way to place classicist precepts under pressure—marks an important contribution on the part of the authors examined herein to the Italian literature of the Novecento, which saw continued and significant innovation outside of a classicist paradigm. Even so, we must be mindful of the fact that the writers discussed in these pages represent only one strand of twentieth-century anti-classicism in Italy. The Futurist avant-garde, for example, prominently advocated and practiced anti-classicism and

[14] As Jean-François Lyotard famously argued, postmodernism is marked both by an "incredulity towards metanarratives," and by the subsequent rise of "petits récits," none of which can claim to be objective or universal truths; this is a clear contrast with the baroque vision of an unknowable plenitude—the fold—which is not conceived of as a construct, but rather as a structure of the universe itself. Thus, while postmodernism insists on the absence of an objective viewpoint, baroque artists and thinkers tend to see the objective viewpoint—like that of Leibniz's super monad (i.e.God)—not as non-existent, but rather as inaccessible to the finite human mind. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

set themselves in opposition to any kind of "passatismo."[15] Gadda, Ungaretti, and Ortese instead openly sought to set into work some of the key ideas and traits of an artistic past that had been long derided and repressed within the context of modern Italian culture. It was thus not through a rupture with history, but rather in a return to it, that these writers sought to create for themselves a kind of representational freedom in the face of Italian Fascism. In the Baroque, they were able to detect, and in their writings they were able to expand, the infinite workings of the fold: as Deleuze acutely remarks, "the problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it."[16] Contesting the inherent violence of fascist politics and aesthetics, with its imposition of hierarchies, compartments and limits, Gadda, Ungaretti and Ortese instead turned to the baroque fold, fully cognizant that "the essence of the Baroque entails neither falling into nor emerging from illusion but rather realizing something in illusion itself."[17]

[15] As F.T. Marinetti wrote in the *Futurist Manifesto*, first published in French in 1909 in the pages of *Le Figaro*: "Voulez-vous donc gâcher ainsi vos meilleures forces dans un admiration inutile du passé, dont vous sortez forcément épuisés, amoindris, plétines?" F.T. Marinetti, "Manifeste du futurisme," *Le Figaro*, Feb. 20, 1909. Available online at: https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/10501294.

[16] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 34.

[17] Ibid., 125.

Bibliography

Agnew, John. "The Impossible Capital: Monumental Rome under Liberal and Fascist Regimes, 1870-1943." *Geografiska Annaler* 80, no. 4 (1998): 229-240.

Alcalde, Ángel. *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Aliano, David. *Mussolini's National Project in Argentina*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012.

Anderson, Peter. "How the Spanish Republic saved the Prado's masterpieces." *The Art Newspaper*. May 31, 2016.

Andreini, Giovan Battista. *Love in the Mirror*, edited and translated by Jon R. Snyder. Toronto: Iter Press, 2009.

Annovi, Gian Maria Annovi. "'Call Me My Name': The Iguana, the Witch, and the Discovery of America." In *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, edited by Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo, 323-355. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

Ara, Judith and Isabel Argerich, eds. *Arte protegido. Memoria de la junta del tesoro artístico durante la Guerra civil*. Madrid: Ministero de Cultura, 2009.

Arato, Guido. "La mia Iguana è nata in cucina," *Il Secolo XIX* (September 1986).

"L'Archivio." Eligendo. Accessed July 27, 2022. https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/.

Baroncini, Daniela. *Ungaretti barocco*. Rome: Carocci editore, 2008.

Bassi, Gabriele. *Sudditi di Libia*. Milan: Mimesis Editore, 2018.

Baugh, Bruce. "Body." In *The Deleuze Dictionary*, edited by Adrian Parr, 30-32. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

Bazzoni, Alberica."Anna Maria Ortese e 'il problema dell'esistenza. Quando la bestia parla.'" In *La Grande Iguana. Scenari e visioni a venti'anni dalla morte Anna Maria Ortese. Atti del convegno internazionale*. *Roma, biblioteca Tullio de Mauro, 4-6 giugno 2018*, edited by Angela Bubba, 61-69. Rome: Aracne editrice, 2020.

Becker, Jared M. "'What We are Not': Montale's Anti-Fascism Revisited." *Italica* 60, no. 4 (1983): 331-339.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, translated by Howard Eiland. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019.

Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will. An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Translated by F.L. Pogson. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957.

Bertone, Manuela. "Murderous Desires: Gaddian Matricides from *Novella seconda* to *La cognizione del dolore*." In *Carlo Emilio Gadda. Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Robert S. Dombroski and Manuela Bertone, 111-131. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Blümle, Claudia. "Infinite Folds: El Greco and Deleuze's Operative Function of the Fold." In *On Folding. Towards a New Field of Interdisciplinary Research*, edited by Michael Friedman and Wolgang Schäffner, 77-91. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016.

Boatti, Giorgio. *Preferirei di no. Le storie di dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini*. Turin: Einaudi, 2001.

Bonaccorso, Giusepppe. "Unclassical Forms of Late Roman Architecture and the Roman Baroque. Francesco Borromini and the new classical tradition." In *The Routledge Handbook on the Reception of Classical Architecture*, edited by Nicholas Temple, Andrezj Piotrowski, Juan Manuel Heredia, 394-408. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Brodini, Alessandro. "Santa Maria degli Angeli." In *Michelangelo architetto a Roma*, edited by Mauro Mussolin, 240-245. Milan: Cinisello Balsamo, 2009.

Bruno, Giordano. *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*. Montevarchi: Harmakis Edizioni, 2018.

Buci-Glucksmann. *Baroque Reason. The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller. London: SAGE Publications, 1994.

_____. *La folie du voir. Une esthétique du virtuel*. Paris: Galilée, 2002.

Buonarotti, Michelangelo. *Rime e lettere*. Edited by Antonio Corsaro and Giorgio Masi. Milan: Bompiani, 2016.

Cajati, Claudio, and Yolanda Tungbang, "Indice dei luoghi di Toledo," in *Romanzi I*, ed. Monica Farnetti (Milan: Adelphi, 2002) 1136-1151.

Calabrese, Omar. *L'età neobarocca*. Bari: Laterza, 1987.

Calcaterra, Carlo. *Il parnaso in rivolta: Barocco e anti-barocco nella poesia italiana*. Bologna: Il mulino, 1961.

Calvino, Italo, "Molteplicità," in *Italo Calvino. Saggi*, edited by Mario Barenghi, 715-733. Milan: Mondadori, 1995.

_____. "Il *Pasticciaccio*." In *Italo Calvino. Saggi*, edited by Mario Barenghi, 1076-1084. Milan: Mondadori, 1995.

Cannon, JoAnn. "The Reader as Detective: Notes on Gadda's 'Pasticciaccio.'" *Modern Language Studies* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 41-50.

Careri, Giovanni. *Baroques*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Carrà, Carlo. "Il Seicento e la critica italiana." In *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte*, 77-80. Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969.

Cassata, Francesco. *«La Difesa della razza». Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista*. Turin: Einaudi, 2008.

Cattaneo, Giulio. *Il gran lombardo*. Milan: Garzanti, 1973.

Cecchini, Laura Moure. *Baroquemania. Italian Visual Culture and the Construction of National Identity 1898-1945*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.

_____. "Baroque Futurism: Roberto Longhi, the Seventeenth Century, and the Avant-Garde." *The Art Bulletin* 101, no. 2 (2019): 29-53.

Cervera, Juan Calduch. "El Greco Cartographer: View and Plan of Toledo (1608-1614)." *Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica* 17, no. 19 (2012): 68-77.

Citati, Piero. "La principessa dell'isola." In *L'Iguana* by Anna Maria Ortese, 199-204. Milan: Adelphi, 1986.

Chang, Natasha V. *The Crisis-Woman. Body Politics and the Modern Woman in Fascist Italy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

Clements, Robert J. "Michelangelo as Baroque Poet." *PMLA* 76, no. 3 (1961): 182-192.

Clerici, Luca. *Apparizione e visione. Vita e opere di Anna Maria Ortese*. Milan: Mondadori, 2002.

_____, ed. *Per Anna Maria Ortese*. *Il Giannone* 4, no. 7 (January-December 2006).

Constant, Benjamin. *Le Cahier rouge*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2017.

Contini, Gianfranco, ed. "Introduzione alla *Cognizione del dolore*." *Quarant'anni di amicizia. Scritti su Carlo Emilio Gadda (1934-1988),* edited by Gianfranco Contini, 15-35. Turin: Einaudi, 1989.

_____. "Saggio introduttivo," in *La cognizione del dolore*, 5-28. Turin: Einaudi, 1963.

_____. *Quarant'anni di amicizia. Scritti su Carlo Emilio Gadda (1934-1988)*. Turin: Einaudi, 1989.

Cortellessa, Andrea and Maria Teresa Iovinelli, eds. “Il Fondo Gadda. Biblioteca del Burcardo.” *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* (2001). https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/resources/catalogues/burcardoLM.php.

Cottini, Luca. “D’Annunzio, Bernini, and the Baroque Prelude of *Il Piacere*.” *Forum Italicum* 51, no. 2 (2017): 335-355.

Croce, Benedetto. *La storia come pensiero e come azione*. Bari: Laterza Editore, 1966.

_____. *La storia dell’età barocca in Italia*. Bari: Laterza, 1967.

D’Annunzio, Gabriele. *Il piacere*. In *Prose di romanzi*, Vol. I, edited by Annamaria Andreoli and Ezio Raimondi, 3-358. Milan: Mondadori, 1988.

Davidson, Peter. *The Universal Baroque*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

De Chirico, Giorgio.“La mania del Seicento.” In *Valori Plastici. Rivista d’arte*, 60-62. Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969.

De Gasperin, Vilma. “Appunti sulla citazione ne *Il porto di Toledo* di Anna Maria Ortese.” *Esperienze letterarie* 1, no. XXXIV (2009): 57-77.

_____. *Loss and the Other in the Visionary Work of Anna Maria Ortese*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

_____. *The Fold : Leibniz and the Baroque.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

_____. *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, translated by Daniel W. Smith. New York: Continuum, 2003.

_____. *Foucault*. Translated by Seán Hand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

_____. “Foucault/04.” The Deleuze Seminars, translated by Mary Beth Mader, 1985, https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/foucault/lecture-04.

_____. “Foucault/08.” The Deleuze Seminars, translated by Samantha Banskton, 1985, https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/foucault/lecture-08

_____. “Sur Leibniz. Les princeps et la liberté.” Seminar, Cours Vincennes-Saint Denis: la logique de l’évènement, Paris, FR, April 8, 1987. https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/147.

de los Santos, María, García Felguera, and Javier Portús Pérez. “The Origins of the Museo del Prado.” In *Manet/Velázquez. The French Taste for Spanish Painting*, 115-137. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

De Marco, Gabriella. “Mussolini e l’uso pubblico della storia: dalle demolizioni nel centro storico di Roma al complesso dell’E42.” In *Immagini e forme del potere. Arte, critica e istituzioni in Italia fra le due guerre*, edited by David Lacagnina, 33-48. Palermo: Edizioni di passaggio, 2011.

De Robertis, Giuseppe. “Il Castello di Udine.” *Pan* 2, no. 9 (1934): 142-144.

Dombroski, Robert S. *Creative Entanglements: Gadda and the Baroque.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

_____. “Overcoming Oedipus: Self and Society in La cognizione del dolore.” *MLN* 99, no. 1 (1984): 125-143.

Dorfles, Gillo. *Elogio della disarmonia. Arte e vita tra logico e mitico*. Milan: Skira, 2009.

d’Ors, Eugeni. *Du baroque*. Paris: Gallimard: 1968.

Due, Reidar. *Deleuze*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007.

Dvořák, Max. “El Greco and Mannerism.” In *German Essays on Art History. Winckelmann, Burchardt, Panofsky, and Others*, edited by Gert Schiff, 191-205. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Eco, Umberto. *Opera aperta. Forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee*. Milan: Bompiani, 1989.

_____. “Ur-Fascism.” *The New York Review of Books*. June 22, 1995.

Falasca-Zamponi, Stefania. *Fascist Spectacle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Falkoff, Rebecca. “After Autarchy: Male Subjectivity from Carlo Emilio Gadda to the Gruppo ‘63,” PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012.

Farnetti, Monica. “Guida di Toledo.” In *Romanzi I*, edited Monica Farnetti, 1133-1136. Milan: Adelphi, 2002.

_____. “Toledo o Cara.” In *Tutte signore di mio gusto: profili di scrittrici contemporanee*, 159-171. Milan: La Tartaruga, 2008.

Fasolo, Vincenzo. “La cappella Sforza di Michelangelo.” *Architettura e arti decorative. Rivista d’arte e di storia* 1 (1923-1924): 433-454.

Feltrin-Morris, Marella. “Visions of War: Universality, Dignity, and the Emptiness of Symbols in Paola Masino,” *Italica* 87. No. 10 (Summer 2010): 194-208.

Ferrari, Chiara. *The Rhetoric of Violence in Fascist Italy. Mussolini, Gadda, Vittorini*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Ferrero, Ernesto. *Invito alla lettura di Carlo Emilio Gadda*. Milan: Mursia, 1974.

Ferretti, Emanuela. "'La matematica del marmo'. Michelangelo fra storiografia e architettura nell'Italia del primo Novecento." In *Michelangelo e il Novecento*, edited by Pietro Ruschi, 79-100. Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2013.

Foucault, Michel. *On the Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Frizzi, Adria. "Performance, or Getting a Piece of the Other, or in the Name of the Father, or the Dark Continent of Femininity, or Just like a Woman: Anna Maria Ortese's 'L'Iguana.'" *Italica* 79, no. 3, (2002): 379-390.

Gadda, Carlo Emilio. "Apologia manzoniana." In *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*, edited by Liliana Orlando, Clelia Martignoni, and Dante Isella, 679-687. Milan: Garzanti, 1991.

_____. *La cognizione del dolore*. *Edizione critica commentata con un'appendice di frammenti inediti*, edited by Emilio Manzotti. Turin: Einaudi, 1987.

_____. "La cognizione del dolore." In *Romanzi e racconti I*, edited by Raffaella Rodondi, Guido Lucchini, and Emilio Manzotti, 565-769. Milan: Garzanti, 2007.

_____. "L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore." In *Romanzi e racconti I*, edited by Raffaella Rodondi, Guido Lucchini, and Emilio Manzotti, 759-765. Milan: Garzanti, 2007.

_____. "L'egoista." In *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti*, edited by Liliana Orlando, Clelia Martignoni, and Dante Isella, 654-667. Milan: Garzanti, 1991.

_____. "Giornale di guerra e di prigionia." In *Romanzi e racconti II*, edited by Giorgio Pinotti, Dante Isella, and Raffaella Rodondi, 431-867. Milan: Garzanti, 1992.

_____. "I grandi uomini." In *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*, edited by Liliana Orlando, Clelia Martignoni, and Dante Isella, 978-979. Milan: Garzanti, 1991.

_____. "Impossibilità di un diario di guerra." In *Romanzi e racconti I*, edited by Dante Isella. 134-146. Milan: Garzanti, 2007.

_____. *Lettere alla sorella. 1920-1924*, edited by Gianfranco Colombo. Milan: Rossellina Archinto, 1987.

_____. "Meditazione Milanese." In *Scritti vari e postumi*, edited by Andrea Silvestri, Claudio Vela, Dante Isella, Paola Italia, and Giorgio Pinotti, 621-894. Milan: Garzanti, 2009.

_____. “Il palazzo degli ori.” In *Scritti vari e postumi*, edited by Andrea Silvestri, Claudio Vela, Dante Isella, Paola Italia, and Giorgio Pinotti, 925-987. Milan: Garzanti, 2009.

_____. “Il pasticciaccio.” In *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*, edited by Liliana Orlando, Clelia Martignoni, and Dante Isella, 506-511. Milan: Garzanti, 2009.

_____. *L’ingegner fantasia. Lettere a Ugo Betti 1919-1930*, edited by Giulio Ungarelli. Milan: Rizzoli, 1984.

____. “Il quaderno di Buenos Aires,” *I quaderni dell'ingegnere* 2, no. 7 (2011): 9-84.

_____. “Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana.” In *Romanzi e racconti II*, edited by Giorgio Pinotti, Dante Isella, and Raffaella Rodondi, 11-276. Milan: Garzanti, 2007.

_____. *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana (redazione di «Letteratura», 1946-47)*. In *Romanzi e racconti II*, edited by Dante Isella, 277-460. Milan: Garzanti, 2007.

_____. “Racconto italiano di ignoto del Novecento.” In *Scritti vari e postumi*, edited by DAndrea Silvestri, Claudio Vela, Dante Isella, Paola Italia, and Giorgio Pinotti, 385-613. Milan: Garzanti, 2009.

_____. “La teoria della conoscenza nei «Nuovi saggi» di G.W. Leibniz.” In *I Quaderni dell'Ingegnere. Testi e Studi Gaddiani*, vol. 4, 5-44. Edited by Dante Isella and Riccardo Stracuzzi. Turin: Einaudi, 2006.

_____. *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana.* Translated by William Weaver. New York: New York Review Books, 2007.

Gal, Ofer and Raz Chen-Morris, editors. *Science in the Age of the Baroque*. New York: Springer, 2013.

Galilei, Galileo. *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo*, edited by Antonio BeltránMarí. Milan: BUR, 2003.

Gazzola, Giuseppe. *Montale, the Modernist*. Florence: Leo Olschki Editore, 2016.

Gentile, Emilio. “Prefazione,” in *Il nemico dell’uomo nuovo. L’omosessualità nell’esperimento totalitario fascista* by Lorenzo Benadusi, vii-xvi. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005.

Germi, Pietro, dir. *Un maledetto imbroglio*. 1959; Carouge, Switzerland: MYA, 2012. DVD.

Ghezzo, Flora. “Anna Maria Ortese and the Red-Footed Angel.” In *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, edited by Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo, 3-31. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

_____. “Chiaroscuro napoletano. Trasfigurazioni fantastiche di una città.” *Narrativa* 24 (January 2003): 85-104.

_____. "On the Ruins of Time: *Toledo* and the (Auto)fiction of the Ephemeral." In *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, edited by Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo, 246-291. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

Gibellini, Cecilia. "Michelangelo e i poeti del Novecento." In *Ut pictura poesis. Intersezioni di arte e letteratura*, edited by Pietro Taravacci and Enrica Cancelliere, 77-100. Trent: Università degli studi di Trento, Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia, 2016.

Gnerre, Francesca. *L'eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano*. Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 2000.

Gramsci, Antonio. *La questione meridionale.* L'Aquila: REA Edizioni, 2011.

Greco, Ludovico. "Anna Maria Ortese, littrice." *Belvedere* 1, no. 4 (1939).

Grignani, Maria Antonietta. "L'Argentina di Gadda fra biografia e straniamento." *Il confronto letterario. Quaderni del Dipartimento di Letterature straniere moderne e comparate dell'Università di Pavia* 15, no. 29 (1998): 57-73.

Haas, Franz. "La cacciata del purgatorio: Anna Maria Ortese e Napoli." *Belgafor* 62, no. 3 (May 2007): 334-342.

Hainsworth, Peter. "Fascism and Anti-fascism in Carlo Emilio Gadda." In *Carlo Emilio Gadda. Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Robert S. Dombroski and Manuela Bertone, 221-241. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Isella, Dante, et al., eds. *Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti I*. Milan: Garzanti, 1991.

_____, et al., eds. *Scritti vari e postumi*. Milan: Garzanti, 2009.

Jallon, Benoit and Umberto Napolitano, eds., *Napoli. Super Modern*. Zurich: Park Books, 2021.

Jay, Martin. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity." In *Vision and Visuality. Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 3-23. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988.

Kallis, Aristotle. *La terza Roma*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta. "Discomfited by the Baroque: A Personal Journey." In *Rethinking the Baroque*, edited by Helen Hills, 83-99. Burlington: Ashgate, 2011.

Kottman, Paul A. "The Claim of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy and Early Modern Artistry." In *The Insistence of Art. Aesthetic Philosophy after Early Modernity*, edited by Paul A. Kottman, 1-30. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017.

Kulpa, Pierrette Marie, "The Fascistization of Michelangelo and the *Libertà Espressiva* of the *Pietà* of Palestrina." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 20, no. 2 (2017): 415-445.

Lacagnina, Davide. “Il Novecento del Greco. Ricezione critica, storiografia artistica, memoria visiva.” *Critica d’Arte* LXIII (2011): 69-84.

Lambiase, Sergio. *Adriana. Cuore di luce*. Florence: Bompiani, 2018.

Lanslots, Inge. “Beasts, Goblins, and Other Chameleonic Creatures.” In *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, edited by Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo, 295-322. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. “Letter to Christian Wolff.” In *Philosophical Essays*, translated and edited by Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew, 233-234. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989.

_____. “The Monadology.” In *Leibniz’s Monadology. A New Translation and Guide*, edited and translated by Lloyd Strickland, 14-33. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

_____.“Preface to the New Essays.” In *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew, 49-67. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

_____. *Theodicy. Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. Translated by E.M. Huggard. Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1985.

Lipparini, Micaela. *Le Metafore Del Vero. Percezione e Deformazione Figurativa in Carlo Emilio Gadda.* Pisa: Pacini, 1994.

Livorni, Ernesto. “Gadda and His Fellow Poets: Some Reflections on Their Exchange.” *Italica* 93, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 724-739.

Longhi, Roberto. “Caravaggio e la sua cerchia a Milano.” In *Da Cimabue a Morandi*, edited by Gianfranco Contini, 876-893. Milan: Mondadori, 1974.

_____. “Il soggiorno romano del Greco.” *L’Arte* XVII (1914): 301-303.

Lucchini, Guido. “Gli studi filosofici di Carlo Emilio Gadda (1924-1929).” *Per Carlo Emilio Gadda. Atti del Convegno di Studi, Pavia 22-23 novembre 1993, Strumenti critici* 9, no. 2, 75 (1994): 223-245.

Lyons, John D. “Introduction: The Crisis of the Baroque,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. John D. Lyons, 1-23. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Malvezzi, Virgilio. *Tarquinio il Superbo*, in *Opere*, edited by Edoardo Ripari, 121-189. Bologna: Casa Editrice Persiani, 2013.

Manacorda, Giuliano. *Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista*. Milan: Principato Editore, 1974.

Manzoni, Alessandro. *I Promessi Sposi.* Milan: BUR Rizzoli, 2017.

Mangone, Carolina. *Bernini's Michelangelo*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

Maraini, Dacia. "Carlo Emilio Gadda come uomo." In *"Per favore mi lasci nell'ombra". Interviste 1950-1972*, edited by Claudio Vela, 154-174. Milan: Adelphi, 1993.

Maravall, José Antonio. *Culture of the Baroque. Analysis of a Historical Structure*. Translated by Terry Cochran. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Marchese, Dora. "Ritorno alla terra natale. L'Egitto di Ungaretti e Marinetti." In *Geografia della modernità letteraria*, edited by Siriana Sgavicchia and Massimiliano Torrora, 395-404, Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2017.

Marinetti, F.T. "Manifeste du futurism." *Le Figaro*, Feb. 20, 1909. https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/10501294.

Marpicato, Arturo, Benito Mussolini, Gioacchino Volpe. "Fascismo." *Treccani*. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana. https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/fascismo_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/.

Mazzocchi, Giuseppe. "Anna Maria Ortese e l'ispanità." *MLN* 112, no. 91 (1997): 90-104.

Meier-Graefe, Julius. *The Spanish Journey*. Translated by J. Holroyd-Reece. New York: Harcourt, 1926.

Mignolo, Walter. *The Idea of Latin America*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Mileschi, Christophe. "*Meditazione milanese*. Gadda filosofo: un percorso retrogrado." *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, no. 5 (2007). https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/journal/issue5/articles/mileschiprecursore05.php.

Milizia, Francesco. *Dizionario delle belle arti del disegno. Tomo primo*. Bassano, 1797.

Montefoschi, Paola. "Prosa di un nomade." In *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, edited by Paola Montefoschi, xi-lxiii. Milan: Mondadori, 2000.

_____."'Roma africana'. Prime avventure romane e un inedito." In *Ungaretti: La biblioteca di un nomade*, 47-56. Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1997.

Morgan, Philip. *Italian Fascism, 1915-1945*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Morone, Alfonso. *La fabbrica dell'innovazione. Gli arredi del Palazzo delle Poste. Napoli 1936*. Siracusa: LettereVentidue, 2017.

Morra, Eloisa. “Visual Storytelling Gadda’s iconographies from L’Adaligisa to Il Pasticciaccio.” PhD. diss. Harvard University, 2017.

Mucciante, Filippo Giada Policicchio, and Mariella Stillitano, “La mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento. Rilettura e riscoperta di uno stile: il Barocco.” In *Mostre a Firenze 1911-1942. Nuove indagini per un itinerario tra arte e cultura*. Edited by Cristiano Giometti, 41-56. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2019.

Mussolini, Benito. “Alla colonia italiana di Ginevra.” In *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XIX. Dalla Marcia su Roma al Viaggio negli Abruzzi (31 ottobre 1922-22 agosto 1923)*. Edited by Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 36-37. Florence: La Fenice, 1956.

_____. “Discorso dell’Ascensione.” In *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XXII. Dall’Attentato Zaniboni al Discorso dell’Ascensione (5 Novembre 1925-26 Maggio 1927)*. Edited by Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 360-390. Florence: La Fenice, 1957.

_____. “L’attuale momento politico.” In *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XVIII. Dalla conferenza di Cannes alla Marcia su Roma (22 giugno 1921-12 gennaio 1922)*, Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 218-222 Florence: La Fenice, 1955.

_____. “Le linee programmatiche del Partito Fascista. Chiarimenti.” In *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini XVII. Dal primo discorso alla camera alla conferenza di Cannes (22 giugno 1921-12 gennaio 1922)*, edited by Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, 174-178. Florence: La Fenice, 1955.

_____. “Per la grande Roma: Programma al Governatore.” In *Discorsi del 1925*, 277-281. Milan: Alpes, 1926.

_____.“La Proclamazione dell’Impero,” in *Scritti e discorsi dell’impero*, 115-119. Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Editore, 1936.

Nannini, Sofia. “The silence of modernity.” In *The Routledge Companion to Italian Fascist Architecture. Reception and Legacy*, edited by Kay Bea Jones and Stephanie Pilat, 277-289. New York: Routledge, 2020.

Nencioni, Enrico. “Barocchismo.” In *Saggi critici di Letteratura italiana*, 107-141. Florence: Le Monnier, 1898.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All-Too-Human. A Book for Free Spirits. Part Two*. Edited by Oscar Levy. Translated by Paul V. Cohn. London: Foulis, 1911.

Nifosi, Giuseppe. “Piacentini e l’urbanistica fascista.” *Arte svelata* (blog). March 29, 2021. https://www.artesvelata.it/piacentini-urbanistica-fascista/.

Noul, M. Marius et al., eds., *Les chefs-d’oeuvre du Musée du Prado*. Geneva: Ville de Genève, 1939.

Onofrio, Marco. *Ungaretti e Roma*. Rome: Edilazio, 2008.

Oppo, Cipriano Efisio. "Discussioni inutili." In *Valori Plastici. Rivista d'arte*, 89-91. Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969.

Ortese, Anna Maria. "Anne, le aggiunte e il mutamento." In *Romanzi I*, edited by Monica Farnetti, 353-356. Milan: Adelphi, 2002.

_____. "Dove il tempo è un altro." In *Corpo Celeste* (Milan: Adelphi, 1997), 57-97

_____. *L'Iguana*. in *Romanzi II*, edited by Andrea Baldi, Monica Farnetti, and Filippo Secchieri, 3-194. Milan: Adelphi, 2005.

_____. Interview by Dario Bellezza. In *L'Iguana* by Anna Maria Ortese, 187-195. Milan: Adelphi, 1986.

_____. Interview by Dacia Maraini. In *E tu chi eri? Interviste sull'infanzia*, 23-35. Milan: Bompiani, 1973.

_____. "Maestri spagnoli alla mostra di Ginevra." In *Da Moby Dick all'Orsa Bianca*. *Scritti sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, edited by Monica Farnetti, 20-25 Milan: Adelphi, 2011.

_____. "Nota." In *Romanzi I*, edited by Monica Farnetti, 997-1001. Milan: Adelphi, 2002.

Ossola, Carlo. "Introduzione." In *Giuseppe Ungaretti, filosofia e fantastica*, edited by Carlo Ossola, 7-21. Turin: UTET, 1997.

O'Sullivan, Simon. "Fold." In *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*, edited by Adrian Parr, 107-108. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Painter, Borden. *Mussolini's Rome. Rebuilding the Eternal City*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Pallavicino, Ferrante. *Il principe ermafrodito*, edited by Roberta Colombi. Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2005.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Comizi d'amore*. 1965, Arco Film, online.

Paulhan, Jacqueline, Luciano Rebay, and Jean-Charles Vegliante, editors. *Correspondance Jean Paulhan-Giuseppe Ungaretti*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.

Porro, Mario. "Da Leibniz le ipotesi del «gran lombardo» su come organizzare il groviglio conoscitivo." *Il manifesto* Nov. 2, 2006.

Piacentini, Marcello. “Per la restaurazione del centro di Bologna.” *Storia dell’Urbanistica* (December 1983): 67-68.

Piccioni, Leone. *Ungarettiana*. Florence: Vallecchi, 1980.

_____. *Vita di Ungaretti*. Milan: Rizzoli, 1979.

Pierangeli, Fabio. “La Vocazione di Gadda: Apologia manzoniana e Caravaggio.” In *Carlo Emilio Gadda. Indagine dolorosa,* 41-54. Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1999.

Pirandello Luigi. “L’umorismo. Parte seconda. Essenza, caratteri e materia dell’umorismo.” In *L’umorismo e altri saggi*, edited by Enrico Ghidetti, 110-147. Florence: Giunti, 1994.

Portoghesi, Paolo. *Roma barocca*. Bari: Editori Laterza, 1978.

Portevi, John. “Organism.” In *The Deleuze Dictionary*, edited by Adrian Parr, 195-196. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

Prodan, Sarah Rolfe. *Michelangelo’s Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Raimondi, Ezio. *Barocco Moderno. Roberto Longhi e Carlo Emilio Gadda.* Milan: Mondadori, 2003.

_____. “Gadda e le incidenze lombarde della luce.” In *Il colore eloquente. Letteratura e arte barocca*. Bologna: Il mulino, 1995. 87-109.

Ravaglioli, Armando. *Roma ieri e oggi: immagini a confronto*. Rome: Newton Compton Editore, 1982.

Re, Lucia. “Alexandria Revisited: Colonialism in the Egyptian Works of Enrico Pea and Giuseppe Ungaretti.” In *A Place in the Sun*, edited by Patrizia Palumbo, 163-196. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

_____. “‘Clouds in Front of My Eyes: Ortese’s Poetics of the Gaze in ‘Un paio di occhiali’ and *Il mare non bagna a Napoli*.” In *Anna Maria Ortese. Celestial Geographies*, edited by Gian Maria Annovi and Flora Ghezzo, 35-77. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

_____. “Polifonia e dialogismo nei romanzi di epoca fascista: censura, autocensura e resistenza,” in *Paola Masino*, edited by Beatrice Manetti, 163-176. Milan: Mondadori: 2016.

_____. “Italy’s first postcolonial novel and the end of (neo)realism.” *The Italianist* 37, no. 3 (2017): 417-435.

_____. “Il vento passa. Anna Maria Ortese e il colonialismo europeo.” In *La Grande Iguana. Scenari e visioni a vent’anni dalla morte di Anna Maria Ortese. Atti del convegno internazionale*, edited by Angela Bubba, 57-71. Canterano: Aracne editrice, 2020.

Roscioni, Gian Carlo. *Il duca di Sant’Aquila. Infanzia e Giovinezza di Carlo Emilio Gadda*. Milan: Mondadori, 1997.

Rozier, Louise. “Motherhood and Maternity in Paola Masino’s Novels ‘Monte Ignoso’ and ‘Nascita e morte della massaia.” *Italica* 88, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 245-261.

Ryan, Christopher. *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Introduction*. London: The Athlone Press, 1998.

Sapir, Itay. “The Visible, the Invisible, and the Knowable: Modernity as an Obscure Tale.” In *Seeing Perception*, edited by Silke Horstkotte and Karin Leonhard, 198-215. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

Sarfatti, Margherita. “Il Seicento Italiano.” In *Valori Plastici. Rivista d’arte*, 95-96. Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1969.

_____. *Dux*. Milan: Mondadori, 1926.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Lettres au Castor et à Quelques Autres. 1926-1939*, edited by Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1983.

Saslow, James M. *The Poetry of Michelangelo. An Annotated Translation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

Savattieri, Cristina. “Il ventennio di Gadda.” In *Scrittori italiani tra facsismo e antifascismo*, edited by Romano Luperini and Pietro Cataldi, 1-33. Pisa: Pacini editore, 2009.

Sbragia, Albert. “Fear of the Periphery: Colonialism, Class, and the South American Outback in Carlo Emilio Gadda.” *MLN* 111, no. 1 (1996): 38-57.

Scaraffia, Lucetta. “Essere uomo, essere donna.” In *Storia sociale delle donne nell’Italia contemporanea*, edited by Anna Bravo, Margherita Pelaja, Alessandra Pescarolo, Lucetta Scaraffia, 3-76. Rome: Laterza, 2001.

Seggiaro, Nicolò. *La chair et le pli*. Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2009.

Seno Reed, Cosetta. *Anna Maria Ortese. Un avventuroso realismo*. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2013.

Sgavicchia, Siriana. “Spazio reale e testuale nel «Porto di Toledo» di Anna Maria Ortese.” *Avanguardia*, no. 21 (2002): 90-99.

Signorotto, Gianvittorio. "Dalla decadenza alla crisi della modernità: la storiografia sulla Lombardia spagnola." In *Alle origini di una nazione. Antispagnolismo e identità italiana*, edited by Aurelio Musi, 313-343. Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003.

Snyder, Jon R. *L'estetica del Barocco*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005.

_____. "The Other Voice: *Amor nello specchio*," in *Love in the Mirror* by Giovan Battista Andreini, ed. and trans. Jon R. Snyder (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009),

Somigli. Luca, and Mario Moroni. "Modernism in Italy: An Introduction." In *Italian Modernism. Italian Culture between Decadantism and the Avant-Garde*, edited Luca Somigli and Mario Moroni, 3-31. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 66-111. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Strickland, Lloyd, ed. and trans. *Leibniz's Monadology. A New Translation and Guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

_____. "The 'Monadology.'" In *Leibniz's Key Philosophical Writings. A Guide*, edited by Paul Lodge and Lloyd Strickland, 206-227. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Storm, Eric. *The Discovery of El Greco. The Nationalization of Culture versus the Rise of Modern Art*, translated by Marjolihn de Jager. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2016.

Tarchi, Andrea. "A 'catastrophic consequence': Fascim's debate on the legal status of Libyans and the issue of mixed marriages (1938-1939)." *Postcolonial Studies* (2021).

Tarchiani, Nello, ed. *Mostra della pittura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento.* 2nd ed. Florence: Casa d'arte Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1924.

Terzoli, Maria Antonietta. *Gadda: Guida Al Pasticciaccio.* Rome: Carocci editore, 2016.

_____. *Commento a* Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana *di Carlo Emilio Gadda II*. Rome: Carocci editore, 2015.

Thomas, Claire. "A Colonial Eye on Egypt: Ungaretti's Writing for *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 1931." *Italian Studies* 71, no. 3 (2016): 384-402.

Thomas, Troy. *Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2016.

Thoré, Théophile. "Au salon de 1864." In *Manet: Raconté par lui-même e par ses amis*, 126-128. Geneva: P. Cailler, 1953.

Tietze, Hans. “Annibale Carraccis Galerie im Palazzo Farnese und seine römische Werkstätte.” *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen* XXVI (1906-1907): 49-182.

Tinterow, Gary. “Raphael Replaced: The Triumph of Spanish Painting in France.” In *Manet/Velázquez. The French Taste for Spanish Painting*, 3-66. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Todorović, Jelena. *Hidden Legacies of Baroque Thought in Contemporary Literature. Realms of the Eternal Present*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

Tumolo, Joseph. “Reinventing the Baroque in Anna Maria Ortese’s *L’Iguana*,” *Italian Quarterly*, forthcoming.

Ungaretti, Giuseppe. “Brasile.” In *Vita d’un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni,* edited by Paola Montefoschi*,* 453-467. Milan: Mondadori, 2000.

_____.“Danni con fantasia.” In *Vita d’un uomo*. *Tutte le poesie*, edited by Carlo Ossola, 207. Milan: Mondadori, 2016.

_____. “Il deserto e dopo. Quaderno egiziano.” In *Vita d’un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, edited by Paola Montefoschi, 25-109. Milan: Mondadori, 2000

_____.“Folli i miei passi.” In *Vita d’un uomo*. *Tutte le poesie*, edited by Carlo Ossola, 263-264. Milan: Mondadori, 2016.

_____. “Interpretazione di Roma.” In *Vita d’un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, edited by Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay, 603-612. Milan: Mondadori, 1974.

_____. “Intervista con F. Camon [1965].” In *Vita d’un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, edited by Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay, 835-841. Milan: Mondadori, 1974.

_____. “Leopardi alla Columbia University.” In *Vita d’un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni,* edited by Paola Montefoschi*,* 1112-1119. Milan: Mondadori, 2000.

_____. “Nota Introduttiva.” In *Vita d’un uomo. Tutte le poesie*, edited by Carlo Ossola, 559-577. Milan: Mondadori, 2016.

_____. “Note a *Sentimento del tempo*.” In *Vita d’un uomo. Tutte le poesie*, edited by Carlo Ossola, 591-603. Milan: Mondadori, 2016.

_____. “Parole per Gadda.” In *Vita d'un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, edited by Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay, 685-688. Milan: Mondadori, 1974.

_____. “Originalità del Fascismo.” In *Vita d’un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, edited by Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay, 149-153. Milan: Mondadori, 1974.

_____."Roma africana," in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, edited by Paola Montefoschi, 7-12, Milan: Mondadori, 2000.

_____. "Per mare interno." In *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, edited by Paola Montefoschi, 27-33. Milan: Mondadori, 2000.

_____."Roma africana," in *Vita d'un uomo. Viaggi e lezioni*, edited by Paola Montefoschi, 7-12, Milan: Mondadori, 2000.

_____. "Secondo discorso su Leopardi." In *Vita d'un uomo. Saggi e interventi*, edited by Mario Diacono and Luciano Rebay, 451-496. Milan: Mondadori, 1974.

_____. "Sentimento del Tempo." In *Vita d'un uomo*. *Tutte le poesie*, edited by Carlo Ossola, 137-236. Milan: Mondadori, 2016.

van Tuinen, Sjoerd, and Niamh McDonnell. "Introduction." In *Deleuze and the Fold. A Critical Reader*, edited by Sjoerd van Tuinen and Niam McDonnell, 1-24. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

van Tuinen, Sjoerd. "Michelangelo, Leibniz and the Serpentine Figure." *Deleuze Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 63-72.

Wassef, Nadine Makram Wassef. "Enrico Pea and Giuseppe Ungaretti: Matrices of Italian Identity and Literature across the Mediterranean." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 167-182.

Wehling-Giorgi, Katrin. "Abjection and the Fear of Alterity: Matricide and the Trope of the Maternal in the works of Carlo Emilio Gadda and Samuel Beckett." *Italian Studies* 66, no. 1 (2013): 76-92.

_____."'Splendid Little Pictures': Leibnizian Terminology in the works of Samuel Beckett and Carlo Emilio Gadda" *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 22 (2010): 341-354.

Williams, Wallace E. "Drawing Limits: Michelangelo Grows Old." *The Art Bulletin* 103, no. 1 (2021): 37-64.

_____. *Michelangelo, God's Architect. The Story of his Final Years and Greatest Masterpiece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Wölfflin, Heinrich. *Principles of Art History. The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, translated by Jonathan Blower. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015.

_____. *Renaissance and Baroque*. Translated by Kathrin Simon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.

Wright, Simonetta Chessa. *La poetica neobarocca in Calvino*. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1998.