

Giuseppe Episcopo**“City Effects, City Defects”. *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*. International Gadda Conference. Edinburgh, 18-19 June 2010.**

Edinburgh, the city that created its future and fulfilled its destiny by duplicating itself during the eighteenth century - two towns dwelling in one city, to paraphrase Goethe's Faust - could not have been a better place to hold “City Effects, City Defects”, the first international conference entirely dedicated to Carlo Emilio Gadda's *L'Adalgisa*.

For two days, 18th and 19th of June 2010, Edinburgh's long sunlight was the stage of *L'Adalgisa*'s Milanese nocturne, Gadda's portrait of a society taken at the edge of its deformation, reformation, and transformation. The novel is a suite in ten movements composed by Gadda as a result of a complex process of writing and selection of pages, book chapters and early sketchbooks that, in turn, became a boundless avanttext archipelago. An archipelago navigable thanks to an accurate philological analysis and, at the same time, intelligible as a magnificent expression of Gadda's compositional technique. So, “City Effects, City Defects” became a metaphorical image, setting the novel in a wide range of analyses during this anniversary conference that unveiled *L'Adalgisa*'s inner structure, its perpetual flux or stream of linear and non-linear combinations.

Emilio Manzotti's and Claudio Vela's outstanding and multifaceted papers explored the intratextual and intertextual layers of *L'Adalgisa*, and its linguistic plasticity came under the spotlight of a remarkable philological analysis pushing the boundaries of Gadda criticism.

Paola Italia anticipated a multidisciplinary project in which the long-lasting tradition of the philological discipline is hybridised with the latest medium at our disposal: the web in which Gadda's palimpsests become fields of analysis and experimentation. Remo Ceserani's, Niva Lorenzini's, and Riccardo Stracuzzi's

“City Effects, City Defects” a cura di / by Giuseppe Episcopo. *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*. International Gadda Conference. Edinburgh, 18-19 June 2010.

Le Simplegadi, 2010, 8, 8: 76-80. - ISSN 1824-5226

<http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi>

papers delved into the synchronic and diachronic “crossover” strata of the text: a geography of portraits and a landscape of memories inextricably interrelated in a system that is itself connected with other languages and cultural atmospheres. Massimo Riva and Federica Pedriali focused on the endemic “dynamic” stratum of the novel; Gadda’s narrative “noise” (Pedriali) breaches the static order and, through this breach, a continuous multi-layered process of contamination comes into the text, becoming the “gnommero”, or the art of “knitting” (Riva). Gian Mario Anselmi, Giuseppe Stellardi and Giorgio Pinotti focused on the “physical” stratum. It is from this standpoint that the novel’s thresholds encroach on the centre: the thresholds with their permeable condition as opposed to the centre, home to intimacy and elusiveness. If the peripheral layers are the city effects, their counterpart is the centre, due to its own peculiar facet: the centre defects to the thresholds, it continuously spills out into external strata. Insofar as the centre appears to be an elusive core, the physics of the novel’s core are its *perpetuum mobile* prerequisite.

It is arduous to summarise the conference in just a few pages. The outcome of “City Effects, City Defects” will be published in the decennial special edition of *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies (EJGS)*. For the moment let it suffice to recall that *L’Adalgisa*, from different perspectives, sits at the crossroads of multiple future/past solutions: it dismantles traditional structures and establishes a new dis/order of things. Its peculiarity lies in the sense of transition that the novel communicates (from one age to another, and yet, of course, from one social era to another in simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal tendencies), and in the fact that this novel in itself is transitional, being the starting point and the place of departure of a long-term process. During the self-confession *Intervista al microfono* (dated 1950 and published several times since), Gadda explores - and partly explains - the ongoing transition from what can be considered an “old” Gadda (the author of *Il castello di Udine* and *La Madonna dei Filosofi*) to a “new” Gadda, the writer of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* and *La cognizione del dolore*. A process that could be considered one specifically of

“City Effects, City Defects” a cura di / by Giuseppe Episcopo. *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*. International Gadda Conference. Edinburgh, 18-19 June 2010.

Le Simplegadi, 2010, 8, 8: 76-80. - ISSN 1824-5226

<http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi>

formation, turning in a way an “author” into a “real writer” (un “autore” in un “narratore”).

As shown during the conference, *L'Adalgisa* occupies a key turning point within that process. For this is not a turn against or away from the themes, the styles, or the interests Gadda had cultivated until then; it is rather something that could technically be considered a turning point. It is the moment in which the chrysalis of the narrative structure begins to encompass Gadda's motives, his philosophical and scientific background, his syntactic pyramids, his “corkscrew” periods.

It is not by chance that in 2010, its tenth anniversary, *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* devoted a two-day conference to *L'Adalgisa*. “City Effects, City Defects” for the *EJGS*, just as *L'Adalgisa* was for Gadda, was set a turning point of projects, at the very moment when a series of brand new proposals were beginning to take shape around the journal: the “Nicola Benedetti Scholarship”; the publication of the *Gadda Pocket Encyclopaedia* in four volumes and its online twin version; the first edition of “Premio Gadda Giovani” in 2011; the second edition of “The Edinburgh Gadda Prize” in 2012, to name just a few.

In keeping with the spirit of *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, the conference was not just celebrating the past. It was rather the first step of a forthcoming series of events. The first closely followed the conference “City Effects, City Defects”: it was the first edition of the Gadda Prize Award Ceremony. As Federica Pedriali stated in an interview with the BBC: “This has been an amazing collaboration between local people, academic institutions, show-business personalities and school children. What we are planning has never been seen in Edinburgh before. We want to encourage academic excellence, give young people a taste for fiction writing”. Federica Pedriali (Professor of Literary Metatheory and Modern Italian Studies at the University of Edinburgh and Director and General Editor of *The Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*) made a perfect synthesis of the Gadda projects' aims: to be inclusive,

“City Effects, City Defects” a cura di / by Giuseppe Episcopo. *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*. International Gadda Conference. Edinburgh, 18-19 June 2010.

Le Simplegadi, 2010, 8, 8: 76-80. - ISSN 1824-5226

<http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi>

to enable connections between different cultures and disciplines, and to involve different parts of society.

The “Blackwell Gadda Workshop” and the “Gadda Prize Award Ceremony” were the instantiation of these aims. The former, run by Daniela Nardini (actress), Denise Mina (writer) and Annie Griffin (BAFTA award-winning film director), was addressed to the twelve Edinburgh pupils (selected from more than twelve secondary schools) who reached the semifinals of the “Giallo giovane” first edition. The ‘Gadda Prize’, on the other hand, gave international awards to scholars who had entered the first literary prize dedicated to Gadda and had excelled in it. Donatella Martinelli won the first “Crolla Amato Gadda Prize” with the essay “Il ‘bel ragnatelo’. Cronistoria della bancarotta dell’Adalgisa” (in *I quaderni dell’Ingegnere*. Einaudi: 2006). Elisabetta Carta (*Cicatrici della memoria. Identità e corpo nella letteratura della Grande Guerra: Carlo Emilio Gadda e Blaise Cendrars*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Cagliari: 2009) and Cristina Savettieri (*La trama continua. Storia e forme del romanzo di Gadda*. Edizioni ETS: 2008) won ex aequo the “Gadda First” category, and Enrico Testa won the first “Novecento in Saggio Prize” (*Eroi e figuranti. Il personaggio nel romanzo*. Einaudi: 2009).

In conclusion, we leave the last words on this event go to Gianrico Carofiglio, Honorary President of “The Edinburgh Gadda Prize”:

Benché Gadda sia accolto da tempo tra i più importanti scrittori del Novecento, la critica di lingua inglese si è sviluppata solo di recente, in parte per via del fatto che i suoi testi sono stati spesso giudicati intraducibili [...] Quest’ultima considerazione per sottolineare ancora una volta l’importanza della rivista e del Premio. Decisivo dal punto di vista della crescita e dell’approfondimento del dibattito critico internazionale sull’autore, il premio è altrettanto importante per l’attenzione che saprà calamitare sulla cultura italiana tutta.

“City Effects, City Defects” a cura di / by Giuseppe Episcopo. *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*. International Gadda Conference. Edinburgh, 18-19 June 2010.

Le Simplegadi, 2010, 8, 8: 76-80. - ISSN 1824-5226

<http://all.uniud.it/simplegadi>

WEBLIOGRAPHY:

<http://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/resources/essays/intervistamicrofono.php>

<http://www.gaddaprize.ed.ac.uk/committee/carofigliomessage.pdf>

<http://www.gaddaprize.ed.ac.uk/events/conference.php>

<http://www.gaddaprize.ed.ac.uk/index.php>

<http://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/resources/walks/pge/adalgisaitalia.php>

Giuseppe Episcopo has a PhD in Modern Philology (University of Naples Federico II, Italy) and is at present PhD student in Italian (University of Edinburgh, UK).