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Brickwork and the wall as metaphors in Carlo Emilio Gadda's fiction

Carlo Emilio Gadda is one of the most outstanding Italian writers of the 20th century. From the beginning of his career, he was considered an eccentric due to his Baroque style and his merciless exposition of the volatility and superficiality of social relations. He was born in Milan in 1893 in an impoverished burgher family with intellectual traditions. He was raised in the patriotic spirit of Lombardy's Enlightenment and Romanticism. He experienced a profound crisis related to the breakout of the First World War, in which he participated as a volunteer to the Alpini corps. He completed technical studies and started working as an electrical engineer at various locations in Italy, Europe, and South America.¹ When he made his literary début, he had been an adult for some time already and his world view had already formed; his philosophy of literature was based on careful and personal interpretations of Leibniz, Spinoza, and Kant, and his life's experiences were reflected in his works. Gadda started as a literary historian and a critic when in 1927 he published in the *Solaria* literary journal the essay titled "Apologia manzoniana", which was devoted to Alessandro Manzoni, the most outstanding writer of the Italian Romanticism. He debuted as a fiction writer with a collection of short stories titled *Madonna dei filosofi*, published in 1931.² Originally affiliated with the *Solaria* journal, he quickly found his own extremely original means of expression, which made him an exceptional writer in the Italian literary scene. The fixed elements of his texts were autobiographical motifs related to inter-family relations – especially to his mother – and social relations, the traumatic experiences of the First World War, and his travels, particularly his visit to Argentina. He was underestimated during the initial period

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1 G.C. Ferretti, *Il ritratto di Gadda*, Laterza 1987, pp. 3–11.

2 A. Seroni, *Carlo E. Gadda*, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Firenze 1973, pp. 5–7.

of his writing career – he was considered an oddball with an eccentric style. It took the following generation of writers to recognise in him their originator and master.³ He was an intellectual loner to whom no definitions matched and who did not belong to any literary school.⁴ The language of literature became the main focus of his expressionist experiments; it was owing to this that Gadda was able to expose these elements of reality which he considered the focus of his literary criticism: the fake burgher relations, the chaos of reality, and intellectual mediocrity. Gadda's original writing style was a combination of styles and registers⁵, which combined sophisticated forms with jargon or dialect forms, archaisms and neologisms, and terms borrowed from various areas of science (philosophy, mathematics, biology, geology, medicine, technical sciences, etc.) Obviously, such a language did not serve the purpose of describing reality but, rather, it became a tool for interpreting and critiquing it, as well as a cognitive tool. For Gadda the reality – the material reality in particular – was always the starting point and pretext for exposing and critiquing deeper relations at all levels of existence. The world of objects was presented in Gadda's prose through his favourite and most commonly used rhetorical devices, i.e. enumerations and accumulations. Thus, there formed a special kind of an "accumulation rhetoric of the catalogue."⁶ The technique of a record applied by Gadda was supposed to organise and catalogue the chaotic reality in order to extract from the depth inside it all possible relations connecting individual components of the material world. The description of that "super-reality"⁷ included even the minutest material items through which – in a somewhat reverse narrative perspective, i.e. from the object to the subject – he developed the identities of his person-characters.⁸

One major element of the material reality he described was architecture, which was also a common source of the author's literary inspiration. Mysterious gardens, castle towers, and old houses were topical motifs in Gadda's fiction. His characters moved within those spaces, and by indicating this the characters acquired specific

3 Alberto Arbasino argued: "(...) the twenty-year-olds of the 1950s discovered that in our modern literature he occupies the «central» position. (...) The people of letter of the 1930s and 40s stubbornly considered him an outsider, «an eccentric... who picked up literature late», a «humourist» who was extremely wearisome and «jabberish» (...) Cf. A. Arbasino, "Inżynier w granatowym garniturze", trans. H. Kralowa, *Literatura na świecie*, issue 1-2/2013 [498-499], p. 112.

4 J. Szymanowska, "Proza okresu międzywojennego", [in:] *Historia literatury włoskiej XX wieku*, J. Ugniewska (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2001, p. 142.

5 Alberto Arbasino referred to his "extremely weird style". Cf. A. Arbasino, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

6 C. Verbaro, *La cognizione della pluralità. Letteratura e conoscenza in Carlo Emilio Gadda*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2005, p. 120.

7 F. Bertoni, *La verità sospetta. Gadda e l'invenzione della realtà*, Einaudi, Torino 2001, pp. 141-142.

8 Cf. E. Guaraldo, "Il realismo di Gadda", [in:] idem. *In cerca del mattino: il senso della nascita in letteratura*, Franco Angeli Editore, Milan 2004, p. 217.

meanings. Yet, in Gadda's fiction it was actually space and objects that became the true characters of his narratives.

The brickwork and walls of villas, condos, labourers' flats, rural manors, and towering stone fencings often possess dual meanings and roles: they separate one from the world and protect them against the chaos of the world, or are the products of the despised by the writer burgher culture, the marks of its members' undoubted richness and bad taste. This was why they became the focus of his criticism.

For Gadda, architecture was also a point of reference when he developed his original comparisons and metaphors, the goal of which was to transcend the classical forms of expression. It was that constant search for the effect of stylistic transgression and not fidelity in reproducing the reality that constituted the writer's main driving force:

Gadda not so much named things and objects as he surprised them as they developed and proved their temporary existence. One could say that the insurmountable mistrust in "utilitarian language", to any form of "utility", lies at the foundation of the exuberant world of metaphors of his pages.⁹

Therefore, his affinity to rhetoric and devices such as extended metaphor or the already mentioned catalogue and enumeration stemmed from Gadda's deeper, deliberate writing project developed over many years. Indeed, Gadda's works were based on an extremely accurately defined philosophical system, in which the basic notion was the notion of a system. He presented the reality as a system of mutual relations and not entirely realised relations between the minutest elements. Gadda discussed even the most abstract notions of his philosophy using architectural metaphors:

I feel close to the thought about reality built of a network of mutually dependant system. Such a reality is like a city, and the city is built of houses, and the houses are built of walls, and a wall consists of bricks, and bricks of fragments, i.e. bits. Thus, a bit constitutes a part present in itself, in a brick and in a wall, in a house and in a city.¹⁰

At another place in the same essay, one titled *Meditazione milanese*¹¹ [*Milan Musings*], the writer specified – using the same architectural reference – that reality

⁹ G.C. Roscioni, *Dysharmonia przedustanowiona*, trans. A. Kreisberg, [in:] *Literatura na świecie*, op. cit., p. 125.

¹⁰ C.E. Gadda, "Meditazione milanese", [in:] idem., *Scritti vari e postumi*, Garzanti, Milan 1993, p. 752.

¹¹ *Meditazione milanese* is an essay with a philosophical and literary theory focus, which Gadda wrote in 1928, but it was published in 1974, already after his death. So far it has not been translated into Polish – the quotations were translated by the author [nor was it translated

was nothing other than an amalgam (*grumo*) or a combination (*convergenza*) of complicated mutual relations. The applied image of a building, i.e. a house, stressed the fact that the existence of any object was derived from its causality and purposefulness:

The house is not a house (a postal parcel): it is rather an amalgam or a combination of complicated relations derived from the function of residence, rest, writing – from the financial capabilities to build it (it is a node of economical capabilities) – from the fact of no earthquake occurring – from the combination of solidifying lime, iron, bricks, applying the appropriate technology, etc. etc. (...) ¹²

By referring in his texts to architectural elements, Gadda always treated them as tangible items consisting of parts, i.e. subject to particular, almost academic analysis. This analysis is sometimes the focus of a detailed description, yet its function is not limited to only pure *mimesis*. It is also not about simple narrative pauses which extend and complement diegesis but, rather, about an impression of ‘petrification’, i.e. a complete static condition of the presented world. One example of such a spatial amplification can be found in the first part of the author’s 1936 novel, titled *La cognizione del dolore* [*Recognising Pain*]. Apart from other elements which depict the location where the action takes place, there is also an extensive description of the Pastrufazio urban developments. The third-person narrative enumerates all the types of overblown burgher houses:

Villas, villas! tiny – eight bedrooms, a kitchen, two bathrooms; princely – forty rooms, an extensive terrace overlooking the lake, a panoramic view of Serruchon, a garden, an orchard, a garage, a guardhouse, tennis, drinking water, cesspool over seven hundred hectolitres (...) villas! tiny villas! excessive huge villas, lonely small villas, double villas, houses resembling villas, rustic villas, villa rustics (...) ¹³

Further in the description, the narrator focuses on details of those “most striking products of technology”, which are even more emphatic in their ugliness. He thus mentions “roofs covered with drain pipes, and drain pipes full of acute angles resembling some terrible northern glacial triangles.” Other houses in the neighbourhood display “pretences of Swiss chalets” despite the fact that they are constantly “simmering in the American heat covering this land.” Other “small villas” are decorated with

into English, for that matter; this is why quotations in English were translated from the Polish translation].

¹² C.E. Gadda, *Meditazione...*, p. 666.

¹³ C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie cierpienia*, trans. H. Kralowa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1980, pp. 24–25.

“quasi-Sienna or Pastrufazio/Norman pinnacles.” Others still boast of their “various cupolas and pinnacles in the Russian or quasi-Russian style”, somewhat resembling “up-side-down radishes or onions” covered with often polychromed tiles, “and thus resembling the scales of a carnival reptile, yellow-and-blue.”¹⁴

In the next part of the description, the narrator ironically doubts the functional value of cutting-edge technical solutions applied in the structures. These improvements are supposed to constitute the key notion of the “20th-century style”, which was nothing else than a fusion of all other architectural styles, which are also carefully enumerated. The 20th-century style is, therefore, distinguishable owing to its “exceptionally functional stairs made of pink marble, that it’s worth breaking your leg,” or dormers “like I have never seen before, as if real portholes on a ship,” or, finally, owing to “outhouses unimaginable for someone who has never been inside them, they are so rational.”¹⁵

An overview of architectural kitsch becomes the starting point for a special kind of sociological analysis of the society as well as of its criticism. That criticism is directed at the owners of the carefully enumerated residences. Considering the similarity between the location where the action takes place – i.e. the fictional South American Maradagal – and the pre-WWII Italy, one could state with considerable certainty that at that point Gadda offered an insightful and quite clearly critical assessment of the condition of the Italian society during the fascist period.¹⁶ Among the owners of the bigger villas, he mentioned both a manufacturer of motorcycle seats and a bankrupt silkworm farmer, a “freshly repainted” count, and a “faded” marquis. The story’s narrator criticises the class of the newly rich, who made their fortunes on shady financial operations during the war and who now flaunt their wealth, yet not being able to obscure with it their lack of taste, education, and refinement.

A very similar description and a social analysis can also be found in Gadda’s second novel, titled *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* [*That Disgusting Minger from via Marulana*]. The internal focalisation applied in the narrative enables an interpretation of the state of things as viewed ‘from the inside’ and presenting the opinions of ‘regular inhabitants’ regarding the new riches of those who are commonly referred to as “sharks”. Also in this case, the most visible manifestation of wealth comes in the form of the owners’ houses. The novel’s protagonists live on Via Merulana, which for Rome’s populace has become a symbol of wealth acquired through not entirely transparent means during the recent war:

¹⁴ C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie...*, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁶ Already in the mid-1920s, to quote his initial narrative texts, Gadda stated that his aim was to present the society within the broadest possible perspective. Cf. C.E Gadda, “Racconto Italiano di ignoto del Novecento”, [in:] *idem.*, *Scritti vari...*, p. 414.

(...) in this house at number 219 only wealthy people resided; there were also some noblemen, but mostly new, dabbling in trade. Those, who until recently have been called sharks. The the crowd called the house itself the ducat house. Because it was entirely, all the way to the roof, stuffed with gold.

What is also striking in this description of space is the level of detail:

Inside, two sides, A and B, six levels per side, and twelve residences, two on each floor. But it was side A third floor that was most honoured as it was there that the Balduccis lived, masters as I've ever seen one, opposite there lived a countess, also on a bag of cash, a widow, Mrs Menacacci, in her case wherever you would put your hand gold fell out, pearls, diamonds, and all other valuable. And whole grands flew out like butterflies. 'Cause to keep them in a bank that's unsafe, a fire could easily devour them. You'd be better off with a chest of drawers with a double bed.¹⁷

The use of dialectic stylisation in the description introduced readers into the world of Rome's proletariat after the First World War, along with their opinions and interpretation of the world. However, the common description features the typical polyphony as alongside the dominant voice of the people one can also hear the burgher voice of countess Menegazzi, one of the tenants of the "dukat house" ("You'd be better off...") The level of detail in the description of the building also has a narrative-based justification: it is soon going to become a crime scene (theft and murder).

Architectural elements in Gadda's fiction sometimes carry an exclusively digressive meaning. It is particularly the case in short-prose attempts, in which a description of a building becomes only the starting point for spinning stories of a different kind. For example, in the short story titled *La chiesa antica*¹⁸, a reference to Rome's Santa Maria in Trastevere basilica becomes a pretext for telling the story of Pope Innocent II, while in *L'antica basilica*¹⁹ the description of space emphasises the elements of architecture both within a global perspective (a square, a colonnade, a church) and an individual perspective (Corinthian capitals, tympanums, panoplia, and bucraniums). Each of the described material elements hides many centuries of geneological and historical traditions of the place, as well as the work of its constructors. Thus, through detailed descriptions of the material reality, Gadda

17 C.E. Gadda, "To ohydne pasztzecisko z ulicy Merulana", trans. A. Wasilewska [in:] *Literatura na świecie*, p. 10.

18 C.E. Gadda, "La chiesa antica", [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1., Garzanti, Milan 1994, pp. 247-254.

19 C.E. Gadda, "L'antica basilica", [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 41-42. The text has not been translated into Polish. The quotations were translated by the author [and then from Polish into English].

fulfilled his initial intention to offer a comprehensive and systemic framing of the world through literature. Reflection on the past which materialises through the grandness of architectural monuments inclines the narrator to engage in “melancholic meditations” on the essence of beauty. Through a series of exclamations filled with admiration, he appreciates even the structural material applied in the buildings, the bright sparkling marble (*i chiari, i fulgidi marmi*), directly addressing his readers: “Why don’t we admire those valuable decorations of Lombardy lands?”²⁰ Utilising that same admiration-filled tone, Gadda’s other text, a short note from his visit in Liguria (*Sogno ligure*²¹) describes the majesty of a former Baroque temple with its “noble Genoan walls”, “celebratory stucco”, and the “unequalled windows” full of “blinding splendour.”²² In the same short story, the magnificence of the monuments of Lombardy and Liguria is combined with the developments of “other cities and lands.” There, wooden temples are covered with zinc trapezoidal sheet metal, resembling warehouses or port docks. The majestic walls of former temples are compared to futuristic ‘basilical’ modern domes of railway hangars. Gadda seemed to be against modern architectural solutions which, for him, were a symbol of poor taste and the erosion of beauty. In this regard, the juxtaposition of modern times and the past was a testimony to the author’s deeper thought. In reality, Gadda polarised time in all his texts. The past was glorified as a moment of forever lost happiness, while the “now” entailed negative connotations.²³ The temporal polarisation was closely associated with the polarisation of space. The real world experienced *in praesentia*, i.e. here and now, is a space of the enemy presented using dark colours, enclosed spaces, or boundless emptiness. In this context, there appear abandoned houses surrounded by dark cypress paths, which become home to spectres, as in the case of the short story titled *La gazza ladra* or *Un inchino rispettoso*. On the other extreme from those negatively marked spaces, there appears a “world of dreamed buildings”, i.e. an idealised distant and sunny landscape, now inaccessible as it exists only in the recollections of the characters.²⁴

Gadda’s novels and short stories are often constructed around the voice of a first- or third-person narrator with internal focalisation, who by indicating elements of space expresses their attitude towards the world. Also at this level there appears a clear dichotomy between the external world – i.e. aggressive, chaotic, and dull – and personal space, i.e. home, the basic role of which is to protect the “I”

20 C.E. Gadda, *L’antica...*, p. 41.

21 C.E. Gadda, “Sogno ligure”, [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 44–45.

22 C.E. Gadda, *Sogno...*, p. 44.

23 Cf. J. Gajda, *Il mondo doloroso nella narrativa di Carlo Emilio Gadda*, Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2002, pp. 60–67.

24 Cf. J. Janusz, “Le sfumature del sottinteso nella narrativa di Carlo Emilio Gadda”, *Romanica Silesiana*, 2006, issue 1, p. 100.

against the aggression of the external world. This motif is distinctly marked in *La cognizione del dolore*: Gonzalo reproaches his mother for allowing the sanctity of their home to be “defiled” by the presence of strangers. A home is mainly a place where a resident should feel safe in every respect. Its walls should fulfil the function of “insulators”, enabling one to escape the aggressive external world: “A house should keep one safe and protected”, guard “focus” when faced with the “erosion of the modern world.”²⁵ In the short story titled *La casa*²⁶, Gadda described – with a considerable amount of self-irony – the perfect house. It should be located on one of Rome’s hills, even if risking a court action by the potential neighbour, the countess, who could complain about losing the panorama of the eternal city being obscured by the new building. Erected for functionality and ensuring every amenity, it should constitute a safe haven protecting the owner against the prying gazes of neighbours and the unsolicited visits by pushy relatives. According to the autobiographic narrator, today’s houses do not fulfil their basic functions. In yet another fragment, the first-person narrator criticises both new construction materials (reinforced concrete and CMUs) and the sizes of multi-level urban “phalanstères”²⁷, in which whole families are cramped. He carefully enumerates the inconveniences caused by the modern “housing revolution”, in particular the lack of consideration of thermal conditions as houses built with CMUs overheat in summer and are under-heated in winter. Yet the biggest flaw is their promiscuity and a lack of sound-proofing. For this reason, the narrator has to endure unsolicited sounds:

I can hear the basic social unit, that is an Italian family, 128 times. Active life, I can hear it, sitting and standing, life in slippers and on high heels, the clacking of high heels, and clogs, lyrical and fisharmonious life, and life expressing own opinion and entering family disputes; the physiological and pathological life, unexpected lack of discipline and the reality of the inevitable.²⁸

Just as a house can become a caricature of itself, so can a wall – which normally separates and protects – stop fulfilling its function. The motif of a wall which cannot prevent entry because it is “low, falling apart, without those pieces of bottles on the top usually boasted by its more diligent friends” – which can be easily conquered in a single leap and is with its very appearance offensive “for a more proper

²⁵ C.E. Gadda, “La nostra casa si trasforma: e l’inquilino la deve subire”, [in:] idem., *Verso la certosa*, Adelphi Edizioni, Milan 2013, p. 123.

²⁶ C.E. Gadda, “La casa”, [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 1107–1132.

²⁷ Gadda defined that block of flats as a ‘falansterio’, i.e. a phalanstère. Apart from referring to Fourier’s utopian socialism, the noun carries in Italian a pejorative meaning, unlike the more neutral ‘palazzo’ or ‘caserme’.

²⁸ C.E. Gadda, *La casa si trasforma...*, p. 124. Translation by the author.

sense of ownership”²⁹ – appears in short stories and in the novel titled *La cognizione del dolore*. While in the humorous short story titled *La gazza ladra*, a useless short wall surrounding the villa of Mrs Campanini became the possible contributor to the theft of a diamond bracelet of the wealthy owner, in *La cognizione del dolore* the motif of a wall “stunted and undeveloped and on top of that missing the ritual bottle shards on the top”³⁰ appeared in a more serious context. A grand solitary villa inhabited by an old Signora and Gonzalo, her son, is surrounded by a short stone fence. Its poor condition enables a burglary, during which the owner becomes severely injured. The villa’s wall became rather a ‘symbol’ than an actual means of protection of the property. It is, in fact, its flaw that Gonzalo himself indicated as he complained that the “hunched wall” did not protect his private abode.

Apart from their denotative and descriptive (or digressive even) significance, those architectural elements also carry symbolic functions. They signify the protagonist’s strive to isolate himself as he is terrified by the chaos and aggression of his surroundings. In the case of young characters limited by social convention and rigid etiquette, the hated walls of their houses become an image of oppression and limitation. In some works, these walls, having been damaged as the time went by, become the sign of the total failure of petite bourgeois values as well as a sad recollection of past wealth.

At the macro level, the symbol of the house appears exceptionally often in Gadda’s works. The writer often chose the insides of houses as the locations where the action of his short stories and novels took place – houses, villas, and houses with rooms for rent sometimes became, at least to some extent, the characters of the narratives. The motif of the family house is also the outer frame of the novel titled *La cognizione del dolore*, where it assumes ambivalent or clearly negative connotations. In an emotional description of the Signora’s home space which opens the second part of the work, readers find an image of a lonely mother trying to find refuge from a storm in an empty house. The clearly defined opposition divides the space of the building into two polar zones: the high zone taken by the storm as well as the mother’s zone, low, located under the stairs, where Signora tries to no avail to hide from the storm and her own sad recollections from her past life. However, unlike in the case of Jurij Lotman’s classical concept³¹, the spatial model in Gadda’s novel includes neither a safe nor a good space despite being based on the up–down opposition; the “up” of the villa, which Signora leaves during the storm descending to the closet, is an aggressive space taken over by the raging element.

29 C.E. Gadda, “Sroka złodziejka”, [in:] idem., *Pożar na ulicy Keplera*, trans. H. Kralowa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1974, pp. 190, 193.

30 C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie...*, p. 150.

31 Cf. J.M. Lotman, “Problem przestrzeni artystycznej”, trans. Jerzy Faryno, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1976, LXVII, col. 1, p. 214.

Then, the “down” – that “nook of the house” where the helpless woman tries to find shelter – is a place of “utter solitude”, a “motionless trap of the black scorpion.”³² For Signora – one of the two protagonists of the novel – the family villa constituted in the past the purpose of her life being the sign of social status, family prosperity, prestige, and happiness. It was the place where she raised her sons, where she felt like a mother and wife, and where her life seemed to her to be based on a steadfast financial and moral foundations. Therefore, the family house becomes the symbol of social status maintained regardless of the price, despite her actual financial standing:

The mother (...) since the bricklayers started their work here in '99 – a hot flash of youth – has started to sense almost like a piece of her existence, that serpent's triumph possessing “own villa, a triumph over her rivals from Keltike, who did not believe that was possible (villas for the penniless Pirobutirros).³³

Those are the objections Gonzalo raised towards his mother as the only thing he remembers from his childhood is sacrifices and poverty caused by his parents' decision that it was necessary to retain the excessively expensive property. Gonzalo also exists within the same space of his house. Yet for him that place has never been a sign of happiness, prestige, or safety. When he was a boy, Gonzalo never shared his parents' pride in owning such a lavish house.³⁴ For him, it rather became a symbol of painful memories, and adult Gonzalo often reproached his mother for the fact that his parents cared more about the condition of the house and its fitting than about the needs of their children. Thus, the villa in Pastrufazio becomes in the novel a symbol of one of the most severely criticised vices of burgher Italy: the unbridled desire to own. A house becomes a “Villa”, or even a “Villa – Idea”, a “reflection and a mode of Living”, the “holy boil on the neck of the Beast of Living”³⁵, to which the whole family existence is ancillary. This is because the desire to maintain the illusion of one's own wealth was socially considered as a useful duty: “This is (...) the social function of a Hidalgo, and even more so of a marquis, whose name is listed in the register of Maradagal catast as the owner of the villa in Serruchon (...).”³⁶

The location where the novel's action takes place is viewed differently by each character. Signora lives through her recollections of past happiness and prosper-

³² C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie...*, p. 113.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³⁴ Among all the modes of describing a family house used throughout literature, Gadda chose the one which presents it as an object of negation and severe criticism. Cf. M. Czermińska, “Dom w autobiografii i powieści o dzieciństwie”, [in:] M. Głowiński, A. Okopień-Sławińska (eds.), *Przestrzeń i literatura*, PWN, Warsaw 1978, pp. 229–252.

³⁵ C.E. Gadda, *Poznawanie...*, p. 144.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

ity, and the present is for her a cruel time during which the once happy space is “unnecessary” as it does not fulfil its basic function: to offer protection and security. After a whole life of hard work, she is left with useless walls and the copper of empty pots in a huge kitchen which no one needs. The once pulsating with life house now consists of such rooms; that “kitchen without fire” and “rooms without voices.”³⁷ Once a place of happiness and a symbol of the social status, now it is for Signora a sign of loneliness, memories of lost life, and a place of suffering.

The motif of a family house and an abandoned villa appears several more times in some of Gadda's lesser texts. The short story titled *Una buona nutrizione* also unfolds in an “old villa on a hill, or actually a rural house”, with rooms for rent. It is surrounded by cypress trees which protect the house on the outside. Throughout the description, as in the case of the Pirobutirro's villa in *La cognizione del dolore*, the narrator stresses the uselessness of the rooms, their randomness, emptiness, and the level of damage: a stable without a single horse, an empty caretaker house, “expensive wall with rusty drains”. The whole description gives the impression of a “merciful collection of rattraps” of walls and roofs.³⁸ The short story titled *Un inchino rispettoso*³⁹ also includes the motif of a solitary house surrounded by a “thick guard of cypress trees”, which is supposed to become a scene of a crime committed on its old lonely owner.

The symbol of a family house also appears in the short story titled *San Giorgio in casa Brocchi*. Its story is set in 1928 and the Brocchis are one of the respectable Milan aristocratic families. The title *House* [at least in the Polish version of the title] refers not so much to the splendid family abode as to the position occupied by the family in the small world of the Milan aristocracy. To maintain the tradition of the “two-hundred-year-old name of the Brocchis”, the family should have become, despite its complete degeneration, a carrier of principles, morality, diligence, and devotion. Countess Brocchi, the mother of the family, is the guardian of those values; she exercises particular care to ensuring the righteousness and moral purity of Luigi, her son:

She found comfort in the thought that the Brocchi house has always responded with utmost severity to the “spread of deprivation by locking its doors fast. (...) It seemed to her that through every hectare of the degenerated lands there crawled towards the house opportunities and encounters to launch a cunning attack on the spirit and the age-long virtues of the Brocchis.”⁴⁰

³⁷ C.E. Gadda, *Poznanawanie...*, p. 112.

³⁸ C.E. Gadda, “Dobre odżywianie”, [in:] *Pożar na ulicy Keplera*, p. 132.

³⁹ C.E. Gadda, “Un inchino rispettoso” [in:] idem., *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 2, Garzanti Milano 1994, pp. 817–821.

⁴⁰ C.E. Gadda, “Dzień świętego Jerzego w domu Brocchich”, [in:] idem., *Pożar na ulicy Keplera*, pp. 27–28.

“The Brocchi house” is a metonymy signifying a whole series of complex rituals which family members must obey, especially Luigi, the family’s final member and its hope for the future. According to the author’s intentions, the short story was supposed to constitute an anti-burgher satire⁴¹, and the youthful character of Luigi is restrained in his natural development by some obscure petty Catholic/burgher conventions, of which “the Brocchi house” is an age-long and unmodifiable sign.

In Carlo Emilio Gadda’s prose, the brickwork and the wall are both clearly topical motifs which are part of the author’s extensive writing project, the goal of which was to depict and catalogue the entire material reality. These elements appear as parts of a bigger whole: a safe house and a private impenetrable space, but also as a symbol of limitations, petite bourgeois conventions, and a place of suffering and sacrifice. In utilising architectural elements, Gadda indicated the minutest of details and functions building the whole. Those are often mere pretext for a deeper sociological analysis and a digressive expansion or a developed pause, which produces the effect – extremely characteristic of Gadda’s works – of a breaking-up of the narrative structure, which remains unfinished and fragmented. By utilising architectural references such as a brickwork or a wall, Gadda made them part of a complex system of metaphorical relations through which he attempted to bridle the chaotic reality.

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⁴¹ In a letter to a friend, Gadda wrote: “The novella (...) is a satire on the conservative and moralising burgher obsessions of a certain Milan family.” C.E. Gadda, *A un amico fraterno. Lettere a Bonaventura Tecchi 1920–1963*, Garzanti, Milan 1984, p. 92.

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Joanna Janusz

Mur i ściana jako metafora w prozie Carla Emilia Gaddy

Streszczenie

Artykuł poddaje analizie motywy topiczne muru, ściany i domu w utworach jednego z największych prozaików włoskich dwudziestego wieku, Carla Emilia Gaddy. Motywy te częścią szerokiego projektu pisarskiego autora, którego celem było zobrazowanie i skatalogowanie całej materialnej rzeczywistości. Elementy te pojawiają się jako części większej całości: bezpiecznego domu i prywatnej nieprzekraczalnej przestrzeni, ale także jako symbol ograniczeń, drobnomieszczańskich konwenansów czy też miejsce cierpienia i wyrzeczeń. W posługiwaniu się elementami architektonicznymi Gadda zwraca uwagę na najdrobniejsze szczegóły i funkcje budujące całość. Sięgając po odniesienia architektoniczne takie jak mur i dom, Gadda czyni je częściami skomplikowanego systemu relacji metaforycznych, poprzez które pisarz podejmuje próbę ujarznienia chaotycznej rzeczywistości.

Mury i ściany willi, apartamentów, robotniczych mieszkań, wiejskich dworków, a także wyniosłe kamienne ogrodzenia często mają dwojake znaczenie i rolę: oddzielają od świata i chronią przed jego chaosem lub też są wytworami zniechęconej przez pisarza drobnomieszczańskiej kultury, znakami jej wątpliwego bogactwa i złego gustu i dlatego stają się obiektem krytyki. W niektórych utworach stają się symbolem pragnienia samoizolacji bohatera. Na poziomie struktury narracyjnej motywy muru i ściany stają się pretekstem do rozwinięcia dygresyjnego czy też rozbudowanej pauzy, co w rezultacie daje efekt rozbicia diegezy, która pozostaje niedokończona i fragmentaryczna.

Słowa kluczowe: mur, ściana, dom, przestrzeń, literatura włoska XX wieku, Carlo Emilio Gadda

Brickwork and the wall as metaphors in Carlo Emilio Gadda's fiction

Summary

The article analyses the topical motifs of the brickwork, the wall, and the house in the works of Carlo Emilio Gadda, one of the greatest Italian writers of the 20th century. These motifs were part of the writer's broader writing project, the aim of which was to depict and catalogue the entire material reality. These elements appear as parts of a bigger whole: a safe house and a private impenetrable space, but also as a symbol of limitations, petite bourgeois conventions, and a place of suffering and sacrifice. In utilising architectural elements, Gadda indicated the minutest of details and functions that constitute the whole. By utilising architectural references such as a brickwork or a wall, Gadda made them part of a complex system of metaphorical relations through which he attempted to bridle the chaotic reality.

The brickwork and walls of villas, condos, labourers' flats, rural manors, and towering stone fencings often possessed dual meanings and roles: they separate one from the world and protect them against the chaos of the world, or are the products of the burgher culture – despised by the writer – as well as the marks of its undoubted richness and bad taste. This was why they became the focus of his criticism. In some of his works, they become a symbol of a character's desire to isolate themselves from the world. At the level of the narrative structure, the motifs of the brickwork and the wall become a pretext for a digressive expanding or a developed pause, which, in turn, produces an effect of a breaking-up of a diegesis, which remains unfinished and fragmented.

Keywords: brickwork, wall, space, 20th-century Italian literature, Carlo Emilio Gadda

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