

The Modernist Short Story in Italy: the Case of the ‘Edizioni di Solaria’

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This article investigates the role played by the modernist periodical *Solaria* (1926-1934) as the Italian short story was being modernized. By offering a descriptive survey of the rarely studied corpus of fifteen short narrative volumes printed by the 'Edizioni di Solaria', the periodical's minor publishing house, it sheds new light on the development of the short genre in this particular context. The two key questions addressed are, on the one hand, the validity of a recent hypothesis proposing Italo Svevo as a model for the 'Solarian' short story, and, on the other, the relationship between the codified *novella/racconto* and other forms of short narrative prose derived from early twentieth-century avant-garde experimentation.

Keywords: *Solaria*, short story, modernism, prosa d'arte, Svevo

Although the circulation of the Florentine periodical *Solaria* (1926-1934) was not extensive, post-war literary scholarship has long recognized its impact on the evolution of modern Italian literature. The major role the magazine played on the literary scene between the wars is commonly summarized in three interrelated dynamics, which can be defined as narrative (i.e. the ‘return’ to the novel, after the experiments with fragmentation that dominated the first two decades of the century), international (referring to its openness to foreign modern literature) and ideological (given its difficult relations with fascism and censorship).¹

When considering *Solaria*’s narrative dynamics, traditional scholarship has tended to follow the self-proclaimed aim of the magazine to rehabilitate and modernize the Italian novel, and has established a compelling connection between the magazine and the rise of the ‘modern’ novel in the early thirties. Luperini however noted that the ‘Solarian’ writers were in the first place short story writers (Luperini, 1981: 458), and this has been confirmed recently by Tortora, who has identified a common Solarian approach to the short story, which essentially consists in an elaboration of the short story as conceived by modernist Italo Svevo (Tortora, 2011a: 41). The study of the short story as the Solarians’ preferred form of narrative experimentation and innovation calls for an investigation of the entire ‘Solarian experience,’ which consists not only of the short stories published in the magazine issues, but also of the fifteen short story collections printed by the ‘Edizioni di Solaria,’ the small publishing house affiliated with the magazine.

Moreover, the recent introduction of the notion of modernism in Italian literary criticism and historiography strengthens the need to re-frame the scholarly perspective on *Solaria* and invites us to consider it in the first place as ‘a point of reference for the development of modernism in Italy’ (Baldi, 2011: 73; my translation).² Indeed, it was through this periodical that Italian intellectuals were acquainted with modernist writers such as Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Faulkner, Hemingway, Kafka, and Mann; *Solaria* also ‘discovered’ major Italian modernists from a

preceding generation, such as Svevo and Tozzi; amongst its collaborators it counted several writers (Gadda, Saba, Montale, Quarantotti Gambini) who continued and further developed the modernist experience.

Pulling these two threads together, I would like to reflect on *Solaria's* part in the development of the Italian modernist short story, by examining the neglected corpus of *Solaria's* short story collections. Though not all Solarian writers reappear in this book series, every collection contains a number of texts previously published by the magazine, and therefore the series can be defined as a representative corpus. Moreover, the study of the book series will broaden our perspective on the short story in the Solarian context, since it enables us to consider a greater number of short stories per author, and, in the recurrent case of an author publishing more than one volume in the series, allows us to reflect on how the poetics of the short story evolves over time.

***Solaria's* publishing house: an introduction**

The 'Edizioni di *Solaria*' released a total of forty-one volumes between 1926 and 1936. Apart from *Solaria's* director, Carocci, among its founding partners it counted Bonsanti, Ferrero, Tecchi, Debenedetti, and Loria (Simonetti, 1984: 151-52). From the start, the main objective of the publishing house was to promote young literary writers rejected by the commercial publishing industry, which was interested solely in popular fiction. However, the diffusion of literary volumes was hampered by the strong connection between the major booksellers and the big publishing houses, as is illustrated by the fact that the book distribution in Italy was organized by the ALI (Associazione Librai Italiana), which was founded and controlled by major publisher Treves (Manacorda, 1979: 10). For these reasons, *Solaria* had difficulty securing the circulation

of its volumes outside the Florentine area, and could rely on only a small number of minor like-minded booksellers and publishers, such as Giardini in Florence (Alpes) and Gromo in Turin (Ribet-Buratti).

Although the number of printed volumes was by any standards modest (usually about 700 copies), it is interesting to note that the balance of book sales was positive, and that the small profits made from the book series covered the losses suffered by the disappointing sales of the magazine issues. This was mostly due to *Solaria's* publishing system, which required that the author pay the typographer 1000 lire as security, and that he provide a certain number of subscriptions (most often 200). When this number was reached, the typographer would print the books, which were divided into a numbered series (for subscriptions) and a quantity of volumes 'fuori serie', to be sold in bookshops. In this way, the publishing house was sure to recover the greater part of the publication cost, and often made a small profit on the book sales (Simonetti, 1984: 152). This surprising relation of dependence between the magazine and the book series is confirmed in a letter from typographer Parenti to Carocci, in which the former proposes to suspend the magazine issues altogether and to proceed only with the book series (Simonetti, 1986: 114).

When one considers the generic features of the books, it immediately becomes clear that the corpus does not quite reflect *Solaria's* self-proclaimed focus on the novel. Of the forty-one volumes published by the 'Edizioni di Solaria,' only three can be defined as novels—with a fourth one located in the gray zone between novel and (long) story—against fifteen short narrative collections, nine poetry collections, nine essay collections, two dramatic works and two mixed collections of short texts lacking a dominant narrative component.³ In the following pages, I will focus on the fifteen narrative collections: Bonsanti's *La serva amorosa* (1929) and *I capricci dell'Adriana* (1934), Carocci's *Il paradiso perduto* (1929), Gadda's *La Madonna dei filosofi*

(1931) and *Il castello di Udine* (1934), Gadda Conti's *Verdemare* (1927), Lanza's *All'albergo del sole* (1932), Loria's *Il cieco e la bellona* (1928) and *La scuola di ballo* (1932), Morovich's *L'osteria sul torrente* (1936), Nannetti's *Malseme* (1930) and *La guerra ritorna* (1935), Quarantotti Gambini's *I nostri simili* (1932), Terracini's *Quando avevamo vent'anni* (1935), and Vittorini's *Piccola borghesia* (1931). To this list, I will add one of the two mixed collections, Pavolini's *Elixir di vita* (1929), because it contains some short narratives of interest. The other mixed collection, Burresi's *Raccolta di scritti*, will not be considered because of its posthumous, incomplete, and predominantly non-narrative character.

This corpus partially overlaps with that of the short stories published by the magazine. However, the change of medium, even though it occurs within the same editorial context, is not completely without consequence. In the case of *Solaria*, the movement from magazine to printed volume generally entails a loosening of the editorial focus and a stronger foregrounding of authorial poetics. This evolution is obviously related to the book series' publishing system: given the fact that authors had to contribute to the expense of the printing process, it seems logical that they should be granted a greater liberty in the choice of texts to be included in the volume. Two specific examples suggest that *Solaria*'s editors were less rigid when it came to the book series. In his first collection, *La Madonna dei filosofi* (1931), C. E. Gadda re-inserted a number of short narratives previously rejected by the magazine, without altering them;⁴ likewise, the volume by Corrado Pavolini (brother of the well-known Fascist party official) contains a eulogy of Mussolini that the magazine, which tried to keep away from politics, would never have published. This factor may account for the greater heterogeneity of the corpus, which will emerge from my survey. Until now I have alternated the use of the terms 'short narrative' and 'short story.' I will elaborate on this distinction in the following sections.

***Solaria* and short story theory**

Interestingly, the strong prevalence of short stories over novels, both in the magazine and in the book series, is not supported by an equally strong theorization of the genre. *Solaria*'s essays mainly concentrate on literature as a whole, and when specific literary genres are considered, the novel and the poem both occupy a dominant position. More than a programmatic decision by the Florentine periodical, this attitude should be seen as an expression of a general reluctance by Italian scholars to study the modern short story, an approach at odds with the rich and extensive short story output of twentieth-century Italy.

In the pages of *Solaria*, the discussion of short stories usually remains confined to the book reviews section (where collections are equally outnumbered by reviews of novels), and primarily focuses on the way the specific work expresses the 'artistic personality' of the author. In these cases, the reviewers hardly ever distinguish between literary genres: novels and short stories are both seen as pieces of a puzzle reflecting the essence of the writer as an artist. Some of these reviews contain interesting theoretical considerations, yet these are too fragmentary and too discontinuous to constitute a proper theoretical discourse. Worth mentioning are Antonioni's and Poggioli's interest in the Russian short story (not only Chekhov, but also Pushkin, Gogol and Remizov), which Antonioni links to its historical antecedent, the oral folktale or *skaz*; as for Manzini's lyrical short stories, Franchi indicates an interesting link with Woolf's and Mansfield's short story practice.

A similar treatment of the short story can be found in the thematic issues dedicated to two of Italy's most prominent modernists, Italo Svevo and Federigo Tozzi.⁵ The issue on Svevo (*Solaria* 3-4, 1929), published in homage to the author after his sudden death, presents a series of personal recollections by Solarians and reflections on Svevo's 'art,' as expressed in his novels.

However, two essayists dedicate a few lines to Svevo's short story 'Una burla riuscita,' previously published by the Florentine periodical. The first of these, Alberto Consiglio, identifies the short story as the 'experimentum crucis of pure romanticism' and notes how the meaning of the story is both 'elementary and profound' (25); the second, Paul Henri Michel, lists a number of key features of Svevo's 'Burla' that apply to the modernist short story in general, such as the density of meaning, the central function of the mechanism of allusion, and the hidden irony. He further highlights the importance of metapoetic reflection in the short story, which defines a great part of Svevo's short story practice (53-55).

Tozzi's short story writing is even more strongly neglected, in spite of the fact that, at the time of the thematic issue (*Solaria* 5-6, 1930), critics had access to two printed short collections (against Svevo's sole 'Burla'). The only substantial comment on the author's short stories comes from Piovene, who argues that Tozzi in his collection *Giovani* merges the models of Verga and d'Annunzio, and that only in his novels does the restlessness already present in the short stories come to full expression (38-39). Although Piovene's reading seems biased by a perception of the short fiction as 'minor' or 'early' work, he does manage to capture an essential aspect of Tozzi's short story writing: the apparent insignificance, fortuity, and indifference of the setting, themes, and plot.

Svevo's model function for the Solarian short story

In his brief discussion of the Italian short story in the first three decades of the twentieth-century, Tortora (2011a) lists a number of characteristics of Svevo's short stories that are assimilated and elaborated by the *Solaria* writers. By defining Svevo's model contrastively against the short stories written by Pirandello and Tozzi, he implicitly identifies three phases of development,

which do not fully correspond to three successive temporal segments, but should rather be seen as conceptual steps between tradition and innovation. Whereas Pirandello's and Tozzi's short stories focus on a trauma or extraordinary event that takes place in everyday life, but breaks with its everyday setting, in Svevo's stories one observes both the absence of a single key event and the negation of its extraordinariness. In short, the trauma no longer 'happens' in everyday life, but everyday life simply becomes the traumatic nucleus of the story. The other main characteristic that completes Svevo's short stories, according to Tortora, is the dominating presence of an analytic narrator. Strongly influenced by psychoanalysis, Svevo is particularly attentive to apparently insignificant details, which acquire a very strong symbolical meaning. The analysis of everyday life eventually leads to some kind of epiphany that leaves the protagonist different than before. In this overall change in structure, Tortora sees the conclusion of the evolution of the Italian short narrative from *novella* to *racconto* (2011a: 42-43).

Tortora argues that the Solarians prefer Svevo as their major model, not only for the tendency toward analysis, but also for the elaboration of character and narrative progression, for which they often resort to the typically 'Svevian' maturation process of the 'inept' adolescent. However, with regard to Svevo's poetics, they reconfigure the representation of ineptitude, and generally offer a wider range of solutions that overcome the conventions of realism. They incorporate Svevo's deep psychological analysis of the self, but combine it with detailed and alienating descriptions of reality, and thus obtain a total mixture of the world as it is perceived and the inner world of the narrator. Both the world and the characters they represent are complicated, multifaceted and often contradictory (Tortora, 2011a: 44).

What is the pertinence of this description with regard to the corpus of short stories published by the 'Edizioni di Solaria'? Is Svevo the dominant model here too? Before I proceed to study the corpus, I would like to discuss briefly two theoretical issues that strongly condition

debate on the modern Italian short story, i.e. the distinction between *novella* and *racconto*, and the relation between the Italian short story and the *prosa d'arte*.

I argue that the difference between *novella* and *racconto* lies on a diachronic level: the *novella* evolves into the *racconto*, and this evolution should be seen as a very gradual process of modernization that does not correspond to the transition of one of Tortora's phases to another, but subsumes all three phases. From this diachronic perspective, the distinction largely corresponds to that between the tale and the short story: in both cases, the evolution of a short narrative form over time results in an increasing number of differences which eventually allow the comparison between both forms on a typological level, as attempted by Tortora. However, it seems to me impossible to pinpoint this formal change in the transition between Pirandello's and Tozzi's writings and those of Svevo. I believe that the triple distinction proposed by Tortora is effective in describing the progressive innovation of the modernist short story, but it does not correspond to a shift in genre, since the distance between Pirandello's short stories and the late nineteenth-century *novella*, as formalized by Verga, seems to me equally significant as that between Pirandello and Svevo.⁶ As for Tozzi, he is to be situated somewhere in between the other two modernists. Although a large number of his stories align him with Pirandello—mostly because of their focus on the 'anomaly,' the remarkable event—in several other stories (such as 'Misericordia,' 'Pittori,' 'Un giovane,' 'Una figliola,' and 'Elia e Vannina') Tozzi represents nothing but the crisis of an eventless, blocked and traumatic everyday existence. Although the brevity of Tozzi's stories inevitably leaves little room for the analytical depth of the narrator's speech, innovative strategies such as the elimination of significant events, the non-conclusiveness of the stories, and the central function of ellipsis (which all succeed in creating a lasting impression of discomfort) argue in favor of a re-evaluation of his importance as a modernist short story writer.

Moreover, when discussing the difference between the terms *novella* and *racconto*, one must be aware of their use in this specific historical context. Whereas the notion of ‘short story’ is generally adopted by Anglo-American writers, editors and critics at the beginning of the twentieth century, this is not the case in Italy, where the term *racconto* is consolidated only in the period after the Second World War. In the two first decades of the century, *novella* remains the dominant reference, and the 1920s and 1930s are marked by a significant terminological confusion between *novella* and *racconto*. In this period, the latter is generally associated with modern narrative, whereas the former can indicate both a traditionally plotted narrative and a modern narrative. Pirandello, Tozzi, and Svevo call their short stories *novelle* and an extremely experimental modernist such as C. E. Gadda uses both notions without distinction. One finds an equally varied use of the terms amongst literary critics of the time.⁷ In my opinion, the indistinct alternation of both notions during this period not only confirms the idea of a large transitory phase, but the preservation of the notion of *novella* by Italian modernists also highlights a specific aspect of Italian modernism, i.e. the fact that these writers do not situate their literary innovations outside the frames of tradition—as Anglo-American high modernists tend to do—but rather present their works as a new chapter of that same tradition.

This discussion, however, does not capture the full extent of *Solaria*’s contribution to the transformation of the short story in the modernist period. The scholarly focus on the tradition that leads from *novella* to *racconto* leaves out a significant quantity of short narratives, which in a first phase developed independently from this tradition. These texts have their origin in early-twentieth-century lyrical and essayistic prose forms such as the autobiographical fragment developed by collaborators of the avant-garde magazine *La Voce* and the ‘classicistic’ lyrical-descriptive prose ‘chapter’ (*capitolo*) elaborated by writers linked to *La Ronda*. In the 1920s, these experimental forms gradually flowed together in the *prosa d’arte*. This notion, which is still

often understood as ‘lyrical prose,’ actually functioned as a common denominator for all kinds of short prose texts, not necessarily anti-narrative or non-narrative, but simply subordinating the problem of their narrativity to the formal and stylistic perfection of the prose. By the launch of *Solaria* in 1926, the *prosa d’arte* had already undergone a significant narrativization, and this process continued until these forms merged with the Italian short story deriving from the *novella*, broadening its horizon and transforming it into the contemporary *racconto* as we know it today.⁸

This evolution of short narratives in the Italian context causes a category problem. On the one hand, *prosa d’arte* today remains commonly associated with its first, non-narrative interpretation (Cenati, 2010: 8-9); on the other, extending the term *racconto* to include all short narratives in the modernist period, though terminologically correct (on condition of using a broad definition of ‘story’), would hardly do justice to these two different traditions, which in the 1920s have only just begun to interact. Indeed, writers and readers of the period perceive and describe this coexistence between a codified short story (*racconto* or *novella*) and another kind of short narrative, but they do not succeed in finding an appropriate term for it, which is all the more difficult since their interpretations of what a *racconto* is differ strongly, and both categories progressively overlap.⁹

This article cannot provide comprehensive debate about the modernist short story in Italy. Though in previous studies I have opted for an inclusive approach that does not distinguish between ‘short narrative’ and ‘short story,’ in this context I will use the (somewhat general) term ‘short narrative prose’ to indicate the narratives derived from avant-garde experimentation, which are generally not considered as *novelle-racconti* (neither at the time, nor by subsequent scholarship). These texts, of which the greater part are travel accounts, autobiographical fragments, and war memories, often contain a strong lyrical component, give much space to reminiscence and observation, and are usually structured by the psyche of the autodiegetic

narrator rather than by a plot (i.e. a successive chain of events). This imperfect definition already shows a significant overlap with the modernist short story as practiced by Svevo (except for the lyrical component). In a different context, such as Anglo-American literature, a similar prose piece would perfectly fit into the category of '(modernist) short story.'¹⁰ I wish to stress that the distinction between *racconto* and *prosa narrativa* is by no means a dichotomy, but should be seen as a coexistence of two different narrative tendencies that strongly interact and progressively merge into each other. I will now compare the texts of all the short narrative collections with Svevo's model, starting with the short stories.

The 'Edizioni di Solaria': first notes for a typology of its short narrative texts

1. Short story

Bonsanti's first short stories (*La serva amorosa*, 1929) still adhere closely to traditional nineteenth-century narrative schemes (Dumas's stories come to mind). The collection mostly consists of adventure tales with much dialogue, some suspense, and little space for introspection, except for 'Un matrimonio combinato' and 'La fine dell'adolescenza,' which narrate the protagonist Pierino's maturation process and announce the shift from plot to analysis that characterizes Bonsanti's second collection. Indeed, in *I capricci dell'Adriana* (1934), the characters and setting of the previous collection recur, yet the stories display a strong tendency toward analysis, resembling that of the French psychological novel as it evolved from Bourget to Proust. In these lengthy introspective stories, the characters are paralyzed by their aristocratic status, which inhibits them from transcending social conventions and moving toward some sort of development (with the sole exception of the patriot Otturino).

As a collection, Gadda Conti's *Verdemare* (1927) is less homogeneous, and combines traditional stories with some travel accounts. 'Sotto il carrubo' uses one of Maupassant's favorite framing structures: the embedded narration of the life of a stranger encountered by the narrator. Other texts, such as 'Il vecchio capitano' and the historical-mystical story 'Maternità pastorale' seem equally indebted to romantic and naturalistic nineteenth-century narrative.

Like *Verdemare*, Morovich's *L'osteria sul torrente* (1936) is a heterogeneous collection, of which the conventional stories remain strongly indebted to naturalistic techniques. They describe rustic scenes (*tranches de vie*), sometimes without a proper plot ('L'osteria sul torrente'), but more often with a central event that changes the everyday patterns ('Il leprotto,' 'Il portafogli,' 'Lo zingaro,' 'Incendio alla stazione'). The detailed description of the characters (all lumberjacks) in their social environment, from which they cannot escape, further illustrates to what extent these stories keep within the lines set out by *verismo*.

As for Loria's two volumes of short stories, it has been pointed out that they reveal a significant evolution toward innovation (Luperini 1981: 466). The stories of *Il cieco e la bellona* (1928) still have strong connections both with the picaresque tradition and with the mythic-fantastic tradition perfected by Hoffmann and Poe. However, already in these timeless settings one encounters atypical characters with some sort of mental disturbance, such as the neurotic spy of 'Il registro,' or the inept female protagonist of 'L'appuntamento.' Loria's second collection, *La scuola di ballo* (1932), further develops this modern track, by focusing on the ineptitude of the main character, often involved in a (failed) process of development which is resolved by death ('Il fratellino,' 'La scuola di ballo'). In other (shorter) stories, however, Loria tends more toward Pirandello's model, and uses a central event (the painting of a house, the recovery of a hypothermic lady in a greenhouse, the observation of an astonishing dancer) to expose the social

and emotional detachment of the characters, their inability to cope with emotions and bonding ('La casa ritinta', 'La serra', 'La danza sul prato').

A stronger debt to Pirandello can be found in Nannetti's *Malseme* (1930), which consists of eighteen stories evolving around a strange event that exposes the sense of alienation felt by the individual in modernity. Sometimes, when the plot consists solely of the depiction of a sad and almost eventless everyday existence ('L'amico nevristenico,' 'Assi di noce,' 'Il sonno simile alla morte'), the absence of analysis and the immediacy of the crisis hint at the influence of Tozzi. There are only three stories which do not follow this track: 'Pecora pazza,' which has strong ties with Verga's model, 'La notte che incontrai Charlot,' and 'Apoteosi di Cyrano,' in which Nannetti explores the absurd and the surreal.

As for Carocci's stories (1929), Proustian influence is obvious in the very title of the collection (*Il paradiso perduto*), and a recent study has defined *Solaria's* founder as a mediocre epigone of the French writer (Ludovico, 2010: 136-37). Whereas, in 'Il giardino,' the description of the family garden is entirely set within the narrator's mind, in other stories the protagonist actually returns to the places of his adolescence, in search of images and memories. These stories of reminiscence often develop a narrative plot of some kind. In 'Ritorno alla villa di un tempo,' the sudden thought of a young woman provokes in the protagonist an ambiguous triangle of desire, in which he and his grandfather contend for her favors. A different triangle relationship is depicted in 'Cose', where the affair between the adolescent and his lover is complicated by the presence of her retarded uncle.

The works of Quarantotti Gambini, Lanza, Vittorini, and Gadda are more consonant with Tortora's parameters of the Solarian short story. Tortora's own analysis of the three stories Quarantotti Gambini included in *I nostri simili* (1932) adequately explains how they each integrate and elaborate Svevo's model. In each short story, Quarantotti Gambini presents a young

and apparently normal—though strongly analytic—protagonist, which is then revealed as socially inept, completely incapable of assuming whatever relational role (lover, husband, friend) his environment tries to bestow upon him. In two out of three of these stories, the ending shows no form of progress by the protagonist (Tortora, 2011: 48-49).

In Vittorini's *Piccola Borghesia* (1931), the narrative triptych constructed around Adolfo offers an innovative example of the Solarian short story. Whereas in all the stories discussed above, any humor is limited to the comicality (or absurdity) of individual situations, Vittorini's narrator takes an explicitly ironic stand. The very title of the second story ('Educazione di Adolfo') is ironic and even suggests a parody. Indeed, Adolfo's supervisors try to teach him the art of the diligent clerk, but for the young man true maturation lies in the conquest of his supervisor's wife. As if the setting and the plot were not enough, even the protagonist's name shows the legacy of Svevo legacy in these stories. Adolfo, however, is not as truly inept as Alfonso Nitti, and Vittorini's narrator highlights the former's autonomy and vitality, by repeatedly suggesting that his incapacity to adapt to his trade is only due to formal rigidity of bureaucratic conventions. Furthermore, the strong sense of alienation caused by the desk work does not simply make Adolfo stand out against the grey squadron of clerks, but also affects other characters, such as the *commendatore* Carmine, who has a nervous collapse during a routine meeting and delivers a strange speech in which he awkwardly exposes his most profound erotic urges (and thus reveals Vittorini's interest in psychoanalysis).

When one looks at the narrative structure of the stories, it is striking that Vittorini is the only Solarian writer (together with Gadda, whom I will discuss shortly) to construct his stories via the assembling of fragments, with many digressions, quick and unannounced shifts of focalization, and a sharp attention to rumors and sounds. However, the remaining stories of *Piccola borghesia* have a more linear development and tend describe scenes of everyday (middle-

class) life, in which psychological analysis prevails over humor (apart from the final story) and exposes the estrangement of the characters.

Strong links with Svevo's work equally define the long title story of Lanza's *All'albergo del sole* (1932), starting from the main character Luigi, who has 'temporarily' abandoned his musical career for higher earnings as a businessman. Like Alfonso, Emilio, and Zeno, Luigi combines a tendency toward reflection and self-analysis with extreme indecisiveness, especially in his relationships with three women (a lover, a fiancé and an old love), whom he repeatedly desires and rejects. The self-analysis Luigi constantly indulges in to justify the non-realization of his many intentions and projects is only partial and is completed by the narrator, creating an ironic, typically 'Svevian' abyss between narrator and character. Whereas the construction of the protagonist strongly resembles that of Svevo's first two novels, the relations between individual and society, as well as the metaphorical connection between mental illness and the human condition, seem to be inspired by the more complex system of *La coscienza di Zeno* and Svevo's later short stories.

I conclude this part of my survey with Gadda, undoubtedly the most innovative writer of the corpus. His stories are perhaps best grouped according to two major formal tendencies: satiric parody of conventional narrative structures, which subverts meaning and destabilizes the traditional narrative voice ('Teatro,' 'La Madonna dei Filosofi,' 'La fidanzata di Elio'); and experimentation with new narrative structures, which results in complex yet coherent montages of digressions and associations ('Manovre di artiglieria da campagna,' 'Cinema,' 'Polemiche e pace nel direttissimo'). This second tendency especially confronts the limits of a distinction between short story and short narrative prose. In fact, several of Gadda's early critics, including the influential Contini, defined the author as a *prosatore*, for his extremely peculiar style and his inability to tell a 'proper' story.¹¹ More recent studies, however, have pointed out both the

complexity of Gadda's narrativity and his strong connection with the traditions of the novel and the short story (Godioli, 2013: 63).

Gadda's *La Madonna dei filosofi* and *Il castello di Udine* contain a number of texts that conform to Tortora's parameters. 'Cinema,' 'La Madonna dei filosofi,' and 'La fidanzata di Elio' all narrate the maturing process of a young protagonist, which for Gadda means that they gain insight into the artificiality of social (bourgeois) and epistemological conventions and acquire (partial) knowledge of the infinite complexity of reality. This more profound consciousness is most often triggered by a traumatic experience of grief. In the case of 'La Madonna dei filosofi,' this process involves the female character Maria, whereas the protagonist Baronfo is a parodic combination of the literary type of the imaginary invalid and the Svevian (and before that 'Flaubertian') intellectual with an insatiable appetite for knowledge but unable to understand himself or the world.

Moreover, the analytic approach of the narrator and the constant effort to transcend realist conventions are present in Gadda's entire oeuvre, though they significantly differ from Svevo's model. Gadda resorts to the strong presence of an ironic and sarcastic narrator, who takes an analytic stand, not in order to capture the functioning of the human psyche, but because narration, from Gadda's peculiar gnoseological perspective, is a cognitive act which modifies the configuration of reality. Narrating thus necessarily means bending language, style, and structure to the author's ends. Through this process, Gadda's narrators seek to 'capture the objects in their making' (Roscioni, 1995: 3, my translation), and insist on describing the totality of spatial, temporal, biological, social, cultural, psychological, and other relations that define an object in its context.

2. Short narrative prose

The other major short narrative type comprises the collections of Nannetti (*La guerra ritorna*) and Terracini, and some texts by Pavolini, Gadda Conti, Morovich and Gadda. With a single borderline exception (Terracini), all these texts use an anonymous first-person narrator, most often a fictionalized figure of the author. Whether these texts recall an episode of the narrator's life or constitute observation of a particular scene, the central point of focus remains the psyche of the pseudo-autobiographical 'I.' Thematically, these short narratives can be subdivided into military memories (Terracini, Nannetti, Gadda), childhood memories (Morovich, Pavolini), and travel accounts (Gadda, Gadda Conti). In the case of war and childhood memories, the narrated episode is described as a decisive formative moment for the 'I,' which connects these texts to the model of the Solarian short story. On a structural level, apart from the diegetic structure, the texts vary greatly, from autobiographical fragments with a strong lyrical tone, to long texts with a narrative development that tend toward the short story. The temporal structures are usually defined by the functioning of memory, but there are several exceptions.

The twenty-six fragments in which Nannetti recounts his war experience contain brief descriptions of the narrator's state of mind, alternated with portraits of scenes and comrades, all united by a fervid militarism. The title story establishes a link between the irregular form and the content of the texts, where one reads that 'la guerra è una giustapposizione di tanti materiali irregolari e roventi' (1935: 12). In 'Tappa a Caporetto,' the narrator insists on the interrelation of all the events, even the most obscure details, that constitute the experience of war. The irregular narrative form of Nannetti's prose aims thus to reflect that chaotic experience.

The longer texts collected by Terracini in *Quando avevamo vent'anni* relate his post-war military service from a collective perspective, as the plural verb form in the title suggests. Sometimes, however, the 'I' figure distances himself from the group and the episode is reconstructed through more codified narrative structures. This is the case of 'Ospedale militare',

where the injury and the convalescence of the protagonist are narrated from a heterodiegetic perspective. The distance created by the change of viewpoint and the protagonist's fear of remaining mutilated create a constant tension. Likewise, the memory recounted in 'In autunno è morto un soldato' is reconfigured as a short story, by means of a complicated temporal structure that delays the description of the main narrative nucleus already announced in the title, thus provoking powerful suspense concerning the precise circumstances of the soldier's death.

Gadda's war memories, which make up the core of *Il castello di Udine*, share both Terracini's tendency toward a narrative restructuring of experience, and Nannetti's fierce militarism which endows the war experience with an authenticity that everyday life is unable to offer. Praise of the 'alpino' and identification of war with the mountains are other motifs that unite Gadda and Nannetti. Gadda, however, is much more focused on the narrative development of his memories, and his texts deal not only with the experience of war, but also with its narratability.

Pavolini's 'Paradiso' and Morovich's 'I mendicanti' are both shaped as a reminiscence of a formative moment in the life of a young narrator. In Pavolini's story, the child explores an abandoned chapel in the old family villa and, through a religious vision, discovers a different form of Catholicism, coherent with the moralistic and ideological aims of the entire volume, which seeks to be a eulogy of fascism.¹² Morovich's 'I mendicanti' has a looser structure and accumulates several memories of beggars and the impressions they made on the narrator as a boy.

Compared with the childhood and war memories, the travel stories, all written by Gadda and Gadda Conti, account for a rather small part of the corpus. Gadda Conti's 'Bibi Eybat' lays emphasis on the adventure of the journey and the rough aspects of nature, and, when visiting villages and cities, highlights the 'common humanity' that reunites all people in the world. In

general, Gadda Conti's travel accounts are highly descriptive, non-humorous and represent the narrator as an anthropologist, more than as a writer or a traveler.

Gadda's approach to the travel story is very different from his cousin's. Whereas Gadda Conti's reminiscence is quite melancholic, Gadda becomes ironical and harps on his fellow bourgeois tourists. Moreover, the explicit confidence Gadda expresses in fascist colonialism, as a civic project of construction of the Italian nation (after the failed war project), further distances him from his cousin, whose writings express only vague ideological traces of pan-humanism.

Gadda's travel stories, which stand out for the peculiar view of reality they convey, are also marked by the author's problematization of the 'I'. This runs contrary to the other prose narrators, who take themselves seriously, or ironically contemplate their younger 'I' in order to stress the success of the process of development of which the narrator is the result. In the travel stories and the war memories, Gadda constantly channels the description of places and events through his traumatic war experience, and simultaneously turns his self-representation into a caricature.

Conclusion

Because of the size of the corpus, this first survey of the short fiction of the 'Edizioni di Solaria' remains necessarily general and incomplete; each collection—especially the lesser known ones—would undoubtedly benefit from additional studies. Nonetheless, my study confirms the tendency toward a more analytic story in Solarian short fiction, as suggested by recent studies, though this tendency is not as dominant as may have been believed. The modern Solarian short story rejects the traditional focus on the 'novel' event and seeks instead to expose the dynamics of everyday life with new sets of instruments that surpass conventional realism and naturalism. This new

tendency, however, is retraceable in the midst of a corpus that in its totality does not unanimously express late-modernist innovation, but rather shows the entire modernization of the Italian short story from the late nineteenth-century until the end of the 1930s. On the one side of this spectrum, one finds short stories still strongly attached to naturalism (Morovich, Gadda Conti, Nannetti's 'Pecora pazza') as well as to the many models of tales of adventure (e.g. the early collections by Loria and Bonsanti); on the other side, one finds the modernist short stories proper, and among these, stories inspired by the early modernist axis Pirandello-Tozzi (Loria, Nannetti) and stories built on Svevo's legacy.

It is clear that the writers of this new generation elaborate this legacy in different ways. Whereas Lanza sticks closely to Svevo's recipes on practically all levels, Quarantotti Gambini and Loria reconfigure the inept protagonist, which is initially presented as normal, until its deficiencies ooze slowly and implicitly through the text. Vittorini and Gadda, then, give a more radical turn to Svevo's legacy. The stories of Adolfo ironically parody and disintegrate Svevo's settings, themes, and structures. The strong formal and structural experimentation completes this effort to transcend a model. As for Gadda, he equally resorts to parody and structural experimentation, though without specifically aiming at Svevo, and develops both tendencies in his own idiosyncratic way, with a set of innovative narrative solutions which confirm his position as an outsider among Solarians.

In this article, apart from retracing the specific modalities of the reception of Svevo by Solarians, I have also tried to shed light on a different and perhaps more important function of *Solaria* in the development process of the modern Italian short story, which has heretofore remained underexposed: the progressive merging between more innovative *novelle* and *racconti*, and other forms of short narrative prose deriving from the *prosa d'arte*. The study of the corpus shows how several writers publish both codified short stories and narrative prose, which are

sometimes included in the same volume (as is the case in collections by Gadda Conti, Gadda, Morovich), and how in other cases it is difficult to distinguish between the two forms (Carocci, Gadda, and Terracini offer the clearest examples of this ambiguity). The development of the *prosa d'arte* in the 1920s can therefore be described as a progressive narrativization preceding an assimilation by the modern *racconto*, which takes place precisely during the Solarian phase of the modernist period. Short narrative prose is characterized by autobiographical elements, a strong focus on the psyche of the narrator, his or her reminiscences and dreams, the use of a lyrical tone, and formal experimentation: all elements that in the modernist period are progressively incorporated in the short story. These elements obviously cannot be traced back exclusively to the *prosa d'arte*, since they result from a complex interplay with other factors such as the influence of foreign (modernist) literature and discoveries in the fields of psychology and philosophy. It is, however, important to include the *prosa d'arte* in this interplay, and to acknowledge its function in the process of modernization of the Italian short story, which in this precise period transforms from a rather rigidly codified form into the flexible, open short story of the twentieth and twenty-first century. *Solaria* is without doubt one of the major laboratories of short fiction through which this transformation takes place, and this first survey of its short story collections may contribute to the study of this modernist magazine and its key role in the development of modern Italian literature.

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¹ These dynamics recur in most works of literary historiography (Muscetta, 1976; Grana, 1979), manuals (Roda, 2005; Ferroni, 1991), encyclopedias (Branca, 1986; Farina, 2000), and studies on *Solaria* (Guzzetta Fava, 1973; Briosi 1976; Ludovico, 2010).

² The notion of modernism undoubtedly favors our understanding of several Italian literary texts that until recently were somewhat lost in excessively broad interpretations of the categories of 'decadentism' and 'avant-garde,' with which traditional literary historiographers described the evolution of literature from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s. However, the introduction of a new literary-historical category implies a complete rethinking of currently used frameworks and the formulation of a set of temporal and aesthetic boundaries, all matters on which the debate is still ongoing. For different proposals regarding the definition of Italian modernism, see: Guglielmi, 2001; Minghelli, 2002; Luperini, 2003 and 2011; Pellini, 2004; Moroni & Somigli, 2004; Pietropaolo & Somigli, 2006; Donnarumma, 2006; Castellana, 2010; Tortora, 2011b.

³ The novels are *Luisa* (Ferrata), *L'amico dei poeti* (Franchi) and *Sogno degli amanti in catene* (Nannetti); the long story is *I nudisti di Monte Catterina* (Nannetti).

⁴ I refer to 'Manovre di artiglieria da campagna' and three of the 'Studi imperfetti' ('Preghiera', 'Treno celere nell'Italia centrale', 'L'antica basilica').

⁵ It is interesting to notice the absence of the third major modernist short story writer of the generation preceding *Solaria*, Pirandello. This significant silence may be related to the perception of Pirandello's writing as 'commercial' and 'mainstream'. However, this does not alter the fact that Pirandello was attentively read by Solarians, as some of the outcomes in the second part of this paper suggest.

⁶ I am aware that this schematic opposition does not do justice to the narrative innovations implemented by Verga, as demonstrated by Luperini (2003). I agree with Luperini that the process of modernization starts with Verga, but I do not think that within this evolution, situated roughly between 1880 and 1940, one can indicate a single specific shift which is more relevant than the others.

⁷ I refer to a study of a corpus of twenty-eight reviews of Gadda's *La Madonna dei filosofi* (1931) and *Il castello di Udine* (1934), which I conducted as part of my Ph.D. study of Gadda's short story collections. A part of this corpus, re-edited by Riccardo Stracuzzi, has been republished as a supplement of the *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies* (Stracuzzi, 2007).

⁸ On the narrativity of the *prosa d'arte*, see: Falqui, 1938 and 1944; Pennings, 1999; Valli, 2001; Duyck, 2013.

⁹ This terminological confusion can be easily traced through book reviews of the 1920s and 1930s, such as the corpus of Gadda reviews mentioned above (Note 7).

¹⁰ I refer to the definitions used by Head (1992), Hunter (2007) and Reynier (2009).

¹¹ See 'C. E. Gadda, o del pastiche,' published in *Solaria* 1 (1934), and Contini's later essays on Gadda (collected in Contini, 1970).

¹² This is most evident in the final story, entitled 'Mussolini', which assumes a hagiographical form.