

# THE ACTOR IN PIRANDELLO'S NOVELS

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Any consideration about a relationship involving two subjects can take opposite directions, and while Pirandello's interest in the art of the actor was certainly prominent, the interest that actors have shown in Pirandello's work is even more apparent. Actors have always been fascinated by Pirandello's plays, as well as by his novels and short stories.<sup>1</sup> An investigation into the intimate connection between Pirandello's artistic trajectory and some principles of acting would help shed some light on the reason for actors' universal and distinctive actors' interest in him.

I will begin this article with an overview of the multifaceted role that Pirandello had at the time of the birth of theatre directing in Italy, highlighting aspects that demonstrate his involvement in the world of theatre practitioners. Then I will relate some features of this role to the relationship between Pirandello and acting. Finally, I will provide some examples of how acting relates to the characters of some of Pirandello's novels, providing a comparative analysis of aspects of Konstantin Stanislavski's background, key theories and practices.

## PIRANDELLO AT THE TIME OF DECADENCE OF THE TRADITIONAL ITALIAN THEATRE

There is little doubt that the majority of critics have separated Pirandello from any discussion of performativity,<sup>2</sup> in consideration of the fact that Pirandello, the Italian writer and playwright *par excellence*, always sided with authors in the historical dispute between writers and actors in European theatre. At a time when actors in Italy seemed to have all the power within the theatrical system, Pirandello championed the cause of writers, although in Italy, they, by the way were, in Italy, not always outstanding.<sup>3</sup>

In his 1907 essay *Illustratori, attori e traduttori* ('Illustrators, Actors and Translators') (*Spsv*, p. 207-24), Pirandello, speaking about the Actor, remarks that theatre is not an art form but a degradation of the work conceived, designed and written by the author. This statement shows that Pirandello was at that time, even before Croce himself, intrinsically neo-idealistic, like most contemporary Italian writers and intellectuals.<sup>4</sup> However soon, as is reflected in his change of style, plot structuring and themes, a fascination for the irrational, for an alienated vitalism, and for relativism, got the better of him. This process placed Pirandello's thought and work—which portrayed the decadence of the bourgeoisie—far from Italian provincialism and, rather, in dialogue with the most advanced European theatre practitioners. For instance, also as a result of this, Croce became one of his most severe critics.

However, Pirandello never overcame his background and his sense of professional belonging as a writer and a playwright, connected to his overall—quite strategic—role as an ‘official’ intellectual. Signs of his persistent invectives against the traditional—and unique in Europe at such a late stage—actors’ management of Italian theatre, were still present as late as October 1934, when he acted as President of the fourth international conference of the Alessandro Volta foundation.<sup>5</sup> This key event was held with the support of the Royal Academy of Italy and was devoted to the question of the ‘Dramatic theatre’, modelled on the Paris Theatre Society Conferences. The first of its kind, this conference gathered some of the world’s most prestigious figures of contemporary theatre, aiming at attracting public attention to the difficulties of the theatre system.<sup>6</sup> This marked, internationally, the historical passage from a market-based theatrical system to a publicly funded-based scheme.<sup>7</sup>

Despite his critical interventions about actors, who were the typical targets of fascist criticism at the time,<sup>8</sup> (not a single actor was invited to the conference), we should highlight the fact that Pirandello was on this occasion, after the failure of his *Teatro d’Arte*, a strong defender of theatre as a whole, against other forms of entertainment such as film, opera and sport that the Fascist regime was strongly supporting, and his polemical approach can be understood as strategic to the cause. As a matter of fact, Pirandello returned to Italy from Germany in 1930: he stayed only for a short time before leaving Italy again to move to Paris, and took the role of President at the conference with the

specific aim of gaining financial support for the theatre system, which was experiencing its worst crisis ever. The first draft of his opening speech, which focused on the relationship between art and politics, must have been even more critical of cinema, sport and radio, as it had to be self-censored (perhaps after an intervention of Mussolini himself, probably inspired by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who was acting as the conference secretary and presumably reported back to the Fascist Party). Pirandello seemed to welcome the contemporary debate about how to face the competition with cinema, through new buildings (Mussolini had envisaged a 'Theatre for the masses', able to accommodate 15-20.000 people, a project soon abandoned), and a modern technical evolution of stagecraft, and also by keeping ticket prices level with those for films. These developments had to be accompanied by some limitations on cinema, such as restricting screenings to one a day at a fixed time, at least 'until cinema finds its peculiar artistic expression'. Pirandello then made explicit his thoughts about the authentic paternity of the theatrical work, saying:

[...] è sperabile che sia definita la questione che da tempo si dibatte, se il teatro sia fatto per offrire uno spettacolo in cui l'opera d'arte, la creazione del poeta entri come uno dei tanti elementi in mano e al comando d'un regista, a pari dell'apparato scenico e del giuoco delle luci e di quello degli attori, o se invece tutti questi elementi e l'opera unificatrice dello stesso regista, creatore responsabile soltanto dello spettacolo, non debbano essere

adoperati a dar vita all'opera d'arte che tutti li comprende e senza la quale ciascuno per se stesso, sera per sera, non avrebbe ragion d'essere: quella vita, intendo, inviolabile perché coerente in ogni punto a se stessa che l'opera d'arte vuole avere per sé e che perciò non dovrebbe essere ad arbitrio del regista alterare né tanto meno manomettere' (*Spsv*, p. 1014).<sup>9</sup>

Although this might appear as a usual argument against the theatre belonging to the actors or to the new figure of the director, the actual (hidden) targets of Pirandello's speech must have been his competitors within the Italian theatrical system, notably the Italian avant-garde and in particular Anton Giulio Bragaglia, the champion of the 're-theatricalisation of theatre'.<sup>10</sup> Bragaglia, who years earlier had had a series of arguments with Silvio D'Amico, the master of Italian theatre historiography, was equally inclined to undermine both the actors' power over the Italian theatre system and the pre-eminence of playwrights.

Pirandello ended his speech referring to the Greeks, according to whom theatre was 'la suprema e più matura espressione dell'arte' ['the supreme and the most mature artistic expression'] (*Spsv*, p. 1042). In the evening he directed (with Guido Salvini, the grandson of the great actor), *La Figlia di Jorio* ('The Daughter of Iorio'), by D'Annunzio, a favourite of the regime, that was seen by Mussolini himself.

Soon after, thanks to this calibrated but focused strategy, Pirandello and Silvio D'Amico, who was his assistant and the real instigator and organizer of the conference, achieved some excellent results: a few weeks later Pirandello received the Nobel Prize, that was supported by a specific recommendation of the Royal Academy of Italy and by the government, while D'Amico obtained the necessary funding to open the first *Accademia d'Arte Drammatica* [Academy of Dramatic Art] in 1936. At a time when theatre was still a business, the drama schools, such as the one run by Luigi Rasi, were only private. The need for a publicly funded school devoted only to drama came with the end of the market-based system. It is worth noticing that this was the first publicly funded national theatre school in the world which made no reference to Music, and was devoted to offering a varied programme of formation exclusively for both the modern actor and the recently established figure of the director.<sup>11</sup>

Pirandello's involvement with the practical production of plays (not only of his own works, as we have said) is crucial for the understanding of his idea of theatre and his approach to acting. With the foundation of the *Teatro d'Arte* in Rome in 1924, Pirandello established himself as one of the first Italian directors. I would not underestimate the fact that the name of the company was most probably chosen after Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>12</sup> Pirandello proved to be essentially, like Stanislavski, and not only because of the kind of aesthetics they were representing, a director of actors, rather than a utopian of the stage, like Bragaglia.

We have to keep in mind how exceptional the situation of the Italian theatrical system was at the time.<sup>13</sup> In all other European countries, the traditional nineteenth century organization of the companies, that were family based, *di giro* (always travelling), managed and run by the actor-managers (in Italian the *capocomici*), structured on ‘parti e ruoli’ [‘parts and roles’] (in English ‘lines of business’, based on ‘ranks’ or ‘stock characters’) surviving exclusively out of ticket sales, had long faded, leaving the deserted space of theatre to the rise of the new protagonists, some intellectual amateurs foreign to the theatre environment: the directors. In Italy, a country recently formed, with a recently unified language, and a strong, ancient theatre tradition, that system was still the only one actually operating throughout the nation. The Italian *divas*, the ‘vedettes’, the ‘stars’ able to attract the audience to theatre, were still only the actors, often indeed the internationally famous ‘Grandi Attori’. This was the situation, with the single exception of Pirandello, who was the only Italian ‘vedette’ of theatre not belonging to the ‘caste’ of actors.<sup>14</sup> Pirandello’s move from being a mere literary source to a manager-director appears then to be crucial for the Italian development of the whole theatrical system, where inevitably the old structures were going to collapse, as happened, gradually, over the 1930s and 1940s. However, this passage from page to stage, from writing to directing, was not merely instrumental, as in fact it was, from a financial point of view, a total disaster. It demonstrated instead the intrinsic

connection between Pirandello's literary work and his work on directing the actors.

## PIRANDELLO A DIRECTOR OF ACTORS

Apart from Pirandello's experiences in Germany, the well-known esteem that he shared with Max Reinhardt, who in 1924 successfully staged *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, and his appreciation of Piscator's works, other numerous elements connect Pirandello to the art of the actors, and the way the European directors of actors were conceiving their new theatres.

Pirandello's adventure as a director started as a paradoxical bet, considering his explicit opposition to the supposed treacherous category of actors. It is not by chance that the initial idea of forming a stable company originated at home, and came from his son Stefano.<sup>15</sup> In 1925 Pirandello said: 'Non mi è bastato scrivere commedie e farle rappresentare. Oggi sono capocomico e *metteur en scène* d'una compagnia drammatica. Dovete crederci, proprio perché è assurdo' ['It was not enough for me to write plays and let them to be staged. Today I am the *capocomico* and *metteur en scène* of a dramatic company. You have to believe it, precisely because it is absurd'].<sup>16</sup>

His directing role lasted only three theatrical seasons and four years but was extremely intense. He followed the company everywhere and was fully



committed to it. According to Andrea Camilleri, Pirandello was the first real Italian theatre director, even though he could act as such, and not just as *capocomico* or artistic director, for one season only.<sup>17</sup>

However, it is significant that his principal collaborator for this enterprise was Guido Salvini, who was deeply rooted in the tradition of the *Grandi Attori*. It is important to underline the close relationship between Pirandello and practitioners rooted in the great Italian theatrical tradition, and the fact that some of these had been extremely influential in the birth and the development of new approaches to acting beyond Italy. This happened in particular in Russia, the cradle of these great reforms; the Russians became then in turn extremely influential for the further development of the art and pedagogy of the actors in Italy. Guido Salvini's grandfather Tommaso had been the main source of inspiration for the invention of Stanislavski's 'System'. Other *Grandi Attori*, such as Eleonora Duse, Ernesto Rossi and Giovanni Grasso, had been fundamental models for Stanislavski and his pupils. Giovanni Grasso, originally a Sicilian *puparo* from Catania, was one of the principal interpreters of Pirandello's *Il berretto a sonagli*, that he staged from 1919 until 1930. With reference to Grasso's successful Russian tour of 1908, where he presented *Feudalismo*, a Sicilian version of the Catalan play *Terra baixa* by À. Guimerà, Vsevolod Meyerhold wrote: 'I became aware of several laws of biomechanics while watching the acting of the magnificent tragic Sicilian actor Grasso'.<sup>18</sup> Angelo Musco, another *puparo* from Catania, was a young member of Grasso's

company and one of the main interpreters of several of Pirandello's plays, some written specifically for him.

Guido Salvini maintained a close collaboration with Pirandello far beyond the experience of the *Teatro d'Arte*, for about twenty years. By the way, Salvini, one of the earliest Italian directors, years later, in 1932, when he was in charge of the *Maggio Fiorentino*, invited two of the leading international directors, the already cited Max Reinhardt, and Jacques Copeau, who was a spiritual master for his actors, and who, besides Stanislavski, revolutionized the concept and the practice of theatre directing by establishing its primary pedagogical function.

Then, between 1938 and 1944, Salvini took the role as teacher of directing in the *Accademia d'Arte Drammatica*. It is significant that before Salvini, in 1935, D'Amico hired for this role Tatiana Pavlova, a Russian actress who was a naturalized Italian citizen. Pavlova, even if she had never actually worked with Stanislavski himself but with some of his closest collaborators, brought to Italy the new approach on directing that was conceived by the Russian master, and with which the whole Russian theatrical community was impregnated. She had been criticized over the years, but also admired, by Pirandello and D'Amico.<sup>19</sup>

With regards to Pirandello's work with actors, Macchia stresses the distance between Pirandello and Stanislavski, noticing how for Pirandello the text was the centre of theatre.<sup>20</sup> Indeed Pirandello's *Teatro d'Arte* (actually, just like Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre) broke the conventions of the Italian

stage based on the performances of the *Grandi Attori*. They extended the lighting rig and used colour lights, expanded the stage, eliminated the proscenium—the *Grande Attore*'s realm—and the prompter's box. Still, reading through Stanislavski's autobiography and a number of other scattered notes and transcription of his lectures, we can paradoxically notice on this point an identity of views with Pirandello: the actor must serve the poet. However when we analyse in depth the actual life and the concrete work of both Pirandello and Stanislavski—each with his own specific attributes—we can instead see that for both of them the human activity of acting was at the centre of their existence.

It has been noted that all the actors who worked with Pirandello, after that 'bruciante esperienza' ['burning experience'], could not distance themselves from him for the rest of their life.<sup>21</sup>

Dario Niccodemi remembered that Pirandello, 'Muto, è più efficace di tutti. In lui, seduto, c'è più movimento che in tutti. La scena è lui. La riassume, la riassume e la ributta fuori da tutti i pori del suo viso'. ['When silent, he is the most effective of all. Within him, when he is seated, there is more movement than in everybody else. The scene is him. He sums it up, absorbs it and throws it back from all the pores in his face'].<sup>22</sup> Guido Salvini said that Pirandello demanded from his actors 'un ritmo serrato di recitazione [...] una recitazione viva e vibratile che riusciva a piegare la nostra lingua, di per sé tecnicamente lenta [...] in un fuoco di artificio continuo' ['a very fast rhythm [...] a style of

acting alive and vibrating, able to transform our technically slow language [...] into continuous fireworks’].<sup>23</sup>

Camilleri, again, remembers when Pirandello dared to fine two of his actors because ‘parole testuali—“dopo tante prove e tanto lavoro ieri sera hanno recitato come hanno recitato”’: avevano tradito cioè non il personaggio, ma la vita stessa. Quell’ordine del giorno, mi pare, avrebbe potuto benissimo firmarlo Stanislavskij’ [‘these are the actual words—“after so many rehearsals and so much work, yesterday night they performed as they did”’: that is to say they cheated not the character, but life itself. That agenda, it seems to me, could have well been signed by Stanislavski’].<sup>24</sup>

The actor Corrado Pavolini remembered Pirandello as a ‘grande esempio morale’ [‘a great moral example’], that he ‘ci voleva bene come un babbo’ [‘loved us as a father’], and that ‘la sua faccia finiva col restare in mente come una vivissima maschera teatrale’ [‘his face ended up staying in the memory like a very vivid theatrical mask’]. In order to take the actor to the mood that he wanted: ‘attore consumatissimo lui stesso [...] passava al dialogo [...] facendo lui tutte le parti’ [‘as a very experienced actor [...] he used to play all the parts’], providing a sense of a ‘vivente “orchestra” di voci, di caratteri, di passioni [...] Per Pirandello insomma il teatro non si esaurì nell’esperienza del drammaturgo: fu una zona fondamentale, un elemento base della sua stessa esistenza’ [‘living orchestra made of voices, characters, passions [...] For

Pirandello theatre did not end with his experience as playwright: it was a fundamental space, a basic element of his own existence’].<sup>25</sup>

#### THEATRE IN THE FORM OF A BOOK<sup>26</sup>

Many critics, like Macchia, Taviani, Camilleri, and others, took the discussion forward recognizing that all Pirandello’s works are somehow theatre in other shapes. Macchia recalls Pirandello’s knowledge of Alfred Binet’s *Les Altérations de la personnalité* [‘Alterations of Personality’], whose theories of an ancient synthesis of different human expressions in rituals are reflected in Pirandello’s late works.<sup>27</sup> From this source we can understand Pirandello’s attraction for different levels of expression and his experiments with the interconnectivity between genres, styles and creative techniques. The poet interfaces with the actor; illusion (art) is in constant dialogue with the senses (the tangible truth). Overall, in Pirandello we observe an enthusiasm for the objective permanent displacement and fragmentation of the self, that is the basis for any actor’s work. This game of broken mirrors is actually the realm of freedom. The passage from the text (the past) to the stage (the present time) enhances the dialectics of the impersonal, that moves between spirit and form. Here is where the spiritual activity is freed into movements that translate it into a language of appearances, within the free, spontaneous movement of the form.

Macchia recognizes that, even if closed within narrative forms, the dynamic of Pirandello's creative process is always theatrical. For example, the typical Pirandellian humour is based on a classical (and Stanislavskian) acting technique of 'playing the opposite': the elderly and the ugly play the young and graceful. Pirandello's vitalism expresses the need for the contemporary, broken human being, to find a life; a person is brought to build, to become, a character (or a Stanislavskian 'third being' since the character-model can only be an abstract projection of the spirit). The actors are like clairvoyants, the special mediums who are able to replace the characters' authors, to make out of these a living form of art. However, the highest degree of acting is needed in turn by the characters themselves, rather than by the actors, because the characters only have an existential relationship with their author. In this discrepancy there is an impossible challenge, with a permanent tragic outcome. 'I personaggi di Pirandello non hanno nessuna posterità. Calato il sipario, sono veramente morti [...] nati altrove, fuori dal teatro, vi sprofondano per sempre, una volta che la rappresentazione è finita.' ['Pirandello's characters have no posterity. When the curtain is brought down, they are really dead [...] born elsewhere, outside theatre, they sink into it, once the show is over].<sup>28</sup> Fiction becomes life that kills life (the life of the characters), resulting in an Artaudian pyre of both the characters and the spectators.

An example of this can be found in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* [*The Late Mattia Pascal*], when Pirandello imagines a paradoxical situation in a puppet show of

Sophocles' *Electra* (and here we can notice the influence of Giovanni Grasso and, more generally, of the Sicilian *pupi* theatre) when Orestes stops the action because of a hole in the sky.

Similarly to Artaud, who famously said; 'If there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames',<sup>29</sup> in Pirandello we observe the urgency of revealing the dramatic coincidence of life and theatre. In *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* [*Tonight We Improvise*] we see the actors becoming characters in front of the audience (*Mn IV*, 244-396). This could happen when the usage, and the trade, intrinsic value of theatre was radically changing, with the end of the market-based theatre system. The new actor now had the chance to stop using the poet's creation just as a functional tool as he had for centuries, and can rather take the author's place on stage. Pirandello said: 'Come l'autore, per fare opera viva, deve immedesimarsi con la sua creatura, fino a sentirla com'essa sente se stessa, a volerla com'essa vuole se stessa; così, e non altrimenti, se fosse possibile, dovrebbe fare l'attore' ['Just as the author, to make a living artwork, must empathise with his creature, until he can feel it as it feels itself, wanting it as it wants itself, so, and not otherwise, if possible, should the actor'].<sup>30</sup> Acting functions for the self as a liberating force. Again Macchia notices that the protagonist of *Enrico IV* understood that only through the great art of the actor—a being that becomes himself, only by showing another self—could he free his soul, and 'uccide per ricadere nel pozzo

profondo di una cosciente e volontaria claustrazione' ['kills in order to fall again into the deep well of a conscious and voluntary imprisonment'].<sup>31</sup>

In the short story *L'avemaria di Bobbio* ['Bobbio's Ave Maria'] (1922) Pirandello, through his character the notary Marco Saverio Bobbio from Richieri, makes a philosophical reflection about the human mind, explaining that the unknown memories and perceptions that we can recall through a sensation, taste, colour or sound, demonstrate the existence of another unsuspected being inside ourselves (*Na* I, 507-08). We can compare this to what Stanislavski-Tortsov famously says to his actors; 'Just as your visual memory resurrects long forgotten things, a landscape or the image of a person, before your inner eye, so feelings you once experienced are resurrected in your Emotion Memory. You thought they were completely forgotten but suddenly a hint, a thought, a familiar shape, and once again you are in the grip of past feelings.'<sup>32</sup> This has only apparently a pragmatic aim, as it has been interpreted by several generations of actors. Here Pirandello helps in a deeper understanding of Stanislavski's journey.

We would not be able to comprehend Pirandello's poetics if we separated his literary works from his plays, his practical engagement with the work on the stage and his theoretical production. Apart from some evident pouring out of some of his themes and characters from one form to another, what is evident is that Pirandello's works demonstrate something that was elaborated much later by theatre theorists such as Franco Ruffini, that is that theatre, rather than a



specific form of artistic expression, is a category of the spirit. Theatre is a frame of mind (Grotowski would say it is a mind-structure), and writing is, or may be, a performative act.<sup>33</sup> That is why, for the purposes of this essay, it would be easier and more relevant to analyse Pirandello's novels rather than his plays, or the short stories that inspired directly his theatre.

### ACTING IN PIRANDELLO'S NOVELS

The novels that we might find relevant for our analysis are: *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904), *Suo marito* [*Her Husband*] later renamed *Giustino Roncella nato Boggiolo* ['Giustino Roncella né Boggiolo'] (1911-1941), *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* [*Shoot!*] (1915-1925), and *Uno nessuno centomila* [*One No-one and a Hundred Thousand*] (1926).

In *Il fu Mattia Pascal* we have a clear, symptomatic description of the character emerging from the voice of the protagonist, where he refers to his 'costruzione fantastica d'una vita non realmente vissuta, ma colta man mano negli altri e nei luoghi e fatta e sentita mia [...] Me ne feci un'occupazione. Vivevo non nel presente soltanto, ma anche per il mio passato, cioè per gli anni che Adriano Meis non aveva vissuti [...] Or cos'ero io se non un uomo inventato? Una invenzione ambulante che voleva e, del resto, doveva forzatamente stare per sé, pur calata nella realtà' ['fantastic construction of a life not really lived but taken gradually from others and from places, and made

and felt mine [...] It became my occupation. I used to live not only in the present, but also for my past, that is for the years that Adriano Meis did not live [...] Now, what was I but a made-up man? A wandering invention, who wanted, and after all had to stay by himself, by force, even though immersed in reality'] (*Tr I*, 413-14).

Stanislavski's *An Actor's Work on the Self*, which was published between 1938 and 1948, was put together using notes taken from 1904, indeed the same year as the publication in Italian of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*. Here Stanislavski-Tortsov teaches his actors: 'How to banish the Theatre (capital T) from the theatre (small t) [...] We have to learn all this anew, on the stage itself, precisely in the same way a child learns to talk, look and listen.'<sup>34</sup> 'You're unlikely to be able to find all the information you need in your own memory. So you will have to get it from books, maps, photographs and other sources which either provide direct knowledge or reproduce other people's impressions.'<sup>35</sup>

Mattia Pascal continues: 'Io mi ero conciato a quel modo per gli altri, non per me. Dovevo ora star con me, così mascherato? [...] io, se mai, potevo crederci solo a patto che ci credessero gli altri' ['I was dressed that way for others, not for myself. Did I have to be with myself now, masked like that? [...] if anything, I could believe in it only provided that others believed in it'] (*Tr I*, 428).

Here is Stanislavski-Tortsov: 'When he is performing, an actor is divided in two. Salvini said, 'When I am acting, I live a double life, I laugh and weep

and at the same time analyse my laughter and tears, so that they can touch the hearts of those I wish to move more deeply'. As you can see, a double life doesn't stop you being inspired. On the contrary! One helps the other'.<sup>36</sup>

Towards the end of the novel, Pirandello writes: 'ciascuno volutamente [...] è la marionetta di se stesso; e poi alla fine il calcio che manda all'aria tutta la baracca [...] quella fittizia costruzione che i personaggi stessi han messo su di sé e della loro vita, o che altri hanno messo sù per loro: i difetti insomma della *maschera* finché non si scopre *nuda*.' ['each of us voluntarily [...] is the puppet of himself; and then, at the end, the kick that destroys everything [...] that fictional construction that the characters make of themselves or of their lives, or that others make for them: the deficiencies of the *mask* until it finds itself *naked*'] (*Tr* I, 583-84). Here it is not difficult to connect this thought to a post-theatrical approach on performance, that was initially inspired by Stanislavski and then continued by Grotowski.

The Stanislavskian creation of a character is an almost religious act, 'equal in its importance to the birth of a child.'<sup>37</sup> Pirandello shares with Stanislavski an interest in theosophical, mystical, magic, esoteric and psychophonic disciplines. We can trace this interest in several points of Pirandello's literary production. Macchia has noticed that already in the original edition of Pirandello's first novel, *L'Esclusa* [*The Excluded Woman*], first published in *La Tribuna* in 1901, the character of the sister Sidora was a sort of witch, who made use of ancient popular rituals. It seems that a presence was living inside her, as though she

were possessed.<sup>38</sup> In the first edition of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, Pirandello makes several unquoted references to the theosophist and spiritualist Charles Webster Leadbeater's book *The Astral Plane* (1897).<sup>39</sup> Also in *Mattia Pascal*, Pirandello's interest in spiritualism is made explicit in the character of Anselmo Paleari. In Paleari's library there are a number of hidden references to names of authors such as the theosophists Madame Blavatsky and Théophile Pascal,<sup>40</sup> the author of *Reincarnation – A Study in Human Evolution* (1905).<sup>41</sup>

Pirandello took then both from science (the previously mentioned Alfred Binet) and spiritualism, the inspiration for his own original view of the human's divided consciousness and plurality of souls. These activate the mechanism of the creation of characters, the spirit as a 'double' of the original person, with thoughts that become plastic essence and may disappear like bubbles. Characters are born from real life, but need to pass through a process of reincarnation, offered by art, where the writer is the creator and the director (and finally, the actor) the medium. The emptiness of the human, the nude life, through a theatricalization of language, is forced to become theatre.

Theosophy and Anthroposophy were also permeating the pre-revolutionary Russian background. Tolstoy's daughter-in-law Sofia was one of the first to join the Russian Theosophical Society. Michael Chekhov, the great Stanislavskian actor, was an enthusiastic follower of Rudolph Steiner and his Anthroposophical Society. It was actually Stanislavski who introduced him to Steiner. Stanislavski read, and was influenced by, other major theosophists or

experts of sacred sciences, such as Ivan Lapshin—a Kantian philosopher who was an advocate for getting to know by feeling, achieving a mystical knowledge from a ‘universal feeling’, related to artistic creation—and Ernst Wood. Wood was an English *yogi* whose book on meditation inspired Stanislavski widely, as we can connect to it some of the most popular Stanislavskian tasks for the actor, such as the need to establish a ‘superconscious circle of attention’ and the ‘creative’ or ‘stage attention and grasp’.<sup>42</sup> Of course, like Pirandello, Stanislavski also made use of some of the scientific research of his time, in particular of the French psychologist Théodule-Armand Ribot, and, more explicitly, the Russian Ivan Pavlov and his mentor Ivan Sečenov.<sup>43</sup>

In *Suo Marito / Giustino Roncella nato Boggiolo* we read a sort of fictional autobiography of Pirandello, who designs the character of a theatre star, a ‘vedette’ who is not an actor but a writer, something which was, as already noted, absolutely exceptional in Italy. It also constitutes a long invective against the old approach actors used to have to their art, as they are depicted as uneducated, excessively histrionic characters typical of the Italian theatre of the past. We read about the protagonist, ‘Silvia derelitta [...] trovando lui [il marito] [...] tra i comici, in mezzo alle brighe d’una prima rappresentazione’ [helpless Silvia [...] found him [her husband] [...] among the actors, in the middle of the quarrels of a première’] (*Tr* I, 669).

Pirandello’s expression of disgust for that theatre appears today like a sort of manifesto for a theatrical revolution:

Quel palcoscenico buio, intanfato di muffa e di polvere bagnata; quei macchinisti che martellavano sui telai inchiodando le scene per la rappresentazione della sera; tutti i pettegolezzi e le piccinerie e la svogliatezza e la cascaggine di quei comici sparsi a gruppetti qua e là, quel suggeritore nella buca col copione davanti, pieno di tagli e di richiami; il direttore capocomico, sempre arcigno e sgarbato, seduto presso alla buca; quello che copiava lì su un tavolinetto le parti; il trovarobe in faccende tra i cassoni, tutto sudato e sbuffante, gli avevano cagionato un disinganno crudele.’ (*Tr I*, 680)<sup>44</sup>

The actors Pirandello describes in this novel were arguing about their supposed ‘creations’ while they were overloading their characters with unnecessary ornaments. One of them even ‘*baritoneggiava*’ [‘was speaking in a baritone voice’] (*Tr I*, 681) making fun of the *metteur en scène* in an extremely vulgar way.

We have to remember that the first revolution in theatre brought about by Stanislavski, and similarly by Pirandello, besides fighting against the clichés of the old style of acting, was to restore to the actors their dignity as human beings and the respect for their art, which had long been lost because of the spiritual and material decadence of the theatre world of their time.

In *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* we can observe a few topics related to the subject of our exploration. Through this novel Pirandello makes clear his thought about cinema, which displays ‘tutte le meraviglie della complicazione industriale e così detta artistica’ [‘all the marvels of the industrial and so-called artistic oddities’] (*Tr II*, 571).

The first version of the novel was written in 1904 and published in 1915; then it was modified, and titled differently for its final edition in 1925, a date that coincides with the beginning of Pirandello’s work as theatre director. At this stage of his life Pirandello believed that cinema was not a real art form, but rather a very lucrative commercial enterprise that damaged theatre, influencing the actors’ work negatively. It was seen as a gross form of entertainment that dehumanised individuals and society because of its mechanical nature.

La macchina, con gli enormi guadagni che produce, se li assolda [gli attori], può compensarli molto meglio che qualunque impresario o direttore proprietario di compagnia drammatica [...] con le sue riproduzioni meccaniche, potendo offrire a buon mercato al grande pubblico uno spettacolo sempre nuovo, riempie le sale dei cinematografi e lascia vuoti i teatri, sicché tutte, o quasi, le compagnie drammatiche fanno ormai meschini affari; e gli attori, per non languire, si vedono costretti a picchiare alle porte delle Case di cinematografia’. (*Tr II*, 585)<sup>45</sup>

Film actors are regarded not as real actors, like theatre actors. Anybody can become a film actor, no artistic background, no special technique or experience is needed, just a high degree of unscrupulousness. Film actors are depicted like prostitutes: ‘Qualunque altra attrice, che non avesse goduto e non godesse come lei la benevolenza del magnanimo commendator Borgalli [il produttore] sarebbe stata già da un pezzo licenziata’ [‘Any other actress, who had not been or was not favoured by the magnanimous *commendator* Borgalli [the film producer] would have been fired long ago’] (*Tr* II, 556).

The following year, in 1926, Pirandello, while still working with his *Teatro d’Arte*, published his last novel, *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila*.<sup>46</sup> Pirandello’s son Stefano said that his father had been working on it for about fifteen years. As Macchia notices,<sup>47</sup> referring to Stefano’s explanation, this novel for Pirandello was a continuous reference-point for fragments of scenes that he developed on the stage, a diary of feelings, memories and landscapes addressed to the typical silent Pirandellian external character, the reader, the witness, that in Pirandello’s theatre would become the ‘dear sir’. This diary, this interminable monologue, that marks the end of Pirandello as a novelist, produced material that was included in dramatic works such as *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*, of which the explanatory foreword was published in 1925. With reference to *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila*, Pirandello himself said, ‘Avrebbe dovuto essere il proemio della mia produzione teatrale, e ne sarà, invece,



l'epilogo'. [‘It was supposed to be the introduction to my theatre production and it became instead the epilogue’].<sup>48</sup>

Macchia also notices the influence of *Sternism* or, more precisely, *Shandism*, on this novel.<sup>49</sup> In his essay *On Humour* (1908 and 1920), Pirandello quoted Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (*Spsv*, p. 160). It appears that Sterne's conception of the infinitely little as a regulatory principle of the world had a strong effect on Pirandello's conception of human opinions as result of the fragmentation of the self. The issue the character Tristram Shandy had with his flattened nose is reflected in Pirandello's novel. At the end of his essay on humour Pirandello, reconsidering Pascal's famous reflection on Cleopatra's nose, writes, with reference to humour as a result of reflection that decomposes:

Se il naso di Cleopatra fosse stato più lungo, chi sa quali altre vicende avrebbe avuto il mondo [...] questo *se*, questa minuscola particella [...] quante e quali disgregazioni può produrre. (*Spsv*, 159-60)<sup>50</sup>

This ‘if’, has for Pirandello the same creative, performative function of the famous Stanislavski's ‘Magic if’.<sup>51</sup>

Stanislavski-Tortsov says to his actors; ‘You see [...] how many different actions this little word ‘if’ can call up [...] these were not simple but ‘magic ifs’, provoking instantaneous, instinctive actions... in complex plays, there are a huge number of possible ‘ifs’, created by the author and others, so as to justify

this or that line of behaviour in the leading characters. There, we are dealing not with single-storey but with multi-storey ‘ifs’, that is with a considerable number of hypotheses and the ideas complement them, all of which are cleverly intertwined [...] it is a shift, a step forward! [...] Thanks to which [...] something happens which makes the eye see differently, the ear hear differently, the mind to understand the things around it differently.’<sup>52</sup>

There is no doubt that the protagonist of Pirandello’s novel, Gengè Moscarda, after having observed accurately his nose in the mirror, started seeing things around him very differently. And we, with him, too, are brought to lose our certainties like a contemporary actor who, having lost her theatre, mask and role, feels naked on stage, while still seeking her character for protection.<sup>53</sup>

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- 1 In particular I would like to take this opportunity to honour the actor Robert Rietti, who died on 3 April 2015 at the age of 93. Robert Rietti, the son of Victor, another popular actor in his own right, was indeed not by chance the first and the most extensive translator of Pirandello’s works into English, and one of the most renowned experts on the subject in the English speaking world.

- 2 For a broader theoretical perspective on performativity and literature, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962), E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual. Essays On Face-To-Face Behavior* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1967) and *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London, Penguin, 1990), and W. Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966). Pirandello himself was one of the first to theorize on the subject, with his ‘L’Azione parlata’ (*Il Marzocco*, 7 May 1899, now in *Spsv*, pp. 1015-18).
- 3 Ferdinando Taviani disagrees with this generally accepted negative view of Italian playwrights: see F. Taviani, *Uomini di Scena Uomini di Libro* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 1995), p. 38. For a better understanding of the historical debate between *drammaturgisti* and *spettacolisti*, see M. De Marinis, *Capire il teatro. Lineamenti di una nuova teatrologia* (Florence, La Casa Usher, 1988) quoted in Anna Lisa Tota, *Etnografia dell’arte: per una sociologia dei contesti artistici* (Milan, Ledizioni, 2011), pp. 89-90.) For a brief overview on the further evolution of the discipline as performance studies and then theories of the performer, see my ‘A arte do ator e a possessão: os Estados Alterados de Consciência nas suas inter-relações com o Teatro’, in Joice Aglae Brondani (ed.) *Grotowski estados alterados de consciência* (São Paulo, Giostri, 2014), pp. 52-143.

- 4 However Pirandello's essay contains several arguments against Croce. Here, his idea of the actor as the principal obstacle to a pure expression of the author's creation rather anticipates some of Gordon Craig's theories.
- 5 In Italian this was termed a 'Convegno' instead of a 'Congresso' as Pirandello stressed in his introductory speech in order to underline the cultural objectives of the meeting. Among the guests were major figures such as Maeterlinck, Gordon Craig, Yeats, Lorca and Walter Gropius (who was presenting his *Totaltheater* project, Piscator's version of a democratic mass theatre). Many others had been invited, such as Stanislavski, who did not actually take part in the conference. For Pirandello's speech, 'Discorso al Convegno "Volta" sul teatro drammatico', see *Spsv*, pp. 1036-42.
- 6 For a better understanding of the importance and the impact of the *Convegno Volta*, see *Reale Accademia d'Italia, Fondazione Alessandro Volta, Atti dei convegni 4, Convegno di Lettere 8-14 Ottobre 1934–XII, Tema: Il Teatro drammatico* (Rome, Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1935-XIII); I. Fried, 'Sua Eccellenza Pirandello Presidente: Pirandello and the Convegno Volta', *Pirandello Studies* 29 (2009), 129-43; and I. Fried, *Il Convegno Volta sul teatro drammatico. Un evento culturale nell'età dei totalitarismi* (Corazzano [Pisa], Teatrino dei Fondi/Titivillus Mostre Editoria 2014). Another significant contribution to the subject, in English, is M. A. Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in*

*Italy and France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 28-30 and 90-95.)

- 7 By the way, at that time neither the UK nor the USA had a publicly funded State National Theatre.
- 8 Meldolesi speaks of a ‘attacco antiattorico del fascismo’ [‘fascism’s anti-actors attack’]: see C. Meldolesi, *Fondamenti del Teatro Italiano: la generazione dei registi* (Rome, Bulzoni, 1984), p. 37.
- 9 ‘It is desirable that the long debated matter should be resolved, as to whether theatre is designed to offer a performance in which the work of art, the poet’s creation, should be one of several elements in a director’s hands and under his command, in the same way as the stage set, the lighting and the actors, or whether instead all these elements and the unifying work of the director, who is the creator solely responsible for the performance, should be used to give life to the work of art that includes all of them and without which each of these, in itself, night by night, would have no *raison d’être*: that life, I mean, that is inviolable because it is coherent with itself in every way that the artwork wants to have for itself, and that therefore should not be at the director’s liberty to alter or least of all to tamper with.’ (All translations are my own.)
- 10 See Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Del Teatro Teatrale ossia del Teatro* (Rome, Tiber, 1929).

- 11 The model for the Accademia was the ancient *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation* of Paris (originally the *École Royale de Chant et de Déclamation*, founded in 1784), that was directed by a musician, offering traditional teaching of acting interpreted merely as speech from the actors who were members of the *Comédie Française*. A similar type of teaching was also offered in England, initially as part of the activities of the London Academy of Music (founded in 1861), and in Russia, starting with the School of Aleksandrinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg, and in various other schools throughout Europe. In Italy the first publicly funded institution offering this traditional actor's teaching style was the old *Regia Scuola di Recitazione di Roma* based at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory (then renamed 'Eleonora Duse' with a new statute written by Silvio D'Amico). The *Accademia d'Arte Drammatica* aimed instead at a radical reform of drama teaching, shaping the Drama School model as we know it today. See Raffaella Di Tizio, laurea specialistica in *Studi Teatrali* Silvio d'Amico. *Il sogno di un teatro d'arte – La nascita di una scuola*, relatori prof. Ferdinando Taviani e prof. Mirella Schino, anno accademico 2009/2010, Università degli Studi dell'Aquila.
- 12 An interesting comparative analysis that takes into consideration, besides Brecht's, also some of Stanislavski's theories is in G. Policastro, 'Pirandello e Brecht: un incontro possibile?', in F. Petroni, M. Tortora

(eds.), *Gli intellettuali Italiani e l'Europa (1903-1956)* (San Cesario di Lecce, Manni, 2007), pp. 275-94.)

- 13 See Meldolesi, 'Vecchi caratteri ereditari', in his *Fondamenti del teatro italiano*, pp. 9-36.
- 14 D'Annunzio had also a similar public appeal, but his theatrical production cannot be compared to that of Pirandello.
- 15 Very interestingly the actor Lamberto Picasso provided a different reconstruction of the foundation of the company, where he claimed to have had a primary role from the beginning, and also recalled the donation of 50000 lire directly from Mussolini's hands: see A. D'Amico, A. Tinterri, (eds.) *Pirandello capocomico. La Compagnia del Teatro d'Arte di Roma 1925-1928* (Palermo, Sellerio, 1987), pp. 399-401). Even outside this context, this is one of the clearest statements made at the time to express the viewpoint of the actors.
- 16 This comes from an interview which appeared in French, translated by Benjamin Crémieux, as 'En confidence', *Le Temps*, Paris, 20 July 1925. The Italian version is quoted by Alessandro D'Amico and Alessandro Tinterri in *Pirandello capocomico. La Compagnia del Teatro d'Arte di Roma 1925-1928* (Palermo, Sellerio, 1987), 'Premessa', p. 5. On this important interview see C. Vicentini, *Pirandello il disagio del teatro* (Venice, Marsilio, 1993), pp. 9-31.

- 17 See A. Camilleri, 'Pirandello e la regia teatrale', in *Atti del Congresso internazionale degli studi pirandelliani, Venezia, Fondazione "Giorgio Cini", Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 2-5 ottobre 1961* (Florence, Le Monnier, 1967), pp. 311-15 (p. 311).
- 18 Meyerhold, quoted in Franco Ruffini's entry on Giovanni Grasso, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 58 (Rome, Treccani, 2002), online at [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-grasso\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-grasso_(Dizionario-Biografico)/), my translation from Ruffini's Italian.
- 19 See D. Orecchia, *Il critico e l'attore: Silvio D'Amico e la scena italiana di inizio Novecento*. (Turin, Accademia University Press, 2012), pp. 259-70.
- 20 See G. Macchia, *Pirandello o la stanza della tortura* (Milan, Mondadori, 1992), p. 100.
- 21 Camilleri, 'Pirandello e La Regia Teatrale', p. 314.
- 22 Niccodemi, quoted in Camilleri, p. 314.
- 23 G. Salvini, 'Il terzo atto dei "Giganti della Montagna"', in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Pirandelliani* (Florence, Le Monnier, 1967), pp. 925-28 (p. 925).
- 24 Camilleri, p. 315.
- 25 C. Pavolini, 'Pirandello alle prove', in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Pirandelliani*, pp. 917-24 (pp. 917-23).



- 26 I borrow this well-known terminology from Ferdinando Taviani, *Uomini di Scena, Uomini di Libro. La scena sulla coscienza* (Rome, Officina Edizioni, 1997), p. 211.
- 27 See Macchia, p. 27.
- 28 Macchia, p. 96.
- 29 Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Victor Corti. (Richmond, One World Classics, 2010), p. 7).
- 30 ‘Illustratori, Attori e Traduttori’, in *Spsv*, pp. 205-24 (p. 215).
- 31 Macchia, p. 191.
- 32 K. Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work: a Student Diary*, translated by Jean Benedetti (Oxon, Routledge, 2010, p. 199).
- 33 For an extensive, and more sophisticated discussion of this subject, see Taviani, pp. 11-40).
- 34 Stanislavski, pp. 57-58.
- 35 Stanislavski, p. 71.
- 36 Stanislavski, p. 456.
- 37 Anatoly Smeliansky, ‘Stanislavski in Russia Today’, in *Stanislavski on Stage*, edited by K. Dacre and P. Fryer. (Sidcup, Rose Bruford College, 2008), pp. 29-33 (p. 32).
- 38 See Macchia, pp. 47-48.

- 39 C. W. Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane: Its Scenery, Inhabitants and Phenomena* (New York, Cosimo, 2005). Originally published by Health Research in 1895.)
- 40 See Macchia, p. 46.
- 41 This was published in volume form in French in 1905. English edition: *Reincarnation: A Study in Human Evolution, the resurrection of the Body and the Reincarnation of the Soul*, translated by Fred Rothwell, London, The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1910, but preceded by articles in the *Revue Théosophique* by the Société Théosophique de France from 1903.
- 42 See Rose Whyman, *The Stanislavski System of Acting: Legacy and Influence in Modern Performance* (Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 86.
- 43 See Fabrizio Cruciani & Ferdinando Taviani, ‘Sulla scienza di Stanislavskij’, in K. S. Stanislavskij, *Lezioni al Teatro Bol’šoj* (Rome, Dino Audino, 2004, pp. 5-18 (pp. 14-15).
- 44 ‘That dark stage, full of mould and wet dust, with stagehands hammering the frames for the sceneries in preparation for the show; all the gossips and pettiness and laziness and indolence of those actors scattered here and there, that prompter in his box with the script, full of cuts and calls, the *capocomico*, always grim and rude, seated near the box; the prop man busy among large cases, sweaty and grumbling, had given him a cruel sense of disillusionment.’

45 ‘If the machine, with the enormous gains that it produces, hires them [the actors], it can pay them much more than any impresario or dramatic company owner... due to its mechanical reproduction, since it can offer always new cheap shows to a large audience, it fills up cinemas and empties theatres, so that almost all dramatic companies make no money and the actors to survive have to knock at the doors of film production companies.’

46 The novel was actually published in periodical form from December 1925 to June 1926 in the journal *La fiera letteraria* (Milan, Unitas). Now see *Tr* II, 737-902.

47 See *Macchia*, p. 75.

48 *Epoca*, vol. 6, n. 157 (5 July 1922), interview by Diego Manganella.

49 See *Macchia*, pp. 72-73.

50 “‘If Cleopatra’s nose had been longer, who knows what would have happened in the world”. And this *if*, this minuscule particle [...], how many and what kind of decompositions is it able to produce [...]!’

51 See Stanislavski, pp. 37-59.

52 Stanislavski, pp. 49-50.

53 It is significant that Pirandello entitled the collection of his dramatic works 'Maschere nude' ['Naked Masks'].