

IN THE PLACES OF LUIGI PIRANDELLO

DOI: 10.26341/issn.2241-4002-2020-1c-sv-5

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Abstract

The Italian drama writer, Luigi Pirandello, novelist and essayist, perhaps the most important contemporary writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934, continues to excite and trouble readers worldwide.

Key words: *Pirandello, Piraggelos, Sicily, Theater, Pirandello Museum.*

1.1. The early years

He was born in Agrigento, Sicily, ancient Akragas. He came from a rich family engaged in sulfur mining, educated and intensely idealistic, with political positions against the Bourbons and in favor of Garibaldi. Garibaldi's denial of expectations created the first feeling of betrayal in the Pirandello family and especially for the young Luigi. At the age of thirteen, his family moves to Palermo and Pirandello studies Italian poets of the 19th century, intensively. After graduating from high school, he works in the mines with his father, while enrolling in the Department of Law and Letters of the Palermo University. He selects the Department of Letters and moves to Rome to continue his studies. The city disappoints him. The only thing that excites him is its theaters. He is forced to leave for Bonn in order to complete his doctorate at Romantic Philology on the subject of Agrigento dialect.



The author in his early years

Source: pirandelloweb.com

He comes in contact with the German Romantics and especially Goethe. He returns to Sicily and then settles in Rome, where at the urging of his father he marries the daughter of a wealthy businessman, Antonietta Portulano. While his two sons and daughter are born, Pirandello posts in newspapers and magazines. His wife did not realize her husband's artistic greatness. Until 1902 and for five years he was intensely active in literature and its scientific field. His first steps as a writer, included honorary quotes from his favorite authors, short poetry collections, translations, short publications in newspapers and magazines ("La Critica").

These first posts are small volumes of lyric poems, leaning towards the sensitivity of twilight and of Romanticism, such as *Happy Evil* (1889), *Easter of the Earth* (1891) and *Elegy Rhine* (1895), which have been composed more or less on the model of his Roman elegies, like Goethe, who translated them the following year. He also writes two novels, *In Margin* (1893), and *The Shift* (1895), as well as the comedy "If Not So" or "The Right of others" (1895), which will remain unpublished for about twenty years¹².

1.2 The difficult Years – The Late Matia Paskal

The family's bankruptcy comes in 1903, with the flooding of the mines. Antonietta suffers a severe nervous breakdown, which neutralizes her mentally until the end of her life. Pirandello initially thinks of committing suicide, but instead he keeps fighting. He works much harder and while watching his wife's mental decline he gets inspired and in 1904 he writes "The late Matthias Pascal ". An intensely autobiographical novel, which with the literary and fantastic elaboration of the author met immediate and huge success.



Source: pirandelloweb.com

The novel is written in first-person narrative, with a central hero and narrator, Matthias Pascal himself. The hero born and raised in Miranio of Italy, from a wealthy family, lives a carefree youth until financial disaster, which occurred from the untimely death of his father and mismanagement of the family's property, given to Malanias by his helpless mother. Pascal, trapped in a stressful marriage because of his mother-in-law and helpless wife, and especially after the loss of his twin daughters shortly after their birth, he leaves for Monte

¹² Elissavet Theodoranou, THE POETRY OF PIRANTELLINO IN THE POST-THEATER TRILOGY, Master Thesis, Thessaloniki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Fine Arts, Theater Department, May 2009, p. 7.

Carlo. He resorts to gambling and wins a lot of money. And while he decides to return to Miranio, he reads in a local newspaper the news of his death. The corpse of an obviously unknown person was caught streaming outside the village and was identified by his wife and mother-in-law as his own. Matia feels liberated and travels to Europe. He returns to Rome, where he decides to settle under another name, that of Adriano Mace, creating a past based in fiction. After a quarrel with a Spanish painter, he decides to abandon Rome and return to his village, in order to reclaim his lost identity. The book is inspired by the deep philosophical mood the writer creates, concerning the issue of death¹³. Matthias narrates in a comic and tragic way the adventures that led him to learn about his own death, wishing to break the shackles of social conventions and demonstrating man's inability to move the threads of his own destiny¹⁴.

1.3 The continuance of the Literature production

The Old and the Young (1909), Tertseti (1912), The Deck (1915) are some of the books that were written by Matthias in the following years. The old and the young is a clear example of the writer's sensitivity towards the points of time that take on the dimension of a crisis of values. The novel presents the conflicts between Garibaldi and the Sicilian Fassi. Inspired by the Polygenesis period (period of unity and independence of Italy), after Italy became one state, a period stigmatized by pessimism concerning righteous governance, as a climate of widespread corruption prevailed. The working class, formed in that period, which is the class which is basically presented in the work of the author, is not able to find its place neither with the power and the production system, nor with those who want to overthrow or fix it. In Pirandello's work this pessimism and generalized crisis is expressed as one existential emptiness and a crisis of human identity¹⁵.



Pirandello and Einstein meet in New York
Source: pirandelloweb.com

In 1915 and while Italy declares war on Austria, difficult circumstances surround the author, due to the capture of Stefano's son by the Austrians, the deterioration of his wife's mental health and the death of his mother. Under this intense pressure, the writer began to

¹³ Thanasis Liakopoulos, Luigi Pirandello: "The late Matia Pascal", diastixo.gr, November 2018.

¹⁴ Giannis Antoniadis, The late Matia Pascal, book review by Luigi Pirandello, culturenow.gr, October 2018.

¹⁵ Elissavet Theodoranou, p. 8

deal rigorously with Man and his inner world. Inevitably he turned to the study of psychological texts, as well as to writing essay studies, where, examining the principles that govern man, himself, but and his art, his intensely emotional morality was manifested. From 1915 to 1920 he publishes "The Law of Others", but also presents a series of books in Sicilian dialect (Citrus from Sicily, Think again, Giacomino etc.), as well as This is it if you think so, The pleasure of honesty, The bowl etc. Pirandello believes that the Sicilian dialect expresses more vitality and truth.

2. His Theatrical Plays

But what made him world famous was his theatrical plays, which brought Italy back to the mainstream of European drama and which are based on his idea of the multiplicity of the individual and its disintegration and consequent subjectivity ultimately of the truth. He was to become the most important representative of the "grotesque" theater, with Italy being its birthplace.

A common theme of the theatrical authors who preceded Pirandello, of Luigi Chiarelli, Luigi Antonelli and Rosso di San Secondo, is the handling of the hilarious tragic swing of man between reality and fantasy combined with a grotesque humor. According to Manola (2020) the issue of the "mask" of the face finds its culmination in the theater of Pirandello the struggle between the face and the mask is guided, through his unattainable writing skills, to heartbreaking outcomes: "When we face ourselves," he said, "team consistency is an unbridled mourning. This mourning is my theater". And yet, from the author's theater there is mercy for its heroes. His work is preoccupied with the vanity of the human aspirations and man's inability to fully understand a personality. Pirandello's work could be categorized as follows: a) The hilarious tragedy of the love triangle, b) The mask and the person, c) The ethnographies in the Sicilian dialect and d) The symbolic work¹⁶.



Six people are looking for a writer, National Theater, New Stage, 2003¹⁷

The stage plays written in Sicilian dialect are entrusted to Sicilian actor Angelo Musco, whereas the plays in Italian are passed on to more well-known actors of the Italian theater such as, actor Ruggero Ruggeri, comedian and Marco Praga theater critic, the charismatic Virgilio Talli and the protagonist Vera Vergani. It is a fact that most of his plays are based on

¹⁶ Sofia Iordanidou - Introduction to the work of Pirandello, <https://siordanidou.gr/>, December 2016.

¹⁷ Digitized Archive of the National Theater

short stories. In 1918 he publishes the essay "Theater and Literature". After his two sons return from the war, he is forced to enroll his wife into a psychiatric clinic. From the 1920 decade he exclusively deals with the writing of stage plays, from this moment the most creative part of his theatrical career begins leading the writer to the peak of his success.¹⁸

Pirandello did not take long to abandon the conventional and introduce to the world stage, the "**post-theater**" or otherwise "**theater in theater**", for which he is most remembered. Texts that integrate theater into one another appear as spectator mirrors and come to break the wall between the stage and the audience. With these plays, the actor-performer enters the position of the spectator and experiences a theatrical text from the point of view of the third, while at the same time the spectator identifies himself with the performer. Spectator and actor are at the borderline of realistic and imaginary, and because of this the boundaries of reality and theater seem confused. Thus, they enter a process of internal meditation, of communication criticism and experimentation with boundaries. It is a masterpiece technique incorrectly claimed to have been invented by Pirandello, as it has been known since the time of Thomas Kidd ("The Spanish Tragedy") and Shakespeare (short version of "Hamlet"). The latter, had summarized the meaning and importance of the technique of theater within the theater, stating that: "**the entire world (is) a scene**"¹⁹.



Tonight we improvise, National Theater, November 2018
Digitized Archive of the National Theater

Pirandello's stage plays, "Six People Ask for an Author", "Each with his way" and "Tonight we improvise", constitute his so-called post-theater trilogy. Pirandello mentions the trilogy for the first time, in his dedication to Max Reinhardt, in the German translation of "Tonight we improvise", in 1929. A special fact that intrigues the scholar of the trilogy is that the three plays are written and rewritten by the author over a period of about twelve years, from 1921 to 1933. Observing the chronologies and the different versions of the plays, it is obvious that the author is constantly contemplating and editing the texts in such a way that it is revealed that the trilogy is a work in progress within the context of the specific dramaturgical formula of the post-theater. The evolution of Pirandello's artistic career and

¹⁸ Elissavet Theodoranou, a.a. p. 9

¹⁹ Elena Mouzaki, Luigi Pirandello: "The whole world is a scene", maxmag.gr, December 2018.

working conditions during the twelve years of writing the trilogy have a significant impact but are also reflected in three texts²⁰.

3. Teatro d'arte- The relationship with the Mussolini Regime

In 1924 he founded the Teatro d'arte troupe in Rome and took his place as artistic director. Although the original idea for the creation of the troupe started from a group of young intellectuals led by Pirandello's son, Stefano, he soon appropriated the whole venture. The initial intentions of this initiative was to establish a stable base at the Teatro Odescalchi in Italy and the organization of a select world repertoire, against the idea of touring troupes, who due to their nomadic life, were not able to take care of the quality of the repertoire and the performances they uploaded. This business was originally sponsored by Mussolini himself and privately owned funds of the group, but the money were not enough to be able to respond to the needs of the troupe and the costs of the renovation of the Teatro Odescachi. Thus, the performances that began in 1925 lasted only two months and immediately after, Pirandello, in the role of troupe leader, was forced to start touring in various Italian cities and abroad, as Mussolini did not keep the promises he had made for financial support of the troupe. Despite the devotion to the Teatro d'arte, the national propaganda in favor of the regime made by Pirandello abroad and the persistent appeals to government officials and to the Italian dictator himself, the troupe's financial problems were never resolved, resulting in the theater's final lockdown in 1928²¹.

For his relationship with the Italian dictator, Pirandello was branded a fascist. He used to joke about this nickname saying that he is a "fascist" just because he is Italian. This "joke", however, was not suitable in a boiling Europe, and he found himself several times in a position where he had to finally clarify his policies. In fact, the author's irrational realism did not allow him to grow his political beliefs. Due to his political apathy, he did not hesitate to describe himself as "the man of the world." This statement, as well as his official distancing from the fascist party made him "dangerous" and placed him under the constant control of Mussolini's police²².



Pirandello gives directing instructions to the actors, during the rehearsal of the play "The new colony ", (1928).

²⁰ Elissavet Theodoranou, a.a. p. 11

²¹ Elissavet Theodoranou, a.a. p. 12

²² Elena Mouzaki, a.a.

The collapse of the dream of Pirandello, the radical overhaul of the Italian theatre, as well as his frustration with the Mussolini regime, will lead him to self-exile in Germany. Without ever being able to become a real director, his troupe leading experience and his acquaintance with the theatre's material dimension, with actors, set designers and technicians, were determinant. The various reflections on the theatrical text, the interpretation of the actors and more generally the theatrical performance, result in his artistic and professional maturity, which lead him to the need to overcome the old forms of theater.

The Italian writer's complete contact with the theater is now strongly mirrored in the post-theater trilogy. "Pirandellism" manifested itself uniquely in *Tonight we improvise!*, (1930), where the actors were invited, not just to realize their dimension from the character they play, but having to try to identify completely with the character. It's unique how Pirandello, through the director of this "improvisation", directs the actors to reach six or seven levels of roles, theaters among others theaters, enchanting with its inconceivable "fantastic realism"!²³



The Award Ceremony of the Noble Prize of Literature in 1943.
Source: pirandelloweb.com

The Pirandello "madness" awarded the author the **Nobel Prize in Literature in 1934**. He died alone, in Rome, just two years later (December 10, 1936).

With over fifty theatrical texts, eight novels and several poetry collections, Pirandello brought to the writing field, his own revolution, reminding to fellow authors the multidimensionality of drama, clarifying positions, rehearsing limits and trying to approach with his personal (marginally "crazy") realism the human nature reminding us that everything around us, even ourselves, are nothing but parts of a theater! As confusing as his work was, he saw the people and simply believed exclusively in action and never in the "philosophy" behind the text. It has been disputed if what he did was groundbreaking. Its timelessness,

²³ Elena Mouzaki, a.a

however, is indisputable and the theatrical (and not only) troupes every year draw inspiration from one of his texts²⁴.

4. Pirandello's plays on the Greek stage

Luigi Pirandello never traveled to Greece. However, he admired our country, as the homeland of the theater. In an interview he gave to Costas Ouranis, he says about our Country: "I bring Greece inside me. Her spirit comforts and enlightens my soul. I can even tell you that, even I never visited Greece, it's like I know the country well. I am from Sicily, from Greater Greece, and there are many Greek characteristics in Sicily. [...] Besides [...] I am of Greek origin. My name is Πυραγγελοσ. Pirandello is nothing but its vocal corruption: Piranzello, Pirandello..."²⁵.



To clothe the naked, National Theatre Center stage 1935.
Eleni Papadaki, Georgios Glynos.²⁶

Pirandello and his work grafted the theatrical events of our country, from a very early age, just like his homeland, Italy, and his acceptance was steady and continuous. Initially, critics and audiences alike were divided over the newcomer author and his performances draw critical reviews or triumphant praise. But over the years, people in the theater business accepted Pirandello as a major author. Important directors, actors, translators and others theater factors in Greece dealt substantially and systematically with Pirandello's plays which were staged in various, private and public scenes, throughout Greece and at different times. A typical case is according to Manola & Tsatalbassoglou (2020) Kazantzakis with "Othello" and Matesis with "The Station".

His reception begins in 1914 with the performance of his play "The vise", from the Kyveli troupe. The responsibility for that first presentation of Pirandello's play was bestowed upon Telemachos Lepeniotis, one of the "conjugators" of the New Stage of the pioneer director Konstantinos Christomanos. It is worth mentioning that Greece is the first country outside Italy, in which a play by the Nobel Prize-winning Sicilian is presented. The following years the main representative of his work in our country, will be Spyros Melas, who introduces the author to the Greek public, while Eleni Papadaki is established as one of the most important Greek women Pirandello performer. In the following decades the characters that will dominate in directing Pirandello's work will be Karolos Koun and Dimitris Myrat, who in fact will be honored in 1983 with the award for " the best Pirandello directing outside

²⁴ Elena Mouzaki, a.a

²⁵ Sofia Iordanidou, a.a.

²⁶ Digitized Archive of the National Theater

Italy ", whereas a primarily performer in the Italian author's plays is also Vassilis Diamantopoulos. The Greek theatrical audience, despite the difficulties of his writing, loved his work and watched them with great interest. Its significant production continues and is a point of interest and study (Manola, 2020).

5. Points of tourist interest Pirandello Museum, Agrigento of Sicily

The house where Pirandello was born, built in the 18th century, is located in a countryside overlooking the sea, on the border between the cities of Agrigento and Porto Empedocle. His family had taken refuge there to avoid the cholera pandemic, which plagued Sicily at the time.



Source: pirandelloweb.com

In 1949 it was declared a national monument. In 1952 it was bought by the Sicily Region, which oversaw its restoration and layout. In the rooms. Upstairs, documents marking the early stages of literature production of the author are displayed, starting from the youthful period of his high school years²⁷.



Source: pirandelloweb.com

Pirandello's House-Museum in Rome

Situated on the top floor of an Art Nouveau villa on Antonio Bosio Street in Rome, is the apartment where Luigi Pirandello lived. In the years 1913-1918 Pirandello had lived in the

²⁷ Angelina Papathanassiou, "Luigi Pirandello: The Author's House Museum", Custodians Due to Arts, arts magazine, www.thematofylakew.gr.

villa with his family. From 1933 to 1936 he lived there alone, occupying the rooms that are kept intact on the top floor. His driver lived in the room next to his apartment, while his son Stefano lived with his family downstairs. In this house in 1934 Pirandello received the news about the Nobel Prize award.



Source: pirandelloweb.com

With the death of the author, as the house was purchased by the state, his heirs in order not to damage his memory, willingly donated to the public everything contained in the apartment. Since 1961 the apartment has been under the auspices of the Institute of Pirandello Studies, which aims at its research, study, life and work of Pirandello. Thus, the whole legacy of Pirandello is protected and accessible to the public. In the apartment you can find manuscripts, correspondence and other documents, period photographs, Luigi Pirandello's personal library, the paintings on the walls by his son Fausto and Pasquarosa Bertolotti, the Nobel Prize award, the uniform of the Royal Academy of Italy, a portable typewriter, a photographic archive, many art objects and various furniture. Over the years the Institute has enriched its heritage with various donations. The apartment in addition to series of conferences, courses and workshops, hosts tours and is open to the public every day of the week²⁸.

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