

ELUSIVENESS OF REVENGE AND IMPOSSIBILITY OF
TRAGEDY: SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*
AND PIRANDELLO'S *ENRICO IV*

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The objective dimension of the relationship between Shakespeare and Pirandello, if one means to restrict it to explicit quotations and allusions, is very limited and would seem to make the link somewhat tenuous between the two dramatists so far apart in time; however, an indirect link—so far not spelled out—does exist, and I intend to reaffirm it here in all its strength. It is a question of a link that is to be found mainly in two plays: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Pirandello's *Enrico IV* (1921), which present on stage basic thematic analogies already articulated and argued in various words by the Italian writer, especially in the novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904) and the essay *L'umorismo* (1908). This is an element that shows the homogeneity, the continuity of the author's thinking as well as the appearance of the same themes in the different literary forms Pirandello uses. I would like to emphasize in particular, with regard to this, the contiguity between the works of the imagination and these essays, of theory or practice.

Few are the Italian Anglicists who have devoted their time specifically to this topic but among them, significantly, should be mentioned Maria Valentini,¹ who tackles the problem in detail, paying

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attention to all the possible Shakespearean echoes in Pirandello's plays. Italian literature scholars, more understandably, point out little more than surface similarities between the melancholy character, the feigned madness of Hamlet and the madman, at times real and at times feigned, of the main character in *Enrico IV*. Moreover, in England during the 1920s, Pirandello's work was not well received.² More recently Ferguson, Brustein and Paolucci have written on it, in works primarily devoted to other subjects and also Bradbury, who has placed Pirandello among the ten most interesting twentieth-century writers in Europe.³ Pirandello's play is a work of his maturity, written in record time if the author himself writing to Ruggero Ruggeri, whom he considered the ideal actor for his play, is to be believed at all.⁴

As is known, much of Pirandello's activity revolves around the theatre, as a dramatist and, in the years from 1925 to 1928, as artistic director of the company "Teatro D'Arte". When Pirandello was living in the capital, he certainly had occasion often to attend performances of Shakespeare more frequently staged in the years of the end of the nineteenth century to the early years of the twentieth, less often in the Fascist period characterized by an ideology of autarchy,⁵ even when relating to humanistic culture. It is in the first decade of the twentieth century, however, that Pirandello's conception of the world and the theatre is defined; one that in the latter reaches its expressive maturity, starting from the 1920s with *Sei personaggi in cerca di autore* and *Enrico IV*, Pirandello's only incursion into tragedy as a genre and into History as a subject. This history however has nothing to do with one patronized by Shakespeare, from the moment that, playing with the ambiguous reference of the title, I think knowingly, the Italian playwright is alluding to the Head of the Roman Empire, in the period from 1000 to 1100.

The situation of the event brought to the stage is admissible for a regular tragedy, throughout one day in the protagonist's life, always presented with the name of his disguise "Enrico", a recluse for twenty years in a villa furnished like the throne room in a medieval castle because he is by now mad. This follows a fall from his horse during a cavalcade in costume, when he was in fact impersonating the Emperor

Henry IV, an identity and a temporal term of reference he has remained fixed in.⁶ The accident took place during Carnival, when he was riding alongside a young girl called Matilde, dressed like Matilde of Tuscany, an historical character remembered only because, devoted to the cause of the affirmation of the supremacy of the Papacy over the temporal power of the Empire, at a certain point involved herself in interceding with the Pope for him to cancel the excommunication already inflicted on their adversary. The feelings of the Countess, who subordinates herself to political reason, are therefore ambiguous, at least as much as those of the Emperor, referring both to the historical events and to the human reality of the modern characters involved in the masquerade. The inference is legitimate since "Enrico" hints at a growing feeling towards the girl in the past, a feeling that, because of its promise of stable faithfulness, terrified the young girl, somewhat superficially attracted, instead, by the "rules of the game" of skirmishes that society seemed to allow her.

After the accident the young man's sister has kept around him a set-design in keeping with the particular form of "Enrico's" madness where two full size portraits of "Enrico" and Matilde appear in the foreground, both in the initial stage-direction and on the stage, towering over the scene and important to the conclusion of the tale.⁸ When the curtain rises on Pirandello's drama, the sister has been dead for a month, adding to the feeling that the brother's madness was being cured. For this reason she had made her son and heir promise to take care of the uncle. The young man, engaged to Matilde's daughter, goes to pay him a visit accompanied by the two women and by Belcredi, and by a doctor. Belcredi, who later became Matilde's lover, was another participant in the fateful cavalcade, while the medical practitioner, who is by profession an explorer of the world of the unconscious, is asked to speed up the poor madman's cure.

The working hypothesis of the doctor is that since the time series and the events, as it were, are crystallized for "Enrico" at the moment of the accident, manipulation of the time sequence, bringing before his eyes simultaneously images of the past and the present, can create a

short circuit such as to make him cover in one leap the temporal distance between the two moments in time and to reveal the nature of disguise of the historical identity "Henry IV" that formed over time the continuity of his own personal identity.

The experiment, indeed the play within the play as in Shakespeare, in which the conscience of the madman can be caught,⁹ is destined to failure. "Enrico", who had secretly regained his mental sanity,¹⁰ after the accident caused in the past by Belcredi out of ambiguous motivation but explicit Shakespearean suggestion—he had pricked from behind the horse of his friend and rival so as to make it bleed, causing it to rear up—and disturbed by the regrettable situation created around him in the present,¹¹ reacts by setting upon the girl, in some way picking up on some signs of the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia and by unsheathing his sword to run Belcredi through. Even in this act the non-deliberateness and yet necessity of the revenge brought to its conclusion in a way analogous to Hamlet's seems discernible. At this point the disguise of madness becomes inevitable and the real madman brought back to his senses will now, like Hamlet, feign madness and will definitely escape reality and the consequences of an unlooked for action.

The following textual material allows, I believe, a comparison between the two texts that because of their time distance make you think of a strong influence of Shakespearian themes on the twentieth-century Italian dramatist. So as to examine how far and what play of strong influences are triggered off, I propose following the isotopic path established by the vengeance motif, by discussing its impossibility for the new Renaissance man and its transposition to the field of narration and literature, by setting it in parallel with the largely homologous tragic Pirandellian theme. In addition I intend to discuss the theme of madness and the related one of pretence, of disguise, in relation to which the interpretative differences rooted in the two texts, I am persuaded, account for the specific universes of discourse of the two authors.

The motif of revenge and its impossibility

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be inserted, even if somewhat late, into the course of English Renaissance tragedy, centred on the theme of revenge, as an analysis of the 1603 version that goes under the name of Q1¹² makes clearer. The theme of revenge came to the Elizabethans from long direct experience regarding many episodes related to the civil war known as the War of the Roses that had recently ended, from renewed reflection on the Bible with which the reformed religion prescribed direct, continuous contact and last but not least as a specific theatrical motif traceable to Seneca, an author who features largely in the canon of classical studies of the period and who had been translated into English precisely in this period.¹³

No matter how untypical compared to the tradition of the revenge tragedy, *Hamlet* does however share some important aspects of it, many of which to be found also in Pirandello's drama. Elements of the data collected by considering as a whole the relatively small group of English tragedies of revenge allows one to affirm that the world where revenge expresses its reason for existence is often the field of excess of feelings. Hamlet alludes to the sensuality of his mother in the soliloquy "O that this too too sullied flesh (...)" in 1.2.129-158, and to Horatio he says that before he returns to Wittenberg at Court he will be taught to drink a lot (1.2.175), a habit that, as he says elsewhere, is "more honour'd in the breach than the observance" (1.4.15-38; 5.16). With regard to *Enrico IV*, in the section of the plot inferred by the audience to have occurred before the beginning of the play with the function of determining its successive development, we have an episode of Carnival celebration inserted into a situation dominated by feelings of attraction still not clear but intense, at least on the part of the protagonist.¹⁴ The story where the need for revenge is considered generally implies that the position of the revenger is such as to offer the audience no doubts about his right to the revenge.¹⁵ Despite this his role often puts him in a situation of objective disadvantage in the mechanism of the story itself: in the Shakespeare

tragedy the disadvantage comes from Hamlet's young age and in Pirandello's from the condition of "Enrico" as a mad recluse.

Usually the main character faces a sequence of events lasting many years before managing to bring his revenge to a conclusion. In *Hamlet*, slightly exceptionally compared to tradition, the long process is fundamentally emotive on one hand and rational on the other, and especially his monologues prove this. In *Enrico IV* there is a stalemate lasting eight years when the character, even though regaining his mental sanity, suffers, living in the same situation. Besides, against a whole band of revengers kept in check by their single obsession, neither Hamlet nor Enrico shows himself to be insensitive and impenetrable to feelings. These are especially friendship—Horatio, Marcellus, Francisco, even Laertes—and disappointed love—Ophelia—in the case of the former and love for a sister in the case of the latter.¹⁶

The *deus ex machina* that suddenly brings on the events, or more generally the chance to carry out the revenge, comes in Shakespeare, as by epochal convention, from the ghost's appearance, which sets the action in motion, and from the *play-within*, which decides the final moves in the story. Something similar we also find in Pirandello's drama that sees the medical practitioner and his stratagem of performance as catalysts of the concluding catastrophe that similarly takes on the role and appearance of a real *play-within*. The script according to which the revenge is carried out is that of History, but a History presented *sub specie ficta*, as the staging of a grotesque play with "Enrico" as actor, director and author, which designs but also delimits a narrow world where he takes the part of a demiurge. The world moves solely according to the impulses of his will, since his relation to reality had broken down twenty years earlier in the sign of the impossibility of carrying out his own most genuine needs in that dimension.

Conforming to the tradition of the revenge tragedy, also in the cases under discussion, the punishment for the initial crime is excessive compared to the original fault. Think of the final slaughter in *Hamlet*, where the only survivors are Horatio, who has the task of handing down Hamlet's story, and Fortinbras, whose task is to re-establish

harmony in the state. In parallel, Belcredi's death in *Enrico IV* involves the main character's definitive alienation from a community where the superficial game reigns and his hope for authenticity of feeling has no place. The madness that shows itself especially in the language and is functional in the masquerading of the character reveals itself to be instrumental in the revenge, while ambiguously exploring the limit between reality and make-believe in *Hamlet*. Madness is equally ambiguous in *Enrico IV*, but shows itself at work especially as complex, functional "theatre direction" aimed at the control of the events and of the people who gravitate around.

In utter, qualifying difformity of the revenge tradition is the role played in the two texts by irony, the paradox of logic and humour, even if these traits are very dissimilar in the two texts. These aspects of artistic expression are fixed in both cases to the protagonist's ability to consider dispassionately his own actions, a condition that allows him to apply his acute analytical ability to experience. Regarding the use of conventions in the production of an artistic work, in Shakespeare the debate stands out on the question of "comic relief" that gave shape to the aesthetic thinking of the period and which in *Hamlet* is never only instrumental, but touches and casts new light on the heart of the matter. Shakespeare explicitly says in the text that the impulse and strategy aimed at making the audience laugh without connection to the logic within the drama being acted is only a bad use of the comic element (3.2.39). In the Gravedigger's scene, indeed the comic relief is achieved but with emphasis showing the intimate essence of the drama being performed.

Turning to the revenge motif, it can be argued that despite points of contact between *Hamlet* and the Elizabethan and Jacobean tradition, the path leading the protagonist to carry it out shows without a shadow of doubt that in the new Renaissance culture there is no longer room for this school of thinking. This assertion could be substantiated by many comments, beginning with the explicit prohibition of private revenge in the Bible, the customary companion and often the only reading matter to accompany a Christian's life in Renaissance England, and ending

with the appearance of the ghost. Beyond its nature of conventional gesture in the theatre, what perplexes is its metaphysical nature: the fact that in England in the 1540s there had been the break with the church of Rome and then the Reformation poses the problem, over which generations of critics have pondered, of where the ghost comes from. From a Catholic point of view, the ghost might be a sinning soul from Purgatory that needs to be purified before entering Paradise and in this condition is still lingering between Heaven and Earth, pining in its early grief that hardly finds metaphysical atonement. The question is radically different in a reformed religious concept that totally rejects the very idea of Purgatory.¹⁷ From here the doubt, expressed clearly in the tragedy with direct questions and requests for clarification, comes to mind:

HAM: [...] Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. (1.4.40-4)

[...] but tell
Why thy canoniz'd bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements, why the sepulchre
Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd
Had op'd his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
That thou dead corse, again in complete steel
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?¹⁸ (1.4.47-57)

Doubt as such, however, undermines to its very foundations the revenge mechanism which to be convincing must present as unquestionable

both the crime that is its origin and the guilty person. Curiously, in *Hamlet*, the crime is actually hidden and unknown to everyone, mimed by a chance occurrence and revealed by the ghost, intentionally, only to Hamlet. He tells it only to his friend Horatio, who for the public therefore takes on a principal role among the protagonist's other friends, emphasizing as the only explicit element, his feeling of premonition, formed by the "unmotivated" melancholy the public has met in the tragedy's first scenes.

Doubt about the ghost's nature makes a pair with that about Claudius' guilt. Faced with this Hamlet behaves like the New Renaissance Man, who does not subscribe to anything as the truth unless he has verified its exactness by experience, being convinced that in Nature are contained, observed and therefore made accessible to man the same truths revealed in the Bible and forming the central nucleus of conscience, besides that of religious faith. The ascertainment of the truth of the ghost's words is organised around an expedient, the staging of the *play-within*, reflecting on the nature of the audience's emotive response and on the functioning of the theatre:

HAM: - I have heard
That guilty creatures, sitting at a play
Have, By the very cunning of the scene,
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions (2.2.584-88)

However somewhat surprisingly, Hamlet, also when he is by now certain of the king's guilt, does not seize the first favourable opportunity to take revenge and postpones its *performance* until a better moment according to the intentional logic guiding him, almost as if the knowledge and experimentation brought to a conclusion were not enough.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. (1.5.175-76)

'Sblood, There is something in this more than
natural, if Philosophy could find it out. (2.2.364)

Yet he has shown himself convinced of the public nature of his revenge,
and therefore of its admissibility:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right. (1.5.196-7)

Doubt about the nature of the phenomena had led to its introjection
and therefore to the creation of an internal conflict. Moreover, according
to a well-known and convincing theory by Catherine Belsey,¹⁹ this is
the period when into the English Renaissance cultural paradigm comes
consideration of individual subjectivity.

In Shakespeare's artistic design the attempt to authenticate
Hamlet's revenge as admissible is translated into the need to explain
the motivation of the revenger's actions. In particular are motivated
also inaction and all those that might alienate the public's liking for
the protagonist. Indeed there are justifying reasons for Polonius's
chance killing and motivations for the falsified letter that will send
Rosencratz and Guildenstern to their deaths. They were university
fellow-students of Hamlet's, whom he had warmly welcomed to court
before realising their role as spies in the service of Claudius. The stage
action even offers reasons for Hamlet's verbal violence against
Ophelia, the most hateful action among those he takes.

All these cases testify to the centrality of the strategy aimed at
preserving the public's liking for the protagonist, whom the process of
reception must be able to reveal to be free from blame. Even the bloody
action marking the carrying out of revenge will be in the last analysis
caused by the disloyalty of Claudius and Laertes, whom Hamlet kills
in the end in a fit of rage.

The desire for revenge indeed comes from a desire for justice
that has not been satisfied for a crime that, although remaining
unpunished, is considered as a disease of society. It follows from this

that the revenger's action is an act of purification and as such totally justifiable according to current culture, even if not according to Religion.²⁰ To overcome the objective difficulty of checking the ghost's words, Hamlet had recourse to the expedient of taking on an "antic disposition", feigned madness, that allowed him *de facto* the same stature as a *fool*, immunity with respect to the unpleasant truths he was able to tell or actions he was able to perform. His uncle Claudius, who had taken/ usurped the position of his dead father, observes him and has him spied on (3.1.164) but it seems that the expedient of madness only serves to increase his suspicion with regard to his nephew's intentions, who gives substance to his moment of strategic delay with protracted consideration on analysis of the situation. Contrary to the interpretation favoured for a long time, that has made Hamlet the prototype for indecision, when he finds he has to act without preparation, he shows himself to be very decisive, as in the case of the killing of Polonius or in Act 5, when he kills Laertes and Claudius when their treachery in organising the fencing match is revealed. But the act, by being an impulse of the moment never turns into real revenge, characterised on the contrary by cold calculation at the planning and execution levels. Despite killing Claudius, however, Hamlet in the end substantially fails to carry out his revenge which indeed he delegates to his friend Horatio when he gives him the task of spreading the story of his case so that total justice is given him. The plan is immediately fulfilled: Fortinbras will be the first to hear Hamlet's story (5.2.380) which from then on Horatio will continue narrating. And we will continue hearing it century after century, since Hamlet's story, in the sequence of its happenings and the motivation of its actions, will be subsumed and transported in the tale through which it will become part of the collective literary memory. In the telling is paradoxically realized the sublimation and true realisation of the act of revenge demanded by the ghost.

If it is true, as Kilroy says, that "The central concern with memory, with remembrance, with rites of passage (...) must be fully honoured (156) and besides that (...) words are so important (...). Words must be

said over the dead, goodbyes must be uttered, goodnights liturgically chanted" (*ibid*). The word is also the depositary of cognitive values socially shared, and it is the nucleus around which literature as an activity characteristic of man produces its own fruits.

Literature and representation as memory

Collective memory as cultural memory is a concept developed in the first decades of the twentieth century, after the first notion was disentangled by the false idea of memory as a biological fact, thus placing it as a part of the heredity of a race. Belonging to a culture produces effects that are not transmittable but rather the effect of consolidated habits assimilated individually, which, once accepted, have the function of orientating the choices of successive generations. The concept of cultural memory according to Jan Assmann²¹ "directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society" (126) and stands out at one and the same time both from everyday memory, fundamentally communicative and uncultivated, and from scientific memory that has a less individualized character and reflects rather an image of collective knowledge. Cultural memory "is characterized by its distance from the everyday, (...) has as its fixed point[s], [sort of] fateful events of the past whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communications (recitations, practice, observance)" (129). When this happens and a series of texts, plays or cultural constructs derive from one single nucleus, one can speak of a kind of mnemonic energy that produces these new derived textual constructions, where the collective experience is crystallized that points in the direction of a group identity. This parameter of identification aims at underlining factors of belonging, unity and specificity defined in positive or negative terms, besides bringing to the foreground the ability to reconstruct artefacts connected to that nucleus. It becomes almost a potential archive "fixed in immovable figures of memory and store of knowledge, but every contemporary context relates to these differently, sometimes by

appropriation, sometimes by criticism, sometimes by preservation or by transformation" (130). Following this formulation the connection is easy with all those texts which re-write cultural myths that dot the history of reception of the most important texts in our Western culture; as in the case of "Orestes" or "Hamlet" that we have brought into discussion. This scripting of communicated meanings and shared collective knowledge form the collective heredity, culturally institutionalized, characteristic of every society.²²

I am therefore talking of a corpus of texts and images of re-use, specific for every society in every single period of time, aimed at stabilizing and then conveying the image of itself that each society authorises. I believe one can conclude with the words of Assman according to whom "Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society" (133). In the literary memory, the mythical story of Hamlet has been traceable for three centuries since it has been re-proposed in its adaptations and rewritings and it is therefore not improbable that with its pervasiveness, at the start of the twentieth century, it had begun to interact with Pirandello's thinking and imagination.

Pirandello's novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* is of that period, having as the main character a man believed to be dead, who then complies with the general belief, and when he thinks of reappearing in society, realizes he cannot be reintegrated because of the strength of the social certification, even if irrespective of truth in that narrative world absurdity and incongruity regulate social living. This same situational nucleus forms a considered matrix of ideas completely in line with the paradoxicalness of the story which is the basis of *Enrico IV*, while the paradox of real life, the absurdity of formal logic, is one of the distinctive features of Pirandello's poetics.

Again in the same novel there is a passage, often quoted in abbreviated forms in the critical literature, that refers directly to Pirandello's concept of tragedy. The comment is put into the mouth of a secondary character who, not by chance, is a librarian, physically a

depository for literary memory. Now Pirandello never wrote real tragedies, but significantly *Enrico IV*, which is his closest approach to tragedy, without ever being able to reach it because of the quality of his dramatic world, contains an indication of the genre in the subtitle, “tragedy in three acts”.

The passage I have alluded to, and which I will quote almost in its entirety, is at the beginning of Chapter XII of the novel²³ which opens with the announcement of a marionette show based on the tragedy of Orestes, the classical myth whose story line is quite similar to *Hamlet*’s, and will be then followed by a second show on the tragedy of Electra, in the style of Sophocles, so as to confirm that it is of revenge Pirandello is speaking.

Now just listen to what strange idea comes to mind! If, at the culminating moment, just when the marionette representing Orestes is about to avenge his father’s death on Aegisthus and his mother a rent were to occur in the paper sky of the little theatre, what would happen? You tell me.

—I wouldn’t know—I answered shrugging my shoulders.

—But it’s very simple, signor Meis! Orestes would be terribly disconcerted by that hole in the sky. [...] Orestes would again feel the impulse for revenge, would want to follow it with frenzied passion, but his eyes, at the crucial moment, would go there to that rent, from where every kind of evil influence would now penetrate the stage and you would feel his arms to be falling. In a word, Orestes would become Hamlet. All the difference, signor Meis, between ancient and modern tragedy lies in this, believe me: in the rent in the paper sky [...]. The image of the marionette Orestes disconcerted by the rent in the sky however remained for some time in my mind. At a certain point: “Blessed be the marionettes”, I sighed, “on whose wooden heads the false sky is preserved without rents! Not agonizing perplexities, or restraint, or stumbling blocks or shadows, or pity: nothing! And they can

bravely wait and enjoy their play and love and have respect and esteem for themselves, without ever suffering giddiness or dizziness, since because of their height and actions that sky is a well-proportioned roof. (53)²⁴ (my translation)

The impossibility of tragedy for Pirandello's characters rests firstly in having to account for modern man's awareness of a marionette's condition, a marionette not so much in the hands of an adverse metaphysical fate as the mechanism of the dehumanizing social game that one tends to evade, no longer by escaping, as in the case of the main character in the novel just quoted, but by adapting oneself, manoeuvring from within so as to dominate, as in *Enrico IV*. A social game of the bourgeois type that is about opposed loves, burning jealousies, various configurations of characters sometimes ill or mad, where the anxiety of rebellion finds neither satisfaction nor place in the social schemes to be able to affirm their own individuality, men "without qualities" as Musil says, in a society without ideals, unable to communicate and therefore turned in on themselves.

The foul space of madness and History

Much has been discussed about Hamlet's madness, a place of safety that the character creates for himself and which relates him to the *fool*, a holder of a kind of immunity permit when he dares to tell uncomfortable truths. The madness feigned by Hamlet to defend himself from a hostile court environment ascertains the state of affairs that should bring him to revenge. Hamlet does depict madness starting with a language, which is polysemic, non-consequential, where even words no longer corresponds in an unequivocal way to objects, in the Denmark by now out of "joint" of Shakespeare's tragedy. Hamlet plays with words on several semantic levels bringing about rhetorical and logical discards that mark a playful use of language. Sometimes the spectator can justifiably have the impression that it is the play on language that leads the character on the path to euphoric madness.²⁵

This comment leads directly to what Pirandello had written about the language of humour:

More common characteristics, and also more commonly observed, are the fundamental “contradiction”, usually given as the principal cause for the disagreement that feeling and meditation reveal either between real life and the human ideal or between our aspirations and our weaknesses and miseries, and, as main effect, that very perplexity between tears and laughter; then scepticism that colours every comment, every humorous description and in the end its minutely and even maliciously analytical process.²⁶ (my translation)

The incongruity that causes laughter or triggers a smile is a mechanism Pirandello explains in this way:

[in] every humorous work, reflection is not hidden and does not stay invisible nor almost as a form of sentiment, as almost a mirror where sentiment is contemplated; but it puts itself forward as judge; it analyzes it, keeping its distance from it: it breaks down the image; however, from this analysis, from this breaking down, another sentiment springs up or emanates: the one that could be called and which I in fact call this *feeling of the opposite* [...]. The comic quality is actually a *warning of the opposite* [...] reflection, working inside me has made me go beyond that first warning, or rather more inside it: from that first *warning of the opposite* has made me pass to this *feeling of the opposite*. And here is all the difference between the comic and the humorous. (135)

This state of mind, every so often that I find myself before a really humorous depiction, is one of perplexity: I feel myself held between two: [...]. (139)

Conciliation of conflicting tendencies, of disgusting feelings, of opposite opinions, seems more feasible on the bases of a

common lie, than on the explicit declared tolerance of dissent and contrast; in a word, it seems that a lie must have been considered more advantageous than truth, in that the former can unite, where the latter divides; which does not prevent that, while the lie is tacitly discovered and recognised, it then is accepted as a guarantee of its efficacy of association, making hypocrisy seem sincerity. (155) (my translation)²⁷

In the world of Pirandello's drama the word does not correspond to the thing from the moment the chain of representations has frustrated their essence. Something similar seems to have happened especially in the identity of "Enrico", whose name we'll never even know, frustrated under a heap of roles, tried by him or attributed by others, but under which the character is positively lost.

Madness had placed Hamlet in an alien space, privileged but temporary, on a collision course with the court environment he was so close to. Events have had the quality to limit Hamlet's freedom, as a student at Wittenberg, and to force him into an enclosed position, in a topographic, social, and spiritual sense. The alien space of madness turned out to be a further prison for the prince.

Also in *Enrico IV* events acquired the power to limit liberty of movement of the individual who can no longer go beyond certain boundaries (think of the consequences of Enrico's fall from the horse). The events incorporated also individual wishes, premeditated or chance (see Belcredi's role in the fall). In the latter case the limiting of liberty becomes very heavy, exactly because "the rent in the paper sky" gives awareness of one's own condition, the paralyzing awareness of who contemplates from outside one's own condition. "Enrico", who already before the fall was considered eccentric in the aristocratic circle of his friends, who by the transparent expression of his most intimate gestures had been pointed to as mad,²⁸ as an act of supreme rebellion stops looking for the script for his character—his role in society—and instead accepts the one already written by History, apparently unchangeable and therefore safe. The present is the dimension of uncertainty and

dubiousness and even Hamlet well knew that words do not serve to solve problems; think of that cry, "I, the son of a dear father murdered, / Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, / Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words" (2.2.593-95) or the words of Claudius' prayer which although adequately constructed, do not rise to heaven because they are not able to give substance to his repentance (3.3.36-71).

Pirandello accepts the Shakespearean lesson relying strongly on the representation, not on the isolated word, but on that which fits the action. The performance of History that makes up the script of his own private representation becomes indeed the one made by a kind of amateur dramatic society, with grotesque make-up, transparent to the audience revealing what there is below, in costumes already used. It is a performance for an audience made up of his friends, once regular in their visits, like his sister, now unexpected like the group of visitors. It is above all with the arrival of this new potential public that the protagonist, from a madman (then a secretly cured madman) becomes in a most striking way an actor and manager of a theatre company.²⁹ The plan of art is the only one of reality he can be part of: a constant but not static dimension, the only type of life in fact possible in a reality that has no sense of evolution: "Enrico" acts constantly according to a scenario, in the only dimension in which he can have a winning role and with this choice doesn't opt for life, but chooses to see himself live, at times even looking at himself in the life-size portrait that fixes the constancy of his masquerade in time.³⁰ A distinction between actor-character-character's mask which in this drama, unlike what happens in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* written immediately before, is not always shown on stage and present to the public at every turn in the action. The portrait that comes about like a mirror image does not offer confirmation but imposes on "Enrico" and whoever is near him to work to keep himself at the level of pretence and concretely realizes on stage the sense of life as "performance" that is an interpretative construct extractable from the story. Bradbury's comment, otherwise general, is incisive with regard to this point:

Fascinated by the interpenetration of appearance and reality, of object and reflected image, of face and mask, Pirandello achieved in his pitiless honesty a kind of second-degree naturalism, the sophistication of which announces itself in the title he gave the ten-volume edition of his collected dramas: *Maschere nude* (Naked Masks). It proclaims the paradox that man is only able truly to be himself when wearing the mask, for only then does he feel to discard pretence. (Bradbury and MacFarlane, *Modernism*, cit. 566-67)

A further plan of the work is that of art as pretence and the life of art as the only dimension for anyone excluded from a social circle, almost "Defeated" in the style of Verga. The portrait is a symbol of an alienation that is knowingly transformed into portrayal, according to Enrico's intentions while for the analyst doctor it becomes an image destined because of its movement to destabilize the conscious portrayal performed by the character and bridge the gap between past and present. The portrait, just like the Youth and the Child in *Sei personaggi*, is not a human being that rises to becoming a complete character in full relief, but is only a function of the drama of others, a mirror where others project internal images. When the sky in the marionette theatre scene rends and the falseness of the performance is discovered, one comes to the awareness of one's own essential condition, that bears with it the discovery of the falseness of History as a dimension that man operates in. For Hamlet, History had already demonstrated his disease.³¹ In both tragic characters—Hamlet and "Enrico"—therefore the historical dimension looms important, the succession of events that is *per se* the negation of inaction often imputed to Hamlet.

The relationship between the two texts far apart in time is one episode on the long trail of moments when *Hamlet* has offered itself for new elaboration as adaptable material for being remodelled, an archive of motifs, themes, conventions verbal or otherwise, into which new life can be instilled with different thoughts, the fruit of cultural constraints in keeping with the times and stories different from the original. The

adaptability of Shakespeare's material, far from being caused by the presumed "universality" invoked by Harold Bloom and supporters of his theories, a kind of changeless painted back-drop of a story always true to itself, is instead the result of instability, controversy, rapid change in the still unstable historical frame of reference of the Elizabethan period. History, in fact, has not yet crystallized ideologies, power strategies, language and conventions for artistic representation and people dealt with a composite cultural paradigm that had not yet reached coherent a monolithic organisation able to instil unshakeable certainties, thus not yet inducing people to believe in only one way of looking at things.

Therefore according to the perspective "the spectator" watches the stage from, the complex picture of Hamlet's story changes, as the multiplicity of meanings that spring from it shows, with each successive act of manipulation and rewriting. The Pirandellian reading gives back to the ancient text its semantic and ideological multiplicity, while considering it with the background of History which, even if it has an authoritative sequence of established facts, and a fixed script, is again entrusted to the provisional nature of orientation that the representation makes of it. Matthew Proser correctly comments: "The possibility that the theatre metaphor might have 'cosmic' reference simply does not exist. For Pirandellian man there are only the instinctual life force, the social ideas and forms he uses to contain it, and the time" (344).

The comforting impression of certainty that Hamlet did not succeed in acquiring and which "Enrico" consciously pursued in the *re-enactment* of History, while being totally aware of its illusionism, is frustrated in the vast number of directions it takes in tales, always posterior and therefore "imposed from the outside". The fearful coherence of the fixed mask, parallel to that of History already crystallized, collides with the incessant becoming of History in its tale and the clash makes the process of change to be mistakenly conceived of as an attribute of external reality when instead it is none other, according to Pirandello, than projection of a state intrinsic in man. He had written in *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, with words that could prefigure a feature of *Enrico IV*'s universe of discourse.

On us men, instead, having been born, a cruel privilege has touched, that of *feeling ourselves* living, with the fine illusion that comes from it: that is of taking like a reality outside us this whole feeling of that life of ours, changeable and varied, according to time, case and luck.

And this feeling of life for signor Anselmo was exactly like a little warning light that each of us carries within us alight; a warning light [...] [that] makes us see evil and good; [...]. It seems to me [...] that in certain ages of history, as in certain seasons of individual life, one could determine the predominance of a certain colour, eh? In every age, indeed, is usually established among men a certain agreement of feelings that gives light and colour to those warning lights that are abstract terms: *Truth, Virtue, Beauty, Honour* and whatever else [...]. The light of a common idea is fed by collective feeling; however if this feeling splits up, yes the lantern of the abstract term remains standing but the flame of the idea crackles, flickers and groans, as usually happens in all periods that are called transitional. Besides certain sharp gusts that put out all these warning lights at a stroke are not rare in History. [484-85] (my translation).³²

It is a question of Diogenes' "warning light", "the light of the intellect" that projecting its little light and its many shadows gives form to the environment around man.³³ And after a charming description of the disorder created among men from one of those "gusts" that History reserves for us, that no longer know in which direction to go, as happens with ants when their entrance to the ant-hill is in some way blocked, the character asks:

And if all this darkness, this great mystery, in which uselessly philosophers first speculated and which now, by renouncing inquiry into it, science does not exclude, it was fundamentally one trick like another, a trick of our mind, a fantasy that doesn't

colour? If we were finally to persuade ourselves that all this mystery does not exist outside ourselves, but only within us and of necessity for the famous privilege of the feeling that we have for life, that is of the warning light, which I have spoken of up to now?³⁴ (my translation)

After this follows a consideration of the meaning of death that closely recalls the terms this is made in, in Hamlet's most famous monologue (3.1.56-88).

The contemporary critic is aware of an element of prominent continuity between all this and the Neo-Historicists' concept of History, whose work is linked inextricably to consideration of Shakespeare's myth, as in Stephen Greenblatt, Jean Howard, and Stephen Mullaney, who have elaborated the theory in America, and as in the English Cultural Materialists like Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, and Graham Holderness. One of the central points of their reflection is the concept that every single historical paradigm is always made up bringing together a thousand representations, all controversial and debatable, in fact, and this representation is historical in so far as it is perpetually in the state of becoming from the receivers' current perspectives, and from the one that is still to come about in the future; in other words, from the warning lights that will from time to time be lit up. If History is a continuous process even in its reception, the having stopped it constitutes a grave fault, a fault that in *Hamlet* was committed by Claudius when he killed the king and married his queen and whose consequences Hamlet was not able to escape from entirely because he was called on to "set it right".

In Pirandello's drama, arguably, the same fault is made all the graver by the lightness of the actions and motivations that, in causing Enrico's fall from the horse, have interrupted the flow of the story. Indeed a similar attempt to stop the Protean multiformity of History is identified also in the case of any tendentious interpretations or when the awareness of the process itself brings attitudes of distancing. The illusion is not allowed that there is only one History to know; there are

many mystifying tales, each transparent in its aims, of the same problematic nerve centre, indefinable because painfully alive, tales swinging between reassuring singleness and paradoxical multiplicity of representation.

Multidimensionality seems to be at the same time the malady of the representation of History, constantly put into action and exploited for its own ends by the characters—Hamlet, Claudius, “Enrico”, the “advisers”, the doctor, the friends—and the sickness of the individual split from himself who feels and contemplates himself living. In fact, madness pollutes the name of History and the stories that make it up also in the two moments of the world history which constitutes the context of our two authors: England at the end of Elizabeth’s reign, and Italy, at the beginning of Mussolini’s imperial illusion.

Fiction/pretences

I have spoken about pretence linked to the motifs of revenge and madness. It is opportune to add that, once “Enrico” has accepted isolation, exile and expulsion from the rhythm of time, not even grief can guarantee reintegration. Indeed, whereas in *Hamlet*, the character’s role comes to be part of reality when he accepts his function in the world, in Pirandello the character takes on a role as an extreme attempt at defence against reality, a trick aimed at survival. This process however always implies a re-interpretation by the character/actor of the part, freely chosen at this point, to adapt it to his own personal case, to the trap in life difficult to avoid. This active elaboration is the mask each one wears, awareness of alienation without hope and without solution of continuity that prevents the flaring up of tragedy in “Enrico”, just as it had prevented the full carrying out of revenge in Hamlet. Jill Levenson comments, regarding the theatrical metaphor that has a large part in both plays, that in *Hamlet*, the plan of reality and that of illusion always remain separate, the plan of pretence moreover is often functional for operating in the real, whereas the relationship between art and life can be expressed either *as art that reflects on life or as art*

that reflects life. In Pirandello's theatre world, on the contrary, the two plans draw near each other until they coincide, obliterating every distinction between what is illusory and what is real. This is the short circuit point given by individual memory to the new stage-setting of the past that is destined to reproduce a triangular relationship, painful and alienating then and unacceptable now, after all that has happened to all the characters.

Good God, the impudence to present herself here, to me, now—with her lover beside her [...]—And they had the appearance of lending themselves to pity, so as not to infuriate a wretched person already out of this world, out of time, out of life! (HIV.II.52)³⁵

The dramatic conflict that is introduced is not, as in classical tragedy, between the protagonist and fate, but between the protagonist and the restricted society that makes up his little world. If in the awareness of his impossibility Hamlet had transposed revenge in the story, and hence in literature, "Enrico" transposes the impossibility of tragedy in the act of contemplation of the representation of himself, in the theatre.

However the contemplation of pretence is not without second thoughts: after a dialogue/monologue and a triple cry "Fools! Fools! Fools!" (52), "Enrico" pulls off his disguise that has become intolerable and recognises the painful passage of time, while at the same time making an accusation against the puppets of hypocritical and tyrannical society that surrounds the "sanctuary" that he makes the *setting* for his personal representation. The impetus of rage is expressed on one hand by an attack on Frida, Matilde's daughter, who had lent herself to pretence by repositing the protagonist's real trauma, his unsatisfied desire for Matilde who had escaped from him to continue her game of seduction with others and on the other hand, in putting Belcredi to the sword, with a purely emotive, not calculated gesture of revenge, neither more nor less than what had happened in Shakespeare's play. To defend

himself from life Hamlet had looked for death, and "Enrico" clings to madness, real or feigned, condemned again to see himself living from the outside, from all that distance that History allows him, the actor of a script of which everything is known, who manages to draw on it only after annihilating out of necessity his all-time rival.

Proser, in commenting on how much madness has made of "Enrico" an extraordinary actor, adds: "Aside from his philosophical pronouncements, it is this quality of historic self-demonstration that makes Henry Pirandello's most Hamletian Character" (345). Feigned madness highlights the instrumental function in both texts of this motif, the nature of symptom and reaction with regard to the stimuli of surrounding reality. Rage which in both is a neighbouring demonstration of madness, a symptom of excess of feeling, has a liberating function with regard to the pressure produced on the subject by his sense of failure, frustration and ridicule which Matilde's refusal and Belcredi's action have inflicted in the past and which repropose themselves in the present. Reaction to all this is the act of revenge that remains, like in *Hamlet*, in the personal sphere, this time suggested by its own intimate ghosts, brought to conclusion with the very instrument society cancelled the protagonist with: the pretence that classifies him as "a mad king". The pretence, questioned, discussed and championed by Pirandello, makes the artistic creation live, as Franca Angelini convincingly argues, in a quotation that relates a passage by Pirandello, while inserting her own comment in it. Pirandello comments on the figure of Hamlet as follows:

Think of Hamlet: to be or not to be. Remove this problem from Hamlet's mouth, emptying it of his passion, conceptualize it in his philosophical terms and, in the light of criticism, you could play it for all the time you like. But leave it there, on Hamlet's lips, a living expression, a representation in Action... And the problem of to be or not to be will never be resolved, in eternity (*Teatro nuovo e teatro vecchio*, in *Saggi, poesie e scritti vari* 255). Pirandello [Angelini then comments] is unable to admit the historicity either of creation

or artistic representation and therefore does not manage to talk explicitly of the theatre as a specific social form of communication. (69, 255)³⁶

Likewise consider here the actor's role as mediator, touching the crux of the specificity of the dramatic genre in contrast with an epochal opinion that excluded the theatre as "impertinent"—in the philological sense—as regards literature, but perhaps alludes also to Pirandello's biographical experience, who after successfully writing regularly creative and critical prose, accepts the challenge of the comparison between authorial/authoritative/authoritarian fixity of the written text (and of History) and the changeability of the scene, conditions of representation, "intercourse" with the audience, and also by the intertextual relationship with Shakespeare and his problems will construct his path towards the Nobel Prize.

Notes

1. See the volume *Shakespeare and Pirandello*, Roma, Bulzoni Editore 1990, and the more recent essay "Shakespearean Pirandello" in *Shakespeare e il Novecento*, edited by Agostino Lombardo, Rome, Bulzoni Editore 2002, pp.165-186.
2. See, especially, Irene Nardiello, "un caso letterario: la 'sfortuna' di Pirandello in Inghilterra negli anni Venti e Trenta" in *Rivista di studi pirandelliani*, 3rd series V, XV, no. 14/15, pp. 163-178. *Enrico IV* was performed with some success in 1924, and in June 1925 Pirandello took his own company to England for a tournée in which all the performances were acted in Italian, which certainly did not encourage total reception of the plays, considered absurd and incomprehensible. That year the play was shown in London at the New Oxford Theatre and then, when the Italian company had already gone back home, it was again produced by Filmer in London at the Hampstead Everyman. In 1929 the play was again staged under the title *The Mock Emperor* at the Queen's Theatre London. The first English translation of Pirandello's play was made by Edward Storer and published in *Three Plays by Luigi Pirandello*, New York, Dutton 1922. However, it is still, together with *Sei personaggi*, the best known of Pirandello's plays in England.

3. See Francis Ferguson, *The Idea of a Theater*, New York, 1953; Robert Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt*, Boston 1964; Anne Paolucci, *Pirandello's Theater: The Recovery of the Modern Stage for Dramatic Art*, Carbondale Ill., 1974; Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890-1930*, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1976, pp. 566-570; and Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern World*, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1988.
4. For the text of the letter see the "Lettera a Ruggero Ruggeri", totally reported on the website <http://www.classicitaliani.it/pirandel/pira0026.htm> visited on 19.12.2005. For an examination of the events of the presentation of Pirandello's play see Roberto Alonge's comment in "Tendenze della messinscena pirandelliana" in *Dal testo alla scena. Studi sullo spettacolo teatrale (1984)*, Torino, Tirrenia Stampatori, 1992, pp. 241-85. Different acted versions are considered: those by Ruggeri, Renzo Ricci, Memo Benassi, Romolo Valli, Giorgio Albertazzi omitting only Salvo Randone's version, which comes before Romolo Valli's. See also Lido Gedda, "L'Enrico IV e gli eredi di Ruggeri", in *Rivista di studi pirandelliani*, Vol. VIII, no. 4, 1990, pp. 29-38. Film versions have also been made of the text, but with little success. Remember in particular the one with Osvaldo Valenti and Clara Calamai during the Second World War and the most recent one with Marcello Mastroianni in 1984, directed by Marco Bellocchio.
5. Valentini records four performances of *Hamlet* in Roman theatres in the period from 1890 to 1934 (three in the pre-Fascist period), four of *Othello*, distributed more or less similarly over the same period, and three of *Julius Caesar* (1905, 1906, 1935). There were four comedies, with only the *Merchant of Venice* in two different productions, but only tragedies were produced in the Fascist period (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear* and *Cariolanus*).
6. "Non ci fu verso di rimuoverlo più da quella fissazione, di fargli lasciare quel costume in cui s'era mascherato: la maschera, con tanta ossessione studiata fino allo scrupolo dei minimi particolari, diventò in lui la persona del grande e tragico imperatore". Cf. Pirandello, "Lettera a Renato Ruggeri", cit. Trans.: "There was no way to move him from that fixation, to make him take off that costume he was dressed up in: the fancy dress/the character, studied obsessively even to the smallest detail became in him the person of the great tragic Emperor".
7. See the servants, minor characters that present the protagonist to the spectator through their works and opinions, just like what happens in the first scenes in *Hamlet*. They are called on to back up "Enrico's" evident madness and their ambiguous role also of spies of his condition recalls, not just by chance, the figures

of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Notice that Tom Stoppard, author of the famous *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, is the author of an adaptation of Pirandello's *Enrico IV*, staged in April 2004 at the Donmar Warehouse and published as *Pirandello's Henry IV*, in a new version by Tom Stoppard, London, Faber and Faber 2004.

8. The portraits recall very closely these of Claudius and his brother, Old Hamlet, that stood out on the stage when Betterton was playing the "closet-scene" in his *Hamlet*, with a stocking pulled down when the ghost appears to signify metaphysical terror, as can be seen in a famous illustration in the eighteenth century (1709) edition of the complete works of Shakespeare made by Nicholas Rowe.
9. See William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by Harold Jenkins, the Arden Shakespeare, London, Methuen 1982. "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (II.2.600-01). All quotations from the text are taken from this edition and are followed by reference to the Act, Scene and line numbers.
10. Cf. Pirandello, "Lettera a Ruggero Ruggeri", quote: "...in realtà da anni non è più pazzo ma simula filosoficamente la pazzia per ridersi entro di sé degli altri che lo credono pazzo, e perché si piace in quella carnevalesca rappresentazione che dà di sé e agli altri della sua 'imperialità' in quella villa addobbata imperialmente come una degna sede di Enrico IV;..." Trans.: "... in fact for years he hasn't been mad but philosophically forges madness to be able to laugh inside himself at the others who think he is mad and because he enjoys this carnival-like portrayal which gives from him to the others some of his "imperialism" in that villa furnished imperially as a seat worthy of Enrico IV".
11. Cf. Pirandello, *ibid*: "...e se Ella pensa che poi, quando ad insaputa di lui, è messo in opera il trucco del medico alienista, egli, finto pazzo, tra spaventosi brividi, crede per un momento di essere pazzo davvero e sta per scoprire la sua finzione, quando in un momento, riesce a riprendersi e si vendica in un modo che – sì, via questo davvero, per lasciarLe qualche sorpresa, non glielo dirò". Trans.: "... and if She thinks that then, when unknown to him, the alien doctor's trick is put into action, he, as feigns madman indeed with dreadful shudders, thinks for a moment he is really mad and is about to reveal his pretence, when suddenly he manages to rally, and avenges himself so that—but away with this indeed to leave her some surprise, I won't say it to her". This account mimes the special quality of frequent narrative stage directions of Pirandello.

12. See the detailed discussion of the comparison between versions Q1 and Q2 of *Hamlet* often taken up by Sandro Serpieri, for example: "Il mistero del primo 'Amleto' in William Shakespeare. *Il primo Amleto*. Venezia, Marsilio, 1997, pp. 9-14.
13. Translation of Seneca's works in England was over a period from 1559 to 1581.
14. See Luigi Pirandello, *Enrico IV*, Torino, Einaudi, 1993, p. 20. All quotations from the text are from this edition and are followed by Act and page references.
15. Hamlet says he is the scourge of heaven: "but heaven hath pleas'd it so/To punish me with this and this with me/That I must be their scourge and minister" (3.4.175-77).
16. Cf. Pirandello, op. cit., p.31-32: "*E non posso neanche piangerla, Madonna. – Mi rivolgo a voi, che dovrete aver viscere materne. Venne qua a trovarmi, dal suo convento, or è circa un mese Mi hanno detto che è morta. (Pausa tenuta, densa di commozione. Poi sorridendo mestissimamente) E non posso neanche piangerla, perchè se voi siete qua, e io così (mostra il sajo che ha indosso), vuol dire che ho ventisei anni. / ARIALDO (quasi sottovoce dolcemente per confortarla) E che dunque ella è viva, Maestà*". Trans.: "...And I can't even weep for her my Lady—I am turning to you, who should have maternal instincts. Let her come and see me from her convent, for it's been now almost a month. I've been told she's dead. *Pause full of emotion. Then smiling very sadly.* I can't weep for her, because if you are here now and I am like this, he points to the habit he is wearing, means I'm twenty-six. ARIALDO (*almost sweetly sottovoce to comfort him*). And so therefore she's alive, you Majesty".
17. It has been established how the belief in Purgatory was slow to die in reformed England given that masses for the dead and prayers for their souls were so much part of devotional family practices, often requested and defined in a will before dying: Gerard Kilroy, in "Requiem for a Prince" in *Theatre and Religion. Lancastrian Shakespeare*, edited by Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay and Richard Wilson, Manchester, Manchester University, Press, 2003, pp. 143-60, underlines in a way that is often convincing also other elements that seem to indicate the state of doctrinal uncertainty in the English people in this historical predicament that could appear represented in *Hamlet*: the condition of *recusants* being always spied on these Catholics that had refused to take the oath to the king as Head of the Church, the theme of the passage from life to death and the rites of remembrance associated with it, the motif of confession of sins and their consequences, the transience of power and loyalties in this world, the quality of allegory in the final scenes of the duel in Claudius' actions, the recurring insistence in all of the tragedy on the problem of memory.

18. Interesting is the comparison with the discussion on the nature of certain ghosts made by Pirandello in *Enrico IV* when he refers to the pretence of the prostitutes who, embarrassed, only present themselves before him in his wife's clothes: "*Capite? – a letto – io senza quest'abito – lei anche... sì, Dio mio, senz'abiti ... un uomo e una donna... è naturale... Non si pensa più a ciò che siamo. L'abito, appeso resta come un fantasma!* (E con un altro tono, in confidenza al Dottore) *E io penso, Monsignore, che i fantasmi in generale, non siano altro in fondo che piccole scombinate dello spirito: immagini che non si riesce a contenere nei regni del sonno: si scoprono anche nella veglia, di giorno; e fanno paura.*" Trans.: "Do you understand? – in bed, me without this garment — you too – yes my God, without clothes – a man and a woman – it's natural!.... We no longer think about what we are. The garment, hung up, remains like a ghost! (*And in another tone, in confidence, to the Doctor*) And I think, Monsignor, that ghosts in general, are nothing but small combinations of the spirit: images that you cannot contain in the realms of sleep, they come to light even when you are awake, during the day; and they are frightening (Pirandello, *Enrico IV*, cit. p. 51-52).
19. Cf. Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, London, Methuen 1985.
20. See the discussion by Sir Francis Bacon, in his essay "Of revenge", in *Bacon's Essays of Truth, Revenge, Marriage and Single Life, Travel, Innovations, Gardens, Studies*, (third edition, with a supplement containing the essays in their original spelling), edited by Walter Raybould, London, College Press, 1904.
21. Cf. Jan Assman, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125-133.
22. Authors individuate further parameters that I will not discuss in detail. In all they deal with: 1. The construct of identity, 2. Its capacity to reconstruct, 3. Formation, 4. Organisation, 5. Obligation, 6. Reflexivity.
23. All the quotations are taken from *Opere di Luigi Pirandello*, the new edition edited by Giovanni Macchia, *Tutti i romanzi*, in collaboration with Mario Costanzo, v. I, Milano, Mondadori 1973. The page numbers in parentheses follow each quotation.
24. *Ora senta un po' che bizzarria mi viene in mente! Se, nel momento culminante, proprio quando la marionetta che rappresenta Oreste è per vendicare la morte del padre sopra Egisto e la madre, si facesse uno strappo nel cielo di carta del teatrino che avverrebbe? Dica lei. Non saprei, - risposi stringendomi nelle spalle. Ma è facilissimo, signor Meis! Oreste rimarrebbe terribilmente sconcertato da quel buco nel cielo. [...] Oreste sentirebbe ancora gl'impulsi della vendetta, vorrebbe seguirli*

con smaniosa passione, ma gli occhi, sul punto, gli andrebbero lì, a quello strappo, donde ora ogni sorta di mali influssi penetrerebbero nella scena, e si sentirebbe cader le braccia. Oreste, insomma, diventerebbe Amleto. Tutta la differenza, signor Meis, fra la tragedia antica e la moderna consiste in ciò, creda pure: in un buco nel cielo di carta. [...] L'immagine della marionetta d'Oreste sconcertata dal buco nel cielo mi rimase tuttavia un pezzo nella mente. A un certo punto: "Beate le marionette," sospirai, "su le cui teste di legno il finto cielo si conserva senza strappi! Non perplessità angosciose, né ritegni, né intoppi, né ombre, né pietà: nulla! E possono attendere bravamente e prender gusto alla loro commedia e amare e tenere se stesse in considerazione e in pregio, senza soffrir mai vertigini o capogiri, poiché per la loro statura e per le loro azioni quel cielo è un tetto proporzionato". It is tempting to think that the "well-proportioned roof" in the action taking place on stage is a reference to that part of the roof of the Globe Theatre which in Shakespeare's time covered the stage but left the spectators uncovered, almost to symbolise the different degree of awareness of the actions taking place on stage respectively of the public-off-stage communication—and of the characters-on-stage communication.

25. This concept represents the point of balance reached after many discussions with Sara Soncini, who was the first reader of this work
26. See Luigi Pirandello, *L'umorismo*, Milan, Mondadori 1986: "*Caratteristiche più comuni, e però più comunemente osservate, sono la 'contraddizione' fondamentale, a cui si suol dare per causa principale il disaccordo che il sentimento e la meditazione scoprono o fra la vita reale e l'ideale umano o fra le nostre aspirazioni e le nostre debolezze e miserie, e per principale effetto quella tal perplessità tra il pianto e il riso; poi lo scetticismo, di cui si colora ogni osservazione, ogni pittura umoristica, e in fine il suo procedere minuziosamente e anche maliziosamente analitico*" (131).
27. Ibid.: "[in] ogni opera umoristica, la riflessione non si nasconde, non resta invisibile, non resta cioè quasi una forma del sentimento, quasi uno specchio in cui il sentimento si rimira; ma gli si pone innanzi da giudice; lo analizza, spassionandosene; ne scompone l'immagine; da questa analisi però, da questa scomposizione, un altro sentimento sorge o spira: quello che potrebbe chiamarsi, e che io infatti chiamo il sentimento del contrario. (...) Il comico è appunto un avvertimento del contrario. (...) la riflessione, lavorando in me, mi ha fatto andare oltre quel primo avvertimento, o piuttosto, più addentro: da quel primo avvertimento del contrario mi ha fatto passare a questo sentimento del contrario. Ed è tutta qui la differenza tra il comico e l'umoristico" (135).

“Questo stato d’animo, ogni qual volta mi trovo innanzi a una rappresentazione veramente umoristica, è di perplessità: io mi sento come tenuto tra due: [...]” [p. 139] “La conciliazione delle tendenze stridenti, dei sentimenti ripugnanti, delle opinioni contrarie, sembra più attuabile su le basi d’una comune menzogna, che non su la esplicita e dichiarata tolleranza del dissenso e del contrasto; sembra, insomma, che la menzogna debba ritenersi più vantaggiosa della veracità, in quanto quella può unire, laddove questa divide; il che non impedisce che, mentre la menzogna è tacitamente scoperta e riconosciuta, si assuma poi a garanzia della sua efficacia associatrice la veracità stessa, facendosi apparire come sincerità l’ipocrisia.” [p.155]

28. Pirandello, *Enrico IV*, cit.: “*Parole! Parole che ciascuno intende e ripete a suo modo [...] E guai a chi si trovi bollato da una di queste parole che tutti ripetono! Per esempio: ‘pazzo’*” [II, p. 53]. Trans.: “Words! Words that each one understands and repeats in his own way (...). And woe betide anyone that finds himself stamped with one of these words that everyone repeats! For example: ‘mad’”.
29. However, think that already at the start of the drama, it is Enrico’s will that decides which servant is to replace the one that has just died and with what name he should present himself and therefore which role in the king’s story everyone has to play.
30. An interesting parallel, perhaps deserving further consideration, is the one that puts on the same plane the dialectic, historically determined in Shakespeare, between instability in performance and ambiguous permanency in the theatrical script, in a phase of establishing theatre practice and the one instead socially conditioned but changing interpersonal relationships and fixing those historically codified in Pirandello’s world.
31. See Alessandra Marzola, “Amleto, la Storia, le storie” in *Shakespeare e il Novecento*, edited by A. Lombardo, Rome, Bulzoni Editore, 2002, 57-70.
32. Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, cit.: “*A noi uomini, invece, nascendo, è toccato un tristo privilegio: quello di sentirci vivere, con la bella illusione che ne risulta: di prendere cioè come una realtà fuori di noi questo nostro intero sentimento della vita, mutabile e vario, secondo i tempi, i casi e la fortuna. E questo sentimento della vita per il signor Anselmo era appunto come un lanternino che ciascuno di noi porta in sé acceso; un lanternino [...] che ci fa vedere il male e il bene; [...] A me sembra [...] che in certe età della storia, come in certe stagioni della vita individuale, si potrebbe determinare il predominio di un dato colore, eh? In ogni età, infatti, si suole stabilire tra gli uomini un certo accordo di sentimenti che dà lume e colore a*

quei lanternini che sono i termini astratti: Verità, Virtù, Bellezza, Onore, e che so io... [...] Il lume di una idea comune è alimentato dal sentimento collettivo; se questo sentimento però si scinde, rimane sì in piedi la lanterna del termine astratto, ma la fiamma dell'idea vi crepita dentro e vi guizza e vi singhiozza, come suole avvenire in tutti i periodi che son detti di transizione. Non sono poi rare nella storia certe fiere ventate che spengono d'un tratto tutti quei lanternini (484-85).

33. Interesting the reference to the succession of cultural paradigms in unwinding of history of culture, caught in the dynamic between survival of the old and affirmation of the new framework of reference.
34. *Ibid.: "E se tutto questo bujo, quest'enorme mistero, nel quale indarno i filosofi dapprima specularono, e che ora, pur rinunciando all'indagine di esso, la scienza non esclude, non fosse in fondo che un inganno come un altro, un inganno della nostra mente, una fantasia che non si colora? Se noi finalmente ci persuadessimo che tutto questo mistero non esiste fuori di noi, ma soltanto in noi, e necessariamente, per il famoso privilegio del sentimento che noi abbiamo della vita, del lanternino cioè, di cui le ho finora parlato? [...]" (485).*
35. Pirandello, *Enrico IV*: "Perdio, l'impudenza di presentarsi qua, a me, ora – col suo ganzo accanto... - E avevano l'aria di prestarsi per compassione, per non fare infuriare un poverino già fuori del mondo, fuori del tempo, fuori della vita!" [HIV II, 52].
36. *Pensate ad Amleto: essere o non essere. Togliete questo problema dalla bocca d'Amleto, svuotatelo della passione di Amleto, concettualizzatelo nei suoi termini filosofici e, al lume della critica, ci potrete giocare per tutto il tempo che vi piacerà. Ma lasciatelo lì, su le labbra d'Amleto, espressione viva, rappresentazione in Atto E il problema dell'essere o non essere non si risolverà mai, in eterno". Pirandello non riesce ad ammettere la storicità né della creazione, né della rappresentazione artistica, e non riesce quindi a parlare esplicitamente del teatro come specifica comunicazione sociale.*

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