

## **“Continental Air”: Performing Identity in “Leonora, addio!,” *L’aria del continente*, and *Questa sera si recita a soggetto***

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Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the writings of Luigi Pirandello can be read from a postcolonial perspective, especially in regards to texts that engage with the relationship between Sicily and the mainland after the 1860s and with the transformations brought about by the Italian unification (Rössner 2010; Bernardi 2010; Sorrentino 2013; Sorrentino and Rössner 2012). Short stories that question or subvert the axis of center and periphery, such as “Lontano,” “Lumè di Sicilia,” and “Donna Mimma” have received particular attention; “Leonora, addio!” (1910) and its adaptation as *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (1930) have been reread in light of a conflict of culture between modernity and tradition. In this article, I add to this scholarship by reflecting on how the idea at the core of “Leonora, addio!” migrates from Pirandello’s prose to Nino Martoglio’s theater, to resurface, many years later, in Pirandello’s last play in the trilogy of the theater in the theater. Through a comparative analysis of “Leonora, addio!,” *L’aria del continente* (1915) and *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (1930), I will examine the role of artists in shaping regional and national identities through representations.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, I will stress how the collaboration with Martoglio and the experience of the dialect theater continued to influence Pirandello as he became a well-known, international playwright; and I will draw attention to the implications of a rhetoric geared to question stereotypes but, at the same time, to satisfy the expectations and the imagination of the target audience. I will begin by illustrating how fiction and performances, at the beginning of the twentieth century, contributed to the construction and representation of the Sicilian character. I will then examine how Pirandello objected to these representations but engaged with these very stereotypes in short stories such as “Leonora, addio!” and the way in which the same commonplaces are used, in a comic key, in Martoglio’s *L’aria del continente*. With this step in mind, I will re-assess the implications of elaborating the contrast between the Sicilian and mainland

ways of life for the German audience, as Pirandello transforms “Leonora, addio!” into the play-within-the-play of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*.

### **Describing and performing Sicilianness**

Since the late nineteenth century, the authors of *verismo* were particularly concerned with describing an ancestral Sicily defined through cultural and folkloric traits that they did not hesitate to exaggerate, at times resorting to imagination for the sake of stressing the specificity of the island’s traditions (Rapisarda 325-352). As Nelson Moe notes, these authors were aware of the fascination that rural Sicily had for the bourgeoisie of the mainland and exploited local idiosyncrasies accordingly, either by dwelling on the picturesque or emphasizing the island’s difference (250). On the one hand, the stress on distinctive traits turned diversity into exoticism, making the authors’ works appealing and marketable. On the other, the emphasis on difference contributed to a discourse that viewed Sicily in terms of a troubling alterity. The consequences that these narratives had on the national imagination are summed up in a comment by Luigi Capuana:

Come mai questi benevoli lettori non hanno riflettuto che noi, per ragioni di arte, abbiamo dovuto restringerci a studiare quanto vi ha di più singolare, di più efficacemente caratteristico nelle nostre province [...] e tralasciare tutto quello che esse hanno in comune con le altre province e che non è punto poco ... ? (quoted in Sciascia 44)

Why did these benevolent readers not recognize that, for the sake of art, we had to limit ourselves to studying what is most peculiar, most effectively distinctive in our provinces [...] and neglect all they have in common with the other provinces— which is by no means just a little... ?<sup>2</sup>

The traits and features that the audience has interpreted as typical, Capuana stresses, have been selected specifically for their appeal to the artistic imagination: they constitute exceptions, rather than the norm, and would gradually disappear if writers were not careful to record them.<sup>3</sup>

The way in which Sicilian plays were enacted by

travelling actors also emphasized—and often exaggerated—the image of Sicily as depicted by the writers of *verismo*. In particular, the performances of Mimi Aguglia and Giovanni Grasso, who in the first decade of the twentieth century toured Europe as well as the Italian peninsula, created a “Sicilian type” tailored to confirm the imagination of the national and international audience. In spite of the press’ praises, Verga was horrified by the “grotesque caricature of Sicilian character” enacted by Grasso in the Parisian performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* and, irritated by his improvisation and change to the ending, went as far as ordering the play’s withdrawal from Grasso’s repertoire (Verga 1954).<sup>4</sup> In line with Verga, the theater critic Lucio d’Ambra, in a series of articles written between 1908 and 1909, reacted against the opinion that these plays offered a faithful portrait of Sicilian life. In “Giovanni Grasso e la commedia dell’arte” (1909), D’Ambra blamed the actors for conjuring the image of “un’Italia brigantesca e accoltellatrice, dove si ragiona a colpi di coltello ...” [“A predatory Italy filled with stabbings, where one reasons by knife-strokes”] (297). Contesting the view that Grasso represented the typical Sicilian, he described him rather as a pathological phenomenon. For D’Ambra, too, the most appealing and disturbing traits of difference, rather than as rules, are to be regarded as exceptions: “è un errore grave ed imperdonabile di quanti conoscono la Sicilia e il suo popolo, e specialmente dei siciliani, quello non dico di sostenere, ma di ammettere soltanto, anche alla lontana, che Grasso con l’arte sua rispecchi una parte, anche piccola, della vita e del carattere dei siciliani” [“it is a serious and unforgivable mistake on the part of those who know Sicily and its people, and especially of Sicilians, I am not saying to support, but even to admit, however remotely, that Grasso with his art reflects a part, however small, of the life and character of Sicilians”] (303).

A year later, an expert on folklore, Giuseppe Pitrè, would similarly warn against the disparaging representations of *Sicilianness* in contemporary theater: “Il siciliano non è quello che si vuol dare a credere. Le eccezioni non fanno regola; anzi intanto sono eccezioni, in quanto escono dalla regola. La gelosia connaturata alla fierezza isolana non dà il diritto di far dei siciliani delle belve” [“The Sicilian is not the type one wants to make the audience believe. Exceptions are not the rule; indeed they are

exceptions because they are outside the rule. Jealousy, inherent to the pride of the island, does not give us the right to portray Sicilians as beasts”] (quoted in Barbina 289).<sup>5</sup>

Having completed his doctoral studies in Bonn, Luigi Pirandello, after 1891, paid particular attention to the way in which Sicily was conjured in the German imagination. In a review of Konrad Telmann’s collection of Sicilian stories, “Trinacria” (1895), he complains that the writing of Capuana, Verga, and De Roberto has contributed to an inexact and stereotyped image of the island for both national and international audiences. He further regrets that Telmann, as a German author, has not been able to offer a more objective view to dissipate “quel brutto e falso concetto che se ne ha in Germania, com’io so per prova” [“that bad and false conception of Sicily that one has in Germany, as I experienced first-hand”] (338).<sup>6</sup> He mocks Telmann’s mistakes in referencing Sicilian folklore, his erroneous use of toponymy, and the exaggerated emphasis on sentiments such as jealousy, rage, and honor. The Sicily depicted by this German author, Pirandello concludes, reflects the imagination of the German bourgeoisie: “è proprio quell’aspro, selvaggio paese della loro romantica fantasia, fulminato per dir così perennemente dal sole, covo di briganti, d’assassini, qualcosa come (e anzi molto peggio) della Spagna rappresentata nella Carmen (libretto)” [“it is indeed that harsh, savage country of their romantic imagination, so to speak, perpetually struck by the sun, den of brigands, murderers, something like (and indeed much worse than) the Spain represented in *Carmen* (the libretto)”] (338). In Pirandello’s view, it is bad enough that Italy should have a negative conception of the island, but that Germany should contribute to such stereotypes is simply unacceptable:

Io quasi vorrei domandargli che forma crede egli che abbia la Sicilia, e se l’abbia mai vista in effigie su una carta geografica. Guardi, guardi un po’, il signor Telmann! L’Italia, che ha la forma di uno stivale, pare che allunghi un calcio, è vero, all’isola disgraziata; ma questo è un calcio dato, diciamo così, in famiglia, e poco male. Non vedo proprio la ragione perché lei, venuto di Germania, debba poi allungargliene un altro ... (338)

I would almost like to ask him what shape he thinks Sicily has, and if he has ever seen it on a map. Look, look closer, Mr.

Telmann! Italy, which has the shape of a boot, seems to stretch out to kick the unfortunate island, it's true; but this is a kick given, so to speak, in the family, and so it's no big deal. I do not see the reason why you, from Germany, should give it another one ...

A few years later, in the famous and frequently-quoted essay "Il teatro Siciliano" (1909), Pirandello reflects again on the image of Sicily in the national and international imagination. Joining the debate on the dialect theater, he comments on how the "spaventose bravure" ["frightening bravura"] of actors such as Mimì Aguglia and Giovanni Grasso arouse a reaction shifting between enthusiasm and repugnance towards the local culture. The main obstacle to developing a dialect theater that represents Sicily in its diversity and complexity is, in Pirandello's view, the scarce knowledge that the mainland has of the island. "Ora, fuori dei confini dell'isola," he questions, "che conoscenza si ha della Sicilia? Una conoscenza limitatissima di poche espressioni caratteristiche, violente, diventate ormai di maniera. Il carattere siciliano si è fissato, tipificato nella terribile, meravigliosa bestialità di Giovanni Grasso. Mancando ogni altra conoscenza della vita così varia e caratteristica della Sicilia, ogn'altra espressione di essa riesce quasi inintelligibile" ["Now, outside the borders of the island, what knowledge does one have of Sicily? A very limited knowledge of a few distinctive, violent expressions that have already become a fashion. The Sicilian character has been fixed, typified in the terrible, wonderful bestiality of Giovanni Grasso. Since one lacks any knowledge of the highly varied and characteristic life in Sicily, every other expression turns out almost unintelligible"] (981). He concludes that, outside of Sicily, people will appreciate only the clichés that they recognize and that a successful Sicilian theater for the mainland audience would inevitably result in a "Sicilia d'importazione" ["an imported Sicily"] (981).

In all these essays, we can already recognize a feature that will become increasingly important in Pirandello's work: the awareness of the power of cultural representations, as well as the understanding of identity as a performance—together with the idea that regional stereotypes can be tolerated within one's country, but not in an international context. On the other hand, as Christine Ott has observed, elsewhere Pirandello does not hesitate

in taking an essentialist view to describe the Sicilian character (Ott 76). This is, for example, evident in the essay on Verga, originally written in 1920 and presented again, with very little variation, in 1931, in which Pirandello uses the notion of “insularity” to define what he perceives as the immobile and unchangeable features of the Sicilian, naturally inclined to distrust and to remain closed-off (1000-1021).<sup>7</sup> Here, I am especially concerned with the emphasis on identity in three works whose theme is the contrast between life in Sicily and on the mainland.

### **“Leonora, addio!”**

Jealous, violent, unable to control his rage, the novella’s protagonist, Rico Verri, epitomizes the Sicilian vices prominent in the literature of *verismo*. It is useful to briefly recall the plot: in a town of the island’s interior, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Sicilian officer, Verri, falls in love with Mommina, the “wisest daughter” of an atypical family. Mommina’s mother, donna Ignazia, “plays the man of the house” and, bragging of her Neapolitan origins, looks down on her fellow townspeople, pushing her four daughters to defy local customs by adopting the manners of the mainland. Whereas local families enforce a closed-off lifestyle, Ignazia encourages her daughters to frequent a group of officers that, with the exception of Verri, come from the mainland. The sentence “in continente si faceva così” [“this is the way it is done on the continent”] becomes the refrain through which the women in the family justify behavior that goes against the local moral code, and the same sentence is repeated by the officers to get away with their transgressions.

In a recent essay, Guglielmo Bernardi observed that the crisis at the core of the novella originates from the profound social transformations brought by the industrial revolution and the Italian unification—the *Risorgimento* as myth and historical process is, in fact, a crucial theme for Pirandello and one that often re-surfaces in his fiction.<sup>8</sup> In “Leonora, addio!” the Sicilian town is depicted as an self-enclosed reality with distinct social and cultural practices; Naples, Ignazia’s reference for modernity—and capital of the no-longer-extant Kingdom of the Two Sicilies—is itself provincial, surpassed in importance by the modern cities of the north. The conflict, therefore, is one between insularity

and the provincial mainland. For example, the refinement that Signora Ignazia believes distinguishes her from the townsmen, the melodramas she listened to in the last season (*Gli Ugonotti* (1836), *Ernani* (1844), *Il Trovatore* (1853), *Faust* (1853), *La forza del destino* (1862)) are not at all contemporary but nineteenth century works (Bernardi 142).

Performance plays a crucial role throughout the short story: the women of the La Croce family attend the local theater, stage their own melodramas at home, and perform men's roles; Mommina, for instance, is described as a young girl as she sings the aria of Sibel in *Faust*, and in the end of the story dies performing the role of Manrico in *Il trovatore*. Taking advantage of a position that the family perceives as superior, the group of mainland officers perform the "continental manners" that Ignazia and her daughters envision. But whereas the young men are aware of their performance, Ignazia and her daughters are too embedded in the local culture to realize that their attempt to imitate continental life is a source of laughter and ridicule.

Rico Verri initially supports Ignazia in her "hate for all the savages of the island." The shift occurs when he falls in love with Mommina. It is at this point that jealousy emerges as the main trait of Verri's character, prompting him to adopt the traits that he had previously defined as barbaric. "Innamorandosi sul serio di Mommina," ["Seriously falling in love with Mommina,"] we read, "cominciò a diventare un selvaggio anche lui. E che selvaggio!" ["he, too, started to become a savage. And what a savage!"] (470). On the one hand, we are told that this jealousy is hereditary: it the same sentiment that had led his father to keep his mother as a prisoner. On the other, the metamorphosis is described as the result of conscious decision. His "particular sexual moral and erotic behavior" (Sciascia 24) is the fruit of a negotiation: the text speaks of "pacts" with his father as well as with the rest of the community.<sup>9</sup> To defend his honor, Verri locks Mommina in his house on the south coast of the island, where he keeps her in a constant state of physical and psychological strain. The description of Mommina's imprisonment contains significant geographical references that underscore the position of Sicily within a European geography: the country from which Rico Verri receives the locks that sentence Mommina to her imprisonment come, paradoxically, from Germany, a country

that Pirandello, during his stay in Bonn, had described as a place in which women enjoy considerable freedom (Rössner 2001, 153). Mommina's only window faces instead the "African sea" (571), a detail that implicitly compares her condition, and the customs that condemned her to it, to a reality beyond Europe, contextualizing Sicily as "a liminal zone between Europe and Africa" (Moe 49). The conclusion emphasizes Verri's sadistic and misogynistic behavior: Mommina dies as, nostalgic of her previous life, she performs the melodramas of her youth for her children. When Verri, upon his return, discovers his wife's body on the floor, he rushes to it filled with rage and does not even touch it, but rather rolls it over with his foot.

During the time spent in Germany (1889-90) Pirandello had been exposed to very different societal customs, to a contrasting way of life that led him to reflect on and to observe his own culture as if from a distance. One of the main differences to which he was exposed was the contrast between the customs that regulated the life of women in Sicily and their daily life in a city such as Bonn. It is not a coincidence that, when Pirandello had become an old man and an international writer, he chose to adapt "Leonora, addio!," a short story that makes the life of women into the main difference between the island and the mainland, for the play-within-the-play of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, a work written specifically for the German stage, published in German in 1929 and in the Italian version in 1930. However, many years earlier, Pirandello had played with the contrast between life in Sicily and the mainland in *L'aria del continente* (1915), a play by Nino Martoglio that Pirandello claimed to have co-authored, and to which he contributed at least in subject matter and structure.

### *L'aria del continente*

*L'aria del continente* premiered in Milan, at the *Teatro Filodrammatici*, on November 27, 1915, with Angelo Musco in the role of the protagonist.<sup>10</sup> Musco was famous for the mobility of his features and his ability to transition from a comical expression to a grotesque sneer; as Zappulla-Muscarà notes, his shows were often perceived and described as revivals of the *Commedia dell'arte* (1996, 14-15).<sup>11</sup> If Grasso was associated with the tragic Sicilian type, Musco was often considered his comical counterpart. At

the time, the poet, dramatist and actor-manager Nino Martoglio aimed to renew the repertoire of the dialect theater: he included new themes, shifted the action from a peasant to a bourgeois environment, and avoided emphasis on gory or violent scenes. *L'aria del continente* was in this sense an innovative play. As in previous works, however, it relied on the representation of the Sicilian type for a non-Sicilian audience.<sup>12</sup> The island's difference was underlined by contrast with the way of life on the continent: the audience laughed not only because the performance represented and exaggerated their expectation of Sicilian customs, but also because it presented them, as in a distorted mirror, with a comical representation of their own way of life.

A year later, in 1916, Pirandello, drawing from short stories written around the same time as "Leonora, addio!," would write four plays in Sicilian for Martoglio's theater, all to be interpreted by Musco ("Pensaci, Giacominu," "Liola," "A birritta cu' i ciancianeddi," "A Giarra"). In 1921/22, he would compose two other works in collaboration with Martoglio ("A vilanza" and "Cappiddazzu paga tuttu"). Scholars have often wondered why, after stating that "una letteratura dialettale è fatta per rimanere entro i confini del dialetto" ["a dialect literature is made to remain within the confines of the dialect"] (980) and criticizing the performances of Grasso and Aguglia, Pirandello chose to collaborate with his friend Nino Martoglio and to write for a dialect theater tailored to the mainland audience. Laura Lepschy and Paul Renucci agree that Pirandello changed his mind after witnessing the success of Martoglio's theater, whose greatest success was *L'aria del continente* (Lepschy 265-275, Renucci lvii). According to today's notions of authorship, it is not far-fetched to consider Pirandello a co-author of this play,<sup>13</sup> which enables us to trace a link between the representation of regional stereotypes for a mainland audience and the (much later) resurrection of the Sicilian type for the German stage.

Set in Sicily, in a town of the interior, the play tells the story of a mature gentleman, Don Cola Dusciu, who, after having been hospitalized in Rome, develops a "continental spirit" and returns to his Sicilian hometown accompanied by a singer, a young woman who goes by the name of Milla Milord, allegedly from Romagna. Having adopted a way of life that he believes to be continental, Cola insults his townsmen by calling them

barbaric and ignorant and defies their customs and traditions by openly living with the artist. In order to demonstrate that he is not suffering from jealousy, he goes as far as encouraging Milla to flirt with the townsmen. In the end he discovers her identity to be that of "Concetta Cafiso," born in Sicily, and, outraged, he chases the girl from his home.

Compared to "Leonora, addio!," where the conflict is mainly one between the island and the provincial mainland, here the tension between different layers of periphery is further developed. "Se lei è delegato, caro signore, io vengo da Roma!... Dalla capitale, ha capito?" ["If you are authorized dear Sir, I come from Rome.... From the capital, do you understand?"] (286), screams Cola to the officer in the first act, referencing Rome as the model for the civility that he strives to imitate. Other areas of the mainland, in particular the south, are considered provincial. "Dico, lei è del Continente, ma non nordico, sarà della bassa Italia" ["I say, you are from the Continent, but not Nordic, you must come from southern Italy"] (302), Cola guesses, for instance, about the lieutenant. The towns where Cola and Milla come from represent the insular, a reality with distinct societal customs untouched by modernity. After discovering Milla's true identity, Cola cannot comprehend how a girl from the interior of Sicily could have performed in Rome. "Puteva suppori mai ca 'na siciliana, una di Carrapipi, avissi avuto 'ssu spiritu di cantari a Roma? Dove c'è il re, c'è il papa, ci sono senatori, deputati e tuttu l'andirivieni di persone illustri?" ["Could I ever guess that a Sicilian, from Carrapipi, could have had this courage to sing in Rome? Where there are a king, a pope, senators, congressmen, and all the coming and going of illustrious people?"] (328). At the end of the play, "carrapipana," the adjective that defines the inhabitants of the town Carrapipi, where Milla is from, becomes a synonym for an insult (328).

The humor here relies not so much on the depiction of Sicilian customs as on the performance of the "continentalized" characters. In Pirandello's short story, it is Ignazia's defiant behavior, the transgression to which she pushes her daughters, that provokes Verri's jealousy and eventually leads to Mommina's imprisonment. In *L'aria del continente*, it is Cola, rather than his "backward" townsmen, who incites laughter by imitating continental manners. Many of the core motifs of Pirandello's

short story can be found in this play, although they unfold in a comical, rather than in a tragic, mode. Both works are set in a bourgeois environment, rather than in a peasant one. As in “Leonora, addio!,” the condition of women is referenced as the main difference between the way of life on the island and that on the mainland; and the necessity of imitating continental manners is used as an excuse to justify sexual liberties, with its ensuing misunderstandings. “Lasciatele libere, le donne, per Dio, fatele respirare, emancipatele dalla schiavitù...” [“Let the women free, by God, let them breathe, emancipate them from slavery...”], Cola proclaims in the second act in standard Italian (301). As he switches to Sicilian to address his townsmen, this reasonable suggestion is transformed into absurdity: “...E chi cci haju proibitu forsi, alla mia Milla, di trasiri e nesciri a piaciri so’, libira comu l’aria?...di fari chiddu ca voli?... Ppi mia po’ jri anchi in mezzu a un reggimentu di suldati!...Si po fari curtiggiari...” [“Have I perhaps forbidden Milla to come and go at her pleasure, free like air?... to do whatever she wants?... for me, she can even go in the middle of a soldier’s regiment ... she can let herself be courted...”] (*ibid.*). Translation, the play underlines, is not always possible, and what appears reasonable in the context of the mainland is transformed into a farce within the frame of reference of the island. In addition, as in “Leonora, addio!,” plenty of misunderstandings are generated by the encounter of the “continentalized” protagonist with a mainland officer. Even Cola’s sister, Marastella—who is compared to a *carabiniere* for the way in which she bosses around her brother, husband, and children—has certain features that display similarities with Ignazia, whose nickname is *la generala*.

By juxtaposing folklore with tokens of modernity, the stage notes underline the contrast between the way of life in Sicily and that in continental Italy. For instance, in the second act, the altar for the Christmas prayers, adorned according to local traditions, is described in great detail (296).<sup>14</sup> In the same environment we also find gambling tables, a map of northern Italy, and a map of Europe, in a progressive widening of the gap between local traditions and European modernity. This contrast is further underlined by music, as the religious litany sung by the women and children next to the altar for the Christmas prayers is interrupted by Milla and Don Lucino, who burst onto the scene dancing the *cancan* (312-13). Milla, initially introduced by Cola

as an opera singer whose repertoire consists mainly of Verdi, is eventually unveiled as a vulgar (and tone-deaf) cabaret performer.

As in “Leonora, addio!,” the mainland is constantly associated with civilization and modernity (Marastella: “all’uso cuntinentali!” Don Cola: “che poi è l’uso civile!”) [Marastella: “In the way it is done on the Continent!” Don Cola: “that is, of course, the civil way”] (291). Like Ignazia, Cola refers to the superiority of the way of life on the mainland and insults his townsmen as barbaric and ignorant: “Viva la faccia del continente” he proclaims, “unni ci su’ genti evoluti, genti di spiritu, e non certi cretini ‘ncuntrunuti nell’ignoranza e nei pregiudizi, comu cca!” [“Hooray for the surface of the continent, where there are evolved people, people of spirit, and not such cretins stuck in ignorance and prejudice, like here!”] (299). This conflict is now explored further than it is in the short story, and Cola goes so far as to propose a “civilization” course to teach continental manners, which becomes the pretext of a series of jokes that present, in a comical key, a similar situation to the tragedy that unfolds in “Leonora, addio!”:

LUCINO: Iu?... Mi dispiaci ca’ n Cuntinenti non cci pozzu jri puru iu!...

DON COLA: E vacci!...Fa’ qualunqui forzu per andarci!... Tornerai incivilito!...[...]

Metà di vuatri avissivu a jri in cuntinenti, a fari un corso di civiltà di ‘na decina di anni, e altrettanti cuntinentali duvissiru veniri cca, o’ vostru postu!...V’assicuro iu ca ‘stu paisi divintassi un paradisu!...

DON LIBORIU: Sintiti, d’accordo fussi iu, ppi ‘stu passaggiu d’abitanti, di ‘na parti a ‘n ‘autra, ma cca avissivu a purtari suli fimmini!...

TUTTI: benissimo!...Approvatu!... Fimmini, fimmini!...

DON COLA: (ride, osservandoli e commiserandoli): Già!... E quannu ‘sti fimmini vinissiru cca, ppi so’ svintura, trovassiru a vuatri, tutti istruiti, eleganti, galanti, spiritusi... ca l’accuglissivu ccu ‘a scuzzetta ‘ntesta e ‘u menzu tuscanu o’ ‘a pipa ‘n vucca... e allura è certu ca si ‘nnamurassiru di vui comu tanti signi!... (Ride, ride). Senza cuntari ca ‘i chiudivissivu dintra, a chiavi, e cci mittissivu macari ‘u catinazzu ‘nt’è barcuni, ppi non farli affacciari!...

DON FILADELFU: Chisti su’ esagerazioni!... (300)

LUCINO: Me?... I am sorry that I can’t also go to the Continent!

DON COLA: Go!... Make whatever effort needed to go!... You will come back civilized!... [...]

Half of you should go to the continent, to take a civilization course for a decade or so, and the same number of continentals should come here, in your place!... I assure you that this country would become a paradise!

DON LIBORIU: Listen, I agree to this exchange of inhabitants, from one side to the other, but we should only bring women!

ALL: perfect...! Approved!!!! Women, women!...

DON COLA: (laughs, looking at them and commiserating with them): Right!... And if these women came, to their misfortune, and found you guys, all educated, elegant, chivalrous, witty... and you met them with a *scuzzetta* on your head and a cigar or a pipe in your mouth... then it is certain that they would fall in love with you like many monkeys!... (laughs, laughs). Without mentioning that you would lock them in, and maybe add a bolt to keep them from appearing at the balcony!...

DON FILADELFU: These are exaggerations!...

Like “Leonora, addio!,” *L’aria del continente* emphasizes traits that the audience would recognize as typically Sicilian and revolves around the performance of regional and national character. In the play, the idea that identity is no more than a performance coexists with the notion of *Sicilianness* as a set of immobile, unchangeable features. Cola defines himself as “Continentale di spirito, di mentalità, di adozione” [“Continental in spirit, way of thinking, adoption”] (302). Whenever he threatens to give in to jealousy, Milla reminds him of their agreement, their “pact” (316), according to which Cola promised not to behave like a typical Sicilian. Ultimately, Cola’s adoption of the “continental spirit,” his attempt to imitate a culture perceived as superior, is only partially successful.<sup>15</sup> Milla, the cabaret singer, initially engages in a successful performance as she pretends to be from a northern region (Romagna); but in the end of the play she is unmasked, as underlined by the sudden code switching—before disappearing, she insults Cola in Sicilian. As in “Leonora, addio!” and *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, the culture of the mainland is mimicked through a process that underlines, rather than erases, difference. Using a concept from postcolonial theory, we can say that locals try to be one with the dominant culture, but that this performance results in a distortion that produces “slippage, excess, [...] a representation of difference that is itself a process

of disavowal” (Bhabha 126). This exposes the culture that the protagonist is trying to repress. Allusions to the immobility of Sicilian character are further underlined through numerous references to race: “Io appartengo a un'altra razza... a un'altra categoria, sa!” [“I belong to a different race...to another category, you know!"] (310), confirms Don Cola to the mainland officer, afraid to be considered one with his fellow townspeople. “Razza siciliana antica, caru don Cola, e mi nni vanto!” [“Pure ancient Sicilian race, dear Cola, and I am proud of it!”] (308), asserts, a few lines later, Don Liboriu, defending the local customs. After discovering Milla’s true identity, Cola caricatures her shows at the cabaret, thereby impersonating a Sicilian man imitating a Sicilian woman who, in turn, impersonates a mainland artist (a scene written with Musco’s *lazzi* in mind). He then asks for a “scuzzetta,” [Sicilian beret] a “pipa di rasta,” [Sicilian pipe] and a “marruggio” [cane] (330) and waits for Milla to return. When Milla asks what is going on, Cola answers “mi stuffai di fari ‘u Continentali e sugnu turnatu sicilianu!” [“I got tired of performing the continental, and I became Sicilian again!”] (332). The ending is open to interpretation: on the one hand, Cola’s return to and embrace of local customs can be read as confirmation that his continental phase was only a show and that, at heart, he remained Sicilian. On the other, *Sicilianess*, too, is presented as a performance that, to be enacted, requires a certain use of language, the ability to code-switch, and all the necessary paraphernalia.

### *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*

In 1928, after a professional crisis, disenchanted by the situation of Italian theaters and attracted by the cinema industry, Pirandello left Italy and moved to Berlin. Here, he played once more with the representation of the Sicilian type and the contrast between island/mainland by selecting “Leonora, addio!” as the short story to be adapted in the play-within-the-play of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*—a work that Pirandello hoped would result in great profits. The play has been thoroughly examined as a reflection on the dynamic among author, director, and actors, as well as in relation to the innovations and excesses of the German *Regie*.<sup>16</sup> However, if we shift our attention from the meta-play—Dr. Hinkfuss’s attempt to stage an improvised play and the

vicissitude of the actors—to the play-within-the-play—the story of the La Croce family—it becomes evident that the choice to adapt a short story that emphasizes Sicily's otherness entails a reflection on the way in which life on the island was imagined by the German audience.<sup>17</sup> Just as, during his involvement with Martoglio's theater, Pirandello had written his plays with Angelo Musco in mind (trying to tame his impulse to improvise) and tailored his plays for the mainland, he now conjures Sicily specifically for German actors, adapting "Leonora, addio!" for Germany.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the choice to adapt a story that, in the tradition of *verismo*, represents Sicily as a pre-modern space with archaic customs, and to do so using the latest technologies available to the German *Regie*, reflects aspects of the debate on Italy's place in modernity.<sup>19</sup>

By emphasizing the antinomy between life and form, reality and appearance, Hinkfuss' long monologue encourages the interpretations of German critics who, after the performance of *Six Characters*, had seen in Pirandello's work an echo of Kant's philosophy (Büdel 104). Through this monologue, Pirandello also establishes a link between *Questa sera* and the most successful and well known of his plays in Germany, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, extremely popular since the *mise en scène* by Max Reinhardt (1924). In doing so, he presents the play as the work of an international author well established within the German literary and theatrical system.<sup>20</sup> Concurrently, he associates the play from the outset with the *Commedia dell'arte*, a tradition that foreign directors such as Gordon Craig, Jacques Copeau, and Vsevolod Meyerhold had celebrated and that Italians, in years of fervent nationalism, were in the process of glorifying and re-claiming as their own.<sup>21</sup> The exaltation of the genre was in line with the German reception of Pirandello's work. In fact, since the German tour of Pirandello's "Compagnia del teatro d'Arte" in 1925—which Mussolini had financed as a means to promote Italian theater and, more generally, the image of Italy and *Italianness* (Cometa 229)—Pirandello's work had been reviewed and praised in the German press in connection with improvised comedy (243). The representations of *Six Characters* by the Teatro d'arte, in particular, had unleashed a number of articles that, with an almost anthropological approach, had compared "Mediterranean" acting to the German *mise en scène*. The Italian actors were considered ill-suited to represent

“mysterious, translucent, typical Nordic creatures” (Tinterri 138), while Marta Abba’s performance was described through references to her “dark blood” and in terms of a pathological “desire to exhibit herself” (Alfred Kerr in Tinterri 138). How does *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* engage with these interpretations, and how is Sicily performed in this play? How does it differ from the Sicily conjured in the short story, and in what way do these changes recall Martoglio’s strategies?

From the outset, the conflict at the core of the story is simplified as attention is shifted from the complex reasons that isolate the La Croce family to jealousy. Hinkfuss, the German director, stresses that: “L’azione si svolge in una città dell’interno della Sicilia, dove (come sapete) le passioni son forti e covano cupe e poi divampano violente: fra tutte, ferocissima, la gelosia” [“The action takes place in a city in the interior of Sicily, where (as you know) passions are strong; they smoulder inside, then burst out violently. And the fiercest of them is jealousy”] (308). The imaginary geography of the short story is complicated by additional references to several levels of the periphery: the town of the La Croce family continues to represent insularity, and Hinkfuss still stresses the fact that Ignazia is a native of Naples, emphasizing her provincial pride, but now we are given additional details and told that the mainland officers come from Milan and Venice—smaller cities in the industrialized north.<sup>22</sup>

Using a strategy similar to the one employed by Martoglio, Pirandello underscores the contrast between Sicily and the mainland by setting side by side folkloric details and tokens of modernity. This contrast is underlined visually as well as sound-wise. A parallel can be established between the scene in which, in the second act of *L’aria del continente*, the litany sung at the Christmas altar is interrupted by Milla’s *can-can*, and the way in which, in the second act of *Questa sera*, the sound of the bells after the religious procession is gradually replaced by the melody of jazz (323-5). Scholarship has emphasized that the cabaret recalls the venues that Pirandello visited in Berlin, and its *chanteuse* the nightlife of European capitals.<sup>23</sup> If jazz symbolizes the cultural influence that arrives, via North America, in Paris and Berlin, the spectacular religious procession, a device that Pirandello had already used in *Il signore della nave* (1924), conjures instead the primordial religious sentiment of old rural communities.<sup>24</sup> Ancient customs stand out

against the backdrop of jazz, and the gap between the archaic and the modern assumes a European, rather than a national, dimension.

As noted, when the narrator of the short story describes Mommina's condition after her wedding, an emphasis is placed on Sicily as a liminal territory between Europe and Africa (Verri orders his locks from Germany; Mommina's window faces the African sea). In the play, such details are omitted but replaced by the musical intertext. Nenè is introduced as singing Bizet's "Habanera," provocatively playing the role of the gypsy in *Carmen*; Mommina performs "Stride la vampa" (*Il Trovatore*) dressed as Azucena—also a gypsy.<sup>25</sup> In his review of Telmann's *Trinacria*, Pirandello had traced several similarities between the Spain depicted in the libretto of *Carmen* and the stereotypes attributed to Sicily by the German bourgeoisie, underlining how both settings were conjured as marginal, dangerous spaces within modern Europe. The fact that Nenè and Mommina are now assigned the roles of gypsies (the rest of family sings, significantly, the gypsy choir of Verdi's *Trovatore*) underlines their subaltern and marginal status. In fact, like Carmen and Azucena, both sisters constitute—albeit in different ways—a threat to a deeply patriarchal society.

As in "Leonora, addio!" local culture is associated with savagery in comparison with the modernity of the mainland, but now the space dedicated to these comparisons grows significantly. Just like Cola in *L'aria del continente*, Ignazia suggests that her fellow townsmen should enroll in a course on civilization:

LA SIGNORA IGNAZIA: Ah voi dovrete acquistare una grande benemeranza, cari miei, verso la civiltà!

MANGINI: Noi! E come, signora Ignazia?

LA SIGNORA IGNAZIA: Come? Mettendovi a dar lezione, al vostro circolo!

POMETTI: Lezione? A chi?

LA SIGNORA IGNAZIA: A questi zotici villani del paese! Almeno per un'ora al giorno. [...] Una lezioncina al giorno, d'un'ora, che li informi di come si vive nelle grandi città del Continente... (341)

LA SIGNORA IGNAZIA: You should gain a bit of credit for yourselves, my dear friends, in the great march towards civilization!

MANGINI: Us? How is that, Signora Ignazia?

SIGNORA IGNAZIA: By giving lessons at your club!

POMETTI: Lessons? To whom?

SIGNORA IGNAZIA: To these boorish peasants here in town!  
An hour or so a day, at least. [...] A lesson a day, for an hour,  
showing them how they live in the big cities of the Continent...

Bernardi has stressed how, in creating an unpleasant character such as Hinkfuss, and in underlining his assertiveness towards a cultural patrimony that is not his own, Pirandello emphasizes and criticizes the process through which adaptation becomes cultural appropriation (142). It is in this light that we can read other variations, such the addition of a scene in which Sampognetta (the father) comes home to die after having been wounded at the cabaret. While the incident happens off stage, it provides a spectacular entrance, and since Sampognetta has been stabbed for courting the *chanteuse*, it underscores the clichés of the crime of passion. Hinkfuss emphasizes that his position as a non-Sicilian allows him to make use of stereotypes that a Sicilian author could not afford to display:

Scena capitale, signori, per le conseguenze che porta. L'ho trovata io; nella novella non c'è; e sono certo anzi che l'autore non l'avrebbe mai messa, anche per scrupolo ch'io non avessi motivo di rispettare: di non ribadire, cioè, la credenza, molto diffusa, che in Sicilia si faccia tant'uso del coltello. (369)

It's a very important scene, ladies and gentlemen, because of its consequences. It's my invention; it's not in the story. But I'm sure the author would never put it in anyway, even if it weren't for a scruple of his that I had no reason to respect: you see, he did not wish to reinforce the wide-spread belief that people are quite free with the knife in Sicily. (88)

Extraneous to the culture represented on stage, the German director can afford to reproduce common beliefs about Sicily, to reduce life on the island to a series of stereotypes, conjuring the image of a land "where one reasons by knife-strokes" (Barbina 297). The comic actor performs this scene out of character, outraged that the other actors do not react to his entrance as he had planned, thereby ruining the effect. However, the swift alternation of the Sicilian story with the meta-theatrical dimension does not prevent the audience from associating the scene with "southern" performances that, twenty years earlier, had shaped the Sicilian

type throughout the peninsula as well as abroad.

Hinkfuss justifies the addition of the episode with an explanation absent in the short story:

Il personaggio deve morire; la famiglia piombare per questa morte nella miseria; senza queste condizioni non mi par naturale che la figlia Mommina possa consentire a sposare Rico Verri, quell'energumeno. (369)

The character must die; as a result the family must plunge into poverty. If that doesn't happen it doesn't seem natural to me that the daughter, Mommina, would consent to marry that savage, Rico Verri. (88)

With these words, Hinkfuss gives the German audience a rational reason for Mommina's choice to marry "the brute." Immediately afterwards, however, he repeats the original explanation of the short story, ascribing it to the interpretation of the leading actress:

...il Verri, eh il Verri farà per lei, non uno, ma tre duelli con quegli ufficiali che subito, al primo colpo della sventura, si sono tutti squagliati: la passione dei melodrammi, in fondo, ce l'aveva anche lei in comune con le sorelle; Raul, Ernani, don Alvaro ... (370)

... Verri... Verri will fight not one but three duels with the officers, who all disappeared at the first sign of misfortune. After all, like her sisters, Mommina has a passion for melodrama: Raul, Ernani, Don Alvaro... (89)

If the first explanation was geared to the German audience, the second is ascribed to the Sicilian context: according to this view, Mommina marries Verri not only because of need but because she admires his passion and rage, recognizing in him the hero of a melodrama. This explanation, already present in the short story, can be introduced in the play only after the mediation of the first one, as it would otherwise "not seem natural" to the target audience.

Adapting "Leonora, addio!" into a play, Pirandello does not hesitate to underline outbursts of jealousy and spectacular killings, but, perhaps concerned with the target audience's reaction, softens the story's misogynistic tones. For instance, instead of being described in detail, Mommina's physical decay is

shifted to the metanarrative, where her mother and sisters work on her make-up and costume to transform her into a prematurely aged woman. Moreover, whereas the short story closes on a sadistic note, in the play *Mommina* is found dead by her more compassionate mother and sisters, and the scene is immediately interrupted by Dr. Hinkfuss.

As in *L'aria del continente*, Pirandello engages with the representation of regional as well as national character. And, as in "Leonora, addio!," particular emphasis is placed on the "pact" established between Verri and the society that surrounds him:

I patti, i patti a cui Rico Verri, sposandola per la picca di spuntarla contro quei suoi compagni ufficiali, si sarà arreso con quel padre geloso e usurajo, e quali altri patti avrà con se stesso stabiliti, non solo per compensarsi del sacrificio che gli costa quel puntiglio, ma anche per rialzarsi di fronte ai suoi compaesani. (369)

What conditions did he have to agree to with his jealous father, the money-lender, so that he could marry her to spite his officer friends? What conditions did he have to agree to with himself, not only to compensate himself for the sacrifice his stubbornness cost him, but even to show his face again before his fellow villagers... (89)

On the one hand, the emphasis on a behavior adopted for societal approval, the negotiation with the older generation suggests that Verri's transformation is the fruit of negotiation. On the other, with a detail found nowhere in the short story, Ignazia makes Verri's behavior a question of blood:

L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTICA: Volevo dire che né io né le mie figliole [...] nessuno di noi s'accorse in prima che lei avesse nelle vene questo *sanguaccio nero dei siciliani*-

IL PRIMO ATTORE: Io me ne vanto! (319)

THE CHARACTER ACTRESS: What I wanted to say is that neither myself, nor my daughters [...] not one of us realized at first that you had that *terrible black Sicilian blood* in your veins<sup>-26</sup>

THE LEADING ACTOR: I'm proud of it! (48)

As in "Leonora, addio!" and *L'aria del continente*, the performance of a "continental in spirit" results in grotesque

mimicry. However, the fact that Pirandello writes for the German stage now considerably complicates the matter. While in *L'aria del continente*, the “continentalized Sicilian” was played by Angelo Musco, a Sicilian, now the roles of Verri, Mommina, and her family members are played by German actors. More precisely, these actors play both the roles of German artists (the actors who are in the process of improvising the Sicilian story) and of Sicilian characters who strive to imitate mainland manners. In other words, they enact *Sicilianness*, as well as the Sicilian mimicry of *Italianness*. As the play is going to be performed in German, Pirandello cannot rely on code switching to underline insularity, but the actors must resort to acting strategies that the audience will identify or recognize as denoting “Southernness,” such as mimicry and accents. It seems almost inevitable that the result would be what was described in the reviews of the Königsberg and Berlin premières: *Sicilianness*, for the German audience, was not entirely distinguishable from *Italianness*.<sup>27</sup> After all, in the eyes of the German audience, both represented the South. Moreover, since, in the meta-play, the leading actress goes as far as “living” her role, and, through a process that, using Stanislavsky’s term, we can describe as *perezhivanie*, she becomes one with the Sicilian character, she in a sense experiences a cultural shift. As Nicola Savarese and Eugenio Barba point out, in *perezhivanie* the prefix *pere*, placed before *zhivanie* (the experience of living) indicates excess (62). In Pirandello’s play, the transcultural experience is in fact extreme, and the leading actress feels ill and can hardly get up after interpreting Mommina’s role.

### Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the three works exemplifies how the Sicilian type and the contrast between the way of life in Sicily and on the mainland were described and performed in a time frame between 1910 and 1930. “Leonora, addio!” *L'aria del continente* and *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* all emphasize the traits that the literature of *verismo* had contributed to underline as typically Sicilian. They also all identify the condition of women as the main difference between life in Sicily and the mainland. However, whereas “Leonora, addio!” unfolds into a tragic narrative, *L'aria del continente* tells a similar story in a comic key,

and in *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* the audience's attention is diverted from Mommina's tragedy to the metatheatrical frame. The analysis also underlines a progressive widening of the distance between the local and the European, the archaic and the modern: from a contrast between Sicily and the provincial south in "Leonora, addio!," we have a contrast among Sicily, the provincial south, and the capital in *L'aria del continente* and among Sicily, the provincial south, and modern Europe in *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*. Perhaps remembering the success of *L'aria del continente*, Pirandello uses strategies similar to the ones employed by Martoglio to represent this contrast. He sets side by side Sicilian folklore and tokens of European modernity, and does so in a visual, as well as in an auditory manner—with particular attention to music. Like Martoglio, he engages with the audience's knowledge and expectations of life in Sicily and, through the imitation of "continental manners," also encourages the public to recognize their own culture through the distorting lens of mimicry. As Pirandello translates Sicily for the German stage, the target audience is led not so much to compare the way of life of the island with the mainland, but the Italian south with the life of northern European cities. The island's specificity within the Italian south has faded, but the difference between northern Europe and the European South is underlined. Finally, all three works involve elements that present regional and national identity as a performance, but also include features that suggest a conception of Sicilian character as immobile and unchangeable. In line with this, from 1910 to 1930, we have identified increasing details related to questions of blood and race.

The question that arises is: why after criticizing the construction of a "Sicilia d'importazione" so sharply, does Pirandello twenty years later conjure a Sicily reminiscent of Telmann's short stories? We have seen that, in writing *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, Pirandello was very informed about the reactions of the German press to his previous works and that he was hoping that the play would result in great profit. It is therefore not surprising that he would tailor the play to the audience for whom he was writing, emphasizing features associated with the "Italian spirit" and turning difference into exoticism. However, inventing a character such as Hinkfuss also gives Pirandello the opportunity to criticize—along with other issues—Germany's stereotyped view of Sicily as a "primitive," dangerous place where

one is “quite free with the knife” (*Questa sera...*369). Moreover, in times of frequent comparisons between northern and southern acting, scenes such as Sampognetta’s agony, along with such commonplaces, emphasize the actor’s struggle to improvise and can be read as addressing the difficulty that the German artist, to the contrary of its Italian counterpart, experienced in this kind of exercise. Conversely, devices such as the religious procession are instrumental to summoning an effect that, as scholars have noted, is not unlike the references to the *Tarahumara* that Artaud, several years later, would use to conjure a ritualistic theater (Rössner 2006, 167; Bernardi 161). The Sicilian background therefore fulfills several functions. Pirandello presents the audience with the clichés that it expects, but in such a way that allows him to underline them as commonplaces. In addition, he uses Sicilian folklore to create a sense of distance in space and time, a contrast with the audience’s and the actors’ world that culminates in the second part of the play, after Hinkfuss has been chased from the theater and the actors are “living” the Sicilian story.<sup>28</sup> The Sicily represented by *verismo* is not simply rejected or overcome but rather elaborated and exploited for a different purpose: it is the device through which the actors’ *perezhivanie* acquires a transcultural, ritualistic dimension.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am concerned with representations of regional and national character in the literature examined, and do not aim at an anthropological reading of Pirandello’s work. Such readings have been undertaken by Leonardo Sciascia (1961) and Lucio Lugnani (1986: 31-79). An anthropological interpretation of questions of honor in Mediterranean fiction is also offered by Christian Giordano (1994).

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are my own.

<sup>3</sup> Capuana continues his argument underlining that, if attention is shifted away from the lower classes, life on the island does not differ much from life on the mainland. Elsewhere, he also comments that mainland audiences had become so used to the portrayal of violent scenes that they cannot recognize a story as Sicilian without a pistol shot or a stabbing (see Sciascia 47).

<sup>4</sup> On the enactment of *Sicilianness* on the European stage, see De Francisci, 95-110.

<sup>5</sup> The indulgence in stereotypes can also be explained by the fact that Capuana, Verga, and Pirandello initially considered the theater a way to make money rather than to realize artistic ambitions, and that they therefore heavily relied on the audience's expectations.

<sup>6</sup> Pirandello refers here to his recent experience in Bonn as a doctoral student in 1889-90.

<sup>7</sup> "I siciliani [...] hanno un'istintiva paura della vita, per cui si chiudono in sé, appartati [...]. Avvertono con diffidenza il contrasto tra il loro animo chiuso e la natura intorno aperta, chiara di sole, e più si chiudono in sé, perché di quest'aperto, che da ogni parte è il mare che li isola, cioè li taglia fuori e li fa soli" ["Sicilians [...] have an instinctive fear of life, therefore they keep to themselves, secluded. They perceive with diffidence the contrast between their closed souls and the clear, sunny, open nature that surrounds them, and they keep even more to themselves, because of this openness, this sea that isolates them from all sides, that cuts them off and sets them apart"] ("Giovanni Verga" 1013).

<sup>8</sup> On this theme, see the novel *I vecchi e i giovani*, in which Sicily is described as a "conquered land" and Sicilians as "barbarians that need to be civilized." Recent analyses of the importance of the *Rinascimento* for Pirandello and of his interpretation of this part of Italian history have been undertaken by Rössner (2010) and Sorrentino (2013).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Klinkert suggests that Verri's metamorphosis can be read as type of "mimesis" that symbolizes the immobility of an archaic society, whereas the mimesis of the La Croce family is associated with modernity (163).

<sup>10</sup> On the great success of the play throughout the peninsula, see Muscarà (1985, 70-72).

<sup>11</sup> As Gramsci writes in 1916: "Angelo Musco è eminentemente un attore della commedia dell'arte, egli non può mantenersi mai nei limiti che l'autore ha fissato i personaggi; vuole aggiungere qualcosa di suo personale" ["Angelo Musco is primarily an actor of the *commedia dell'arte*, he cannot keep within the limits that the author fixed for his characters; he wants to add something personal"] (239).

<sup>12</sup> In this light, Musco's performance can be seen as having a similar function to Grasso's and Aguglia's, as it exaggerated diversity to confirm the expectations of northern and central Italian audiences (Valentini 21).

<sup>13</sup> See *Il taccuino segreto*, 27, for Pirandello's claim of authorship in a letter to his son Stefano. On the other hand, in his memoirs, Angelo Musco dismissed Pirandello's input as comprising a title and the play's "general structure" (141-42). Scholars have expressed divergent opinions about who may be the author of the play. Zappulla Muscarà and Alfredo Barbina, for example, define the play as "squisitamente martogliana" ["purely in Martoglio's style"] (Pirandello-Martoglio 35; Barbina 152); Leonardo Sciascia, instead, talks of it as "una commedia tra le più siciliane, e pirandelliane, che lo scrittore [Pirandello] abbia mai concepito" ["one of the most Sicilian, and Pirandellian comedies that the writer [Pirandello] has ever conceived"] (106).

<sup>14</sup> "Dentro l'alcova altarino per la novena di Natale (*cona*), messo con tutte le note caratteristiche e cioè: grappoli d'arance tra rami di cipresso, ostie colorate, cotone sfioccato etc." ["Inside the alcove the altar for the Christmas novena (*cona*), set up in all its features, that is: bunches of oranges between cypress branches, colorful wafers, frayed cotton etc."] (296).

<sup>15</sup> This can be seen as a general pattern in Pirandello's own fiction. The reverse is not always true; in Pirandello's short story, "Donna Mimma," for example, the midwife from Piemonte is able to adapt to the Sicilian environment (see Sorrentino 108; Rössner 2010, 51-6).

<sup>16</sup> See Alonge (2007, 87--102).

<sup>17</sup> This was not the opinion of Italian scholarship. Lugnani, for instance, claimed that Pirandello could have used any of his plays instead of "Leonora, addio!" (66). The idea that the representation of *Italianness* may be a concern of the play, and may have had an impact in the production, was first raised by Steen Jansen and Jane House.

<sup>18</sup> Pirandello finished the manuscript in 1929, and sent it to Marta Abba. In a letter dated April 7, 1929, he warns her: "Ma leggilo senza pensare affatto di rappresentarlo TU, [...]; ho scritto il lavoro in vista dei teatri di qua e degli attori e attrici di qua." ["But read it without thinking of acting in it; I wrote the work for the German theater and with German actors and actresses in mind"] (*Lettere a Marta Abba* 120). See also Alonge (2007, 92).

<sup>19</sup> This discussion had preoccupied fascist intellectuals throughout the 1920s. See, in this respect, the polemics that develop, especially after 1927, around *Strapaese* and *Stracittà* in the group of intellectuals gathered around Mino Maccari and his journal *Il Selvaggio*. According to Maccari, rural Italy offered the perfect background for

Italian modernity, while foreign, and especially Anglo-Saxon influence, embodied in phenomena such as jazz and the *Tabarin*, was corrupting and unhealthy. "Strapaese loves folkloric and rural Italy because it resists the influence of a civilization in which it does not recognize itself: America descends with its dollars, its black idols, its cocktails and jazz, the dazzling sparkle of a civilization that is all foam and no earth, all machine and no heart" (Maccari 1927, in Salvi, "*Il Selvaggio* tra fascismo e strapaese" (n.pag.web). Pirandello, who had joined the fascist party in 1924, after the murder of Matteotti, never challenged fascist ideology. At the same time, he was fascinated by America and phenomena such as jazz and the *Tabarin*, and saw Germany as the least resistant European country to embrace these influences (see Cometa 285-320).

<sup>20</sup> German translations of Pirandello's dramas were available since 1925, and his work was frequently staged and enjoyed great popularity in the 1920s.

<sup>21</sup> On the relation between *Italianness* and the *Commedia dell'arte*, see Braglia's *Evoluzione del mimo* (1930) and *I segreti di tabarrino* (1933).

<sup>22</sup> As Sorrentino notes, in Pirandello's work the center is not one, and most importantly, not fixed. See Sorrentino's analysis of "Lumè di Sicilia," 89-96.

<sup>23</sup> "Sa chanteuse qui nous semble bien plus berlinoise que sicilienne" ["His singer, who seems to come from Berlin rather than from Sicily"] (Boussy 1491).

<sup>24</sup> See *Sagra del Signore della nave*, in which a very similar religious procession is juxtaposed to the slaying of the pigs for the festivity of S. Nicola. The dialogue between the two teachers emphasizes the link between religious feelings and the progress of civilization: "è proprio vero, è... che col progredire della civiltà [...] l'uomo si fa sempre piú debole; e sempre piú va perdendo, l'antico sentimento religioso" ["It is true, that ... with the progress of civilization [...] man becomes weaker; and loses more and more, [...] the ancient religious feeling"] (434). Here, curiously, Vergani reports of how, during the play's rehearsals, the musician had suggested to use a saxophone to imitate the pig's grunt: "Lo sapevate che il grugnito e l'urlo del porco si imitano perfettamente col sassofono? Lo si sente in tante musiche sincopate di jazz" ["Did you know that the grunt and scream of the pig can be perfectly imitated with the saxophone? One hears it in a lot of music in syncopated jazz"] (Vergani 404).

<sup>25</sup> The performance of the gypsy choir takes place after Donna Ignazia, to alleviate her toothache, has recited the Ave Maria in Latin but

has been interrupted by Totina's cross-dressed performance of Sibel's aria in *Faust*.

<sup>26</sup> I am here modifying Campbell and Douglas' translation, as they render the expression as "cursed Sicilian blood." The reference is significant as it is the same that the German press used to define Abba's performance in 1925.

<sup>27</sup> For the press' reactions to *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, see Jansen, 43-49.

<sup>28</sup> In his letters to Marta Abba, Pirandello stresses how the play becomes especially powerful after the actors have chased Hinkfuss (120).

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