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tion which stretches from the masks and harlequins of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries down to Adelaide Ristori, Ernesto Rossi, Tomaso Salvini, Eleonora Duse, they have almost always rebelled against becoming the tools of their authors, rather tending in the spirit of the *commedia dell'arte* to regard the lines which are given them as pretexts for displaying their own virtuosity and asserting their personalities. Except for the small companies already noted and that conducted by Dario Niccodemi, all the Italian companies are directed by actors who rely upon their traditional marvelous gifts for improvisation.

A relative regeneration in the theatre corresponds to the lively renewal of culture which is taking place. While a few years ago the foreign plays were nineteenth French and often rather poor, today works from the best literature of the whole world are selected for translation. And notwithstanding the material and economic inconveniences of their vagabondia, the best companies have for some time tried to improve their productions. Finally we must note the renewal of open-air performances, the most important being those given biennially in the stupendous

Greek theatre of Syracuse. The first to react violently against French domination was Gabriele d'Annunzio with his verbose dramas and his overwhelming tragedies in too marvelous verse. But d'Annunzio is essentially a lyric writer.

The negation which torments the spirit of the dramatists who have come most recently to our stage since the war is one of desperation—whether they sob aloud or conceal

their anguish under a hectic laugh, the combination giving rise to the so-called "grotesque" (a new type of comedy, of spasmodic humor). Our later dramatists are those who carry to catastrophic and frankly nihilistic consequences the philosophic credo of our age and dissolve all reality in doubt and skepticism—not only the reality of the external world but that of pain, of personality itself. No longer the "truth" deified by positivist and naturalist, no longer life with a capital "L" sung by d'Annunzio, no longer the lament of the *crepuscolari* at their inability to soar on high. Truth or falsity does not exist, virtue and evil, nothing objective, fixed, immutable, eternal, no reason for our life, not even in itself exists, a law above us or in us, fixed reality outside of us or in us does not exist: we are not what we believe ourselves to be but only what from time to time "we construct" or appear to this one, that and the other. *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (Some One, No One and a Hundred Thousand) is the title of the last novel by Pirandello; briefly, life is only a funereal farce in which we recite more or less unconsciously the most diverse parts: poor marionettes in the hands of a blind fate.



Sam Benelli

Perhaps none of these dramatists accepts completely all the points of such a "morality," characteristic of the straying of a world which has lost God. But extreme traces are found to a greater or less extent in the works of all.

For some years in Italy as well as abroad Luigi Pirandello has been recognized as the most original, unique, incomparably the greatest—the only one who has a style of his own and who has created in a few years a work which has been capable of large importance. The interpretation that the soul drama of his characters resides in a conflict between "life" and "form"—the form which life

needs in order to find its *ubi consistam* and which it must continually break through in order to maintain the flux essential to its nature—has been confirmed by recent pronouncements of Pirandello himself. He is an idealist: he has none of the cynicism, none of the hopelessness of Andrieff. But as a matter of fact among all his vast number of works the dramas which end with a declaration of faith are few! *L'innesto* (The Grafting), *Due in una* (Two in One), *Ma non e una cosa seria* (He Didn't Mean it). The others all end in the blackest agony. Such at least is that paradox, the perfect *Così e (se vi para)* (Right You Are), the insult of the singular *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (Six Characters in Search of an Author), the genuine drama *Come prima, meglio di prima* (Floriani's Wife), the great tragedy of Henry VI; not to mention numerous one-act plays and scenes and fragments from his thirty other dramas in each of which, notwithstanding all reservations, one observes a constant aspiration of the poet to attain a genuinely tragic atmosphere.

The Italian theatre has not been the field of the greatest triumphs of the futurists. Their attempts at a "synthetic theatre" with comedies and tragedies which last a few minutes, even two or three seconds, are jokes. In *Prigionieri* (Prisoners), *Tamburo di fuoco* (The Fiery Drum), *Vulcano* and other dramatic works, F. T. Marinetti has attacked form most forcefully (we will not say orthodoxly) but without great result. A pleasing philosophical farce of futurist flavor which enjoyed great success in the little Roman theatre of Pirandello is *Nosta Dea* (Our Goddess), by the disconcerting Massimo Bontempelli.

An increasingly restless crisis afflicts our moral life; the new soul of Italy is thirsty in spirit. Possibly our new theatre represented successfully elsewhere all over the world, is often boring, unprofitable, negative and sometimes frankly ill. But this uneasiness is infinitely better than that well-fed bourgeois complacency dear to the audiences of thirty years ago; if it is a sickness, we hope that it is one of those which produces pearls.



Ruggero Ruggieri