PIRANDELLO 150: INTRODUCTION

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The essays collected in this special section of *Quaderni d'italianistica* originate from an event that we organized in 2017 on behalf of the Department of Italian Studies of the University of Toronto, as part of the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Luigi Pirandello's birth. While the nature of our mission was primarily academic, when it came to thinking of a proper way to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the great Sicilian author, we decided that we should also aim at reaching a wider audience. Rather than confining ourselves to the traditional formats of scholarly conferences and symposia, we seized the opportunity to reflect upon, and capitalize on, the broad and popular appeal, in his days as well as in the present, of Pirandello's literary and dramatic production. Although he is perhaps the most internationally recognized figure in Italian modernism, Pirandello was never an author for an audience of "happy few." Often the originality of his works lies precisely in his ability to appropriate characters, tropes, and situations from popular culture (the femme fatale, the tombeur de femmes, the parvenu, the love triangle, the mistaken identity, etc.) as the starting point for his cunning dismantling of the social and psychological structures of the bourgeois world. With that in mind, we decided to organize a series of screenings of films based on his works, and to accompany them with short lectures by renowned scholars in cinema and Pirandello studies, with the intention of then publishing an expanded version of these introductions in this journal.

The series was held at the University of Toronto between September and December 2017, with the support of the Department of Italian Studies, the Goggio Chair in Italian Studies, the Cinema Studies Institute, and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Toronto. Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz (University of Toronto) kicked off the celebrations by discussing Pietro Messina's *L'attesa* (2015), Manuela Gieri (Università degli Studi della Basilicata) introduced Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Tu ridi* (1998), Michael Syrimis presented Mario Camerini's *Ma non è una cosa seria* (1937), and James Leo Cahill (University of Toronto) closed the series by examining Marcel L'Herbier's *Feu Mathias Pascal* (1926).¹ In this issue of

¹ Due to scheduling issues, Professor Cahill was a late addition to the roster, and for this reason he was unable to expand his introductory remarks into a fully-fledged essay within the

Quaderni, Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz develops her analysis of Messina's mesmerizing first feature by comparing it to its source material, the short story "La camera in attesa" (1916) and the play *La vita che ti diedi* (1923), also based on the latter. Katz focuses on Messina's use of quintessentially cinematic techniques, such as the insistence on scant dialogue and diegetic music, to translate Pirandello's periphrastic language into sparse but loaded imagery. Katz's approach is grounded in psychoanalytic theory and a vast knowledge of Pirandello's oeuvre, linking Freud's ideas on narcissism to the playwright's ambivalent treatment of grief. Manuela Gieri's analysis of *Tu ridi* utilizes Lacanian theory to illuminate the complex relationship between the Tavianis' historical method and the psychological depth of Pirandello's characters, which the directors explore in their continuous investigation of the political dimensions of human relations. Gieri's profound familiarity with the cinema of the Tuscan brothers emerges in the connections the scholar draws between the film's two episodes and the five contained in *Kaos* (1984), their first adaptation of short stories from Pirandello's massive *Novelle per un anno*. Michael Syrimis situates Mario Camerini's *Ma non è una cosa seria*, the adaptation of the eponymous 1918 play, in the context of the revitalization of the Italian film industry in the 1930s, a process stimulated by the intervention of the Fascist regime in mass culture. If on the one hand the recourse to a literary source might have helped Camerini establish the cultural legitimacy of his picture, on the other, the imperative for cinema during Fascism to produce entertainment that was compatible with the regime's social values and ideals forced the director to mute the more radical message of Pirandello's work. While the play is constructed upon Pirandello's poetics of *umorismo*—that is, the simultaneous and unresolved experiencing of contrary feelings—and therefore does not provide any facile or conclusive resolution, Camerini's film brings the plot to the harmonious closure provided by the happy ending that is typical of the romantic comedy genre.

Covering a span of almost nine decades, from the waning years of silent cinema to contemporary film-making, the four films examined in our retrospective demonstrate Pirandello's early and enduring influence upon the cinematic medium. Indeed, it may well be in cinema, rather than in prose fiction and play writing, the two genres that he himself practiced during his career, that his legacy remains more vital and lasting.

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time-frame provided by this publication. He hopes to do so at some point in the future.