

FROM MOTHERHOOD TO FATHERHOOD:
THE ECLIPSE OF REASON IN THE TAVIANI BROTHERS'
TU RIDI

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Abstract. The paper presents an in-depth analysis of *Tu ridi*, a free adaptation of some of Luigi Pirandello's short stories, realized by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani in 1998. Within a filmography largely characterized by an attention to the historical, social, and political transformations that Italy experienced over the second half of the twentieth century, special attention should be paid to the films the Tavianis made in a close dialogue with literature, a closeness that has always been particularly fortunate for both art forms. Over the decades, they have recurrently practised the art of adaptation bringing to the screen, among other literary texts, several of Luigi Pirandello's short stories in films such as *Tu ridi*, and *Kaos* (1984). Unquestionably, literature has often been instrumental for the Tavianis' investigation of reality, and my analysis will place in a close dialogue *Tu ridi*, their 1982 film *La notte di San Lorenzo* and, last but not least, *Kaos*, since in all three works the Tavianis' agenda seems to be the same: to interrogate and overturn official historical discourse in order to unveil the complex and multifaceted truth that lies under the surface of things, and thus to rewrite the very narration about Neorealism and its overcoming.

The object of the present analysis is *Tu ridi* (*You Laugh*), a film realized by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani in 1998, and a free adaptation of some of Luigi Pirandello's short stories.

Since the Tavianis' first documentary, *San Miniato, luglio '44* (San Miniato, July '44), which they made in 1954, the Tuscan brothers' filmography has always been informed by an attention to the historical, social, and political transformations that Italy experienced over the second half of the twentieth century: the violence of Mafia culture in *Un uomo da bruciare* (*A Man for Burning*, 1962) and *Tu ridi*; the social battle for civil rights over divorce in *I fuorilegge del matrimonio* (*Outlaws of Love*, 1963); the state funeral of the founder and leader of the Italian

Communist Party (PCI) Palmiro Togliatti in *I sovversivi* (*The Subversives*, 1967); the Nazi-Fascist occupation and the Resistance in *La notte di San Lorenzo* (*The Night of the Shooting Stars*, 1982); as well as the emigration of young Italians to America in search of fortune in *Good Morning Babilonia* (1987), to mention only a few.¹

Deserving of special attention, however, are all the films by the Tavianis that kept in a close dialogue with literature, a closeness that has always been particularly fortunate for both art forms. The two brothers have always saturated their cinema with their different passions—literature, art, music, and, of course, politics—and have merged them with elegance and a powerful poetic inclination. Over the decades, beginning with their 1977 feature *Padre padrone* (*My Father, My Master*), they have recurrently practised the art of adaptation in films such as *Tu ridi* and *Kaos* (1984), a work with which they brought to the screen four of Pirandello's short stories; and yet also *Il sole anche di notte* (*Night Sun*, 1990), a free rendering of Lev Tolstoj's "Father Sergius" (1890–1898); *Le affinità elettive* (*Elective Affinities*, 1996), based on Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandschaften* (1809); *Cesare deve morire* (*Caesar Must Die*, 2012), a striking rendition of Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar* (1599); *Meraviglioso Boccaccio* (*Wondrous Boccaccio*, 2015), a free adaptation of a few short stories contained in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353); and, last but not least, *Una questione privata* (*Rainbow: A Private Affair*, 2017), which is based on the eponymous 1963 novel by Beppe Fenoglio.

In order to better comprehend the object of our analysis, *Tu ridi*, a special mention must be made, though, to *La notte di San Lorenzo*, a 1982 film that does not find any direct antecedent in literature, and yet it returns to an important period of Italian literary history, Neorealism, with unusual but excellent results. Undoubtedly, the film owes much to Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path to the Nest of Spiders*, 1947) and perhaps even to Cesare Pavese's *La luna e i falò* (*The Moon and the Bonfires*, 1950), neorealist novels that have never found a direct transposition onto the Italian silver screen, even though they offered a fairly original interpretation of the neorealist agenda. In fact, 30 years or so separate these works, that is, the novels and the Tavianis' film. The cultural context is thoroughly different, and yet

¹ Many critics have written about the Taviani brothers' cinema and this film in particular. Here I would like to mention Lorenzo Cuccu; Sebastiano Gesù; Millicent Marcus; Jean Gili; Sergio Micheli; Nuccio Orto; Silvia Panichi (see Works Cited).

simile appare il progetto, e cioè l'intenzione di operare uno slittamento dell'estetica neorealista attraverso la sua ri/scrittura entro le coordinate di un nuovo linguaggio che, trasgredendo la ricerca di una semplice mimesi del reale nonché di un ordine convenzionale della rappresentazione, attui un decentramento del realismo in senso magico e fors'anche fantastico. (Gieri and Castagnoli 28)

the project appears similar, and thus the intention to activate a slippage of the neorealist aesthetic through a re/writing within the coordinates of a new language that, by betraying the search for a mere mimesis of the real and of a conventional order of representation, realizes a decentring of realism within the realm of magic and maybe even fantasy.²

In other words, decades after the end of Neorealism in cinema, the Taviani brothers seem to refer to a particular interpretation of the neorealist project, one best expressed in those two novels; in other words, in both the Taviani's film and the literary narratives, one finds the same poetic and discursive strategy, with due respect to the diverse linguistic codes. Indeed, the two directors seem to pursue a kind of "non-style" and the return to an unmediated perception, a poetic originality juxtaposed to the main conventions of Realism, and they achieve that by inserting the fantastic in "real" stories. Reality is thus mutated by the deforming lenses of imagination and memory. In both the audiovisual and the merely verbal code, language embraces the neorealist mandate, and yet contemporarily renovates it through a poetic "restitution of reality":

Sia il film sia il romanzo, infatti, seguendo le rispettive strategie discorsive, giungono ad interrogare e rovesciare il mito della Resistenza, nonché il ruolo della storia ufficiale, costringendoci a guardare tra le crepe dischiuse ai suoi margini, a penetrare dentro quei varchi, a scoprire sotto la superficie una forma di verità più complessa e molteplice. (Gieri and Castagnoli 29)

Indeed, both the movie and the novel, by following their own discursive strategies, come to interrogate and overturn the myth of

² All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

the Resistance, as well as the role of official history, and thus force us to gaze at the cracks that are ajar at its margins, to penetrate those gaps, to unveil the complex and multifaceted truth under the surface.

The close comparison between the Taviani brothers' film and the two novels would take us far away only in appearance from what we are discussing here; indeed, I believe that, in *Tu ridi*, the two Tuscan directors, though moving from literary texts, intended to pursue a fairly similar agenda, and specifically to interrogate and overturn official history in order to unveil the complex and multifaceted truth that lies under the surface of things.

Unquestionably, literature has often been instrumental to the Tavianis' investigation of reality, and the author they have resorted to most often is Luigi Pirandello, employing his *Novelle per un anno* (*Short Stories for a year*), a collection of nearly 250 short stories written between 1884 and 1936, in their works. As observed by Romano Luperini, this collection—together with Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, from which Pirandello certainly drew inspiration for the treatment of time and the realistic representation of the “human comedy,” and with Giovanni Verga's *novelle* constitutes one of the best examples of Italian post-unitarian narrative, as well as of Italian short narrative (*novellistica*) of all time (Luperini, Cataldi, et al. 218).

In 1984, the Tavianis directed *Kaos*, a film made of five episodes, four of which are adaptations of four Sicilian *novelle* by Pirandello, while one is thoroughly original and imagines the encounter between an old Pirandello and his mother. Fourteen years later, the brothers returned to Pirandello and to his short stories, with the two-episode film *Tu ridi*, which they shot in 1998. They focused on four short stories from the rich body of the *Novelle per un anno*: *Tu ridi* (1912), *L'imbecille* (*The Idiot*, 1912), and *Sole e ombra* (*Sun and Shadow*, 1896) served as the raw material for the first episode, entitled *Felice* (*Happy*); *La cattura* (*The Capture*, 1918) was adapted into the second episode, entitled *Due sequestri* (*Two Kidnappings*).

The first segment takes place in Rome in the 1930s, while the second is set in Sicily in the past as well as in the present time of filmmaking. Nevertheless, although in *Felice* time and space seem, at first, more coherently set, in actuality, as the narrative unfolds, time becomes more and more uncertain, and it moves from waking life to dream and imagination. The spectator is drawn into the narrative by this *time tour de force*, and, in the constant shifting between these

extraordinarily different dimensions of human experience, is asked to reconstruct the ultimate meaning of this unusual narrative construct. *Felice* begins with a nocturnal pan over a sleeping Rome in Fascist times, and the political element is immediately placed in the foreground by the view of the Vittoriano, that is, the Altare della Patria, and a sequence of Fascist buildings, such as the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in the EUR district, until the camera's gaze rests for a few moments on the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, from which Benito Mussolini used to address his adoring crowds; meanwhile, the laughter that has accompanied the whole sequence becomes more and more resounding. Then, Pirandello's voice-over introduces the main protagonist—"Felice di nome, infelice di fatto" ("Happy in name, unhappy in actuality")—Felice Tespini (played by Antonio Albanese), a former baritone who had to interrupt his career because of a heart problem. Henceforth, he became the unhappy bookkeeper of an opera theatre. At night, while sleeping, Felice laughs so vigorously that his wife believes he is dreaming of betraying her. Thus, she always awakens him, bringing Felice back to his unhappy life. Similarly to what happens to Batà in *Male di luna* (*Moon Malaise*) and Zi' Dima in *La giara* (*The Jar*) (two of the episodes contained in *Kaos*), Felice can rejoice only at night, in a carnivalesque reversal of power that allows the oppressed to find protection in the nightly moon, as well as compensation and consolation for their miserable daytime condition (Socci 134). Felice is a character devoid of any joy for life: he cannot stand himself, he is constantly surrounded by an aura of oppression and disillusionment, and he experiences constant distress in the alienating relationship that he entertains with his wife—and pretty much with everybody else. Felice does not remember his dreams and thus does not understand the reason for his nocturnal laughter. Yet, one day, in a moment of terrifying reckoning, he remembers: in real life, Felice goes to work every morning with a disabled colleague who is ridiculed and insulted by a group of Fascists; despite the obvious injustice that unfolds before his eyes, Felice is unable to react and defend his friend. Instead, in his dream he becomes one of the victimizers, and an especially vicious one, rejoicing in his own cruelty. This memory brings him to a fatal decision that leads him, the narrative, and the spectator to a necessary, and yet bleak, conclusion: Felice's suicide.

Due sequestri, the film's second episode, is a free adaptation of the short story *La cattura*, which is also set in Sicily. A remote mountain hotel has two guests: Vincenzo (Steve Spedicato), the son of Sebastiano Cangemi, a police informant and former mafioso who has decided to turn himself in, and Rocco (Lello Arena),

Vincenzo's kidnapper and Mafia guardian. From the terrace, one can see Mount Ballarò, named after the Sicilian doctor (Turi Ferro) who had been kidnapped and detained there 100 years before. "Faresti bene a conoscerla quella storia" ("You should know that story"), Rocco says to Vincenzo, but the boy does not want to hear it, in a kind of premonition of what is to come. As the present gives way to the past, the tale of Doctor Ballarò's detention by three miserable brothers unfolds on the screen, in a fairly accurate and faithful rendition of Pirandello's *novella*. The kidnappers hope to receive the ransom from the doctor's family, but the doctor soon unveils the bitter truth, to them and to himself: he has no children and his wife and family are only waiting for him to die to inherit his fortune. They will never pay the ransom. It is the old father of the three kidnappers who ultimately decides the course of events: the doctor cannot be freed, and they will keep him there "finchè Dio vorrà" ("as long as God wills it") because "Quassù siamo tutti Cristo in croce" ("Up here, we are all like Christ on the cross"). Class differences are ultimately erased and there, immersed in nature, all men are alike. From then on, the kidnapped and the kidnappers become closer and closer, almost like the family Doctor Ballarò never had in "real" life, and he dies, in the end, while happily playing with the children of his surrogate family.

The major differences between the short story and the film concern the main character and his kidnappers: Doctor Ballarò is named Guarnotta in Pirandello's tale, where he is only a landowner who, widowed and remarried, is haunted by *tedium vitae* after the death of his only son. In the film, the kidnappers have a father, absent from the literary source, who has the duty of explaining to his sons (as well as to the spectators) the reasons for their journey of repentance and self-punishment. The almost pedagogical relationship between kidnapped and kidnappers is merely sketched in the short story, and yet it becomes the core of the filmic tale. Doctor Ballarò teaches them to see things they never saw before: the metaphor of the gaze, so central to the narrative construction of the earlier film, *Kaos*, becomes central once again in this Sicilian tale about truth and recognition.³ In fact, as Doctor Ballarò says to one of his kidnappers, "I tuoi occhi e i miei sono come vetri colorati attraverso i quali vediamo. Cambia il colore del vetro e cambia anche l'aspetto delle cose. Le cose non sono soltanto come ti hanno abituato a vederle, ma anche come tu vuoi vederle. Pensaci!" ("Your eyes and mine are like coloured glasses through which we see. If the colour of the glass changes, the

³ For a close analysis of the film *Kaos*, see Gieri.

appearance of things changes as well. Things are not merely like they made you see them, but also like you want to see them. Think about it!”).

Once the narrative comes back to 1998, we learn that Vincenzo's father has decided to collaborate with the police. The boy's destiny is now decided and finds an iconographic echo in Giotto's *Kiss of Judas* fresco (1304–1306, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua), which Vincenzo is recreating with a computer program. Invisible lines connect reality and fiction, the painting and real life, Judas and Rocco, Jesus' and Vincenzo's faces. The Christological parallellisms continue after the boy's death, while the images of Rocco's obsessive Afro-Cuban dance behind bars fades into Vincenzo's digital replica of Giotto's fresco, and even more pointedly in the despairing mothers of *The Massacre of the Innocents*, and the angels' cries in *The Redeemer's Death* (also part of the frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel). Earlier in the tale, it seemed that the closeness to nature, and to the past, had contributed to building a relationship between man and child, victimizer and victimized, one that could not turn into anything negative. Suddenly, in an abrupt turn of events, the Law—of the present time; of the city; of a time and space characterized by violence and the relinquishment of eternal values—wins over the past, nature, goodness, and care. The Name of the Father, that is, of Order and Censorship—as defined by Jacques Lacan in his seminar *The Psychoses* (1955–1956) to explain the role of the Father in the Symbolic order—prevails and leads the story to its bitter and dreadful conclusion.

Fourteen years after *Kaos*, then, in the tale of Doctor Ballarò and the *picciottit*⁴ who detain him, the Tavianis seem to prefigure the possibility of a harmonic relationship between the reasons of nature and those of the bourgeois and “civilized” city, a harmony that did not seem feasible in the earlier film. Ballarò and his kidnappers ultimately communicate: he teaches them about the speed of light and Galileo's many discoveries, as well as the possibility of seeing things as they really are for us, and not as others want us to see them. The Tavianis transform the old doctor into a sort of Greek philosopher who gives the uneducated the fire of knowledge as well as civilization, while they offer him an ascetic life and a serene death. Nonetheless, the re-composition of the tension between such anthropological polarities can happen only in the past and on the enchanted mountain (Socci 135). One hundred years later, in 1998, such a harmonic re-composition of

⁴ The Sicilian term “picciottu” corresponds to the Italian “ragazzo,” or young man, and it is customarily used to indicate the affiliation to a Mafia organization.

opposites is impossible, and the resolution comes in the form of a pagan sacrifice, a classical ritual.

However, originally, the movie was supposed to be made of three, and not simply two, episodes, where the first was to be entitled *La figlia* (*The Daughter*);⁵ it was actually shot and edited, but in the end the Tavianis decided not to include it in the final cut of the film. The episode narrativized part of Pirandello's life, specifically the night of the author's triumphant acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934, which had been preceded by the uproarious fiasco of his most famous play, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (*Six Characters in Search of an Author* [1921]). The merciless reception of his theatrical work, one to which he had given such relevance in his oeuvre, had hurt him deeply, but it had also hurt his daughter Lietta, so much so that the Tavianis imagined that, the very night of the fiasco, Pirandello wrote *Felice*, whose story, in *Tu ridi*, is introduced by the voice-over of the writer himself. Possibly, as suggested by Lorenzo Cuccu, the function of this first episode was to introduce some of the film's main themes: the Author's role; the relationship between Art and Life; and the nature of humour and comedy—that is, some of the main themes of Pirandello's 1908 essay *L'umorismo* (*On Humor*), as well as of his entire production.⁶ In the hermeneutical effort to understand this only apparently simple, and yet extremely complex, film, it may be useful to remember here that in the essay *On Humor*, Pirandello evokes Socrates: “Una è l'origine dell'allegria e della tristezza: nei contrapposti un'idea non si conosce che per la sua contraria: della stessa materia si forma il socco e il coturno” (*L'umorismo* 791; “One is the origin of both cheerfulness and sadness: in juxtapositions, an idea may be known only by its opposite; the *socco* [footwear of the comic actors in Roman theatre] and the *coturno* [footwear of the tragic actors in Roman theatre] are made of the same material”). Yet, as Socrates observed, whereas in Antiquity the opposites remained separated, in Modernity, according to Pirandello, such a juxtaposition becomes the very essence of human experience. *Tu ridi* seems indeed to be built upon such a basic axiom: a comic mask is accompanied by, or rather juxtaposed with, its tragic counterpart, mediated by the moving commentary of the narrator's voice-over. This type of construction seems

⁵ See, for instance, Cuccu; Giuntini.

⁶ See Cuccu's analysis of *Tu ridi* in *Il cinema di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani. Natura, cultura, storia nei film dei due registi toscani*, 86–91.

to lead the spectator to the very heart of comedy and tragedy, that is, to life itself (Socci 135).

However, I also believe that, in the fertile exchange between *Kaos* and *Tu ridi*, such an overture, that is, the first episode *La figlia*, would have been specular to the end of *Kaos* itself, since the 1984 movie concludes with an episode in which the Taviani brothers imagine a dialogue between Pirandello, as an old man, and his mother. In that imaginary dialogue, the mother warns her son:

Impara a guardare le cose con gli occhi di quelli che non le vedono più.
Ne proverai dolore, certo. Ma quel dolore te le renderà più sacre e più
belle... Forse è solo per dirti questo che ti ho fatto venire fin qua.

Learn to look at things with the eyes of those who no longer see them.
This will cause you pain, certainly. But that pain will make those
things more sacred and more beautiful to you... Perhaps it was just to
tell you this that I made you come here.

Indeed, this seems to be Felice's destiny: to see things with/through the eyes of those who no longer see them. In a strange and cruel game, however, in the Tavianis' remapping of the humorist's experience, the one who no longer sees reality as he used to is Felice himself, or rather the baritone he used to be and no longer is. Thus, the pain of seeing himself living rather than experiencing life directly constitutes his death sentence, his damnation, and certainly that which leads him, and us, to a necessary and sombre conclusion. Felice's peculiar destiny recalls the ending of Pirandello's novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (*The Late Mattia Pascal* [1904]), in which the eponymous protagonist, believed to be dead by his nagging wife and detested mother-in-law, takes on a new identity and starts a new life, only to find disappointment and sorrow. When he decides to return to his family, he learns that it is impossible.

Indeed, the tale of Mattia Pascal's strange life recalls Felice's equally peculiar destiny: notwithstanding the many differences in the plot, it is relevant to note that the novel ends with the protagonist who continues to live upon having acknowledged his "official" death, while Felice cannot. Yet the novel was published in 1904, that is, at a time when, perhaps, it was still possible to continue living even when the Subject had to face the flimsy nature of his own existence as well as the irreconcilable conflict between the face and the mask, being and appearing,

that lies at the foundation of human existence. In the decades following the publication of Pirandello's novel, Italy fought two World Wars, experienced Fascism and the Resistance, as well as the disillusionment of post-war reconstruction, followed by the troubled Seventies. Thus, in the Tavianis' view, Pirandello's conciliatory conclusion is no longer possible, and for the Subject, nothing else is left but to vanish from the scene.

Such a connection between the two films, *Kaos* and *Tu ridi*, then, is not only suggested by the fact that, deciding to bring Pirandello's work back to the screen, the Tavianis once again resorted to the collection of his short stories, nor simply by the fact that they decided initially to begin the film with an episode that introduced all the themes that were so dear to the Sicilian author. It is also suggested by the fact that they built a profound relationship between the two filmic texts by connecting each story with a mesmerizing jingling sound, both in the 1984 and in the 1998 work, as well as by originally opening the second film with the ending of the first one—albeit with a metaphorical reversal: the person who was his mother's son becomes the daughter's father. Naturally, we could dismiss this strange occurrence, and yet we should not, since it is quite clear that, in the Taviani brothers' endless re-visitation of the vast body of European literature, Pirandello is an author to whom they resorted more often than any other—twice, in two different moments of their career, in the early 1980s and at the end of the 1990s. The question a critic or scholar ought to ask is “Why?”

It must be noted that the Tavianis initiated this particular dialogue not by choosing Pirandello's best-known and most-celebrated and -cited works, that is, his great plays and novels, but by deliberately identifying in his short stories—and particularly those linked to Sicilian peasant culture—a fertile ground on which to build a personal overcoming of the first stage of their artistic, cultural, and even ideological development. Significantly, in abandoning that stage of their career, which was decidedly more marked by political and ideological fervour, and defined by many as a “cinema of utopia,”⁷ the Taviani brothers chose to embrace Pirandello, one of the greatest exponents of the bourgeois *Weltanschauung* as it developed in nineteenth-century Italy and Europe. Pirandello is an author who, amongst other things, extensively pondered over the role and condition of the

⁷ Such is, for instance, the title of a documentary on the two Tuscan brothers, *La passione e l'utopia. Viaggio nel cinema dei fratelli Taviani* (2015), directed by Mario Canale, but also of the collection of essays *Cinema e utopia, ovvero il significato dell'esagerazione*, and the volume *Utopisti esagerati. Il cinema di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani*, edited by Zagarrio.

bourgeoisie, its narrations, and its many representations—artistic, social, cultural, and so on. Not only did he reflect on these matters, but he also used various modes of representation and story-telling, which eventually led him to overcome his nineteenth-century sensibility and to create the practice and theory that were to define theatrical and literary Modernism. In his constant search for new and original dramatic and narrative strategies, Pirandello tackled some of the issues that would become crucial as artistic Modernism sought to define itself, such as the nature of the new Subject in its relationship with reality; the relationship between illusion (fiction) and reality; the different roles held by author, character, and reader/spectator during the process of artistic creation; and the complex nature of both “narrativity” and “theatricality.”⁸ Not incidentally, Pirandello thus came to investigate the specific issues that, at the time, stood at the centre of the debate on a new art form, cinema, and its relationship with established forms of artistic expression, such as the theatre and the novel. One of the key issues in his speculation on different forms of dramatic and narrative expression, and one that Pirandello placed at the core of one of his best-known essays, *Illustratori, attori e traduttori* (*Illustrators, actors and translators* [1908]), was translation and, most importantly, the process of trans-codification: a form of “adaptation” of short stories into plays, as well as plays into short stories, short stories into novels and even scripts, and so on. In order to tackle the issue of the passage of a short story into a theatrical text, and eventually into a filmic one, it is useful to recall

⁸ Here I use the term “theatricality” as defined by Jean Alter in his article “From Text to Performance: Semiotics of Theatricality,” where Alter makes the distinction between “theatricality,” a term adapted from the French “théatralité,” and “theatricality,” opting for the former as this neologism can be used to cover that “total theatre,” which he identifies as a system built of two categories of signs corresponding to the two practical means of theatrical expression, the written text and the *mise-en-scène*. Now, I believe that Pirandello formulated a conception of theatre as a total experience that is very close to that expressed by Alter, and he virtuously reformulated the role of both the text and the performance. In *Dal letterario al filmico. Sistema del racconto* (*From the Literary to the Filmic: System of Story-Telling*; originally compiled in 1983 and then revised in 1998, the text was published in Italy in 2000 by Lindau in Turin), André Gaudreault takes up the concept of theatricality and places it in a very productive dialogue with the concepts of narrativity and literality, with particular attention paid to early cinema. It seems opportune to note that Gaudreault gives us a new perspective to use in analyzing Pirandello’s attitudes with regard to cinema, but also, and most of all, in the study of that incessant course of “trans/lation” from one text to another, from one processuality to another, from one code to another, which seems to inform all the works of the artist from Agrigento, and, I believe, has inspired many Italian artists in the twentieth century, including the Taviani brothers.

the observations made in the conclusion of *Illustratori, attori e traduttori*, where Pirandello supports the centrality of the character's freedom, even in the case of a translation, or, rather, of the transition from one code to another, and therefore of the transposition of a narrative text, for example, into a theatrical text, or even of the *mise-en-scène* of a written text. According to Pirandello, it is imperative that the characters show their independence from the author's intentions as well as the urgency of their actions, thus confirming *the originality of their own being*.

Contrarily to what happens to Mattia Pascal, who somehow resigns to his condition of being a living dead person, in *Tu ridi*, and particularly in the final segment of the episode, Felice seems to be claiming such independence from his own creators and, thus, goes on to seek his own death. Once the Name of the Father and of the Law are finally acknowledged by the Subject, nothing is left but one's own disappearance. Thus, it seems that Felice is capable of accomplishing that which Mattia Pascal was not: his own suicide from the story, and from life itself. In this apparently solipsistic and individual decision, the Tavianis seem to recover a political meaning in their film—indeed an extremely pessimistic one, and yet still a very important one. In the time of the Father, in the time of the City, in the time of the Law that represses the Subject, nothing is left but one's own act of will, even if it means to decide to suppress one's own being.

This is the sombre premise to the second and desperate episode of the film *Tu ridi*, one in which no hope is left in contemporary times for a loving and civilized coexistence between human beings. The invalidation of representation initiated in the first episode with the insertion of the fantastic and the imaginary ultimately reaches its climax here in the final declaration of an irreconcilable fracture between the individual and society. Thus, with *Tu ridi*, the Taviani brothers continue the descent of realist aesthetics in the realm of fantasy and imagination initiated with *Kaos*, but also with *La notte di San Lorenzo*; such a strategy corresponds to an attempt to establish an “estranging” realism as the only possible answer to the need for understanding an incomprehensible reality.

In all three of these films, as it happened in both Calvino's and Pavese's own neorealist novels, one finds an opening up to a new expressive freedom. Still moving in the realm of Realism, they activate a form of estrangement that may allow one to interrogate the Real critically, and yet also to subvert its dominant ideological structures, a process that unquestionably initiated in Modernity with Pirandello's desecrating novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, with his most celebrated theatrical works—the “theatre in the theatre” trilogy: *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*,

Ciascuno a suo modo (*Each in His Own Way*, 1924), and *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (*Tonight We Improvise*, 1929)—and his plethora of short stories, as well as with the Sicilian author's many essayistic reflections on humour.

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