

longer.

Some scholars have viewed Marco Polo's book as a lay summa of scientific and geographical knowledge. Others have stressed the element of the "marvelous" and the constant presence of Marco the merchant. It is unanimously considered a monument of civilization, the encounter of a man with a whole new world. He was instrumental in convincing Europe, more than any other previous explorer, that there was another civilization, or civilizations, much advanced and from which much could be learned: from paper money, to asbestos, to spiritual meditation of the highest order. Above all, though not the first to do so, he provided the push for other explorations and voyages. In essence he was a precursor of the Renaissance and the concept of modern man. Much of Marco Polo's fame rests on his book; very little is known of the period after his return from Asia (1295-1324). We

are not even sure when Polo was captured by the Genovese: was it in the waters near Laiazzo (1296), as Iacopo d'Acqui believes and many scholars accept, or at the naval battle of Curzola (1298), as Ramusio contends? We are left, therefore, with this extraordinary document, of which there are some 119 manuscripts and whose best version is a mixture of some of them. It is a document in which the curiosity toward new and unknown religions, among other things, come under the keen observation of the young Venetian who had joined his father and uncle on a papal mission to the great Tartar Kublai Khan. It is a journey which took him as far as Cambaluc (Peking), Hangchow (Quinsai), India, Tibet, Afghanistan, Arabia, and back to Venice. As a Frenchman said: "le principal effet du voyage de Marco Polo a etc de faire decouvrir l'Amerique a Colomb et aux Cabot - toujours des Italiens."²⁰

G. Di Scipio

FOOTNOTES

1. Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, introduzione e note di Marcello Ciccutto, Milan, BUR, 1975, p. 61. The translation is mine.
2. Quoted in Henry H. Hart, *Marco Polo Venetian Adventurer*, Norman Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1967, p. 11.
3. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated with an introduction by Ronald Latham, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 33. All quotations in English are taken from this edition and indicated by page number.
4. This city is in Uzbekistan, ancient capital of Turkestan destroyed by Genghis Khan in the year 1220. The Tartars subsequently restored its commercial importance. See also R.S. Lopez, "I successi di Marco Polo e la febbre della seta," in *Marco Polo Venezia e l'Oriente*, a cura di Alvisè Zorzi, Milano, Electa, p. 289.
5. L. Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, University of California Press, 1960, pp. 238 and 252.
6. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, p. 11.
7. Lee I. de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khan*, pp. 213-214.
8. See Olschki's chapter "Politics and Religion in Marco Polo's Asia," p. 178-210.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.
11. Leonardo Olschki does not consider absurd Marco's belief that

- Kublai's conversion would have become a reality had the Pope sent the one hundred men. This is justified by the history of conversions carried out by Nestorian priests, and the subsequent conversion of Kublai's son in law and vassal, King George, lord of the Ongut. See Olschki, p. 192.
12. *Marco Polo, Venezia e l'Oriente*, p. 282.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
14. *Il Milione*, p. 58.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
17. *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. I, p. 307 and Mongka Khan's declaration to William of Rubrouck in *Oriente Polano*, Roma, 1957, p. 195.
18. *Oriente Polano*, p. 195.
19. The Patarines was a Christian or Manichean sect that originated in the Balkans around the 12th century. They were associated with the Cathars. Soon after they appeared in Italy where their name was traced by some to a slum quarter of evil reputation in Milan, named Pattaria. They considered matter evil and were opposed to wedlock. The archbishop of Milan had a number of them burnt. The name was applied to all heretics, at one point.
20. *Oriente Polano*, p. 228.

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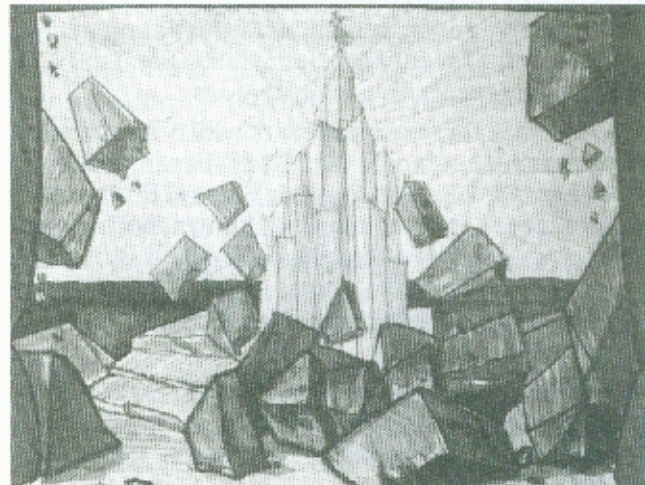
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recorded in Document #118. The hissing was so great, Mussolini was so enraged, that the work was suspended and banned. During the second act Mussolini openly encouraged the audience's rebellion, for he considered the opera immoral, against the principle of the family:

"What had happened? What happened was that the second act took place in a brothel. At that sight the "duce" was walking up and down the stage launching thunderbolts at the Censorship Commission of the Teatro Reale. A scene in a brothel? What about morality, the family. . . and in my presence? He decreed on the spot that the opera would no longer be staged in Italy."²¹

A few months later (November 1934) Pirandello was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. This was viewed in a negative light, as a demonstration again of "corporatismo."²² A secret police report from Geneva dated Feb. 1st, 1935, reveals that an exiled professor, Guglielmo Ferrero, had told some of his friends that Pirandello had fallen in disgrace with the "Capi fascisti and Mussolini" and that he was



Virgilio Marchi. Sketch for the first act of *La nuova colonia* by Luigi Pirandello (1928).

thinking emigrating abroad, probably in Sweden where his books enjoyed an enormous success.²³ A report dated March 23, 1936 indicates that Pirandello, in an interview with the Swedish journalist, Miss Bergh, "in a long and muddled philosophical discourse" made her understand that by now he was "fascista al 200 %." The report labels this last expression as Bergh's own. The tone is skeptical. Was Pirandello being sarcastic? One doubts very much that he was serious considering his relationship with the regime. More telling yet is the fact that Pirandello was excluded from the official list of Italian representatives at the IX International Theatre Congress held in Vienna in September 1936.²⁴

It seems from these facts that Pirandello's interest was mainly the theatre, and the *Teatro d'Arte* in particular. Once it closed down and it was dissolved in 1928, partly due to lack of support from the government, his association with the latter became lukewarm. His support for the regime was utilitarian. When he began to see its true face he cooled off considerably.²⁵

By 1928 he found it very difficult to live in Italy. Between 1926 and 1928 there was a consolidation of the fascist state. Fascist bureaucrats took over important executive posts in public administration and ministries. The so-called *ventottismo* was the take-over movement by mostly incompetent fascist leaders (*ventottisti*) looking for jobs in public administration.²⁶

So 1928 was a critical year for our author and his correspondence with Marta Abba demonstrates it: "Nothing but politics. Life in Italy has become unbearable. I must leave. And go far away."²⁷ From the summer of 1928 until 1933 Pirandello lived abroad. He had said to Lucio D'Ambra: "Yes I am leaving. Now that my company has been dissolved I have



Virgilio Marchi. Sketch for the final scene of *La nuova colonia* by Luigi Pirandello (1928).

nothing more to do in Italy. I shall take refuge in the cinema."²⁸

By 1928 Pirandello had probed and dealt with, but not exhausted, the rapport between the theatrical text and the author: the question of art and life. Now, in the myth play *La nuova colonia* he examines politics and society. He deals with religion in *Lazarus* and with art in *The Mountain Giants*. Almost by necessity the plot of the play within the novel must be modified. One of the important factors in this rewriting is his view of fascism and fascist Italy.

Gian Franco Venè in his *Pirandello fascista* points out that Pirandello had looked at fascism as something that could operate concretely "contro le il-

lusioni del sistema liberale e dello spappolato programma socialista."²⁹ Before Pirandello joined the Partito Nazionale Fascista, by writing that famous letter in 1924, he had placed Mussolini and fascism into his own world, his own terminology and vision of life, his own artistic and theatrical illusion. In fact, in *L'idea nazionale* of October 28, 1923 he had written:

"Mussolini can receive only blessings from somebody who has always felt the imminent tragedy of life which ... requires a form, but senses death in every form it assumes. For, since life is subject to continual change and motion, it feels itself imprisoned by form: it rages and storms and finally escapes from it. Mussolini has shown that he is aware of this double and tragic law of movement and form, and hopes to conciliate the two. Form must not be a vain and empty idol. It must receive life, pulsating and quivering, so that it should be for ever recreated ... The revolutionary movement inaugurated by Mussolini with the march on Rome and all the methods of his new government seem to me to be, in politics, the necessary realization of just this conception of life."³⁰

It did not take him long to realize that fascism was not recreating, that it was becoming pure form, and that it was not life. His rapport with the regime lacked, as Venè states, "ogni serio contenuto politico e ideologico" even though he continued to see in it "a moment of truth ... in the life of the nation."³¹ In essence Pirandello was apolitical as he had stated: "I am apolitical: I feel that I am simply, a man on earth. As such, I am a very simple and frugal one. I could also add chaste, if you allow me."³²

The feeling that life was becoming still and crystallized and practically unbearable, is found in his letters to Marta Abba during 1928:

"I am afraid of being left alone with myself. When I am alone, all the beasts of my menagerie wake up to drown me. And I don't know how to appease them. What anguish it is to look at life and to feel you may lose it."³³

In another letter he tells that there is going to be a meeting of theatre people in Rome, and that he is skeptical of its outcome and of the government's true and sincere interest in the theatre. He writes to Abba:

"We have already had so many consultations, with so many different groups, and yet nothing has been accomplished. If they continue consulting people who, because of their divergent interests, will never be able to come to any agreement, it means that they wish to create the impression that they are interested in the theatre, but that actually, nothing will be accomplished this time either. Who knows how much longer this state of affairs will last? The only solution

for me is to leave Italy for a while, and to return only when I am able to stand on my own feet, when I no longer need anybody, when I can be my own master. There is nothing but mutual hatred here; in public as well as in private, machinations to keep anyone at all from getting that which everyone is shamelessly wishing for oneself. Nothing but politics. Life in Italy has become unbearable. I must leave and go far away."³⁴

These are very revealing and important words confirmed by the life he leads until his death. In September 1928 Pirandello writes to Marta Abba: "Dear Marta, last night Z came to see me and he stayed till after midnight. He spoke of the state of confusion in which people are living because of the general feeling of insecurity... no one must dare raise his head above the ground..."³⁵

Pirandello feels more helpless than ever, overwhelmed and crushed, therefore he decides to leave: "Yes I must leave. I must go abroad, breathe in some fresh air, work, get back the feeling of my own personality. I can't wait for the moment."³⁶

It is in this state of mind that he wrote the myth play *La Nuova Colonia*, the last play staged at the *Teatro d'Arte*.

The title "*Nuova Colonia*" appears in three different works: in an early novel, *Suo marito* (1911), in the film script with the same title (probably 1935).

The first appearance of the title "*La nuova colonia*," is found in the novel, *Suo marito* (1911), later revised and published under the new title *Giustino Roncella nato Boggiolo* (Mondadori, 1941). In the early novel, *Silvia Roncella*, the writer from Taranto, who is being acclaimed in Rome as a new voice in the literary world with her book *La casa dei nani*, has also written a drama, *La nuova colonia*, which is being staged at the Teatro Valle. The major characters (Currao, La Spera, Crocco, Mita), and the details of the plot are similar to the later drama, except for one point. La Spera, in a state of desperation kills her baby, while in the play she and her child alone are saved. One of the critics in the novel will later say that *La nuova colonia* "was Medea translated into Tarantine dialect." In the revised novel, the play's title is changed. It is no longer *La nuova colonia*, but *L'isola nuova*. Pirandello rewrote slightly more than four chapters. The substance of the plot is untouched, but the whole section dealing with the author's questioning of the drama's impact on the public and its live representation is omitted, as well as the section dealing with the staging and rehearsal of the play at the theatre and the actors understanding of their part. This second point is very interesting in terms of Pirandello's poetics (see *Six Characters*), but it is not our subject here.

The title change, however, might convey less of a political idea than "*nuova colonia*." This is precisely because Pirandello has made his statement on politics and political utopia in the play, particularly in its prologue. As it regards the drama—within-the-novel itself, Pirandello wishes to limit its scope to the more narrow vision of a woman's passion and her psychological anguish. The political implications of the 1928 play seem to be absent although the plot provides the basis for a later development. One phrase in the novel is very suggestive, and it remained unchanged in its final version. Referring to the people who seek refuge in the island to create their own society, it says: "They live there outside of all laws, almost outside of time." This indeed anticipates the mythical dimension of the later drama. The most dramatic aspect of the play-within-the-novel is La Spera's vindictive and horrible deed—she kills her child—and the tragic ending intimating her own death.

La nuova colonia reflects Pirandello's sense of suffocation during fascism. It is his description of a society that attempts to create something new. There is a subtle but clear criticism, especially in the Prologue, which is the most anti-fascist part of the play, in which the desire and the necessity of a new life are expressed. The three acts of *La nuova colonia* are, as Paolucci says, the exploration of "participatory democracy. . . in all its dramatic implications," with a background of political utopias.³⁷ It is not, as another critic has stated, the theory that the play ". . . rispecchia il consolidamento del partito in regime e, a livello storico—individuale l'adesione formale di Pirandello al fascismo."³⁸

It is, on the contrary, Pirandello's notion that collective revolutions are a return toward illusion and that the rapport between the individual and society is a strictly personal one. This, therefore, excludes any adherence to a political party or system.³⁹ It means that one tolerates a ruling party; it does not imply ideological commitment. Thus La Spera is able to survive alone with her child. And since this is a myth, it really does not offer a solution, but a deeper cognition of pain. On this subject Enzo Lauretta's words are very meaningful:

"Il personaggio che vien fuori dai miti è, a mio parere, un personaggio più sconfitto e più lacerato di quelli che lo precedono perché qui c'è il tentativo mal riuscito di fuga nel mito, con il medesimo inesorabile e tragico esito."⁴⁰

The intent to create a new society and its actual process reveal a desperate attempt to make sense out of a political system. Its result is failure, a bleak

pessimistic conclusion. It is impossible to create a perfect society and the awareness that this is a utopia does not, however, obliterate the only redeeming quality: the desire and hope of a new and better world. The conclusion is negative because Pirandello considers "la bestia umana," in this case Crocco's desire to possess the woman (la Spera) and to seize power, the perennial impediment to any peaceful and just society. In this struggle the only pure element that can provide constant renovation is motherhood. This only, in its mythic dimension, can provide humanity's salvation against corruption and the possibility to relive the drama generation after generation. As Corrado Simoni says: "C'è un mito della perennità della vita nella speranza di rinnovarsi."⁴¹

Although one can accept Giacalone's conclusion⁴² that humanity cannot live outside of an established society even though the laws are absurd and society unjust (which is part of Pirandello's existential dilemma), it is important to note that Pirandello represented the discontent, the corruption, the injustice of a society which led a group of people to attempt to create a new order. The fact that the new order does not succeed, that it is bound to failure from its inception, is an existential problem. But it does not condone the previous order which has created these individuals and suppressed their aspirations. Pirandello has unmasked, rendered naked the notion that, as Bontempelli would say, "la compagine umana non puo' trovare che la distruzione totale, o il ricominciamento."⁴³ It is precisely fascism that has created this condition of suffocation and suppression. In 1928 it is the fascist regime that comes under Pirandello's accusation and it is possible that Pirandello named this play a myth in order not to incur the wrath of the fascist regime. It cannot be the glorification of a political system when the author wishes to leave the country in which such a system rules.

In the Prologue of the myth play—and the prologue is a very important feature of a tragedy—it is La Spera (an obvious abbreviation of LA SPERANZA) who first proposes going to the island and starting a new life (in the novel and the film script this is not so). La Spera says:

"I am disgusted with my life and you are disgusted with yours... Let's go. Let's go away, away from here, far away. Osso di Seppia. Who sentenced you to go there?"

La Spera—Who? The whole society around us. Can't you see? We can't breathe any more.

Currao—(thoughtfully). Back to the island.

La Spera—It would mean freedom.

Filaccione—There would be freedom, all right, on

Crotone businessmen do not think of it as merely another military installation, but rather as a badly needed economic opportunity. The area has a 30 percent unemployment rate among local youths and household incomes that are half the national average.

While this view is widely shared in this Calabrian city of 65,000, it is far from being accepted in all segments of the population. Some worry that the presence of fighter planes carrying nuclear weapons could expose them to military attack. Others are concerned about environmental pollution and cultural clashes with Americans. NATO foreign ministers are committed to the project.

A Crime Wave Hits Southern Italy

Even by the standard of Italy's crime-ridden south, this has been a blood-soaked year. In Calabria and the Naples area of Campania, the authorities have tallied at least 350 gangland deaths in 1990. Moreover, six of the victims have been youngsters, an extraordinary figure in a country where an unwritten code declares women and children to be off-limits in the battle.

Neapolitan judges and police officials are convinced that the local Camorra is even more dangerous than the Sicilian Mafia. It is less organized, less structured, they say, and therefore more prone to erratic violence.

"In Sicily, they kill at the top level," said Matteo Cinque, a senior police official in Naples. "Here, they kill anyone."

The Italian Government has recently approved a package of anticrime measures that includes millions of extra funds for the judiciary, extra police officers in "Hot Zones," and stiffer gun-control provisions.

Will Queen Isabella Be Granted Sainthood?

The Vatican is debating whether sainthood should be granted to Queen Isabella of Spain, for the 500th anniversary of her death in 1504. The Queen sent Christopher Columbus on his trip to the Americas and opened the New World for the spread of Catholicism.

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints must first decide if there is merit to the candidacy. If approved, the Queen could be declared "venerable," the first step toward sainthood. The second step, beatification, is decided by the cardinals and the pope.

"She was one of the great women of history," said the Reverend Anastasius Gutierrez, who is serving as postulator and will argue the Queen's case in front of the congregation.

Her candidacy is opposed by various religious and political groups on the grounds that Isabella expelled Jews and Muslims from Spain and instigated the Inquisition during her rule with her husband, Ferdinand II.

200,000 Foreigners Have Settled In Rome

A recent census indicates that about 200,000 foreigners reside in Rome and its suburbs. About 20 percent of these are in the country without proper documentation.

Regularly registered foreign residents in Rome total 74,134 and those are the most settled among the alien population. 40,910 immigrants are registered in the various communes surrounding Rome. Others either failed to register or are in the country illegally.

Foreigners in Rome come from 153 different countries. More than 50 percent come from developing countries, such as the Phillipines, Greece, India, Brazil and Morocco. 32 percent are from economically developed nations like the United States, Germany, France or Spain. 7 percent come from the Eastern block, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Russia. About 6,650 people are without specific national attachment and have registered as aliens without a country of origin.

Bibliography of English-Language Books on Modern Italy—

Giacomo Leopardi Poems

University of Massachusetts at Amherst—Western European Studies Program, South College, Amherst, MA 01003. 19 pages \$5.00 P&H (\$ 7.00 FOREIGN) *A Select Bibliography of English-Language Books on Modern Italian History*. 1990.

A most interesting and much needed bibliography of English-language books on Italian history has been compiled by Prof. Roland Sarti of the History Department of the University of Massachusetts under the aegis of the International Area Studies Program directed by Prof. Eric S. Einhorn.

The bibliography includes 267 titles in 16 topical groupings:

General Studies

Government and Society, 1714-1796

Napoleon and the Restoration, 1796-1815

Italian States and European Powers, 1815-1860

Conservatism Challenged, 1815-1848

Independence and Unity, 1849-1861

Liberal Italy, 1861-1915

Church and State

The South and Rural Italy

Popular Movements, Labor, Socialism

Italy and the Great Powers, 1861-1915

War and the Rise of Fascism, 1915-1925

The Fascist Regime, 1925-1945

Fascism and Foreign Policy, 1922-1945

Fall of Fascism and Reconstruction, 1943-1948

Politics and Society since 1948

The publication also lists two other bibliographies printed by the Library of Congress and Oxford Pergamon Press as good starting points for general research on contemporary Italy and other bibliographies specifically designed for research in political science, history, economics, and sociology.

Prof. Sarti also mentions two historical dictionaries, listings of journal literature and a computer-retrievable data base for article abstracts from a large number of

journals, a newsletter covering lectures, conferences, and research in progress on all aspects of Italian history, and a bibliographical guide to Italian emigration.

The bibliography "favors scholarly works published within the last twenty years ... and reflects the recent tendency on the part of historians and social scientists to write books that cross the traditional boundaries between academic disciplines It also lists works that give prominence to Italian developments in comparative perspective, even if they do not focus specifically on Italy."

Giacomo Leopardi, *Poems*. Wellfleet, Mass.: Delphinum Press, 1988. Reviewed by Prof. Giuseppe C. Di Scipio, Hunter College, CUNY

Giacomo Leopardi had very specific notions on translations. In the *Lettera ai compilatori della Biblioteca Italiana, Milano* (1816) he wrote: "E primieramente ricordami avere inteso dire che per ben tradurre sia mestieri avere in certa guisa l'anima dello scrittore che è da voltare in altra lingua." In his *Parere sopra il Salterio* (1816) he stated that the translator must feel the flame, the poetic furor of the original and that poetic translations require a great genius and a true poet. These are only some of his thoughts, there are many more dispersed in his *opus* and in many ways his opinion does not differ from Dante's own theories on translation in the *Convivio*.

This attractive volume by Arturo Vivante presents sixteen of Leopardi's most famous poems in literal verse translation, appearing face to face with the Italian original. The translation being literal, has no great pretense and by necessity it lacks poetic beauty. The force and thoughts, however, do come through. Professor Vivante was interested in providing a clear and precise meaning of outstanding poems such as "L'infinito," "A Silvia," "Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia," "La ginestra," and the remaining eleven chosen. In this he succeeds and he must be praised. In my opinion, however, there is yet to appear a great poetic rendering of Leopardi's poems.