A Shakespearean Reading of Pirandello's *Henry IV*

A Shakespearean Reading of Pirandello's *Henry IV*:

A Comparative Analysis

By

Manuel Macías Borrego

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

A Shakespearean Reading of Pirandello's *Henry IV*:
A Comparative Analysis

By Manuel Macías Borrego

This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-1916-5
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-1917-2

To my loved ones.
You know who you are.
Thank you for being there, despite all odds.

To the love of my life, remember, no one, no one, no one,
there's no one in front; death is no one if it rides on your saddle.
Please, gallop for this the land is yours.

Please, should my voice die on land, take it down to sea level and leave it by the shore.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1

INTRODUCTION

This work begins with a careful reading of two plays: *Hamlet* and *Henry IV*, by William Shakespeare and Luigi Pirandello, respectively, followed by a profound reflection derived from that reading. Two authors of worldwide stature and projection, belonging to two very different literary traditions and historical moments, demonstrate a fundamental common trait: an interest in humanity in all its breadth.

The dimension of the human and the tribulations of its existence permeate the literary production of both writers and, especially, the works studied in this doctoral book. Therefore, we propose a comparative study of both works in light of various critical reflections, always with a clear intention: to demonstrate that in the primary material, the text, of both authors, and also in the abundant tradition and critical discussion surrounding the two works, there is sufficient material to conclude that *Henry IV*, if not a complete reworking of *Hamlet*, as Umberto Artioli (2003) suggests[1], is at

[1] Artioli's reference in this context is clear, making it an essential precedent for this study: "L'Enrico IV di Pirandello è un rinnovamento allegorico del dubbio d'Amleto," in: Artioli, Umberto. 2003. "Enrico IV, ovvero la tragedia del settimo personaggio," *Angelo di fuoco*, No. 2: 49-52.
The term "Hamlet Canon" refers to a catalogue of works that revisit Hamlet and use it as a foundational point. Perhaps the most famous example is James Joyce's rewriting of the classic. Criticism often interprets Joyce's entire literary output as a reimagining of Hamlet. The melancholic nature of the prince and the labyrinthine structure of the work (with doubt and inaction as the driving forces of its dramatic development) have provided this line of inquiry with many interesting insights, as compiled by Manuel Almagro from the University of Seville, accessed August 17, 2024. http://www.siff.us.es/iberjoyce/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Almagro.pdf.
However, Harold Bloom is perhaps the foremost contemporary critic who emphasizes Hamlet's influence on the construction of contemporary Western identity, first in his *Poem Unlimited* and later in *The Invention of the Human*. His 2011 text, *Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*, where he explores the ramifications and interrelations of different texts within the Western canon that inevitably converge in Shakespeare, remains vitally important and relevant to this discussion.

least one of those texts that can be inserted into what criticism has termed the "Hamlet Canon": rewrites, more or less free versions of the Shakespearean classic that, in the light of the vicissitudes and realities of ever-changing times and epochs, turn their gaze to *Hamlet* and take it as a reference. *Hamlet* is, in that sense, a kind of literary beacon that seems to illuminate an entire literary tradition. But also, the character of the prince himself, undoubtedly, is destined, even today, to be the most controversial figure in Western literature (Bloom 2006, 661). Prince Hamlet encapsulates all the problems of human existence.

One of the great Italian critics of the English author is Agostino Lombardo[2], who, for different editions, translated many of the Bard's works and wrote interesting introductions that, laden with the allegorical symbolism typical of the English author, link Shakespeare's figure with the reality of 20th-century Italian literature.

Lombardo, in his interpretation of *Hamlet*, finds a modern hero, inept and incapable of many things, but with an extraordinary capacity to contain within himself all human psychology; that is, the dimension of all that is human. Lombardo, like Bloom in his *The Invention of the Human*, sees in Shakespeare and in *Hamlet* precisely that: the invention of the human. We highlight here the use we give to the possessive in relation to Lombardo's critical view, because approaching *Hamlet* means approaching different visions projected throughout the history of literature, as for years *Hamlet* has been the Holy Grail of Western literature[3]. However, it is not the same *Hamlet*, nor the same *Hamlet*, born from the vision of psychoanalysis, as attested by Violeta Castrillo in her article, since this discipline, as the author points out, emphasizes the complex, ineffective, and castrated

[2] A literary critic specializing in English literature and Shakespearean studies, Lombardo is the author of foundational texts such as *L'eroe tragico moderno* and *The Artist and His Masks*, as well as numerous translations of Shakespeare's works into Italian. The Italian critic's interest in the Bard is undeniable, and we also owe to Lombardo the critical conceptualization of Eduardo De Filippo's translation of *The Tempest*. This underscores the strong influence of Shakespeare on 20th-century Italian literature, particularly from the 1920s onwards.

[3] Jamieson Webster and Simon Critchley, in their work *The Hamlet Doctrine*, draw a parallel between the centrality of Hamlet's character and the myth of the Grail quest. They emphasize the impossibility of finding the "true" Hamlet among so many interpretations. This intriguing reflection helps them connect the figure of the prince to the concept of human fragmentation. In their reading, Hamlet is either all or none of the possible Grails. Reference: Critchley, C. (Ed.). 2014. *The Hamlet Doctrine*. New York: Vintage Classic Editions.

nature of the prince, destined to be the last of his line; consequently, for psychoanalytic criticism, everything ends in *Hamlet*.

Literary criticism has offered almost as many views of the classic as there have been critical readers. However, and despite everything, already from Samuel Johnson's reading of 1765, the fundamental character and centrality of *Hamlet* in an ever evolving and constructing canon begin to be glimpsed. Johnson points out that *Hamlet* is a mirror in which to reflect upon oneself and upon the nature of humanity. These two aspects, far from disappearing, are accentuated with the Romantic reading of the work, and for such important critics as Samuel Taylor Coleridge or Thomas de Quincey, the symbolic mysticism of doubt and the question of the impossibility of tragedy in the work begins to take shape. Another great name from this period, Goethe, indicates, coinciding with Maurice Morgann, the extraordinary ability of Shakespeare to create characters that are larger than life itself[4], characters that are almost people. However, it is with the advent of the 20th century and the revolution that it brought about when *Hamlet* and Shakespearean literature in general, assume an even greater dimension, occupying the centrality in the Anglo-Saxon literary, philological, and critical canon.

The 20th century produces some of the best interpretations of *Hamlet*, interpretations such as that of A. C. Bradley who, looking back at tradition, establishes a modern, innovative, and renewing vision of tragedy in Shakespeare. A. C. Bradley, like Goethe and Morgann, points out that Shakespeare's creative character, beyond scenes, places, and landscapes, focuses fundamentally on his characters, specifically on one: *Hamlet*. The prince thus occupies the centre of his own author's canon, almost like a thematic knot.

Also in the 20th century, another of the great interpretations of the Shakespearean tragedy occurs: the reading of Anne Righter, developed in the light of ineptitude, a fundamentally human characteristic, such as melancholy, which dominates, in her view, what she herself calls "the tragedy of the gambling king in Shakespeare".

---

[4] The reference is not an exaggeration on our part, but rather a literal translation of "larger than life." This is a famous quote from Morgann's *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* from 1777. Reference: Morgann, M. *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*. 2017. New York: Hansebooks.

Hamlet is also the starting point for the third great interpretation, in our opinion, of the work: that made by Jan Kott in the light of the great problems of the 20th century. Jan Kott also directs his critical gaze more to the character than to the work itself and fundamentally explores his contemporaneity. Despite being a character distant in time, Kott finds in *Hamlet* a contemporary who moves perfectly between the reality and unreality of a world in constant change.

All these visions and critical readings directly connect with the reflections of another of the great critics who, with his readings and critical interpretations, is at the foundation of this comparative study: Harold Bloom. The American critic with his *Poem Unlimited* and *The Invention of the Human* lays the groundwork for what is partly understood here as *Hamlet* and *Hamlet*. His reflections act practically as a critical horizon.

In broad strokes, it is impossible to do otherwise, we have attempted to summarize the critical view of the work by providing those names and ideas that underpin our interpretation of the character of *Hamlet* and its tragedy; visions that have helped build the theoretical-critical foundation that underlies our work. These readings and critical views of Northop Frye (1967) and Elaine Showalter (1985), among others, which approach *Hamlet* from a modern human dimension, fragmented and in constant dialogue (with oneself and with one's world) are the basis of our interpretation of Prince Hamlet and his tragedy: *Hamlet*. These and other readings are configured as a self-reflective[5] debate on what indeed *Hamlet* means.

Approaching Shakespeare, and especially his *Hamlet*, inevitably forces the reader and the critic to make important decisions, to decide which philosophical stance is taken regarding madness, which philological stance is taken regarding its textual material, deciding whether to question the identity and authorship of the work.

There are many open questions that may never find answers about the life of the English author. However, here we choose to assume that Shakespeare wrote the works attributed to him since the publication of the

[5] Here, we understand "self-reflexive" as Umberto Eco described it in *La Struttura Assente: la ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale*, as a dialogue with the text itself that contains the universe within it. The text, the work, and the critique are the primary material of our study. Reference: Eco, Umberto. 1972. *La Struttura Assente: La ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale*. Milan: La Nave di Teseo.

First Folio, the first complete collection of Shakespeare's works carried out by his inner circle in 1623. It is also assumed that like all his contemporaries, the Bard worked in a much more cooperative artistic creation system than the modern system[6]. For this reason, there are interferences and references to other great names of the period and perhaps for that reason, it is sometimes too faithful also to the sources; above all, here we stand on the side of the criticism that assumes that *Hamlet* feigns his madness. This is a gruesome aspect of the text; however, we believe that, thanks to a review of the textual material, it will be demonstrated that our critical choice rests on philological grounds. We do not mean to say that the opposite is false, but here, this analytical approach is chosen, as evidenced by the text.

With the beginning of the 20th century, the agony of art is announced[7]; however, the change of century and its beginning did not bring about its death, but rather the profound renewal of the conception of art and its relationship with a changing world. The 20th century, like the 17th century, witnesses some of the greatest transformations in human history. Hegel's enunciation therefore perhaps has more to do with a rebirth than with a demise. Change in art is inevitable, and literature, as an art form, is not exempt. *Hamlet* represents a radical change from many other Shakespearean tragedies[8].

---

[6] The artistic creation method in Elizabethan theatre differs significantly from contemporary practices. During the Elizabethan era, the system was much more cooperative, with actors, directors, and managers sharing the work. The cooperative model, in economic terms, was not unusual. In fact, Shakespeare himself may have participated as a co-partner in some of his plays before becoming a businessman. For further details on the system and its functions, see: Hodges, Walter C. 1990. *Globe Restored: Study of the Elizabethan Theatre*. Michigan: Indigenous People Media.

[7] The reflection on the agony or death of art underpins the entire philosophy and aesthetic criticism proposed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and this is particularly evident in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Hegel's approach is closely related to the issues discussed here, as, for the philosopher, memory and individuality constitute the central problem in contemporary art. Specifically, for this work, the reflections on the end of art, conceived in terms of nostalgia and the relationship between art and death, will be of particular importance. This can be linked to Baudelaire and his notion of symbolism in literature. For further reading on this aspect, see: Mein, M. 1973. *Baudelaire, Hegel and Symbolism: L'Esprit Créateur*. New York: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

[8] In this regard, it is important to note that the reception of Shakespeare in Italy reached its peak starting in the eighteenth century. During the eighteenth century, the first translations of *The Tempest* and at least two translations of *Hamlet* were

Just as in the 17th century, the change in theatre must also necessarily occur in the 20th century. And it is there, where tradition begins to connect both authors: William Shakespeare and Luigi Pirandello. The crises of their respective times create two great universal figures, two great geniuses, who have seen in the reality of their time the raw material for their art. Pirandello, like Shakespeare, transforms reality into poetry. Also, Pirandello, like Shakespeare, sees in the crisis of his time the fundamental element to make his theatre an analytical (almost cerebral[9]) theatre that perfectly reflects the intrinsic problems of his own time, but, like the Bard's theatre, capable of overcoming temporal barriers and positioning itself as an ever-relevant classic. For this reason, *Henry IV* by Pirandello, like *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, is, at the same time, a faithful reflection of its time and of ours[10].

Due solely to temporal reasons, since Pirandello is an author of the 20th century, the critical tradition that supports and arouses Pirandellian literature is smaller, only in extension, but not in importance. Pirandello is undoubtedly recognized as one of the great renovators of contemporary theatre[11]. His texts have a strong influence on many authors; his dramaturgy has provoked comparisons with writers of recognized and wide prestige such as Beckett or Brecht[12]. However, in our opinion, not enough substantial importance has been given to the relationship between his theatre, especially the theatre of the twenties (also, as will be discussed, his

published (Weis 2017, 14). However, it was in the nineteenth and, particularly, the twentieth centuries that a substantial body of Italian translations of Shakespeare's plays was established (Martínez Garrido 2015, 37-60). Furthermore, the impact of the Bard's theatre extended into other cultural discourses such as opera. "Verdi, for instance, composed at least one version each of *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*" (Wills 2012, 16).

[9] The term "cerebral" (144) is not our own, but is borrowed from: Ganeri, Margherita. 2001. *Pirandello Romanziere*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbetino Editori.

[10] Regarding the necessary contemporaneity of the character of Enrico IV, see: Artioli, U. 2003 "Enrico IV, ovvero la tragedia del settimo personaggio," *Angelo di fuoco*, 2: 16.

[11] Pirandellian criticism generally agrees that Pirandello, with his dramatic vision, is a major innovator of twentieth-century theatre. In this regard, it is important to note that his phase of theatre within theatre is typically considered an experimental stage and a quest to explore the boundaries of theatre itself. As pointed out in: Tilgher, Adriano. 2012. *Pirandello o il dramma di vedersi vivere*. Chieti: Solfanelli.

[12] The relationships between Pirandello and Brecht are the core of Gilda Policastro's work, "Pirandello e Brecht: un incontro," in the collective volume *Gli intellettuali italiani e l'Europa*, edited by Manni Editori, 2007.

narrative of the twenties), and Shakespeare's theatre, fundamentally with *Hamlet*.

We anticipate now one of the conclusions to which this comparative study arrives, and it is none other than: Pirandello, with his theatre, in his construction of interwoven and fragmented identities, based on the splitting of the character and on the drama of seeing oneself living, almost as if it were a specular reflection, traverses and occupies a literary place close to the "to be or not to be" soliloquy of *Hamlet*.

If approaching Shakespeare, as we mentioned, forces one to make decisions and clarify positions, the same occurs when the reader or the critic approaches Pirandello's work, as it is not difficult to get lost in the literary and experimental labyrinth that the Italian author proposes. In this work, we clearly position ourselves on the side of the symbolic-existentialist criticism that arises from the deep reflection of Italian decadentism for the analysis of *Henry IV*, considering that it is only apparently a bourgeois drama, and, above all, we choose to define the work as the only tragedy by Pirandello. Not only because the author wants it so, but because the conditions are met, as will be argued and discussed, to define it as such.

Henry IV is, as will be demonstrated, several tragedies, contained within each other. Therefore, it is important to note that in this book, we have chosen to develop our own system of denominations. Consequently, we have decided to refer to the theatrical text of *Henry IV* as the "framework tragedy". On the other hand, we have chosen to designate the tragedy of the character as the existence alienated from the nameless man, and, finally, the chosen denomination for the tragedy that unfolds once the mask takes centre stage is: the tragedy yet to come. Thus, we note the existence of at least three tragic levels within the dramatic text: the framework tragedy, that of the character, and that of the mask, and to facilitate understanding, we have chosen to give each of these levels (each of the tragedies within the tragedy) a different denomination: framework tragedy, character tragedy, and forthcoming tragedy.

This circumstance is analogous in *Hamlet*. And for this reason, we will use the same terminology: framework tragedy, character tragedy, and forthcoming tragedy. This fact, we believe, underscores essentially the relationship between the two works.

A fundamental decision that is taken here as an axiom of our interpretation of the character known as Henry IV is that, like *Hamlet*, he also feigns his madness; in both cases, we are faced with a metatheatrical mechanism in the service of a dramatic objective: the search for truth (which has been and continues to be ever denied).

Our interpretation of *Henry IV* and Pirandello's literature, like our reading of *Hamlet*, is based on a critical tradition that dialogues with itself, creating an interesting intellectual debate aimed at clarifying some of the doubts raised by the author himself in 1908 with his celebrated essay *On Humor*. Undoubtedly, at the core of our understanding of Pirandello's theatre is the author's own essay, as it configures itself as a self-reflective horizon and almost self-conclusive of the author's conception of art and life.

Adriano Tilgher (2012 43-45) and his vision of the double and the drama of seeing oneself living, conceived as a thematic nucleus that threads Pirandello's theatrical production, has been fundamental for this work. Also crucial has been the critical position of Matteo Veronesi (2007, 12-18, 19,21), which is in clear consonance with the postulates of Tilgher and presents Pirandello's theatre as the drama of seeing oneself in the mirror, giving essential importance to the splitting of the Pirandellian character. This splitting is captured by Elio Gioanola (1983 135 - 145) in the nineties, by combining the tragedy of *Henry IV* and postulates closer to psychoanalysis.

We mentioned earlier that our interpretation has a critical basis of a symbolic-existentialist nature, and therefore, it is essential to note that, based on the concept of dialogic polyphony, pointed out by Bakhtin (1934 183) and the theory of intertextuality by Kristeva[13], we will try to apply some of the postulates and precepts of existentialist philosophy and literary criticism by Kierkegaard to the reading of both works, to demonstrate that existence and the dimension of the human in its tragic essence are at the genesis of both texts. We will also apply another fundamental concept in

[13] The theory of intertextuality was formulated by Julia Kristeva in 1966 as a reworking of the concept of intersubjectivity. Its main postulate is that "texts can engage in dialogue with each other on various levels," and since its introduction to the field of literary theory and criticism, it has almost constituted a revolution. For more on the concept of intertextuality, its projection, and its applications, see: Moi, Toril (ed.). 2004. *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Routledge.

our text: the simulacrum, as theoretically outlined by Baudrillard in his *Simulacra and Simulation* of 1977.

For this work, the conception of the simulacrum and simulation constitute a methodological basis and an interpretative horizon because, as we will discuss in the chapter dedicated to *Hamlet* and *Henry IV*, the tragedy is configured as a *mise en abyme*[14] of simulations and simulacra that hide the character's identity and that serve to construct Hamlet's mask, which is, broadly speaking, the same mask that Henry IV wears. Along with existentialism, symbolism, or the importance of the symbol over action[15], and simulation, as a semiotic and hermeneutic horizon and frontier of our interpretation, we will use one of the concepts that we consider essential to understand the dimension of tragedy in both texts: the concept of *durée*. The concept developed by Henri Bergson in his work *Duration and Simultaneity* of 1922, to emphasize the sensation of the distance of time and its psychological dimension, a fact that makes space, essentially, a fixed element, while time is a constant flow. This reflection inevitably brings us back to the "life's eternal flow" outlined by Pirandello in his 1908 essay.

Time is, in our reading, one of the fundamental hermeneutic problems in both works. Temporality inevitably makes us beings for death, and in *Hamlet* and *Henry IV*, the temporal dimension is clearly delineated: simulation and escape, the double and the configuration of one's own identity in relation to others, and the inexorable flow of time. Reflection on temporality and lived time is inevitable in the reading we make of the two works.

The initial reflection that gave rise to this work aimed fundamentally to analyse the role of madness in both works; however, as we have been constructing our study, we believe that we can assert that we have

[14] In literature, the French expression *mise en abyme*, which literally translates to 'placed into the abyss,' refers to the narrative technique of embedding one story within another, analogous to the structure of matryoshka dolls or Russian nesting dolls. In many languages, such as German, English, and Italian, the French phrase is often used directly without translation. The use of the expression has also become generalized to describe analogous structures in various fields such as film, theatre ('theatre within the theatre'), photography, and the graphic arts in general.

[15] A fundamental characteristic identified by North Whitehead in his analysis of *Hamlet*, which we believe is entirely applicable to our interpretation of *Enrico IV*, is discussed in: North Whitehead, Anthony. 1960 *Uses of Symbol: Symbolism in Literature*. New York: Institute of General Semantics Editions.

surpassed this objective and have directed the comparative study towards a more detailed and thorough analysis of what connects, considering all the, both theatrical pieces. We have thus built a comparative study that brings into close contact two different, apparently distant traditions, but also, perhaps unintentionally, in constant dialogue. This, in our opinion, is manifested in an elaborate system of intertextual relationships that, we believe, opens avenues for future exploration.

On the organizational level, for the argumentative structure of the Book, we have tried to develop a system that facilitates its reading and its follow-up, and therefore, we have divided this work into sections, as we have already mentioned, cumulative, with a thematic, also cumulative, that constantly engages in dialogue with itself. We want to emphasize again that we have created these sections for purely organizational reasons, as it is not our intention to privilege any of the ideas expressed in any of these sections over the others. Additionally, to facilitate tracking and offer a more accurate and clear analysis of what is proposed, a brief chapter has been developed those functions halfway between a sui generis methodology and a definition of the object of study.

As we have previously advanced, *Hamlet* and *Henry IV* are complex literary works, and for that reason, in the second chapter that complexity which will be preliminarily studied to lay the necessary foundations for understanding the complete Comparative Analysis in Chapter 3.

2

APPROACHES TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In previous literary discussions and research, Pirandello's *Henry IV* has been not very thoroughly presented as a sort of rewriting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Valentini, 1990). Although perhaps the relationship between both authors, evident in our view, may have been indirectly pointed out already by Pirandello himself in his celebrated and acclaimed novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904), specifically in the famous passage from Chapter XII (*Lo strappo nel cielo di carta*), where one of the characters (Anselmo Paleari) explains the transition from ancient tragedy to modern tragedy as the transformation of Orestes into Hamlet:

- The tragedy of Orestes in a puppet-theatre, Mr. JL Meis! Automatic dolls of new invention. At eight-thirty this evening, via dei Prefetti, number 54. Worth going to see, Mr. Meis!
  So, the old gentleman, Anselmo Paleari was enunciating to me from my doorway.
- The tragedy of Orestes?" I answered. "Yes, 'd'apres Sophocle,' so this flier reads. 'Electra,' I imagine. But listen, I've just thought of some¬ thing. Supposing that, just at the climax, when the marionette representing Orestes is about to avenge his father's death on Aegisthos and his mother, someone should suddenly tear a hole in the paper ceiling over the stage—what would happen, do you think?
- I give up - said I, shrugging my shoulders.
- Why, just think it out, Mr. Meis. Orestes, of course, would be quite flabbergasted by that hole in the sky." "Why?" "Let me finish . . . Orestes would be in the throes of his vengefulness, and intent on assuaging his thirst for blood; but lo, a rent in the sky! His eyes would turn up toward that, wouldn't they, and all sorts of evil influences would become apparent on the stage. He would droop and collapse. Orestes, in other words, would become Hamlet. The whole difference between the ancient theatre and the modem comes down to that, I assure you, Mr. Meis—to a rent in a paper sky! (Pirandello 1923, 211 – 212).

As a result, the transition from ancient to modern tragedy is, for Pirandello, something that appears simple only on the surface: with a tear in the paper sky of the theatre, Orestes will be transformed, irreversibly, into Hamlet. If during the representation of the tragedy, just before avenging his father's death, if at that crucial moment for the tragedy, and not at any other, a tear were to occur in the cardboard representing the theatre's sky, Orestes, suggests Pirandello (through the character of Anselmo Paleari), would still feel the need to carry out his revenge, but inevitably his gaze would shift to the tear in the cardboard sky, and thus, paraphrasing the text of the Sicilian author: now, then, all kinds of bad omens could penetrate, and Orestes would feel defeated and overwhelmed by this new situation, in fact, thus, Orestes would be transformed into Hamlet. Consequently, if thanks to the tear in the cardboard representing the sky, which, in turn, symbolizes the impossibility of classical tragedy in a modern world, Orestes becomes Hamlet; we could infer that, by extension of this same reasoning, Hamlet, in his modernity, necessarily overcome by failure, would be transformed into Henry IV.

Traditionally, criticism, both Italian and international, has devoted little space and time to the comparative study of the literary relationships between Shakespeare and Pirandello, focusing mainly on the relationships and influences that the Italian author has had with (and in) his contemporaries. Sometimes, Pirandello criticism separates his literature and gives greater importance to Pirandello the essayist and writer of novels and short stories than to his dramaturgy. In doing so, due attention has not always been paid to Pirandello as a theoretical and innovative figure in universal theatre. Sometimes, the Sicilian author proposes his most innovative philosophical ideas in his plays, and he does so with greater power and expressiveness because those same ideas often find initial expression in non-theatrical texts before finding further development in his theatre and thus reaching their deepest dimension.

This phenomenon, so characteristic of Pirandello, is of vital importance for understanding his theatre in its entirety. Moreover, when reading Pirandello's theatrical works, especially his dramas from the 1920s, and considering this relationship we have pointed out here, it will be evident, having read Shakespeare, to wonder if there is a much deeper and fluid relationship since the influence of the English author seems undeniable in Pirandello's most recognized and celebrated texts.

It is also noteworthy that sometimes Shakespeare's theatre is considered theoretical dramaturgy, that is, these texts are seen as theatrical theory despite being intended for performance. And it's not surprising, since reflections on theatre are always present in his work. If we think about how, it functions internally, for example, in *Othello* (1604), we discover that Iago acts as a stage director (even inventing plots to keep the action going). Similarly, in *Julius Caesar* (1599), Antony fulfils the same role as Iago but also acts as a theorist; he aims to change the course of history with his words. Just consider one of the most famous passages from the tragedy:

> Antonio: Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
> I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
> The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interred with their bones;
> So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
> Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
> If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
> and grievously hath Caesar answer'd it. (Shakespeare 2007, 1859).

All that has been said about stage direction by the character, in our view, is applicable to Pirandello's theatre, as undoubtedly, upon initial reading, we can see how Henry IV is the key figure of the theatrical piece, since he undoubtedly becomes the director of his scene and the architect of his own work. This same idea, therefore, is applicable to Pirandello's theatre. It is a theatre that, while intended for performance, also has a fundamentally theoretical character, where representation itself is always present in (and in service of) the theatre. In this way, we can understand how Pirandello appropriates one of the most important reflections of Shakespeare's theatre for his *Così è (se vi pare)*, which is precisely: *All the world is a stage*.

We must highlight now, as pointed out by R. Doménech (2011, 13), that Pirandello's theatre is fundamentally (and primarily) marked by crisis. It is a theatre profoundly permeated by the influences of the crisis of the turn of the century, characteristic of the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries. Pirandello's theatre, for Doménech, is ultimately a transitional theatre, a witness to the changing times. The same could be said of Shakespeare's theatre, as the English author writes while English society grapples with the Renaissance and the Baroque.

In this sense, Hamlet is almost always identified with doubt, and this with the insecurity produced by the transition between these two worlds. Hamlet

is often also identified with the awareness of a new world in which, as in ours, doubt is an existential, structural, and fundamental factor of the new order. In this same sense, the doubt, indecision, and lack of absolute certainties that characterize the turn of the century open, in Pirandello, a crisis period comparable to that described earlier in the case of the English playwright.

The crisis of positivism breaks with all established certainties up to that point. These are no longer considered absolute truths. Therefore, it is to be supposed that authors straddling the 19th and 20th centuries would see in Shakespearean theatre, as fundamentally a theatre of crisis, a model (in all its dimensions).

Furthermore, critics assert that Pirandello takes the dimension of fin-de-siècle crisis to the extreme: "there is never a single objective reality in his plays" (Milioto 2017, 13). If we think about the text at hand, *Henry IV*, indeed, there is not a single reality, but rather it is constructed like a prism, with multiple and different facets. In this sense, in the work, there exist at least two realities: the one we understand as objectifiable and external, represented by all the characters except the protagonist, and there also exists the individual experience of the protagonist (which is articulated as a superimposed reality) not perceived by any other character. But furthermore, there is also the apparent stagnation of time, as mother and daughter, Matilda and Frida, respectively, are the fixed image in time of the protagonist's consciousness. This fact contributes to the confusion regarding the objectification and knowledge of reality.

To further emphasize the characteristic relativism that runs through Pirandello's work, it is important to highlight the centrality of the impossibility of knowing objective reality, a theme present in another work of this period: *Così è (se vi pare)*, published in 1919. This is one of the theatrical pieces extracted from an earlier textual essay: the story entitled *La signora Frola e il signor Ponza, suo genero* from 1917. The 1919 work poses a problem for the critic and the interpreter, as it directly fosters a relativistic reading, entirely subjective, according to which each of the protagonists can interpret the other's madness and life in whatever way they want, as its own title suggests – 'so it is, if you think so'. This undoubtedly generates a deep interpretative relativism. The fact that there exists one, or multiple, realities (or truths) is not the essential thematic core of the work. The truly important fact lies precisely in interpretative relativity as a metaphor for the inherent relativity of contemporary identity.

The argument of the drama is, essentially, quite simple: newcomers to a town, Mr. Ponza, his wife, and her mother, Mrs. Frola, live in separate houses, and no one in the town can understand why. This fact serves to unleash the townspeople's obsession with knowing the truth. What is (only) seemingly a comedy of errors is a metaphor for bourgeois society seen as a cage. This labyrinth of forms and identities fundamentally creates a contrast between half-truths and gossip. There is not a single reality, it is not possible to know absolute reality, but it is only possible to approximate it through individual experience.

Both authors, Shakespeare and Pirandello, include in their catalogue of works texts in which the character's identity occupies a central place. Both Shakespeare and Pirandello have a strong interest in understanding the configuration of the human. Identity, truth, certainty, disguise, entanglement, and mask are, in the literary production of both authors, at the service of the drama's objective: encapsulating in a character what is intrinsically human and its limits. Both Pirandello in *Six characters in search for an author* (1921 and 1925) and Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night* (1599–1601), for example, present characters that are split, broken, and fractured, characters that question their own self-awareness and that of other characters on stage. Pirandello does this primarily by questioning the traditional limits of theatre and personality, and therefore of the dimension of the human. Meanwhile, Shakespeare plays with disguise, not only to make the spectator/reader question how real the character is, but also to give the character greater freedom: the disguised character moves between two worlds and, consequently, can know two realities. Likewise, the disguised character can see in others and can know what others think or perceive of him. In this way, disguise is configured, in Shakespearean dramaturgy, as an essential element for understanding the concept of the mask in Pirandello. Consequently, it can be affirmed that the two works (*Six characters in search for an author* and *Twelfth Night*) deal with identity, reality, and illusion. And it is precisely there, in the distinction between the real and the fictitious, in the labyrinth of possible interpretations, in the game of disguises and entanglements, where we can affirm that *Henry IV* stands as the perfect meeting point between what is characteristically Pirandellian and what is inherently Shakespearian.

The impossibility of knowing a single reality, reasoned and reasonable doubt, and, at least, reasonable, connects the two authors. Both articulate some of their works, as is the case with those under discussion here, around a central theme: madness. A madness in self-defence against

everyone else, a madness seen almost as a protective weapon, a madness always relative, never absolute, because madness, like reality or truth, can never have an absolute value: there are no certainties, only individual experience and therefore madness always has a relative and individual character.

In both authors, madness is articulated as another way of behaving in society. Essentially, as we will see later, madness is always a way of existentially and philosophically placing oneself on the limits of society; of the child and the madman, no one expects anything. It is, therefore, a transgression of the norm (Hamlet and Henry IV) and not an illness (Ophelia). Furthermore, madness is articulated as a dramatic element, another element of the theatrical direction that the protagonists exert over the other characters. In this way, the different tensions between the character's masks, the feigned, expressed, believed, or openly accepted madness, create an added tension to the conflict between illusion and reality.

Thus, thanks to all that we have just outlined, we can begin to glimpse the profound relationship that exists between the theatre of William Shakespeare and that of Luigi Pirandello. A relationship that necessarily takes shape as the influence of the English author on the Italian playwright's dramaturgy. An influence that goes far beyond an accidental coincidence in the arguments and themes of the works (not only between *Henry IV* and *Hamlet*), and that is glimpsed in the way Pirandello makes and understands theatre: the theatricalization of reality. All of this, we believe, becomes even more evident when we read Pirandello himself in his *Taccuino Segreto (Secret Notebook)*:

> Shakespeare, though he laughs at all laws and rules [...]. His work is wonderful, grandiose, reflecting everything, the good and the bad [...]. It is studied endlessly, and endlessly new things are found. How many books must have been written about Shakespeare already? If only the reflections on Hamlet were collected, if all the good reasons given by critics to justify that within the drama is the whole human world were counted, the books on Shakespeare's unconscious genius would be countless (Pirandello 1997, 215).

Towards a comparative understanding

This section is dedicated to identifying and reviewing some preliminary, individual but defining elements of our comparative study. To facilitate

comprehension and given its importance, it is divided into several sub-sections that serve to channel the subsequent analysis of the texts.

The object of this study is broad and complex, and therefore the decision has been made to structure this section into four sub-sections: Hamlet, Henry IV, common elements, and finally, those aspects that differentiate both works. Ultimately, it serves the purpose stated in its title: to define the object of our (subsequent) study.

Hamlet: madness within the play

I am but mad north-north-west.
When the wind is southerly,
I know a hawk from a handsaw.

Madness is, from a structural and thematic perspective, fundamental in Shakespeare's work. There is a whole range of characters that support this assertion; madness is inherent to Shakespearean tragedy. However, Hamlet's madness is, at least, different from that of other characters, as he moves between a state of madness and non-madness, occupying two different roles in the play. Therefore, this issue has sparked a significant critical debate. As Augustine pointed out in 1917, "the problem of Hamlet's madness divides Shakespeare readers into two major camps: those who believe that Hamlet is indeed mad and those who, on the other hand, believe that he is feigning it" (Augustine, 1917, 210). This occurs, in part, thanks to the genius of the English author in creating believable characters, so realistic that they seem real, not fiction (Bloom, 2006, 331). These are characters so affected by human passions and emotions that they are equal to human beings in suffering, life's vicissitudes, and morality (Bloom, 2006, 332).

Any critic approaching Shakespeare will find themselves, as Augustine points out, at a crossroads: either humanize the characters and judge them as if they were people (in the real world) or become aware of the fiction behind them and interpret them as means to an end. This second option, in our reading, as in Augustine's, neglects everything human in the character: “their human dimension” (Augustine 1917, 123).

So, what stance should we take regarding Prince Hamlet's madness? We believe there are sufficient reasons in the text to position ourselves on the side of Hamlet's feigned madness. It is true that some would argue the

opposite, that the text itself demonstrates Hamlet's madness because his mother believes so. However, in our opinion, this is not sufficient evidence to conclude that his madness is real; rather, it is evidence to the contrary.

Hamlet, to fulfil his purpose of avenging his father's death, needs to know the truth behind the crime. Therefore, the person he most needs to convince of his madness is precisely his mother. If his mother doubted him, he could discover little or nothing, as we must remember that his mother has just married his uncle Claudius, his father's murderer, and Hamlet does not know if she was involved in the betrayal. On the other hand, Claudius always distrusts Hamlet's intentions and doubts him; his guilty conscience makes him see threats everywhere. Claudius, in his weak position as a usurper, always feels threatened, threatened by the legitimate heir to the throne.

Regarding Augustine's proposed debate, we can say that not only readers and critics are divided, but Shakespeare presents King Claudius's court as divided over the young prince's madness. Therefore, Claudius tries to convince his court that a madman cannot pretend to be mad (Lowell, 2010, 36). However, neither the desperate attempt to convince his mother of his madness nor Claudius's assertion about his nephew's madness, in our opinion, are alone weighty arguments to justify our choice: Hamlet's madness is feigned. The true argument that, in our opinion, the text itself provides to position ourselves on the side of fiction is that there is a truly mad character, and their madness has nothing to do with that of the prince.

Criticism agrees, however, in interpreting Ophelia's madness as real. The transformation of Ophelia's character is radical: she goes from being a shy maiden in love with the prince to becoming a mad character. Ophelia loses herself in songs and ends her own life, consumed by the loss of the two most important men: her father and her lover—Hamlet, the murderer of her father. The loss of her father, a fundamental reference, and of her lover, the guarantor of a happy ending, make Ophelia a character consumed by the misery of knowing that her end will never be happy. Faced with such a situation, Ophelia goes mad, with no possibility of turning back.

According to Kiefer (2002, 88), Ophelia's madness is the counterpart to Hamlet's madness. While Ophelia suffers and goes mad, what characterizes her as a character is her unconsciousness of her state. Ophelia is not aware that she is mad, nor does she understand why others accuse her of being

so: “And of all Christian souls, I pray. God be wi’ ye” (Shakespeare 2007, 1980).

One strong clue that we think demonstrates the faked and feigned character of Hamlet’s madness is that of Ophelia. Unlike Hamlet, Ophelia does not exploit madness to her advantage; instead, her alienation ultimately consumes her and leads her to suicide. Therefore, there is no purpose in Ophelia's mental state, as there is, on the contrary, in Hamlet's (to uncover the truth). Thus, we can begin to understand the two types of madness within Hamlet: Ophelia's, which consumes her life, and Hamlet's, which serves the purpose of his revenge. It is clear, then, that Hamlet's madness is more of a disguise than a state. Hamlet's madness is unleashed now of his father's ghost's appearance, precisely when he decides he needs to uncover the truth. That is the moment when Hamlet changes, his conduct and behaviour at court change. Thus, if madness can be likened to behaviour, it must indeed be feigned and not real.

With all that has been said so far, we can conclude that when Hamlet declares himself partially mad ("I am but mad north-north-west"), he is affirming the fiction of his madness and asserting that he is not actually mad but rather acting to uncover the truth ("when the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw"). This will be of great use to him for the subsequent development of his revenge, as it will be the moment when he pretends to be mad, the moment when the true tragedy begins that will affect all the characters in the play, one way or another, and inevitably make "Hamlet a modern hero" (Edwards 2003, 161).

Hamlet: the providence within a sparrow

There’s a Divinity that shapes our ends.

The starting point of the studies by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rassmussen (2007) is that the tragedy in Hamlet is triggered without the main character doing anything special. Both critics focus on the essential importance of the concepts of providence and chance in the work. They point out that it is chance and providence, articulated through the weight of the word, and not the protagonist, that set the tragedy in motion. In their discussion, they note that the prince faithfully believes that destiny is on his side and therefore believes that providence is operating in his Favor, hence the quote "there's a divinity that shapes our ends" (Shakespeare 2007, 1988) is crucial to understanding the work in its entirety. In the same vein, Augustine

emphasizes that: "Hamlet, once wounded with the poisoned sword, is able to fatally wound Laertes in their final fight, which is indeed another sign that destiny is on Hamlet's side" (Augustine, 1917). This theory by the English critic is reinforced by Hamlet's steadfast belief when he declares that he is acting justly by killing Laertes: “He is justly serv’d … It is a poison temper’d by himself’ (Shakespeare 2007, 1986).

Hamlet, therefore, is constructing his tragedy with two elements: inaction and destiny. For this reason, inaction, doubt, and fiction are articulated as fundamental elements for understanding providence within Hamlet. Providence serves an essential function: to make readers/spectators aware that not everything is within the control of the avenger. Thus, Providence diminishes the tragic dimension of the protagonist, as it is not, he who must or can do everything. In fact, Bate and Rassmussen point out that Hamlet accepts to duel with Laertes in an unjust fight, since the combatants can do little to change what destiny wants to happen. It is not in their hands, nor in their swords; it is in providence. This becomes evident in the following verse: “There’s special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (Shakespeare 2007, 1984).

The verse just cited attests to the function of inaction, which is necessarily linked to providence and destiny. Hamlet is allowing everything to follow its natural course. The prince, as we will analyse further later, is, in fact, always trying to buy time to accomplish his true objective: to uncover the truth behind his father's murder and, consequently, to understand the full truth conveyed by the ghost's proclamation.

Thus, in Hamlet, providence is identified with the reverse of freedom of action and free will, as everything follows a predetermined order. The prince, aware that destiny seems inexorable, decides to benefit from it. He benefits from a sort of coincidences, or accidents as Augustine (1917, 154) calls them, which unravel the plot devised by his uncle, Claudius, to usurp his father's throne. Essentially accidental is the way the company of actors arrives at the court, accidental also is the manner in which he obtains Claudius's secret letters, and likewise accidental is his ability to kill Laertes, even though he has been mortally wounded. All these accidents (or coincidences) constitute the turning points of the play, which undoubtedly demonstrate that providence is on Hamlet's side, and that it plays a fundamental role in the work. Providence, manifested through these accidents, is, in summary, the representation of the moral order of things, and therefore, it will aid the hero in fulfilling his mission: avenging

his father's death. However, for Hamlet, the objective is different: to uncover the truth. In this dissonance lies, in our opinion, if not all, a significant part of the modernity of Hamlet.

Henry IV

Madness within the play

No! Non sei pazzo!
Non è pazzo!
Non è pazzo'

In his 1992 work, Luperini suggested that the fundamental aspect of Henry IV is its ability to navigate between fiction and reality, especially regarding the protagonist's madness: Henry IV. Throughout the play, he remains unnamed, identified with the historical figure he first believes himself to be and later pretends to be, clearly feigning madness (which has already ended). For Luperini, consequently, Henry IV's madness is first transitory and then feigned.

On the other hand, Gioanola, in his renowned 1990 work, *Pirandello o la follia*, identifies Henry IV's madness with the darker side of the Pirandellian mask: in other words, with the abandonment of being and entry into believing to be. Additionally, the critic defines Henry IV's madness as a pathological problem, a fact that, in our opinion, is indisputable, albeit only until the protagonist regains consciousness and knows that he is not actually Henry IV. At that moment, madness becomes, like in Hamlet, a disguise and is used to devise a revenge plan, which he will execute step by step. Consequently, the interplay between fiction and reality is crucial here, to the extent that we could say that the entire work revolves around this interplay: time and space are employed in the service of the drama to not disturb the seemingly fragile mental stability of the main character.

Time is essentially the main factor of fiction, as the play transitions between contemporaneity and a feigned Middle Ages so as for the protagonist to live, almost, reenacting Hamlet's famous soliloquy of "to be or not to be." First, believing to be and then pretending to be the emperor Henry IV, but ultimately oscillating between (believing to) be and not to be (but pretending to be). It is necessary to emphasize a fundamental element: upon regaining consciousness, Henry IV decides to "become" the emperor of the same name.

The text asserts that the protagonist's real state of madness lasts for eight years, during which Henry IV truly believes himself to be emperor and acts as such. However, upon regaining consciousness, he makes a fundamental decision for the development of the tragedy: he will continue to make others believe he is mad, acting as emperor, to unravel the farce that his own existence has become. This is a crucial decision, theatrically speaking, as the character chooses to portray a character, perhaps because after so long it is the only reality that is not foreign to him; the world, life, has continued its course, but he has no knowledge of what the world is like outside his fiction. Living with such a large temporal gap, in a time of great changes, the only reality that provides him with total security is his fiction. Thus, Henry IV is deprived of his own identity, his only possible existence is fiction, something that Pirandello makes evident by giving other characters a name and a role to play, while leaving Henry IV with neither: (neither name nor role are bestowed upon him) Henry IV decides who to be. This, however, is not the only difference between the protagonist and the other characters, as all the others have the ability to enter and exit fiction, they move between two worlds, live outside and pretend inside, they are ultimately capable of articulating an alter ego. Henry IV, on the other hand, is deprived of this capacity throughout the play, depicting the drama of seeing himself live:

> Henry IV. (at once). No, I won't name him! (Turning to Belcredi): What did you think of him? But we all of us cling tight to our conceptions of ourselves, just as he who is growing old dyes his hair. What does it matter that this dyed hair of mine isn't a reality for you, if it is, to some extent, for me? -- you, you, my Lady, certainly don't dye your hair to deceive the others, nor even yourself; but only to cheat your own image a little before the looking-glass. I do it for a joke! You do it seriously! But I assure you that you too, Madam, are in masquerade, though it be in all seriousness; and I am not speaking of the venerable crown on your brows or the ducal mantle. I am speaking only of the memory you wish to fix in yourself of your fair complexion one day when it pleased you -- or of your dark complexion, if you were dark: the fading image of your youth! For you, Peter Damiani, on the contrary, the memory of what you have been, of what you have done, seems to you a recognition of past realities that remain within you like a dream. I'm in the same case too: with so many inexplicable memories -- like dreams! Ah! . . . There's nothing to marvel at in it, Peter Damiani! Tomorrow it will be the same thing with our life of today! (Suddenly getting excited and taking hold of his sackcloth). This sackcloth here . . . (Beginning to take it off with a gesture of almost ferocious joy while the three valets run over to him, frightened, as if to prevent his doing so)! Ah, my God! (Draws back and throws off sackcloth). Tomorrow, at Bressanone, twenty-seven German and Lombard