

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Music

RESEARCH COLLOQUIA
SPRING 2017

Cormac Newark
(Guildhall School of Music and Drama)

Opera and Italian History in the Work of Luigi Pirandello

Though best known outside Italy for his plays (in particular for his “teatro nel teatro” trilogy, above all *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, 1921), Pirandello's most consistent form of expression was the short story, so much so that in 1922 he resolved, Balzac-like, to group all his past and future production in the genre into a single meta-work, the *Novelle per un anno*. The set was to contain a short story for every day of the year, and, just like the *Comédie humaine*, its illustrious literary precedents (Petrarca's *Canzoniere*; the *Thousand-and-one nights*), its systematic organisation into volumes (re-organisation, in some cases) and its grand ambition to represent an entire social culture were key aesthetic elements. When it came to representing the place of opera in that culture, Pirandello clearly inherited other things from Balzac, and from nineteenth-century literature more broadly. Prominent among these are commonplaces such as the idea that opera-going is both essential to, and revealing of, social structures, and that immersive fictions in general can be perilous for women. “Leonora, addio!”, first published in the *Corriere della Sera*, 6 November 1910, and set in the author's native small-town Sicily, makes use of both of these tropes, but filters them through a new sensibility. A great deal has been written on the place of opera in the idea of Italy pre- and immediately post-unification; close reading of “Leonora, addio!” uncovers valuable clues to what it may have been in later, less thoroughly examined reception, in particular that of the decade or so immediately preceding Fascism. Though Pirandello's nationalist allegiance and apparent support for the regime have been subjects of controversy ever since, his manipulation of the canon of Italian opera, seemingly an increasingly weighty cornerstone of Italian culture and cultural politics, became more, not less, deconstructive under Mussolini: in the last play of the “teatro nel teatro trilogy”, *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (1930), the “play within a play” is a version of “Leonora, addio!” that has been collapsed under pressure from characteristically Modernist anxieties about historical and cultural alienation.

Cormac Newark works mainly on nineteenth-century French and Italian opera and literature. He has published articles in journals including *19th-Century Music*, the *Cambridge Opera Journal* and the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, essays in various collected volumes, and a monograph, *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust*, with Cambridge University Press. He leads a Leverhulme Trust International Research Network project on film adaptations of *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* and is co-editing (with William Weber) the *Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon* (due for publication later in 2017). He is currently Head of Research at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London.

WEDNESDAY 29 MARCH 2017, 5:00PM

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For further information, call 3917 7045