

LUIGI PIRANDELLO  
EDITED AND TRANSLATED  
BY BENITO ORTOLANI

Pirandello's  
Love Letters to  
Marta Abba



PRINCETON LEGACY LIBRARY

PIRANDELLO'S  
LOVE LETTERS TO  
MARTA ABBA





*Pirandello's*

LOVE LETTERS TO

*Marta Alba*

*EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY*

Benito Ortolani

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Copyright © 1994 by Princeton University Press  
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,  
Princeton, New Jersey 08540  
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Chichester, West Sussex

All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pirandello, Luigi, 1867–1936.

*Pirandello's love letters to Marta Abba / edited and  
translated by Benito Ortolani.*

p. cm.

English translation of 164 letters written originally in  
Italian by L. Pirandello which are now in the  
Library, Princeton University. Cf. Editor's remarks.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-691-03499-0

1. Pirandello, Luigi, 1867–1936—Correspondence.
2. Abba, Marta—Correspondence.
3. Authors, Italian—20th century—Correspondence.
4. Princeton University. Library.

I. Ortolani, Benito. II. Title.

PQ4835.L7Z482 1994

852'.912—dc20 93-38617 CIP [B]

This volume contains a selection of 164 letters from the complete edition of 552,  
which Princeton University Press will publish in cooperation with  
Mondadori, in the original Italian, in 1995.

All letters and illustrations, donated by Marta Abba, are from the  
Luigi Pirandello and Marta Abba papers. Department of Rare Books  
and Special Collections. Princeton University Library.

This book has been composed in Adobe Garamond

Princeton University Press books are printed on acid-free paper  
and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability of the  
Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity  
of the Council on Library Resources

Printed in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Princeton Legacy Library edition 2017  
Paperback ISBN: 978-0-691-60767-2  
Hardcover ISBN: 978-0-691-65458-4

# CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION	xiii
EDITOR'S REMARKS	xxiii
CHRONOLOGY	xxvii
<i>The Short Note of 1925</i>	3
250207  Marta Will Play <i>Nostra Dea</i> by Bontempelli	4
<i>Letters of 1926 from Rome</i>	5
260805  Family "Tempest." Danger of Bankruptcy	7
260817  Work on <i>L'amica delle mogli</i> as Salvation	8
260820  Influence of Marta's Letters on Pirandello	10
260821  Contents and Style of Marta's Letters	12
<i>Letters of 1928 from Rome and Nettuno</i>	14
280705  The Pine Grove of Villa Borghese in Nettuno	16
280708  Life in Italy Has Become Stifling	18
280712  Pirandello's Great Love for Marta	19
280713  Self-proclaimed "Physician" for Marta's Scruples	21
280922  Mussolini's Tactics to Undermine Rival Power	23
280925  Pirandello a Senator? Away from Italy's Dunghill!	24
<i>Letters of 1929 and 1930 from Berlin, Rome, and Milan</i>	27
290314  Desperate Tears for Marta's Departure	30
290315  Gaffe at the Embassy: The "Secret" Revealed	32
290316  The Evening Hours Remain Unbearable	34
290320  Marta as Meaning, Worth, and Purpose of Life	37
290322  Mussolini Names Pirandello to Accademia d'Italia	38
290323  Marta Stresses Distance, Signing: Marta Abba	41
290325  Marta No Longer Has the Feeling She Had Before	42
290326  Congratulations and Invitations from Everywhere	45

290328	Marta's Cry for Help, Will Start a New Company	47
290329	Marta's Training as an Artist	49
290330	Marta's Mentor: Analysis of Marta's Character	52
290331	A Lonely Easter Day Mourning a "Lost Feeling"	54
290401	Embarrassing Easter Meal at a Friend's Home	56
290402	Easter without Resurrection: I Live without Life	58
290405	The Nature of Pirandello's Love for Marta	60
290406	The Problem of Languages in the Talking Film	62
290408	Work on <i>O di uno o di nessuno</i> . Birth of <i>Giganti</i>	64
290411	Sentence of Life or Death? Faith in Mussolini	65
290416	From London: The Talking Film—What a Horror!	68
290421	From Berlin: New Contracts Signed in London	70
290422	Euphoria in the Creative Process	71
290425	Will Talking Film Abolish Theater?	73
290428	Truly There Is No Man Unhappier than Myself	74
290430	With Otto Kahn: A Film for Paramount?	76
290505	Marta Ignores Pirandello's Tragic Fantasies	78
290508	Bucolic Wishes for Peace and Recovery	80
290627	Thoughts about the Joy of Dreams and Madness	82
290628	Flowers and Telegrams for Pirandello's Birthday	84
290629	Expectation of a Hit Season in Berlin	85
290716	Return to Berlin: Feist and Meinhardt	87
290720	A Pirandello Revival in Italy	89
290721	Death of Max Reinhardt's Brother	90
290722	<i>Come tu mi vuoi</i> , in the Midst of Despair	91
290913	Again in Berlin, Pirandello Sues Feist	92
290927	Creative Process: Independently Alive Characters	93
291011	Villino in Rome Finally Sold for 900,000 Lire	95
291212	Pirandello's Theater Is Dead without Marta	97
300227	From Berlin: <i>Questa sera</i> Triumphs in Königsberg	99
300228	Turmoil—Such as to Go Insane or Even Die	101
300301	At the Brink of Suicide—I Am Your True Father	103
300303	Mortal Crisis Because Marta No Longer Gives Life	104
300304	Mussolini Interfered with the Nobel Prize	106
300310	A Pirandello Revival in Germany	107
300312	Also in Paris a Favorable Atmosphere	108
300316	Worried about Marta's Exhaustion	110
300324	I Don't Have a Moment of Peace: Suicide?	110
300325	My Marta, How Much I Love You! <i>L'Ennemie</i>	112

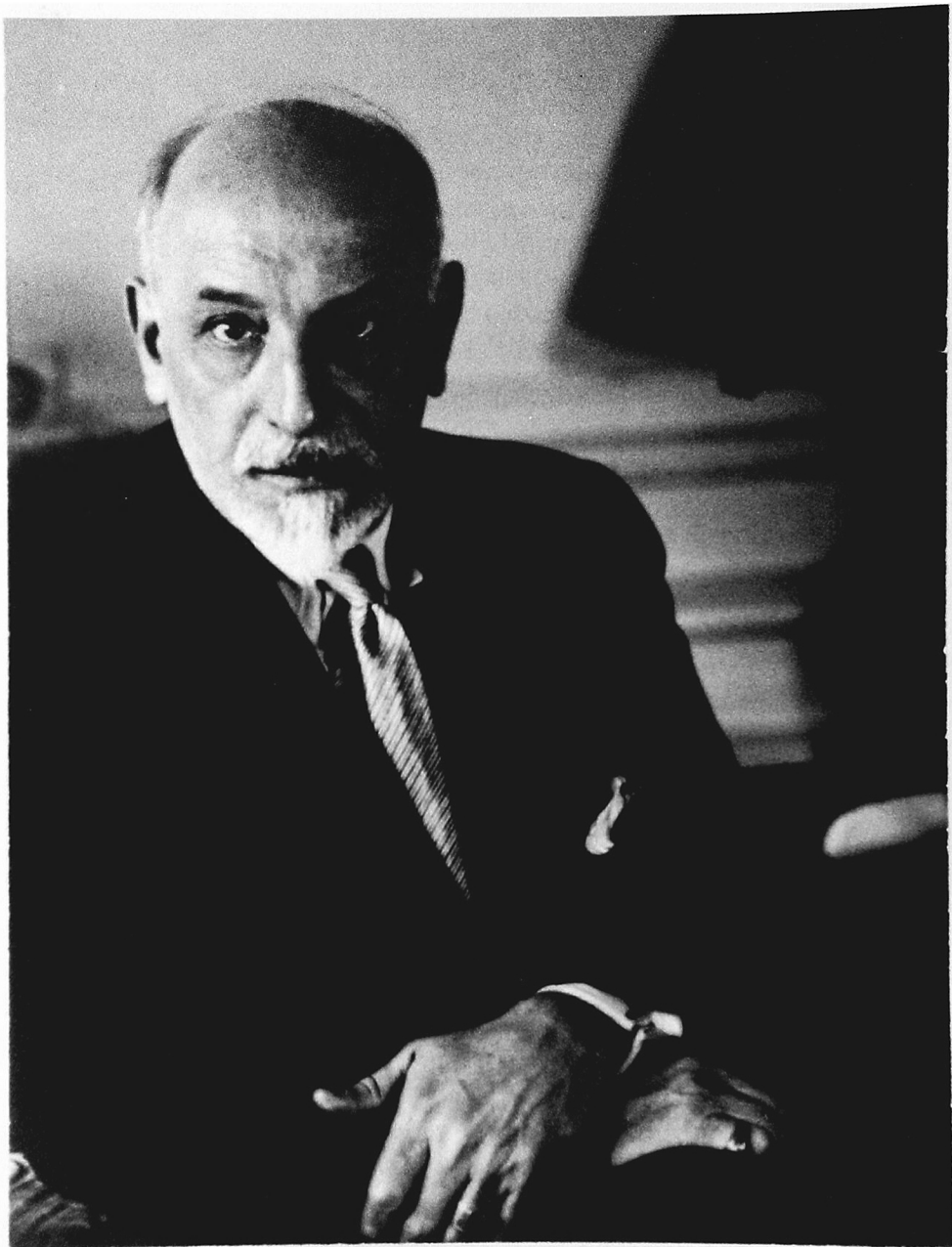
300402	Marta's Reproaches for Being Disrespectful	114
300405	Very Weak but Happy about Festivities in Naples	116
300406	First Idea about <i>Quando si è qualcuno</i> in German	117
300409	Life at a Great Distance as if in the Past	119
300412	Contract for <i>Questa sera</i> in Berlin. <i>Fiamma</i>	119
300415	Foresees a Miraculous Success for <i>Questa sera</i>	122
300417	Triumphs of <i>Questa sera</i> and <i>Come tu mi vuoi</i>	124
300418	No Actress in the World Is Comparable to Marta!	125
300420	Liturgical Easter Play in Sicily	126
300425	Creative Process of <i>Giganti della montagna</i>	128
300429	Glory Will Come from Abroad or after Death	130
300430	In the Euphoria of Creation He Feels like a God	131
300504	Triumph of <i>Questa Sera</i> in Milan	133
300505	Contract with Lasky/Paramount. Gilbert Miller	134
300507	Announcement of Pirandello's Voyage to America	136
300514	Italy's Ingratitude toward Her Best Children	137
300517	Fritz Lang Wants to Film <i>Six Characters</i>	138
300518	The German System of Exhausting Rehearsals	140
300522	The American System of Preparing Film Scripts	141
300524	Life—a Journey without Arrivals and without Rest	142
300525	A Foreigner in Italy, He Needs a New Country	144
300527	The Talking Film as a New Expression of Art	145
300601	Tumultuous Opening of <i>Questa sera</i> in Berlin	146
300602	Attempts to Separate Him from Marta	148
300603	Reasons for the Violent Attacks of the Berlin Press	150
300605	Thomas Mann Condemns Anti-Pirandello Wave	152
300606	Decision to Abandon Germany for Good	154
<i>Letters of 1930 from Paris, Berlin, London, and Rome</i>		156
300727	A Pirandello Season Planned for New York	157
301215	Pirandello's High Expenses Criticized by Marta	158
301217	I Am Really Ready for Death	159
301226	<i>As You Desire Me</i> Is a Hit in Philadelphia	159
301231	Jealous of Those Who Are Close to Marta	160
<i>Letters of 1931 from Paris, Milan, and Portugal</i>		162
310101	Telepathy with Marta on New Year's Eve?	163
310103	<i>As You Desire Me</i> Is a Hit in Chicago	164

310108	Max Reinhardt Revives <i>Six Characters</i> in Vienna	165
310109	I'll Go Soon, but My Plays Will Remain	166
310112	Pray for Me, My Marta, and Have Mercy	167
310125	Desolation of Wearing the Sad Mask of Old Age	168
310127	I Have a Penetrating Look and Two Devilish Eyes	169
310208	Marta Is the Greatest Actress in the World	171
310210	My Art Has Never Before Been So Full, So Varied	172
310216	<i>Giganti della montagna</i> : I Am Touching the Peak!	174
310220	I'll Be a Millionaire by the End of This Year	176
310222	My Dream: A Theater of Your Own	177
310225	A Horrible Night—I Felt I Was Going to Die	179
310317	Fears of Family Influence on Marta while in Rome	180
310330	Glory of a Poet and Glory of an Actress	182
310401	Shubert Wants to Organize Marta's Tour in the U.S.	184
310422	Marta Is "Solar," "Mediterranean," "A Southerner"	185
310427	I Feel Abandoned by You, I'm Going Insane	186
310501	Implores Forgiveness: His Mind Was Perturbed	188
310503	The Lilies of the Valley for Marta's Portrait	189
310512	My Fantasy Has Never Been So Lively	191
310515	Italy Cannot Do without Pirandello	192
310520	Catastrophic Situation of Show Business in the U.S.	193
310531	Alone in the World with Art as Only Companion	194
310611	You Are the Holiest among All Women	195
310718	Describes His New Apartment in Paris	196
310722	A Happy Marta Flying from London to Paris	197
310726	Nobody Will Ever Love You More than I Do	199
310803	How Beautiful You Must Be, a Joy in the Sun	200
310806	Failure of Bourgeois Order and Technology	201
310819	Rushes to Genoa to a Sick and Depressed Marta	203
311009	Marta Is Invited to Perform in Paris	204
<i>Letters of 1932 from Paris, Rome, and Castiglioncello</i>		207
320118	Marta Leaves Paris after Performing in French	209
320122	Isn't It Better to Extinguish My Life Forever?	210
320126	I Have the Blackest and Most Frightening Despair	212
320206	Mussolini Says Pirandello Has a Bad Character	213
320211	A Discussion on the Theme of <i>Trovarsi</i>	215
320214	Mussolini's Coarse Reality and His Necessary Myth	216
320216	Pirandello Describes His Serious Heart Attack	217

320222	The Disease Is Life Itself: Only Medicine Is Death	218
320310	The Duce Doesn't Like the Fact that I Live Abroad	219
320314	Enthusiastic about the Audience with Mussolini	220
320318	I Work Directly with the Duce	221
320402	I Want to Give Energy, Work, Ideas for Everybody	223
320427	Triumph of <i>Pensaci, Giacomino!</i> at the Congress	225
320504	I Am the Only One Who Is <i>Truly Alive</i> Everywhere	226
320804	<i>As You Desire Me</i> Not Ready for Venice Festival	228
320822	Perhaps You Would Prefer Never to See Me Again	229
320904	Discusses His Play <i>Trovarsi</i> and Buys a Car	231
320908	Marta Is Upset by Family Misunderstandings	232
320909	A Laborious Creative Process for <i>Trovarsi</i>	234
320912	Finds the Solution for the Finale of <i>Trovarsi</i>	236
321108	Triumph of <i>Come tu mi vuoi</i> Directed by Baty	238
321125	I'd Be Able to Have a Home Only with You	239
321206	Frightening Audience with Mussolini	241
<i>Letters of 1933 from Rome, Paris, and Castiglioncello</i>		243
330209	A National Dramatic Theater at the Argentina?	246
330304	Marta Abba Is Today Our Greatest Actress	247
330316	Limited Obedience to Fascism	248
330517	Mussolini Maneuvers against the Monopoly	250
330713	I Am Working with the Sea in Front of Me	252
<i>Letters of 1934 from Rome, Milan, London, and Paris</i>		255
340224	Pirandello Experiences Financial Difficulties	256
340324	Animosity against the <i>Favola del figlio cambiato</i>	257
340329	Mussolini Forbids Performances of the <i>Favola</i>	259
340405	Giordani's Arrogance in the Film World	260
340429	What a Trap Is the Civil Law!	262
340604	I Don't See Any Reason for Anything	263
340726	Creative Process for <i>Non si sa come</i>	264
340805	A <i>Teatro Stabile</i> in Milan—a Lifelong Dream	266
340821	Trying Hard to Complete <i>Non si sa come</i>	268
341115	Besieged Because of Announcement of Nobel Prize	269
341129	Festivities in Paris Because of the Nobel Prize	271
341206	The Company of Myself Is Unbearable to Me	273
341212	Celebrations in Stockholm for the Nobel Prize	275

<i>Letters of 1935 from Paris, Rome, Milan, and New York</i>	277
350203 Negotiations in London for Pirandello Company	280
350214 Is the Fall of Paolino Giordani Imminent?	281
350217 Overview of Pirandello's Income in Ten Years	283
350219 Audience with Mussolini about National Theater	284
350301 The State Theater: A Firm Intention of Mussolini	286
350318 Day of Judgment for the Gang of Enemies	288
350408 I Never Felt So Much Tenderness for You	289
350425 Pirandello Honored at Palazzo Ruspoli with Ciano	290
350721 In New York: Defends the Conquest of Ethiopia	291
350813 Endless Negotiations but No Contracts in the U.S.	293
350830 Pirandello's Art "Above" the Taste of the Masses	296
350907 International Tension Hampers Negotiations	297
351014 Heart Attack at the Pier on Arriving in Naples	299
351027 Living Means for Me to Work, to Create	300
351030 Mussolini Invites Pirandello to His Box	302
351209 I Fervently Hope that I Have Little Time to Live	303
351218 Marta Undecided about Publishing Her Notes	305
 <i>Letters of 1936 from Rome</i>	 308
360114 I'd Love to Spend All My Time Writing to You	310
360116 I Feel as if I Were Dying amid Petty Routines	311
360117 Dangers of the Newly Planned State Theater	312
360306 Does Not Want to Wear Glasses Because of Vanity	313
360311 Marta Is Depressed Because of Fatigue	314
360313 I Cannot Keep a Grudge against Anybody	315
360406 Negotiations for <i>Tovarich</i> with Gilbert Miller	316
360413 When I Know You Victorious, I Can Die	318
360427 I Am Waiting for Your Triumph in America	319
360430 A Vision of Marta's Glory in America	320
360516 I Do Not Know What to Hold On To	321
360530 I've Fallen into a Bottomless Abyss of Sadness	323
360629 I Am in the Age Bracket in Which People Die	324
360712 I'll Always Have Your Affection, as Long as I Live	325
360721 I Don't Know Where to Flee, I Cannot Take It!	327
360801 The Truth Is that I Should Die	328
360919 Pirandello Lives with His Thoughts in New York	329
361007 In Berlin Goebbels Orders a Pirandello Revival	330

<i>Contents</i>	<b>xi</b>
361025 Overjoyed at Marta's Triumph on Broadway	332
361121 Dream of Visiting Marta in New York, Alone!	334
361204 If I Think about the Distance, I at Once Feel I Am Sliding into an Abyss of Despair	337
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>339</b>
<b>SUBJECT INDEX</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>NAME INDEX</b>	<b>352</b>



• Marta  
il suo  
Napoli

Gen. 30. VII. 1950.

FERRARI  
FRANZI  
1951  
D. 1950/1951

## INTRODUCTION

---



**T**HE NATURE of Pirandello's relationship with Marta Abba has been a subject of curiosity and controversy since the world-famous aging writer met the beautiful young actress for the first time in 1925. Sixty years later, an octogenarian Marta, referring to the love letters still locked in the vault of a bank in Milan, told me several times, "The truth is all there, clear and simple; nothing needs to be added."

At the end of several years of editing the thousands of pages so neatly handwritten by the Sicilian playwright, I must acknowledge that Marta was right. The reader will find Pirandello's secret emotions and the sad reality of his love story fully revealed in the letters selected and published here for the first time in English translation.

For decades Marta was hesitant about making these important documents available to the public. She seemed unable to make up her mind—torn between her desire to disclose to the world an intimate, still-unknown Pirandello and her reluctance to lift discreetly the veil cloaking a treasured love secret that most readers would probably misunderstand and some even defile with mockery. In 1984, at the age of eighty-four, the actress finally resolved to proceed with publication. Through Peter Putnam, her American friend Mildred Andrews Putnam's son, who as a child in Cleveland was bounced on her knee and who later tried for years to convince her to publish the much-talked-about correspondence, she was put in contact with Princeton University. Princeton was pleased to accept the coveted gift, guaranteeing its preservation and publication both in the original Italian and in the present English version.

Marta confided to me many times that she had finally come to her decision because she felt it was her duty "to make known how much Pirandello suffered." She explained that for her it was most important to disclose the extent of his existential anguish—so far hardly suspected by anyone. In fact, the letters most dramatically reveal a Pirandello "horribly alone" for the better part of the last ten years of his life, prostrated with long periods of deep depression and cruel despair, drowning in an ocean of intimate pain and "going mad from it." His martyrdom ended only in

the bosom of death, so often desired and so often entertained as a voluntary way out of his unbearable torment.

At Peter Putnam's suggestion, I went to Italy and met Marta for the first time in the resort village of San Pellegrino Terme on September 7, 1985. By nature suspicious, she needed to be sure that I was an editor/translator suitable for the task, one she could entrust with the care of this "sacred" part of her life. She screened me carefully with respect to my deep feelings about the Maestro, and I plainly told her what I had always thought: that Pirandello is a poet of human suffering, and that to understand and appreciate him there is no other way but to learn to hear the agony echoing from within his dramatic voice, a voice that is in essence an excruciating scream of pain. Marta's mistrust quickly melted away. She said to me with great ingenuousness that the Maestro was overwhelmed by his own sensibility, consumed by an intense longing for love, integrity, and trust, but that he lived, on the contrary, with the constant feeling of being "betrayed at all levels." I was moved by this revelation of Pirandello's most intimate confidante and, later, developing her insight, I proposed to her an interpretation of the Pirandellian oeuvre as flowing from a keen obsession with tragic betrayal. The writer, in his "abyss of sadness without end," suffered immensely because he felt betrayed by the people closest to him and whom he loved most; betrayed professionally by his "friends" and "collaborators"; betrayed by the disastrous political-administrative situation of his country under fascism; and finally, betrayed also at the cosmic-universal level by a hostile and cruel "fate" that seemed almost to enjoy its little game, encouraging man to dream the most beautiful dreams, only to delude him afterward with a mocking smirk, indifferent to the immense pain inflicted.

Against the backdrop of this dark tragedy of betrayal suddenly loomed his love for Marta, a love that soon became the sole source of light for his spirit, the inspiration of his art, and consequently the only reason for keeping on with his involuntary, tormented, and aimless journey on earth. This love absorbed and consumed the last years of his "most useless existence" with a total and obsessive intensity of which his biographers until now have had hardly a clue.

The gamut of guesses about the real nature of Pirandello's love for Marta has swung from a purely platonic, literarily elaborated romantic involvement to ironic assumptions of a long-lasting, trite sexual affair. The letters definitely exclude this last hypothesis. Yet it is enough merely to glance at the entry Love contained in the Subject Index of the present volume to conclude without a doubt that Pirandello's feelings for the

actress were not comparable to a father's affection for his daughter, nor can they be characterized as a merely literary infatuation. The letters explicitly reveal the forcefulness of his feelings and the demands made on Marta for a reciprocal correspondence of a much different quality than she was ready to provide. Pirandello, in fact, writes as one who loves in toto. Until his very last days he insistently begged his beloved accurately to describe everything about herself so that he would be able to follow her in every moment of her life, to "see her" as a living fantasy, in every posture—including the most intimate—and he pressed the issue to the point of provoking indignant replies from an offended Marta. He never ceased imploring her to offer even a small token of reciprocation—as rejected lovers often demand on the brink of despair. Only a rapturous adoration can explain the obsession of counting the days and hours required by the mail service to deliver her letters, morbidly awaited and cried out for. The longing for a tender word or a special lover's sign never abandoned him—although bitter experience had made very clear to him that all he could realistically expect was news related to business and sparse routine expressions of respectful devotion.

"Hostile fate" determined that Pirandello would meet the greatest love of his life far too late, and amid moral and legal circumstances that would render a joyous conclusion unthinkable. They first met in Rome at the Odescalchi Theater, where the playwright was forming a company with the intent of giving to Italy an artistic theater of the highest level. The actress, originally from Milan, not yet twenty-five and at the beginning of her career, was engaged to debut in the leading role in Massimo Bontempelli's *Our Goddess*. Pirandello was fifty-eight years old and in the throes of a painful family situation, because his wife's illness had already progressed beyond any serious hope for recovery and made her permanent confinement in a mental clinic unavoidable. Divorce at this time in Italy was nonexistent. His children were older than Marta. An authentic, old-fashioned Sicilian gentleman, honorable and faithful to traditions, Pirandello tried to control the intense feelings that threatened to overwhelm him. He was also very conscious of his international fame and felt the eyes of the world focused on him. Imminent old age obsessed him.

In a scene from his last autobiographically inspired play, *When One Is Somebody*, Pirandello presents a very famous elderly poet who is being castigated by the young and beautiful Veroccia. She bitterly recalls a previous time when, consumed by love, she offered everything he wished: "Everything—and you know it—you didn't want it, you coward . . . you didn't have the courage to take me, to take the life that I wanted to give

you—you who were suffering because you had none.” It is the end of the second act, and the poet, left alone, begins speaking with infinite tenderness to Veroccia as if she were still there: “You were ready for everything, and now you berate me for the wrongs I didn’t do to you . . . you’re still not aware of the restraint in me . . . the humiliation of old age . . . and the shame inside, the shame then, as of an obscenity, because I felt, behind that old appearance, a heart still young and warm.” The drama probably mirrors a real event in Pirandello’s life. It certainly reflects the writer’s desperate feeling of an immense pain for the irreparably lost last chance to *grab life when it offered itself—a feeling that permeates a number of the most moving letters in this epistolary*. The fire of yearning for the realization of his unattainable great love was destined to burn unsatiated to the end, leaving the desolate lover in an agonizing limbo into which he seems to have fallen after a mysterious, traumatic episode. Pirandello probably refers to it in a letter of August 20, 1926, as to an event well known to Marta—an “atrocious night spent in Como.” Three years later, abandoned by Marta in Berlin, the playwright attributes his misery to “a feeling that is no longer there” in the heart of his beloved, thus implying that the feeling had been there previously. The secret hope, however remote, that things might still change and that the feeling might rekindle itself is never relinquished until his death.

In the course of her lifetime the actress showed little or no inclination for amorous adventures. Under Pirandello’s tutelage she reinforced her negative attitude toward matters of the flesh. An engagement at a very young age was arranged by her family but did not survive Marta’s overwhelming priority—to succeed in a major way in show business. After Pirandello’s death, her 1938 marriage to the wealthy socialite Severance A. Millikin resembled the glow and the vicissitudes of a Hollywood melodrama, with a glamorous honeymoon among the riches and the power for which she had always strived. The harsh reality of an impossible union in the milieu of Cleveland’s conservative high society led to a bitter separation after long years of fighting. Later on, at the rare times she touched on the topic of her marital experience, she would rapidly dismiss the subject with gestures of loathing. A divorce was granted in 1952, based, at least partly—if we give any credence to the local gossip—on Marta’s persistent refusal to live the conjugal life. Ever since her youth the actress was extraordinarily reserved in her relationship to the opposite sex. In the years of her development as an actress everybody knew that she was “very busy” with Pirandello, which might also have served her well as a convenient shield from unwanted male attentions. No record is available of any affair

or romantic involvement. She was very attached to her family and totally dedicated to art, pledging all her energies in the relentless struggle to survive and succeed in the junglelike world of Italian theater. Raised as a Catholic and sincerely attached to her faith, she couldn't reconcile Pirandello's aspirations for their relationship with her religious and moral convictions. She was therefore duty bound to disallow the realization of any expectations on his part that might trespass the limits of the paternal affection of a teacher and a guide.

Marta was at his side during the three years in which Pirandello's company toured throughout Italy and abroad (1925–1928). After the troupe's breakup, she spent approximately six months in Berlin—living most of the time with her sister Cele in a room next to Pirandello's and always keeping the necessary distance. During that period she was Pirandello's shadow and adviser, sustaining him with affection and pragmatism while he struggled with dreams of boundless riches, fits of rage at a “gang of enemies,” grand plans to radically reform the Italian theater, and the childish expectation that Mussolini would solve, like magic, all of its problems with one act of authoritarian intervention. She comforted him during bitter family feuds and his never-ending legal entanglements with agents and lawyers.

After her traumatic departure from Berlin in 1929, Marta's role as confidante continued from afar. His desperate cries of love, however, and the even more desperate requests for an answer to his agonizing doubt about her sentiments were systematically and coldly neglected by the actress as “useless chatter” that merited no response. Marta never abandoned her habit of addressing the Maestro formally, using the respectful Italian pronoun “lei,” which excludes intimacy and familiarity with the person to whom it is directed. “For me he was like a god,” she confessed to me with a tone that left no doubt as to her sincerity.

The reading of the letters does exclude not only the hypothesis of a trivial sexual relationship, but also that of a senile infatuation in a platonic literary romance. In the daily messages we are confronted with a man whose blood has long reached the boiling point, whose tears are real and abundant, whose capacity for torment seems almost unlimited. There is the mad grabbing for every thin thread of hope; the unbearable frustration resulting from the long distances away from Marta and the subsequent loneliness; and even the palpable temptation closing in on him to reach into a drawer containing an implement of death and turn it on himself. But there is also relief. We read of his unbridled joy over every fulfillment of his beloved's desires and the generous offering of his time,

his creative energies, and his moral and economic support in the effort to make Marta a happy, admired, and envied woman.

The final curtain of this extraordinary drama of an impossible love is drawn on a semihappy ending. Pirandello is ecstatic at seeing realized his ambitious dream of making Marta a “star” of international fame. This new, most exalted glory of his beloved is construed into a supreme moment of almost divine radiance during which Pirandello feels he is finally able to tiptoe out of this life and abandon this earth, which had lately seemed to him too small, remote, extraneous—leaving behind the torments of loneliness, the bitterness over his now-ruined plans to reform the Italian theater, the recurring financial worries, and the wretchedness of a peripatetic existence without any permanent mooring.

Emerging from this scenario of unrequited love we perceive, rendered with vivid immediacy, the stark contours of a personality central to the arts and culture of our century at some of his most distinctive moments. We experience with Pirandello the triumphs of recognition (nomination to the Italian Academy, conferring of the Nobel Prize, his many dramatic successes across the stages of the world, honors conferred by many prestigious international cultural institutions); his satisfaction in gaining access to the highest levels of power (personal rapport with Mussolini and with the most prominent exponents of fascism in Italy and nazism in Germany); his relations with the most influential figures of his time in the most varied fields of endeavor (science, finance, show business: Einstein, the Rothschilds, Chaplin); and also his defeats (the Berlin fiasco of *Tonight We Improvise*).

Numerous letters are devoted to the problems encountered by Marta in her daily battle to assert herself with her company in the jungle of the Italian theater, struggling against a hostile monopoly of owners/managers who controlled the use of every important theater in Italy for profit alone, without any interest in the artistic level of the performances. Other letters depict Pirandello’s frustrations in his lifelong fight against that hated “gang of enemies,” who had been the main cause of the demise of his Teatro d’Arte and now were trying to make the continuation of his work through Marta Abba’s company impossible. Pirandello appears as a very poor businessman, often exploited and cheated by dishonest or incompetent agents, frequently ensnared in lawsuits that compelled him to maladroitly swindle himself amidst a hallucinatory, Kafkaesque judiciary system.

The letters—written during a decade of fascism’s rising and undisputed power in Italy—reveal a Pirandello lacking a solid conviction in his

political orientation. His feelings toward Mussolini are imbued at times with faith and even enthusiasm, at other times with disillusion and contempt. Pirandello, impelled by the conviction that only an act of “lofty” rule could put an end to the arrogance of those who were sacrificing art to the boorish thirst for profit, turns suddenly full of hope and support for the dictator when Mussolini seems to be personally ready to realize the dream of a state-funded artistic theater. We listen to the Maestro applaud colonialism in Ethiopia, parroting the bombastic speech of Fascist propaganda, but we also hear him hurling bitter criticism against the dictator and his corrupt government when the appalled playwright sees the state-allocated funds—originally promised by Mussolini to establish a noncommercial national theater under Pirandello’s artistic direction—actually wind up in the pockets of the usual unworthy profiteers.

Although they do not shed any substantial new light on Pirandello’s literary-theatrical opinions and theory, the letters reveal interesting aspects of his process of artistic creation, confided to the beloved while in the flowery throes of an irresistible inspiration, or in a laborious search for plots and solutions to scenes and plays still in outline form. They contain, also, sharp echoes of the heated controversy then surrounding the talking cinema. This novelty initially disconcerted the playwright, producing in him a sense of “horror” that quickly abated as he accepted sound film as an “art form” that would develop unlimited possibilities for the future and create new artworks of great beauty and originality. He became enthusiastic about the idea of creating films as sequences of beautiful images illustrating famous musical compositions—out of which project he hoped himself to harvest immense profits. The letters offer candid descriptions of the symptoms of his illnesses, their frequency and seriousness, and his deep mistrust of medicine and physicians; they also show Pirandello’s extraordinary capacity to concentrate on his creative work and on a never-ending series of negotiations with managers, editors, agents, directors, translators—while in the midst of much spiritual turmoil and physical pain.

The intimate Pirandello of these letters does not discuss the fundamental questions of human existence: the mystery of its origin, the disturbing question of why we live, or the relativistic and atheistic philosophy that goes under the label of “Pirandellism.” He does, however, confess an envy of Marta’s faith in God and on more than one occasion implore his beloved to pray to that God for him. He also frequently appeals to indisputable principles of justice, upholding rigorous standards of public and private morality, always struggling for their triumph and implicitly affirming

the universal truth and value of an objective ethic. We meet in the letters a Maestro who teaches his disciple Marta never to compromise the dictates of her conscience, never to give up her lifelong pursuit of the highest moral and artistic standards.

Pirandello often appears angry at envious and malicious enemies, especially in his own country, against whom he does not spare harsh words. His repeated attempts to relocate permanently—first to Berlin and then to Paris—can be explained as a reflection of his resentment against a native country that did not recognize him as he would have liked. Marta, when deciding the final destination of the letters, believed she was faithfully interpreting Pirandello's will by choosing a library in the United States, perhaps urged by the recurring echo of one of the writer's exhortations that she had heard and read many times: "Away, away, out, out of Italy!"

The style of the correspondence, which flows monotone for long paragraphs in order clearly to communicate news and practical instructions, changes suddenly when Pirandello shifts into inspirational passages—often followed by swift returns to the perfunctory language of plain business. In his masterful use of the rhetoric of persuasion, Pirandello implores, praises, remembers, argues, and appeals to Marta's sense of responsibility—sometimes construing convoluted sentences just as his characters do in his plays; that is, using the same dubious consistency of logic that leaves the mind unconvinced but moves the heart because of its underlying, heartbreaking despair. Brief touches of almost childlike self-justification—when Pirandello catches himself in the uncontrollable act of breaking the thousands of promises to his beloved not to perturb her mind anymore with his heart-wrenching laments—alternate with powerful descriptions of his unhappy existence, without purpose or hope after Marta abandoned him. Adjectives abound—two or three often synonymous qualifiers for one substantive are not unusual. Inversions in the sentence order—with the object at its beginning—as well as repetitions of the same word, two, three times for the purpose of emphasis, are common. When Pirandello allows his fantasy to elaborate on idyllic dreams and fervent longings and amorous enlightenment, his ornate language and similes might well remind us of the great classic lovers, from Petrarch singing his rapture for Laura's beauty to Abélard affectionately instructing his beloved Héloïse. Some passages of the letters, written in moments of profound inspiration, do reveal in their spontaneity and immediacy the master of Italian narrative at his best. In general, however, the reader must be forewarned that these letters were not written as a literary work, were

not edited or corrected for publication by the author, and therefore contain many repetitions, run-on sentences, tedious borrowing from slogans of Fascist propaganda, and pathetic exaggerations.

This correspondence rewards its reader with the unique experience of living in intimacy with a profound poet of human pain, along the arc of the last ten years of his life—in moments when he was not trying to communicate through dramatic characters conceived in his imagination and set loose in a fictional world. This is a Pirandello without the mask of art, nakedly exposing his own tragedy of perennial, meaningless suffering—an immensely sad, authentic confession, directly reflecting, therefore, the great writer's helpless weakness and hopeless loss of his own self.

The present publication was made possible by a grant from the Mildred Andrews Fund—of which Mrs. Andrews' son, Peter Putnam, was the founder and generous administrator until his death—and through the assistance of the Library of Princeton University and of Princeton University Press. Grateful acknowledgment is due to the many people, especially at Brooklyn College, who assisted me in the preparation of the Italian edition, which serves as foundation for this partial English translation. Special thanks are also due to Elio Providenti and my brother Oddone Ortolani, who reviewed the lengthy Italian manuscript; to Andrea and Pierluigi Pirandello, to Maria Luisa and Alessandro D'Amico, who provided me with important suggestions and information; to Robert Karpen, who patiently revised my first draft of the English translation, and to Glenn Loney and David Garfield, who read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions; to my daughter Laura-Lee Griffith Carrasquel, who spent countless hours at the computer; and above all to my wife, Maria, who generously comforted and sustained me with patient love through the endless postponements, complex legal vicissitudes, and mishaps that almost turned the making of this publication into a true-to-life Pirandellian scenario.



## EDITOR'S REMARKS

---



1. The 164 letters contained in this book were selected from the collection donated by Marta Abba in November 1986 to the Library of Princeton University. The complete collection consists of 552 handwritten letters of Luigi Pirandello, addressed to Marta Abba, and a few more addressed to Marta's younger sister, Cele, and to her parents, Pompeo and Giuseppina Abba. The announcement given to the press at the time of the donation, that the letters numbered 560, was because that sum included letters not addressed to Marta, plus a very few additional envelopes that on later inspection proved not to contain letters to Marta. The almost complete collection in the original Italian is scheduled to be published by Princeton University Press—and by Mondadori in Milan in two volumes of the collection *I Meridiani*—approximately one year after the present English translation. The original handwritten letters are all available for research purposes at the Princeton University Library, Special Collections.

2. Importance of contents and literary relevance were the main criteria in the selection. I tried to avoid the tedious chronicle of lesser business transactions and the ennui of endless repetitions in Pirandello's protestations of love and self-pity—which remain available for the specialist to study in the Italian edition.

3. Every letter carries a six-digit number, which shows the date on which it was written. The first two digits indicate the year, the following two indicate the month, and the last two the day. For example, the letter 260805 was written on 5 August 1926.

4. The requirement of respecting Marta's wish—that the English language remain as close as possible to the original Italian—made my effort to translate this important but uneven body of literature very arduous. As already remarked in the introduction, Pirandello writes effortlessly, spontaneously, with many repetitions, using very long sentences and still adding to them thoughts, as they come, often with a copula. He doesn't shy

away from topical idioms and from repeating, almost *ad litteram*, occasional slogans of Fascist propaganda—without the usual stylistic consistency that characterizes material meant for publication. Marta did not want me to introduce choices that, at first, might sound as “better English” but that would, in the total rhythm of the translation, give a less than genuine impression of the main original characteristics of the letters—their immediacy and truthfulness.

5. Marta Abba requested that the work of introduction and comment be minimal. She wanted to give the Maestro a chance to speak directly to the readers just as he had spoken to her—without the filter of an interpreter or the distraction of learned literary exegesis. Introductions and footnotes are therefore kept brief; only essential information and the most necessary references for a correct reading of the text are provided, without literary analysis, scholarly quotations, or lists of bibliographic references. It will be the task of specialists in future years to research the many problems these letters leave unsolved and discuss their literary value and their position in the history of the epistolary genre. It would be, for example, very important to establish the degree of objectivity in the picture drawn by Pirandello about himself to his beloved and about his relationship to his children. Again, in some cases it appears very difficult to reconcile the author's description of an absolute, paralyzing despair with the experience of people who lived very close to him, with the content of other correspondence addressed on the very same day to his children or to friends, and with the extraordinary activity of the writer at the time. The process of literary and historical interpretation—even before the publication of the texts—has already begun, with a book by Pietro Frassica, *A Marta Abba per non morire: Sull'epistolario inedito tra Pirandello e la sua Attrice* (Milan: Mursia, 1991), and will no doubt continue.

6. Judgments expressed by Pirandello about people and institutions are not discussed in the commentary. These are often impulsive, momentary reactions to events, confided on the spot to his beloved. An overwhelming passion for art and for Marta led the writer to express certain obnoxious characterizations of family members or personalities of the political and theatrical world. In a number of cases, Pirandello later did correct, explicitly or implicitly, hasty pronouncements that are, therefore, to be considered the result of his passionate temper.

7. Pirandello's original handwritten letters show almost no corrections, and the Italian is almost flawless. When Pirandello introduces foreign

words or the names of non-Italian people, he does misspell quite often. In the present translation, such errors are corrected in the text and only rarely reported in the footnotes. Only the correct form is used in the indexes.

8. I was not at liberty to use in my commentary the letters written by Marta to Pirandello. A copy of them was sent to me by Peter Putnam, but Marta requested the copy back, and I returned it personally during a trip to Milan. The essential elements of Marta's writings can be reconstructed from Pirandello's letters themselves—with the caveat that the loving Maestro sees in those plain letters, almost totally dedicated to business and news about her company, nonexistent literary merits. Moreover, some of Marta's most important letters, written at the time of Pirandello's greatest distress after her departure from Berlin in 1929, were destroyed by Pirandello, who reluctantly obeyed Marta's precise instructions. At this time I am aware that a publication of Marta's surviving letters is being prepared in Italy.

9. Hundreds of names are mentioned in Pirandello's letters, many of which are obviously unknown to most readers. In most cases a brief footnote provides essential information when a name appears for the first time. The same information is repeated in the Name Index at the end of this volume. The rule is not applied to names obviously known to everyone, such as Shakespeare or Dante.

10. The Subject Index and the brief title of each letter in the Contents provide further points of reference to the wealth of information contained in the correspondence.



## CHRONOLOGY



{ 1924 }

While performing in Milan with the Talli Company Marta Abba scores a remarkable success with her interpretation of Chekhov's *Seagull*.<sup>1</sup> Pirandello is impressed by a review written by critic Marco Praga on that occasion and decides to hire the actress as leading lady of his Compagnia del Teatro d'Arte di Roma—then in the process of being formed. Marta Abba (born in Milan on June 25, 1900) is still unknown, at the very beginning of her professional acting career.

Pirandello's better-known plays, such as *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, *Enrico IV*, *Così è (se vi pare)*, and *La vita che ti diedi*, are performed in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Athens, and London, and also in Japan and Brazil. Over the last two decades Luigi Pirandello (born in Agrigento, Sicily, on June 28, 1867) has been universally recognized as one of the leading European authors of narrative and drama.

Pirandello writes the novel *Uno, nessuno, e centomila*, which is published in installments during the following two years in *Fiera Letteraria*, and then in one volume by Bemporad in Milan.

**MAY 22.** The Niccodemi Company presents the world premiere of Pirandello's *Ciascuno a suo modo* at the Teatro dei Filodrammatici in Milan.

**SEPTEMBER 19.** In an open letter to Mussolini published in *L'Impero* Pirandello applies for membership in the Fascist party.

**SEPTEMBER 30.** Pirandello's one-act play *Sagra del Signore della nave* is published in *Convegno*.

**OCTOBER 6.** The Teatro d'Arte di Roma is legally incorporated under Pirandello's leadership. This event marks the beginning of Pirandello's triennium as artistic director/manager, during which he will travel with his company to a great number of Italian and foreign cities.

<sup>1</sup> Only some of the facts mentioned in the chronology are directly referred to in the letters. All of them, I hope, will help in providing a frame of reference for a better understanding of the letters themselves.

## { 1925 }

**FEBRUARY 7.** First letter written by Pirandello to Marta Abba.

**LATE FEBRUARY.** Pirandello and Marta meet for the first time in Rome. On February 25 Marta signs the contract as leading actress of the Teatro d'Arte. The love for Marta marks the beginning of a new phase in Pirandello's life, which lasts until his death. Marta begins to inspire and become the main interpreter of Pirandello's works.

**APRIL 2.** At the Teatro Odescalchi in Rome the inauguration of the Teatro d'Arte takes place in the presence of Mussolini with the premiere of Pirandello's *Sagra del Signore della nave*.

**APRIL 22.** Marta Abba triumphantly debuts in Rome in the premiere of *Nostra Dea* by Massimo Bontempelli.

**JUNE 15–JULY 15.** Pirandello's company performs *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, *Enrico IV*, *Vestire gli ignudi*, *Così è (se vi pare)*, and *Il piacere dell'onestà* in London, Paris, and Geneva.

**BETWEEN OCTOBER 1 AND 6.** This is the probable date of the "atrocious night" in Como, which had catastrophic repercussions on the love relationship between Pirandello and Marta.

**OCTOBER 12–NOVEMBER 7.** Pirandello's company performs in Basel, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Kassel, Dresden, Leipzig, Halle, Magdeburg, Hannover, Hamburg, Bremen, and Münster, with the same repertory.

**NOVEMBER 12–JULY 30, 1926.** Pirandello's company performs in twenty-two Italian cities. Pirandello accompanies the actors during the tours in Italy and abroad and is therefore always close to Marta. The actress is confirmed as the company's leading lady and more and more recognized as the main interpreter of Pirandello's theater. Fifty different shows are produced during the three years of the company's existence, and Marta plays the lead in thirty-six of them.

## { 1926 }

During this year Pirandello writes nine letters to Marta.

Several of Pirandello's plays are performed in Italy and abroad.

Pirandello's novel *Uno, nessuno, e centomila* is published by Bemporad.

**AUGUST 5–25.** Pirandello writes frequently to Marta during the short summer break. Back in Rome, Pirandello discovers he is on the brink of bankruptcy, accuses his son-in-law and his daughter of being responsible for his financial troubles, and wants to sell the brand-new *villino* in the Via Panvinio. Pirandello revises *Diana e la Tuda* and completes *L'amica delle mogli*. He negotiates with the governor of Rome for the lease of the Teatro Argentina and has a temporary reconciliation with the theatrical impresario Paolino Giordani in order to present with him to the Duce a common project for the institution of a state-subsidized national theater.

**NOVEMBER 20.** At the Schauspielhaus in Zürich the world premiere of Pirandello's *Diana e la Tuda* takes place (in the German translation by Hans Feist). It is the first play inspired by Marta and dedicated to her.

**DECEMBER 5.** Pirandello publishes in the *Fiera Letteraria* the project for the state theater, prepared together with Giordani.

**DECEMBER 14–22.** Pirandello's company performs *Sei personaggi, Così è (se vi pare)*, and *Vestire gli ignudi* in Prague, Vienna, and Budapest.

{ 1927 }

Pirandello and Marta are together practically the whole year long. There is no record of letters written to Marta during this year.

**JANUARY 14.** At the Teatro Eden in Milan the Italian premiere of Pirandello's *Diana e la Tuda* takes place, interpreted by Marta.

**MARCH.** Pirandello's company changes its name and becomes the Compagnia del Teatro Argentina.

**APRIL 28.** At the Teatro Argentina in Rome the world premiere of Pirandello's *L'amica delle mogli*, the second play inspired by Marta, takes place. Pirandello's work and Marta's interpretation receive excellent reviews and are cheered by the audiences.

**MAY 27.** At the Teatro Eden in Milan the Almirante-Rissone-Tòfano Company presents Pirandello's one-act play *Bellavita*. The play is adapted from Pirandello's short story *L'ombra del rimorso*.

**JUNE 15–SEPTEMBER 15.** Pirandello's company performs in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. The repertory is mostly made up of Pirandello's plays interpreted by Marta.

Pirandello writes a number of short stories, and Bemporad publishes a revised edition of his novel *L'Esclusa*.

{ 1928 }

During this year Pirandello writes thirteen letters to Marta.

**MARCH 24.** At the Teatro Argentina in Rome Pirandello's *La nuova colonia* premieres, with Marta Abba and Lamberto Picasso in the leading roles. It is the last important production of Pirandello's company, which is close to folding because of financial difficulties.

**JULY 4–17.** Pirandello writes almost daily from Nettuno, a resort on the seashore near Rome, to Marta, who is vacationing in Salsomaggiore, a fashionable spa resort near Milan. Pirandello decides to leave Italy because of the distressing political situation, the financial failure of his company, and the loss of the hope of transforming it into a state-supported national theater. The Maestro deals with German and American agents, trying to approach the international world of cinema and find there the financing for his dream of a new artistic theater company independent of state funds. The first written declarations of his great love for Marta take place.

**AUGUST 15.** In Viareggio, the final performance of Pirandello's company takes place.

**AUGUST 16–SEPTEMBER 20.** Pirandello and Marta spend their summer vacations on the Tyrrhenian coast. Marta leaves Viareggio for Milan on September 19, and Pirandello leaves for Rome on the twentieth.

**SEPTEMBER 21–26.** Pirandello writes almost daily from Rome to Marta, who lives in her father's house at Via Caiazzo 52 in Milan. There are preparations for the trip to Germany and hopes of great business deals in America.

**SEPTEMBER 28.** Pirandello arrives in Milan, where he spends several days with Marta until their departure for Berlin. During his visits in Milan Pirandello stays at the Hotel Corso Splendid.

**OCTOBER 9.** The probable date of Pirandello's and Marta's departure for Berlin, where Marta stays until March 13, 1929. Pirandello's addresses in Berlin are 9, Hitzingstrasse, and then Hotel Herkuleshaus, 13, Friedrich-Wilhelmstrasse. Pirandello and Marta live in adjacent rooms, and Marta is very often accompanied by her sister Cele.

New volumes of Pirandello's works are published by Bemporad (*Liola, La giara, Il viaggio, Candelora*).

In Berlin Pirandello writes, in collaboration with Adolf Lanz, a film scenario for *Sei personaggi*, published in 1929 by Reinmar Hobbing—but the film is never realized.

### { 1929 }

During this year Pirandello writes ninety letters to Marta.

**MARCH 13.** Marta abandons Berlin because none of Pirandello's promises have materialized and returns to Milan, where she spends a couple of months trying to reenter the Italian theatrical world. Pirandello writes almost daily letters—full of despair because of her departure.

**MARCH 22.** In Berlin Pirandello receives a telegram from Mussolini announcing his nomination to the Accademia d'Italia.

**APRIL 12.** Pirandello goes to London to see the very first examples of "talking films" and is horrified by them.

**MAY 9.** Marta goes to Terme di Miradolo (Pavia) for a couple of weeks of rest.

**JUNE 1–16.** Pirandello takes a short trip to Italy for the first meeting of the Accademia d'Italia in Rome. On June 2 he sees Marta briefly in Milan, and again he visits her from the eleventh to the fifteenth. He is back in Berlin on the sixteenth.

**JULY 4–15.** Pirandello travels from Berlin to Paris, where he meets Marta. He is back in Berlin on the sixteenth.

**JULY 9.** At the Royal Theatre in Huddersfield, England, the world premiere of Pirandello's "myth" *Lazzaro* takes place, in the translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff.

**AUGUST 3–SEPTEMBER 13.** Pirandello, in Italy for the summer vacation, is preparing with Marta the first season of her new Compagnia Marta Abba, of which she is the artistic director/manager. On his return to Berlin he sues his German translator Hans Feist, now transformed into a bitter enemy. This feud will have serious consequences in the near future.

**MID-SEPTEMBER.** Marta goes to the Grand Hotel of Salice Terme (Voghera) for ten days of rest/treatment, and by the end of the month is again in Milan. There she spends very tiring weeks trying to put together her

new company and ensure bookings for her tour. Pirandello's letters are full of advice and encouragement for the difficult enterprise.

**EARLY OCTOBER.** At last the villino in the Via Onofrio Panvinio is sold for nine hundred thousand lire, providing a period of relaxation in Pirandello's never-ending financial worries.

**OCTOBER 18–NOVEMBER 17.** Pirandello is in Milan to advise Marta on the repertory of the new company she is recruiting among young actors. For the upcoming first season Marta chooses a repertory of plays mostly by Pirandello, among which are the new *Lazzaro* and *Il grillo del focolare*, an adaptation by S. Strekowsky and C. V. Ludovici of Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth*.

**LATE OCTOBER.** Pirandello travels to Rome for the inauguration of the Accademia d'Italia. On October 30 he is back in Milan with Marta, on his way to Vienna, where he arrives on November 2 and negotiates for a European tour of Marta's company, which never takes place. On the sixth he leaves Vienna for Berlin.

**NOVEMBER 4.** At the Teatro di Torino in Turin the Almirante-Rissone-Tòfano Company presents Pirandello's *O di uno o di nessuno*.

**MID-NOVEMBER.** Pirandello leaves Berlin to settle his finances in Rome after the sale of the villino in the Via Panvinio. He travels afterward to Turin, where he assists Marta in the production of *Lazzaro*, in which Marta interprets the role of Sara.

**DECEMBER 7.** In Turin at the Teatro di Torino the Italian premiere of *Lazzaro* takes place. Right after the failure in Turin, Pirandello travels to Milan to help out in the production of the same work at the Teatro Olimpia in Milan, with Maria Melato in the role of Sara. The end of the year finds Marta and Pirandello distressed because of the failure of *Lazzaro* and the financial losses of the new company.

### { 1930 }

During this year Pirandello writes 113 letters to Marta, addressed to the many cities where she is performing.

Marta is completely absorbed by the fatiguing tour of her company to a great number of Italian cities. At the beginning Pirandello accompanies her from town to town, but soon his despair over his unrequited love drives him to the brink of suicide. At the end of February he flees to Berlin, where he remains until the beginning of June.

**JANUARY 25.** At the Neues Schauspielhaus in Königsberg the world premiere of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (*Heute abend wird aus dem Stegreif gespielt*) takes place in the German translation by Harry Kahn.

**FEBRUARY 18.** At the Teatro dei Filodrammatici in Milan the world premiere of Pirandello's *Come tu mi vuoi* takes place, with Marta in the leading role.

**FEBRUARY 27.** A desperate Pirandello returns to Berlin, where he again stays at the Hotel Herkuleshaus.

**MARCH 4–6.** Pirandello travels to Königsberg to be present at a performance of his *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, which is having an extraordinary success in that provincial city.

**MARCH 12–18.** Pirandello is in Paris to be present at the premiere of *La vie que je t'ai donnée* (*La vita che ti diedi*) on March 13 at the Petite Scène.

**MARCH 19.** Pirandello is back in Berlin. He is working on the rewriting of the comedy *Coquette* by Ann Preston Bridges and George Abbot for the use of Marta's company.

**EARLY APRIL.** In Berlin Pirandello conceives his first idea for *Quando si è qualcuno*.

**APRIL 14.** In Turin at the Teatro di Torino the Italian premiere of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* takes place, performed by a company under the artistic direction of Guido Salvini.

**MAY 31.** In Berlin at the Lessing-Theater the disastrous premiere of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* takes place, directed by Gustav Hartung. A wave of anti-Pirandellism in the German press reveals signs of a rising fierce xenophobic nationalism in the unstable political situation. Pirandello feels betrayed and distressed and decides to flee from Berlin forever.

**JUNE 13.** This is the probable date of Pirandello's departure from Berlin, to which he will come back only for short visits. Pirandello travels to Italy to appear in person at the Appellate Court in Rome, and then he stays near Marta for five weeks.

**JULY 23.** Pirandello arrives in Paris to meet the American impresario Lee Shubert, who buys on the spot the U.S. rights for four Pirandello's plays.

**AUGUST 3–6.** Pirandello travels from Paris to Berlin and back.

**AUGUST 12.** Pirandello arrives in London to discuss with Charles B.

Cochran a contract for Great Britain similar to the one he has just signed with Lee Shubert for the U.S.

**SECOND HALF OF AUGUST–OCTOBER.** Pirandello is back in Italy, visits Marta in Milan and his children in Positano (Naples), and then spends a longer time working near Marta. The trip to the U.S., previously planned for the end of September, is put off because of the severe economic depression in America.

**OCTOBER 9.** Pirandello is in Rome for the election of new members of the Accademia d'Italia, while Marta is performing with her company in Venice.

During October the film *La canzone dell'amore*, freely adapted from Pirandello's short story *In silenzio* and directed by Gennaro Righelli for the Cines of Rome, is distributed in Italy. It is the first Italian talking film to appear on the market, and it has success also in the French and German versions, which are distributed in the following year.

**DECEMBER 5.** Pirandello returns to Paris, where he stays for a few days at the Hôtel Vendôme, but soon establishes his residence in an apartment on the first floor at 5, Avenue Victor Emmanuel III. He begins a tireless activity to make Paris the center of his international contacts with the world of the movies.

**DECEMBER 12.** At the Teatro Manzoni in Milan the Compagnia Marta Abba presents for the first time in Italy Heinrich Mann's play *Madame Legros*. Marta's repertory for this theater season includes Maugham's *Penelope*, Molnár's *La buona fata*, P. A. Antoine's *La nostra compagna* (*L'Ennemie*), Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, and the ever popular *Il grillo del focolare* (The cricket on the hearth). Marta is very tired and very preoccupied with serious financial problems.

At the end of the year the Shubert production of Pirandello's *As You Desire Me* (*Come tu mi vuoi*) has a great success in Philadelphia on its way to Broadway.

Mondadori, who is now the publisher of Pirandello's work instead of Bemporad, publishes *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* and *Come tu mi vuoi*.

### { 1931 }

During this year Pirandello writes 126 letters to Marta, who is touring major Italian cities with her company: in January she performs in Turin,

Alessandria, Bergamo, Cremona, Como; in February in Genoa and Florence; in mid-March in Rome; from the beginning of April through the end of May in Naples. Most of Pirandello's letters are written from Paris.

**JANUARY 28.** At the Maxine Elliott Theatre in New York the Broadway premiere of Pirandello's *As You Desire Me* (*Come tu mi vuoi*) has great success. The play runs for 142 performances.

**FEBRUARY 21.** The rights for the filming of *As You Desire Me* are sold by Shubert to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for the then enormous amount of \$40,000. Pirandello is now sure that his dream of great riches will soon become a reality.

**MARCH 19–14.** Pirandello meets Shubert again in Paris. The impresario acquires the U.S. rights for Pirandello's *La nuova colonia* and proposes an American tour for a company selected and managed by Marta with a repertory of Pirandello's plays.

In the first two weeks of June Marta is in Milan with her parents in the new residence at Via Aurelio Saffi 26.

**JUNE 14–JULY 16.** Marta is in Paris with Pirandello. Marta is shopping for furniture for her rooms in her father's new apartment.

**AUGUST 1.** Pirandello moves to an apartment on the top floor of Rue La Pérouse 37, near the Étoile in the center of Paris.

**AUGUST 20.** Pirandello leaves Paris to visit Marta, who is ill in Genoa.

**LATE AUGUST.** Pirandello and Marta travel first to Milan and then to the mountain village of Caspoggio (Sondrio) for a period of vacation.

**MID-SEPTEMBER.** Pirandello returns to Paris for a short visit on the way to Portugal.

**SEPTEMBER 17–28.** Pirandello leaves for Portugal to participate in the Fifth International Congress of Critics. There he is publicly honored and made the object of enthusiastic affection by the Portuguese audiences.

**SEPTEMBER 20.** At the National Theater of Lisbon Pirandello's play *Sogno (ma forse no)* is performed in the Portuguese translation by Caetano de Abreu Beirão.

**LATE SEPTEMBER.** Pirandello is back in Paris.

**OCTOBER 9.** Pirandello sends to Marta—who was still recuperating from her sickness—a proposal to perform in French at the Saint-Georges in Paris the role of “the virtuous signora Perella” in Pirandello’s *L’uomo, la bestia e la virtù*. Marta accepts and leaves almost immediately for Paris to start rehearsals without delay.

**DECEMBER 3.** At the Accademia d’Italia Pirandello gives a controversial lecture in honor of the Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga, in which he attacks Gabriele D’Annunzio. The lecture is published the following day in the Roman newspaper *Tevere*.

Pirandello prepares a new edition of his novel *I vecchi e i giovani* for the publisher Mondadori. He also publishes two short stories (*Uno di più* and *Il soffio*) and the first act of *Giganti della montagna*.

{ 1932 }

During this year Pirandello writes seventy-one letters to Marta, most of them from Paris—except those from Rome and from Castiglioncello during the summer.

**JANUARY 17.** Marta leaves Paris at the end of her contract for the performances of Pirandello’s *L’uomo, la bestia e la virtù*.

**FEBRUARY 2 OR 3.** In Rome at the Palazzo Venezia Marta is received in audience by Mussolini and remains disillusioned. Her interview, however, prepares the way for Pirandello’s long audience the following month.

**MID-FEBRUARY.** Pirandello, who had been suffering from a relapse into his major depression after Marta’s departure from Paris, has a heart attack.

**MARCH 13.** A long colloquy with Mussolini marks for Pirandello the beginning of a period of enthusiastic work in cooperation with the Fascist government for the establishment of a state-subsidized national theater. Pirandello resides now in Rome with his son Stefano at Via Piemonte 117.

**EARLY APRIL.** Marta goes to Rapallo for a couple of weeks’ rest and then returns to Milan. In April Marta buys a summer home, the Villino Mezzaluna in Lido di Camaiore, a beach resort near Viareggio on the Tyrrhenian coast.

**LATE APRIL.** Pirandello participates in the International Theatre Congress in Rome, during which his play *Pensaci, Giacomino!* is presented with great success. He has an encounter with Max Reinhardt.

**APRIL 29–MAY 3.** Pirandello leaves Rome to visit Marta in Viareggio and Lido di Camaiore, and then returns to Paris on May 3.

**MAY 13 OR 14.** Marta, accompanied by her mother, joins Pirandello in France and helps him out in closing his Parisian apartment. Pirandello thus officially terminates his self-imposed exile and makes his son Stefano's apartment in Rome, Via Piemonte 117, his temporary official residence. Toward the end of May, before coming back to Italy, Pirandello completes *La favola del figlio cambiato*.

**LATE MAY.** Pirandello is back in Rome. In collaboration with his son Stefano he completes the scenario *Giuoca, Pietro!* which is later published in *Scenario* (January 1933) and used for *Acciaio*, a film directed by Walter Ruttmann and produced by Cines.

**JUNE 25.** Pirandello is Marta's guest at the Villino Mezzaluna in Lido di Camaiore until the end of July, then goes to Castiglioncello, where he remains through October with his son Stefano and his family at the Villino Conti.

**MID-SEPTEMBER.** In Castiglioncello Pirandello completes *Trovarsi*.

**FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER.** In Castiglioncello Pirandello completes *Quando si è qualcuno*.

**SECOND WEEK OF OCTOBER.** Pirandello goes back to Rome and then goes on to Naples to assist Marta in the production of *Trovarsi*.

**NOVEMBER 4.** Pirandello is present at the premiere of *Trovarsi* in Naples. Marta is on her tour with a repertory of Italian plays, including, besides Pirandello's novelties, *La vedova scaltra* by Goldoni, *La corsa dietro l'ombra* by Enrico Roma, *La sedicesima notte* by Curio Mortari, and *La cacciata dal Paradiso* by Goffredo Ginocchio. Marta's company performs in major Sicilian cities, such as Palermo and Trapani in November, and Catania and Messina in December.

**NOVEMBER 7.** Pirandello is present at the Parisian opening of *Come tu mi vuoi*. In Paris Pirandello is honored with extraordinary recognitions and festivities.

**DECEMBER 4.** A depressed and sickly Mussolini receives Pirandello at the Palazzo Venezia and makes it clear that because of the menacing international circumstances Pirandello's project for a national theater has to wait.

During this year the publisher Mondadori reprints a number of volumes of Pirandello's work which had been previously published by Bemporad.

## { 1933 }

Only thirteen letters written by Pirandello to Marta during this year are preserved.

At the beginning of January Marta is in Cagliari, Sardinia, with her company. At her return Pirandello goes to the harbor of Civitavecchia to meet her and remains near her during her performances in Rome.

**FEBRUARY 8.** Probable date of Marta's departure from Rome for Turin, where she performs with her company until the beginning of March. She then performs in Genoa, and on February 21 she is back in Milan to perform at the Teatro Manzoni.

**FEBRUARY 23–MARCH 8.** Pirandello travels to Paris in a vain attempt finally to get rid of his agent Saul Colin.

**MARCH 11.** Pirandello is in Rome for the Premio Mussolini, and then reaches Marta in Milan.

**BEGINNING OF MAY.** Marta is in Venice, where she performs at the Teatro Goldoni; in mid-May she travels to Trieste.

**MAY 15–16.** In Bologna Pirandello participates in the Writers' Congress.

**JUNE.** Marta is in Rome, where she stars in the film *Il caso Haller*, directed by Alessandro Blasetti and produced by Cines.

**JULY–MID-AUGUST.** Pirandello is in Castiglioncello, where he works on *Giganti della montagna* and helps Marta organize the new Compagnia Stabile San Remo Marta Abba. The repertory of that company will include *Quando si è qualcuno* by Pirandello, *Il caso del dottor Hirn* by Rino Alessi, *L'Olimpo* by Umberto Fracchia, *Il Maestro* by Luigi Antonelli, directed by Pirandello, *Il marito che cerca* by Salvator Gotta and Sergio Pugliese, and *Un mese in campagna* (A month in the country) by Ivan Turgenev.

**AUGUST 17.** Pirandello sails for South America.

**SEPTEMBER 20.** In Buenos Aires at the Teatro Odeon Pirandello is present at the world premiere of *Cuando se es alguien* (*Quando si è qualcuno*) in the Spanish version by Homero Guglielmini.

**SEPTEMBER 26.** Pirandello lectures on Ariosto and Cervantes at the Teatro Solis in Montevideo.

**OCTOBER–NOVEMBER.** Pirandello is in San Remo with Marta for the

preparation of the Italian premiere of *Quando si è qualcuno*, which takes place on November 7 at the Teatro del Casino Municipale di San Remo.

**FALL.** Pirandello takes up residence in the villino located at Via Bosio 15, Rome, where he will reside until his death.

During this year Mondadori publishes new editions and reprints of a number of Pirandello's works, including *Quando si è qualcuno*. Ricordi publishes *La favola del figlio cambiato*.

{ 1934 }

During this year Pirandello writes twenty-one letters to Marta, most of them from Rome.

**JANUARY 13.** At the Landestheater of Braunschweig in Germany the world premiere of Pirandello's *La favola del figlio cambiato* (*Die Legende vom vertauschten Sohn*) takes place, translated by Hans Redlich, with music by G. F. Malipiero.

**FEBRUARY–MARCH.** Pirandello informs Marta that he is going through financial difficulties, while Marta is facing problems with the administration of the Compagnia Stabile San Remo Marta Abba, which has been losing substantial amounts of money during the season. During the second half of March Marta performs in Venice and Turin.

**MARCH 24.** At the Teatro Reale dell'Opera in Rome, the Italian premiere of *La favola del figlio cambiato* takes place. Mussolini, who is present at the opening, does not like the opera and forbids further performances.

**MAY 2.** In Milan at the Teatro Manzoni Pirandello is present at the performance of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* directed by Max Reinhardt. At the beginning of May Marta performs in Verona, at the Teatro Nuovo.

**MAY 9–END OF MAY.** Pirandello is with Marta, who is performing in Milan. At the beginning of June Pirandello must go back to Rome for the preparations for the Volta Congress, of which he is the president.

**MAY 12.** In Turin Pirandello gives a lecture, "Teatro nuovo e teatro vecchio," which is published in the newspaper *La Stampa* of Turin, May 13.

**JUNE 9.** After fulfilling the terms of her contract with her company

Marta arrives in Rome for the filming of *Teresa Confalonieri* directed by Guido Brignone.

**JULY–AUGUST.** In Castiglioncello Pirandello works at *Non si sa come*.

**AUGUST 23.** Marta is at the Lido di Venezia for the premiere of the film *Teresa Confalonieri*, which receives the prize of the Festival Internazionale Cinematografico. Pirandello is not in Venice to share the glory of his beloved because he is in the middle of a fervent moment of creativity in the peaceful atmosphere of Castiglioncello.

**OCTOBER 8–14.** In Rome Pirandello presides over the Fourth Congress of the Volta Foundation on the theme “The Dramatic Theater.” On the occasion of that international congress Gabriele D’Annunzio’s *La figlia di Iorio*, directed by Pirandello and interpreted by Marta Abba and the actor Ruggero Ruggeri, is performed at the Teatro Argentina.

**EARLY NOVEMBER.** The news of the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Pirandello is announced. Marta goes to Salsomaggiore for a few weeks of treatment/rest. Pirandello publishes the second act of *I giganti della montagna* in the journal *Quadrante*.

**SECOND HALF OF NOVEMBER.** Pirandello is honored with great festivities in Paris and London.

**DECEMBER 10.** In Stockholm the king of Sweden awards the Nobel Prize for Literature to Pirandello.

**DECEMBER 19.** At the National Theater of Prague Pirandello is present at the world premiere of *Non si sa come* in the Czech translation by V. Jirina.

During this year Mondadori continues the publication of further volumes of Pirandello’s works. The newspaper *Corriere della sera* of Milan publishes four short stories by Pirandello (“I piedi sull’erba,” “Di sera un geranio,” “Un’idea,” “C’è qualcuno che ride”).

### { 1935 }

During this year Pirandello writes forty-three letters to Marta, mostly from Rome.

**EARLY JANUARY.** Pirandello goes to Paris with Marta and her mother.

**JANUARY 27.** Marta leaves from Paris for London to study English and prepare herself for a career in the international theater and film world.

**EARLY FEBRUARY.** At the Teatro San Carlo in Naples the opening of an opera with music by Giuseppe Mulè and libretto by Arturo Rossato takes place, drawn from Pirandello's play *Liola*. Pirandello travels to Milan and then to Rome, where the hope for the establishment of a state theater is once more revived.

**FEBRUARY 18.** Pirandello has an audience with Mussolini, who seems greatly interested in realizing immediately Pirandello's plan for a state-subsidized theater. Pirandello begins a period of feverish work to prepare with Bottai and other key Fascist personalities the realization of the project. In the meantime, as a result of the Nobel Prize, Pirandello's plays are performed all over the world.

**LATE MARCH.** Pirandello spends a week in London to visit Marta and attend to business. On the way back he visits Paris and is in Rome on April 7.

**APRIL 24.** Great festivities take place in Pirandello's honor at Palazzo Ruspoli in Rome.

**APRIL 26.** Pirandello inaugurates the cycle of Conferenze internazionali d'alta cultura at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence with a talk on an introduction to the Italian theater.

**MAY–OCTOBER.** Marta returns to Italy from England and works at finding her place again in the Italian theater. In July she is in Venice for the Festival di Venezia, where she interprets the role of Portia in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by Max Reinhardt. During August and September Marta is again in Milan, and in October she goes to Salsomaggiore for a vacation, after which the preparations for her next roles with the company of Guido Salvini begin.

**JULY 20.** Pirandello arrives in New York aboard the Italian liner *Conte di Savoia*. He stays in New York for about two and a half months, without reaching any concrete results, after endless discussions and negotiations. Pirandello's support of the Italian aggression in Ethiopia and the international tension are powerful obstacles to any successful business transaction.

**OCTOBER 13.** Pirandello arrives in Naples aboard the *Conte di Savoia*, where he suffers a violent heart attack right before disembarking. On the fifteenth another, even more violent heart attack follows. During the rest of October Pirandello is convalescing in Rome, while Marta is now the leading actress of the Compagnia dei Grandi Spettacoli d'Arte directed by

Guido Salvini. She is busy with the preparations for her interpretation of the role of Saint Joan in Shaw's play and for her role in the troublesome play *Simma* by Pastonchi.

**OCTOBER 29.** Pirandello gives a short speech at the opening of the theater season of the Teatro Argentina in the presence of Mussolini. Pirandello is seen more and more, in the eyes of everybody, as a deeply respected living symbol of the Italian theater—at the same time everybody is aware of the precarious state of his health.

**LATE OCTOBER–DECEMBER 5.** Marta is in Rome.

**DECEMBER 13.** In Rome, at the Teatro Argentina, the Italian premiere of *Non si sa come*, performed by Ruggero Ruggeri, takes place. It has great success with an audience that wants to pay homage to the author, now definitely old and in poor health. Pirandello's relationship to Marta becomes more and more fatherly, while the thought of impending death appears more often in the letters.

During this year Mondadori publishes *Non si sa come* and reprints several volumes of Pirandello's work.

At this time Pirandello writes at least a great part of his *Informazioni sul mio involontario soggiorno sulla terra*, published after his death in *Corriere della sera* (March 30, 1937), in *Meridiano di Roma* (May 2, 1937), and in *Almanacco letterario Bompiani* 1938 (Milan, 1939).

The film *Ma non è una cosa seria*, adapted from the comedy by Pirandello, is realized by director Mario Camerini for Colombo-Film of Rome, with Vittorio De Sica and Elisa Cegani.

### { 1936 }

During this year Pirandello writes fifty-two letters to Marta, almost all of them from Rome.

**FIRST WEEKS OF JANUARY.** The “elitist” project of the state theater is temporarily set aside by the Fascist government, which is now concentrating its resources on the planning and construction of Cinecittà—with the purpose of producing propaganda movies for the masses. After many contradictory hesitations by the author about the timing of the publication, Marta's memoirs are eventually published, under the title *Note*, in three installments of *Italia letteraria*.

**JANUARY 11.** Pirandello's *Sogno, ma forse no* is broadcast by the Italian

national radio network EIAR—a “first” in the history of Italian radio drama.

**JANUARY 21.** Pirandello is in Turin for the opening of his son Stefano’s play *Un padre ci vuole*, performed by the Tòfano-Maltagliati-Cervi Company at the Teatro Alfieri.

**LATE JANUARY–MID-FEBRUARY.** Pirandello is in Milan, where he remains until Marta opens at the Teatro Lirico as leading lady of the Compagnia dei Grandi Spettacoli d’Arte directed by G. Salvini, in Shaw’s play *Saint Joan*.

**MID-FEBRUARY.** Marta falls ill and the company cannot continue the planned tour.

**LATE FEBRUARY.** The tour of the Compagnia dei Grandi Spettacoli is resumed in Turin. Marta performs with that company at the Teatro Corso in Bologna, Teatro Verdi in Florence, and Teatro Argentina in Rome.

**MARCH 14.** Marta arrives in Rome with the Compagnia dei Grandi Spettacoli.

**LATE MARCH–BEGINNING OF APRIL.** There are feverish negotiations with the American impresario Gilbert Miller, who offers Marta the leading role in a Broadway-bound comedy, *Tovarich*. In the meantime the actress continues her tour in Leghorn, La Spezia, Genoa, Padoa, and Venice.

**LATE APRIL.** Marta is again in Milan, preparing for her meeting with Gilbert Miller. Pirandello, suffering from high blood pressure, declines an invitation to go to South America, where great festivities in his honor had been widely publicized by the press.

**MAY 7.** Marta is in Rome, meets with Gilbert Miller, and signs the contract that will take her to her “dream-come-true” success on Broadway.

**MAY 23.** Marta leaves for London to start rehearsals for *Tovarich*. Pirandello, who had been with Marta during her last few days in Milan, now goes to Anticoli Corrado, a picturesque village in the province of Rome, as a guest of his son Fausto and spends his time painting. Pirandello is depressed and as though numbed by Marta’s departure.

**MID-JUNE.** Pirandello is a guest of Marta’s parents in Marta’s villino at Lido di Camaiore.