THE REANIMATION OF THE PIRANDELLIAN PROTAGONIST

FROM SPIRITUAL SICKNESS TO MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Reanimation of the Pirandellian Protagonist

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My analysis demonstrates Luigi Pirandello’s application of spiritual modes of thought ranging from Eastern mysticism to the modern Western movements of Theosophy, Spiritualism and Parapsychology. Using Antonio Illiano’s seminal work, Metapsichica e letteratura in Pirandello (Metapsychics and Literature in Pirandello) as a point of departure, my research incorporates the various philosophical, scientific and spiritual frameworks Pirandello utilized to describe the psychological and spiritual crisis pervading man’s experience in the modern world. One of the most interesting facets of my research is the unequivocal parallel between Pirandello’s spiritual approach and the ancients teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Very few Pirandello scholars address the spiritual essence that encompasses Pirandello’s entire collection. This is surprising considering the author’s ingenuous admission of the fundamental role of the spirit in the genesis of his artistic creation as well as the explicit presence of spiritual elements that pervade his aesthetic theories and fictional stories. This dissertation contributes to the limited scholarship of this nature and aims to
stimulate further discussion regarding the connection between Pirandello’s work and Buddhism.

The historical research and close analysis of the selected texts in this dissertation provide ample evidence that beyond being an index of Pirandello’s fluency with current, cultural, scientific, and spiritual trends, these systems of thought provide the very scaffolding on which Pirandello’s works are constructed. This discourse allows the reader a deeper understanding of the spiritual evolution of the Pirandellian protagonist and offers insight to the author’s artistic process as guided by the *spirited imagination*, substantiating my claim that Pirandello’s *oeuvre* must be read through a spiritual lens.
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TEXTUAL NOTE

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this dissertation:

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Years</th>
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<tr>
<td>TLN 1</td>
<td>Tutte le novelle I</td>
<td>1884-1904</td>
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<td>TLN 2</td>
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<td>Tr 1</td>
<td>Tutti i romanzi I</td>
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<td>Tr 2</td>
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“Pirandello’s Six Characters” is abbreviated from:

Illiano, Antonio. “Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author: A Comedy in the Making.”

Metapsichica is abbreviated from:

Illiano, Antonio. Metapsichica e Letteratura in Pirandello.
INTRODUCTION

Ve ne sono altri [scrittori] che, oltre questo gusto, sentono un piú profondo bisogno spirituale, per cui non ammettono figure, vicende, paesaggi che non s’imbevano, per così dire, d’un particolar senso della vita, e non acquistino con esso un valore universale. Sono scrittori di natura piú propriamente filosofica. Io ho la disgrazia d’appartenere a questi ultimi.¹

-Luigi Pirandello

Luigi Pirandello’s literary collection reflects his concern for man’s psyche at the turn of the twentieth century. Witness to the rapid advancements in technology and science of the Industrial Revolution, Pirandello observed the negative consequences of society’s shift toward industrialization and away from old world values. He saw the profound impact of modernization not only on socioeconomic and cultural conditions but on man’s consciousness, soul and spirit as well. He argued that the increase in materialism, bolstered by the mechanistic and materialistic philosophies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, greatly contributed to man’s mental suffering by tarnishing the human spirit and repressing the consciousness.² According to Pirandello’s assessment, the limits imposed on the consciousness generate dis-ease in the human spirit, causing the spirit to create illusions that man mistakes as reality. These fictions of the spirit

¹ From the “Prefazione” (“Preface”) (1925) to Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author) (1921). See Maschere nude 1: 36. Translation: “But there are other [writers] who, beyond such pleasure, feel a more profound spiritual need on whose account they admit only figures, affairs, landscapes which have been soaked, so to speak, in a particular sense of life and acquire from it a universal value. These are, more precisely, philosophical writers. I have the misfortune to belong to these last” (Eric Bentley, trans. 364-365).

disconnect the individual from his true *Being*, and subsequently, force him to live *inauthentically.*

Throughout his *oeuvre*, Pirandello emphasizes the psychological and spiritual ramifications of the materialistic world-view. He asserts his conviction that the human spirit is put in crisis due to the disparate value of knowledge appropriated to the methods of logic, reasoning and rationalizing as endorsed by scientific method and the Age of Enlightenment. Pirandello repeatedly proposes that the influx of technological inventions and the denial of the natural intelligence of the *universal spirit*, ruin humanity by belittling man’s sense of himself in the universe and destroying his connection to the human spirit. When scientists, such as Copernicus, uncover (not *discover*) certain truths of the universe, the new findings disrupt the perspective of the unconscious collective, limit his consciousness and displace his soul.

In the essay, “L’umorismo” (“On Humor”) (1908), Pirandello introduces his aesthetic theory of perception and contradictions that permeates the majority of his writing. This account of *umorismo* (humorism), in which Pirandello delineates his artistic approach as a *humorist*, provides valuable insight to the author’s conception of psychic *Being* as comprised of personality, consciousness, spirit and soul. According to Pirandello’s *umorismo*, the artist motivated by the passions of the *humorist spirit* has the capacity to penetrate the barriers of the consciousness via the process of *reflection* and is

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3 The capitalization of *Being* is in response to Pirandello’s reference to “l’Essere” in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (*The Late Mattia Pascal*) (See Tr 1: 484) and in “L’umorismo” (“On Humor”) (See *Spsv* 155). Pirandello uses the word *Essere* to signify his vision of *true reality*, or *authentic existence*, meaning the realization of the unity between the human spirit and universal spirit and the interconnectedness of man and nature. Similar to Buddhist enlightenment, embodiment of this reality is achieved through the cessation of the illusions and desires of the *ego-self*, which brings awareness to the individual being of his higher consciousness, or *Self*. Attainment of higher consciousness and the detachment from one’s individual existence harmonizes the individual with that of the universal consciousness and spirit—allowing him to experience genuine *Being*. This concept is explored throughout my dissertation. See Ghose, Aurobindo *The Psychic Being* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurubindo Ashram, 1990).
then able to access to realms of the consciousness generally inaccessible to common man. Pirandello explains that in his quiet meditations, he delves deeper than other artists to contemplate existence on a profound level. By stripping the soul of its habitual fictions, the humorist deconstructs man’s psychological tendencies so as get at the root cause of his suffering. Armed with keen intuition, Pirandello attests that in these moments of inner silence he is seized by an impression of a reality, different from the one normally perceived by human vision, and he intuits true reality. The universe reveals to him the illusions that man unconsciously constructs, based on his individual perceptions, which he ignorantly mistakes as reality. Pirandello ascertains, therefore, that an existential crisis results from man’s misperception of illusory external appearances that disconnect one’s true self, or Being, from the wisdom that resides in, yet is concealed by, his own consciousness. “L’umorismo” demonstrates that the humoristic disposition, and the artistic production that results from this sophisticated thinking, is profoundly connected to the exploration of the spirit, soul and consciousness. Pirandello suggests, via his theory of humorism and the fictional works inspired by this philosophy, that for an individual to be liberated from the mental suffering of the modern consciousness, one must not only have a comprehension of the unifying universal spirit, but he must also attempt to purify the human spirit by penetrating the unconscious through inner reflection.

As Pirandello wrote very little commentary about his own work, his critical essays as well as the interviews collected in Interviste a Pirandello (Interviews With Pirandello) offer the reader a beneficial view of the author’s evaluation of the spirit. In opposition to the materialists, Pirandello considers the spirit an all-encompassing force

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4 See “L’umorismo,” Part Two, Section II (Saggi, poesie, scritti vari 126-132).
that is manifest in each individual: “Io vedo intorno a me spirito, sempre, non materia”
[“I see spirit all around me, always, not material”] (Ed. Ivan Pupo 181). In an interview
from 1922, Pirandello further explains his position: “Per me, lo spirito è tutto, ed ognuno
di noi lo possiede in quanto che esso è attivo; i materialisti che lo negano ed ammettono
la materia non si accorgono che con questo affermano sempre una forza che è in noi
attiva e che non si manifesta che per la sua attività” [“For me, the spirit is everything, and
each of us possess it insofar as it is active; the materialists who deny it and acknowledge
the material do not realize that with this they always affirm a force that is active in us and
that does not manifest itself but for its activity”] (Ed. Ivan Pupo 159). Because traditional
science continues to dominate epistemology and fully rejects the spiritual realm, man’s
spirit traps him deeper in the entanglements of the material world. The misdirection of
the spirit results in the disharmony of the body, mind and soul and leads to psychological
suffering and a crisis of consciousness.

The compounding of technological invention, economic growth and political
tension of the early 1900s stimulated social, moral, intellectual and spiritual responses and
precipitated avant-garde movements in literature, the visual arts, and philosophy. In
contrast to the traditionalists, the most cursory glimpse of some of the pioneers of of
philosophy and psychology at the turn of the century, such as William James, Sigmund
Freud, Carl Jung, Henri Bergson, and Friedrich Nietzsche, provide a snapshot of the

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5William James, (1842-1910), born in New York, was a chemist, physiologist and psychologist. 
He is renowned for his writings on philosophy, psychology, religion and his proposal of the “stream” of
consciousness analogy in his Principles of Psychology (1890). James graduated from Harvard University
with a medical degree in 1869 and soon after became an Assistant Professor of Philosophy, also at Harvard.
One of the first medical doctors at the turn of the century to apply scientific theory to abstract and
psychological theories, his method and results were extremely influential for the twentieth century. His
semital work on the psychology of religion, The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), is a close
examination of human nature and illuminates the philosophy behind the varying approaches to
metaphysical questions. James was the first president of the American branch of the Society for Psychical
contemporary and emerging metaphysical explorations of the individual consciousness, the mind, the soul and the spirit.

Research. For more information on the life and work of William James, see Martin E. Marty’s introduction to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (NY: Penguin Books, 1982). Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist and the founder of psychoanalysis, was “one of the seminal influences on the literature of Europe in the twentieth century. From his early collaborative inquiries into abnormal states of mind, the results of which were published in *Studien über Hysterie (Studies on Hysteria)* (1895), his clinical studies led him to propound an entirely new concept of mind, its life and ways, its structure and development (Bradbury and McFarlane 619). Freud proposed that the human psyche could be divided into three parts: *Id*, *ego*, and *super-ego*; he discusses this model in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) and fully elaborates upon it in *The Ego and the Id* (1923). See *Freud and the 20th Century* (NY: Meridian Books, 1957).

Carl Gustav Jung, (1875-1961), “Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist and for a number of years one of Freud’s closest collaborators, broke clear in 1913 to pursue his own line: analytical psychology. Doubtful about the total and overriding importance Freud attached to the ‘libido,’ and persuaded that man’s basic drive was to achieve a surer balance—the essence of ‘individuation’—between the conscious and the unconscious parts of his mind, he advocated (notably in *Psychology of the Unconscious: a study of the transformation and symbolisms of the libido* (1912), *Psychological Types* (1921), and *The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious* (1928)) adoption of a new set of concepts, the yield from which would clarify many of the more bewildering areas of religion, art history, mythology and symbolism in general. His notion of the ‘collective unconscious’ was in support of his view that the human psyche was only in part *individually* determined, and that part was an interpersonally shared experience of ‘archetypal’ phenomena” (Bradbury and McFarlane 625).

Henri Bergson, (1859-1941), “French philosopher and Nobel prize winner for Literature in 1927, was one of the most formidable intellects to be deployed against the deterministic, rationalistic and over-intellectualized patterns of thought of the nineteenth century. His voice is most distinctly heard in *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness) (1889), in *Matière et mémoire* (Matter and Memory) (1896), and – most influentially – in *L’évolution créatrice* (Creative Evolution) (1907), where man’s creative spirit is defined in terms of an *élan vital* which is fluid, mobile and intuitive. Only by the recognition and acknowledgement of forces of this order can man free himself from the fatalistic and mechanistic determinants to which the nineteenth century paid such homage. Bergson’s ideas exercised an influence on twentieth century European literature second only to Nietzsche’s” (Bradbury and McFarlane 625).

Friedrich Nietzsche, (1844-1900), “German philosopher and poet, welcomed the term ‘aristocratic radicalism’ as that which most appropriately defined his mature ideas of the eighties: the proposition that ‘God is dead’; the myth of the Eternal Recurrence; the emergence of the Superman, and the coming inevitability of the ‘transvaluation of all values.’ From his early examinations of the origins of poetry and tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), through the cultural pessimism of a series of works—*Human, All Too Human* (1878-80), *The Dawn* (1881), *The Gay Science* (1882)—of the late seventies and early eighties, he moved to the formulation of ideas which had (and continue to have) the profoundest influence on Western thought and literature: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–92), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) and the uncoordinated fragments which were intended to form a systematic exposition of his most advanced thinking under the title of *The Will to Power*” (Bradbury and McFarlane 630).
Life in modern times, fostered by the justified fear of war and the collapse of traditional norms, contributed to a collective consciousness of anxiety; the analytical and determinist tradition gave way to ‘individualization’ and an increased attention toward “the nature of the unconscious or subconscious or subliminal self” (Brady 76). The artistic transformation from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, parallel to the industrial and commercial acceleration, was marked by a reorientation of the aesthetics of Romanticism, Realism and positivistic Naturalism that gave way to Symbolism, Futurism, Cubism, Dada and Surrealism (Bradbury and McFarlane 46). The new movement in literature was distinguished by the recurring themes of fragmentation of the consciousness, personality and identity with the scope of representing the current “crisis of reality”: the confusion and difficulty one experiences in trying to adapt to the “progressive disintegration of those meticulously constructed ‘systems’ and ‘types’ and ‘absolutes’ in a “world of rapid industrial development, advanced technology, urbanization, and secularization” (Bradbury and McFarlane 57, 80). Reflective of Pirandello’s exploration of the human psyche, the commonalities of modern literature are described:

We recognize the quality common to many of the most characteristic events, discoveries, and products of this modern age: in the concern to objectify the subjective, to make audible or perceptible the mind’s inaudible conversations, to halt the flow, to irrationalize the rational, to defamiliarize and dehumanize the expected, to conventionalize the extraordinary and the eccentric, to define the psychopathology of everyday life, to intellectualize the emotional, to secularize the spiritual, to see space as a function of time, mass as a form of energy, and uncertainty as the only thing. An explosive fusion, one might suppose, that destroyed the tidy categories or though, that toppled linguistic systems that disrupted formal grammar and the traditional links between words and words, words and things, inaugurating the power of ellipses and parataxis. (Bradbury and McFarlane 48)
Pirandello utilized various philosophical, scientific and spiritual frameworks to describe the psychological and spiritual crisis pervading the experience of man in the modern world.\(^6\) One of the most interesting facets of my research on Pirandello’s spiritual approach throughout his works are the unequivocal parallels with Hinduism and Buddhism. My analysis demonstrates that his oeuvre reflects modes of thought from Eastern religion to the modern movements of Theosophy and Spiritualism. While criticism regarding Pirandello’s application of Theosophy, Spiritualism and Parapsychology is extant (yet limited), to date there is practically no scholarship correlating Pirandello’s works and Buddhism.\(^7\) M. John Stella is perhaps the only other scholar suggesting this link. Stella claims that an examination of Pirandello’s works will show that he “profoundly comprehended the essence of Buddhism” (Stella 3). In his book

\(^6\) Man referring to the male gender, not humankind encompassing both men and women, as Pirandello almost exclusively wrote about married and professionally employed men in Italy in the twentieth century. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead writes: “Again and again in his stories and plays Pirandello focuses on characters like clerks, teachers, civil servants and small time business men since their professions depend on social appearances and ceremonies” (Radcliff-Umstead “Pirandello and the Puppet World” 15). Corrado Donati writes in “Eros and Solitude in Pirandello’s Short Stories”: “Critical historicism has taught that Pirandello’s man is first of all a twentieth-century man, and that the society within which he finds himself struggling between anguish and alienation is our bourgeois society” (Biasin and Gieri, eds. 142).

\(^7\) Antonio Illiano was a pioneer scholar regarding Pirandello’s application of spiritual and parapsychological elements. Illiano, in his article, “Pirandello and Theosophy” (1977), and his seminal book, Metapsichica e Letteratura in Pirandello (1982), explores Pirandello’s utilization of Spiritualism, Theosophy and parapsychology throughout his oeuvre and establishes the influence of such approaches on his creative process. In the positive review of Illiano’s book, Olga Ragusa writes: “[Equally interesting] is the author’s acceptance of intellectual and scholarly respectability for systems of knowledge long judged marginal and from a rationalist perspective suspect, and only now beginning to emerge into the mainstream of serious scholarship” (Ragusa “A Pirandello Quintet” 71). While some scholars have presented informative analyses of a similar nature,\(^7\) there is very little extant scholarship regarding Pirandello and spirituality. Illiano’s fresh contribution to Pirandello studies and the informative bibliography in Metapsichica e letturatura in Pirandello is indispensable, and is at present the most complete work for this type of analysis. It should be noted that Illiano’s book was never translated into English and is, unfortunately, currently out of print and difficult to obtain. For other criticism regarding Pirandello and spirituality, see: Pirandello o La stanza della tortura by Giovanni Macchia (1981), Futurismo Esoterico by Simona Cigliana (1996), Magia di in Romanzi: Il fu Mattia Pascal prima e dopo, a compilation edited by Pietro Frassica (2005), Letteratura come anamorfosi by Angelo Mangini (2007).
Self and Self-Compromise in the Narratives of Pirandello and Moravia, Stella describes
the correspondence between Buddhist doctrine and the works of Pirandello and Alberto
Moravia:

My study contends that several important themes in [Pirandello’s] work have not been thoroughly understood, in part because of a lack of
familiarity with oriental thought, specifically the Buddha’s teaching. [Buddha’s] major claim was that the assumption of a subsistent ‘I’ or ego
was the cause of the world’s ills, and that above all else we must disabuse
ourselves of this latent ‘self’-deception.8 If we can accomplish that task,
we shall transcend the everyday world with its care and commotion,
abiding placidly in a different dimension, a permanent state of wisdom and
felicity, in this very life. In sum, in order to live fully, we must negate our
own existence or Daesin. […]

So what is the self? What is it that we customarily call ‘I’, ‘me’, and
‘mine’? Pirandello and Moravia have been among the most relentless in
Western literature to ask these questions and to propose the following
answer: the ego is a persistent illusion, a deception, a shadow, or better
yet, a mirage. If this were their only contribution, they would conform to
the existentialist tradition. As opposed to their contemporaries, however,
Pirandello and Moravia dramatized a way out of the existential dilemma.

If, then, we are to consider seriously the question of identity in
Pirandello [and Moravia], it seems to me that we that we ought to
investigate Buddhist doctrine, the earliest known philosophy whose aim is
the denial of asminama (the pre-supposition “I am”). […]

Let the reader be assured that there is enough historical and textual
evidence to link Buddhist sources with Pirandellian [and Moravian] fiction. (Stella 1-4)

I also agree with Stella’s assertion that Pirandello scholars have not taken into account
the fact that at the time when Pirandello was studying at the University of Bonn (1889-
1891), Germany was the European center for the research into oriental philosophies.

Indeed, Pirandello was exposed to and influenced by German philosophers, such as

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8 M. John Stella’s footnote to reference the source in Buddhist doctrine: “As at Dighanikaya I:
196, where the Buddha says, ‘I teach a doctrine whose aim is the abandonment of the assumed self” (See
Stella Self and Self-Compromise in the Narratives of Pirandello and Moravia Note 1, 9).
Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, who were among the first Western intellectuals to comment on Buddhism.⁹

Pirandello’s ultimate message is that the spirit has the potential to create both positive and negative manifestations and his aim is to convey the spirited imagination’s capacity for creation. For Pirandello, the spirit is the eternal, active and creative force of the universe and its dynamism is the essence of true reality: “Lo spirito ci guida, ci alimenta, ci dà la vera vita” [“The spirit guides us, nourishes us, gives us true life”] (Ed. Ivan Pupo 399). Depending on the individual, the human spirit may create valuable art or it may create fictions that harm the consciousness and soul. Pirandello demonstrates that the human spirit, prone to fabricate illusions based on the relative individual perceptions, creates artificial realities that man mistakes for a communal and absolute reality. Therefore, according to Pirandello, reality does not exist beyond the comprehension of the dynamic nature of the universal spirit. The architecture of Pirandello’s aesthetic vision is built upon man’s misconception of reality and the representation of the negative consequences of the repressed spirit. For Pirandello, any conception of reality that does not encompass the recognition and comprehension of the universal spirit is illusory, and he emphasizes that mental anguish is inevitable if man does not detach his consciousness from such illusions.

⁹ Stella writes: “While it is well-known that our author spent some three years (1889-1891) studying at the University of Bonn, Pirandello scholars have not taken into account the fact that at the time Germany was the European centre for the research into oriental philosophies. It might be assumed that a young student of philology from a small town in Sicily, eager to broaden his intellectual horizon, would have been fascinated by the possibility of discovering a new world beyond the limited vistas offered by a traditional Italian education at that time—and would therefore have seized the opportunity to read the translations that had aroused such interest in intellectual centres of contemporary Germany” (See M. John Stella “Self and Suicide in Pirandello”).
In describing his role as an artist, Pirandello says in an interview from 1932:

“L’artista non deve servirsi delle cose, ma esprimere lo spirito delle cose” [“The artist should not make use of things, but express the spirit of things”] (Ed. Ivan Pupo 485). At the dawn of the twentieth-century, it is clear that Pirandello’s philosophical writing is concentrated on exposing the causes and effects of the fragmented consciousness as resulting from the collective unconscious imposed by a long tradition of material science, reason and logic. As though responding to Friedrich Nietzsche’s premonition in Beyond Good and Evil, Pirandello questions the supposed absolute truths in his criticism and humorist art and he urges others to do the same if they wish to experience authentic existence. Nietzsche writes:

However much value we ascribe to truth, truthfulness or altruism, it may be that we need to attribute a higher and more fundamental value to appearance, to the will to illusion, to egoism and desire. It could even be possible that the value of those good and honoured things consists precisely in the fact that in an insidious way they are related to those bad, seemingly opposite things, linked, knit together, even identical perhaps. Perhaps! But who is willing to worry about such dangerous Perhapses? We must wait for a new category of philosophers to arrive, to whose taste and inclination are the reverse of their predecessors—they will be in every sense philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps. And to speak in all seriousness: I see these new philosophers coming. (Eds. Pearson and Large 313)

Pirandello’s aim is neither to resolve the crisis of the spiritual sickness nor to philosophize tirelessly, but to spread awareness of such issues to his fellow man through his artistic representation. Despite Anthony Caputi’s claim that “Pirandello never championed a pat solution to this condition,” this dissertation demonstrates that a solution does indeed come to light for Pirandello and his characters (18). In order to demonstrate that authentic existence and liberation from suffering is predicated on the realignment of the human Being, that is spirit, soul and consciousness, with the universal spirit,
Pirandello ultimately illustrates a successful spiritual-psychological approach, unequivocally similar to Buddhist philosophy.

Incorporating traditional science, metaphysics and the new field of metapsychics, Pirandello effectively demonstrates the debilitating realization that one’s personal perspective of self-identity is an illusion, and not the reality upon which one built his life. To illustrate this crisis, as well as the solution, Pirandello explored the metaphysical branches of ontology (the study of the nature of being pertaining to material and spiritual existence), and cosmology (the philosophy of the structure and laws of the universe).

Examining the metaphysical and spiritual concepts interwoven throughout his collected works, one can trace Pirandello’s application of super-mundane principles, from the early the topical treatment of the ghost-like antagonist in his 1896 novella, “Chi fu?” (“Who was it?”), to his last, preternaturally abstract drama begun in 1934, I giganti della montagna (The Mountain Giants). Pirandello confronted the universal mysteries of life, death, the soul, and the spirit, and funneled these metaphysical elements into his artistic process, particularly his method of character creation. Eastern mystical teachings, Western philosophy and religion, the breakthroughs of modern physics and the science leading up to its astounding discoveries, from Copernicus to Einstein, converge in Luigi Pirandello’s oeuvre, encompassing both his aesthetic philosophies and his extensive collection of fiction. Focusing on Pirandello’s application of Spiritualism, Parapsychology, Theosophy and Buddhism, this dissertation demonstrates: 1) the fusion of ancient and modern elements throughout his oeuvre; 2) the author’s valuation of Buddhist psychology; 3) the transformation of the Pirandellian protagonist from a crisis-ridden and fragmented character to one that is peaceful and spiritually fulfilled. This
trajectory is brought to light via the analysis of the following texts, the critical essays: “Arte e coscienza d’oggi” (“Art and Consciousness of Today”) (1893), “Rinunzia” (“Renunciation”) (1896), “L’umorismo” (“On Humor”) (1908), and “Da lontano” (“From a Distance”) (1909); the novelle: “Chi fu?” (“Who was it?”) (1896), “Pallottoline!” (“Little Pellets”) (1898), “Il vecchio Dio” (“The Old God”) (1901), “Quando ero matto” (“When I Was Mad”) (1902), “La casa del Granella” (“Granella’s House”) (1905), “Personaggi” (“Characters”) (1906), “Dal naso al cielo” (1907) (“From the Nose to the Sky”), “Leviamoci questo pensiero” (Let’s Dispose of this Worry”) (1910), “La tragedia di un personaggio” (“A Character’s Tragedy”) (1911), (“La trappola”) (“The Trap”) (1912), “Canta l’Epistola” (“Sings the Epistle”) (1912), and (“Di sera, un geranio”) (“At Night, A Geranium”) (1934); the plays: All’uscita (At the Exit) (1916) and Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author) (1921), I giganti della montagna (The Mountain Giants) (begun 1934, incompleted); the novels: Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal) (1904) and Uno, nessuno e centomila (One, No one and One Hundred Thousand) (1909-1925).

I consider the selected texts to be paradigms of Pirandello’s artistic quest, driven by his “profound spiritual need” to express his skepticism concerning the current social norms and their implications for the modern consciousness, to represent Western man’s “spiritual sickness” and existential crisis, and to reveal the healing properties found in philosophies hitherto unknown or considered taboo. As evidenced in Pirandello’s works, freedom of liberated consciousness, and reunion of mind, soul and spirit, is achieved when man consciously practices detachment from his selfish desires and false beliefs and learns to live selflessly, in harmony with himself, others, and nature—not in the universe
but as a manifestation of the universe. In order to overcome the “spiritual sickness,” one must gain awareness of his misconceptions and experience the fragmentation of self-alienation in order begin the process that will heal his plagued psyche and mend the disconnect between his perception of himself, other people, nature and ultimately, his own soul and consciousness. The realization that one is not the rigid and fixed self he believed himself to be is indeed frightening, but this awakening of consciousness is the necessary first step, for those who wish to overcome their suffering, toward returning the human spirit to a state of wholeness. Man may acknowledge that his personal perception of the world is faultily based on his subjective belief system, but to achieve true lasting inner peace he must be willing to completely detach from his prior way of sensing the world—his view of himself included.

The close analysis of these texts provides ample evidence that beyond being an index of Pirandello’s fluency with current, cultural, scientific, and spiritual trends, these systems of thought provide the very scaffolding on which Pirandello’s works are constructed. An understanding of the esoteric philosophies and scientific theories—the raw material from which Pirandello extracted the essence—allows a deeper understanding of his fictional stories and critical theories. This study substantiates my claim that Pirandello’s oeuvre finds its basis in, and must be read through a spiritual lens—taking into consideration both Eastern and Western ideologies, methodologies and spiritual practices.
CHAPTER 1

THROUGH THE REVERSE TELESCOPE

Antipositivism & Pirandello’s Cosmic Vision

Se io interrogo la mia coscienza, mi par di sentirvi un’aspra, continua discordia di voci; mi par che tutto in lei tremi e tentenni. E non so più credere alla calma fiducia di certe gente serena, che vorebbe per esempio, richiamar l’arte a fini più civili, proponendole d’inneggiare alla scienza, suggerendole finanche non so più quanti straordinarii motivi lirici. […]

Io vorrei che ci domandassimo, che cosa in fondo la scienza, insieme con la filosofia moderna, abbia risposta e risponda al nostro spirito libero, mercé loro, per forza di ragionate negazioni, dalle vici credenze, e rimasto quasi tra le rovine di queste e le nebbie dell’avvenire.

Dalla natura appunto di questa risposta mi par che si debba solamente argomentare il perché del presente malassere intelletuale, e fors’anche la cagione dei torbidi commovimenti morali e sociali dell’oggi. 10

-Luigi Pirandello

Luigi Pirandello distinguishes himself from other artists claiming that, as a humorist, he is endowed with a special process of intuition and reflection that enables him to reveal profound truths about man, existence and the human experience. Asserting that the artist essentially defines and gives artistic representation to psychological states, Pirandello’s complex task as a genuine humorist is to disassemble man’s psyche,

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10 From “Rinunzia” (“Rinunciation”) (1896). See Saggi, poesie, scritti vari 1056-1057. Translation: “If I examine my conscience, I seem to sense there a sharp, continuous discord of voices; it seems to me that everything in it trembles and wavers. And I no longer know how to believe in the calm confidence of certain serene people, that would like for example, to redirect art to more civic ends, proposing to sing the praises of science, suggesting even I do not know how many extraordinary lyrical reasons. […] I would like that we ask ourselves, what ultimately science, together with modern philosophy, has answered and responds to our spirit, liberated thanks to them, by force of reasoned negations, from the prohibited beliefs, and remaining almost between the ruins of these and the haze of the future. Precisely from the nature of this response it seems to me that we should only argue the why of the present intellectual malaise, and perhaps also the cause of the affecting moral and social troubles of today.”
examine the concealed elements, and identify any illusory aspects. Ultimately, as an artist as well as a ‘fantastical critic,’ the humorist must re-assemble the pieces and enlighten others via artistic representation that reflects the new awareness and gained comprehension of the inner-workings of the mind. Dedicated to this process of creating authentic humor, Pirandello purposefully contemplates human existence and closely examines the current sociological issues in order to penetrate man’s disquieted psychological state.

In this chapter, I demonstrate Pirandello’s criticism of empiricist epistemologies and I present his concerns for the moral, psychological and spiritual well being of humanity. In the first section, I examine the critic’s rejection of positivism and metaphysical naturalism, specifically concentrating on his early critical essays: “Arte e coscienza d’oggi” (“Art and Consciousness of Today”) (1893) and “Rinunzia” (“Renunciation”) (1896). In these essays, Pirandello introduces his conceptualization of the spiritual sickness to illustrate the negative effects of scientific, economic and

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11 In “L’umorismo” (1908), Pirandello writes: “L’artista, in fondo, non fa altro che definire e rappresentare stati psicologici” (Spv 124).

12 Regarding positivism, Stephen Shapin writes in The Scientific Life: “Towards the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century a variety of related philosophical terms of art were developed to describe formal philosophies of science that, in one way or another, rejected the idea of scientific Truth as correspondence to God’s reality, to the ultimate reality that was supposed to lie behind appearances”; Shapin explains the tenets of positivism: “Metaphysical speculations are scientifically illegitimate and sense-date are the only proper objects of knowledge and criteria for judging it” (Shapin 27).

13 In World without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism, Michael C. Rea describes the rapid flurry of various trends of naturalistic philosophy in the twentieth century: “By all accounts, naturalism involves a very high regard for the natural sciences and a very low regard for nonscientific forms of inquiry. […] Naturalism is identified sometimes with materialism, sometimes with empiricism, and sometimes with scientism; but all of these positions are equally difficult to characterize [as] there is widespread disagreement among naturalists about what it is for something to count as natural or supernatural. (21) Owing to the proliferation in the literature of different and conflicting formulations of naturalism, it is now common for people to say that naturalism comes in several different varieties, each expressible by a different philosophical thesis. Typically, the putative varieties are metaphysical, epistemological, and methodological. Perhaps the only clearly formulated explicitly ontological thesis that all naturalists agree on is the terribly uninformative thesis that there are no supernatural entities” (Rea 52-54).
philosophical materialism on the consciousness, soul and spirit of his contemporaries. According to Pirandello’s assessment of the present climate, man was trapped in the throes of an existential crisis imposed by the predominance of positivistic approaches that—in their denial of the legitimacy of metaphysical speculation and ignorance of the spirit—deprived man of living an authentic existence. The analysis of Pirandello’s reproachful commentary is essential for a complete comprehension of the inception of his protagonists as afflicted and fragmented, and also serves as the theoretical point of departure for the characters’ journey of self-realization and spiritual evolution undertaken throughout his oeuvre.

In the second part of this chapter, I offer examples from Pirandello’s early fictional texts in which he articulates his criticism of positivistic science and initiates his artistic representation of the protagonist as imprisoned by the artificial barriers of his consciousness. To convey Pirandello’s vast knowledge of cosmology and early interest in spirituality, I specifically concentrate on his works that feature the cannochiale rivoltato (inverted telescope), the medico-filosofo (doctor-philosopher), and the filosofia del lontano (philosophy of distance). Pirandello’s humoristic manipulation of the telescope and its derivative philosophy of distance, inter-textually woven throughout the first half of corpus, serve as a trope for his protagonists’ original attempts to understand and overcome the “spiritual sickness.” I trace this pattern from the early novelle: “Pallottoline!” (“Little Pellets”) (1898), “Il vecchio Dio” (“The Old God”) (1901), “La tragedia di un personaggio” (“A Character’s Tragedy”) (1911); to the critical essays: “L’umorismo” (“On Humor”) (1908) and “Da Lontano” (“From a Distance”) (1909). Concluding with an assessment of Pirandello’s rejection of the doctor-philosopher and
his discontinuance of the *philosophy of distance*, I prepare the reader for the following discourse and ultimate disclosure of this dissertation: Pirandello’s protagonists attain genuine enlightenment and embody *authentic existence* when, through full engagement with the present moment, they are able to realign the human spirit with the spirit of the universe.

**Modern Consciousness & the Afflicted Spirit**

Because of its past success and immense future promise, science cast a hegemonic shadow over other intellectual endeavors during the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century. As a result, the occult, along with philosophy, theology, and art, suffered tremendous internal tensions. To what degree should science be accommodated? Embracing it meant tapping into widespread prestige and thereby winning almost instantaneous social approbation, but outright acceptance of its principles might irreparably compromise the integrity of whatever non-scientific belief system one wished to promote.

In the essay “Arte e coscienza d’oggi” (“Art and Consciousness of Today”) (1893), Pirandello writes: “Lo spirito moderno è profondamente malato” [“The modern spirit is profoundly sick”] (*Saggi, poesie, scritti vari* 893). Pirandello elucidates a crisis of identity, or *spiritual sickness*, induced by a corrupted spirit that fragments man’s consciousness and displaces his soul. In the critical essays of this nature, Pirandello examines the ethical implications of scientific and philosophical materialism as the source of man’s increasing anguish. He proclaims with antipositivistic fervor that mental suffering is the repercussion of the narrow empirical scope of such epistemological perspectives. Pirandello argues that modern materialist philosophy, rooted in traditional scientific method, wrongly envisions the universe as, “una vivente macchina” [“a living machine”] that together with science assigns man to his “malinconico posto”

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15 “Arte e coscienza d’oggi” was first published in “La critica” on September 11, 1895 (*Spv* 891).
[“melancholy position”] in nature (Spv 895). This melancholy position, Pirandello explains, emerges from the implementation of man-made laws of logic to explain the universe while disregarding its innate laws and customs, i.e. the logic inherent in nature. He disputes the restriction of using only empirical science to study the physical world, and disproves of its reduction of the forces of nature to equations and measurements. The author challenges ideologies that insist on intellectualizing the determining causes of events and concepts. He claims that traditional scientific materialism, governed by the dictates of objectivism, reductionism, physicalism and monism, in their refusal to consider the nonphysical realm as a viable subject of inquiry, are the cause of the “malessere intellettuale”—the intellectual malaise afflicting contemporary society—particularly the young people and artists (Spv 901).

In Pirandello’s estimation, the influx of technological inventions that supposedly increase human comfortability, and the current void of a structured standard for values, leads to a moral breakdown, as well as a spiritual and mental crisis. In Pirandello and the Crisis of Modern Consciousness, Anthony Caputi describes Pirandello’s conception of the distressed modern consciousness:

The affliction of modern consciousness, as Pirandello understood it in the 1890s, was that it had lost the focus that inherited cultural structures had made possible for many centuries: it lacked the means to order, define, and regulate the data of experience; the familiar categories, the time-honored distinctions, the unexamined standards and loyalties that had given shape and meaning to experience had been lost. The crisis of modern consciousness consisted in its need to discover a new idea of itself and the world, a way to structure itself that would enable it once again to derive values coherently (Caputi 17).17

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16 For specific information regarding the Scientific Method, see the Introduction to Buddhism & Science: Breaking New Ground by B. Alan Wallace (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
17 This “crisis of modern consciousness” echoes Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of “bad conscience,” his term used in On the Genealogy of Morals to describe “a serious illness which man was forced to succumb by the pressure of the most fundamental changes which he experienced,—that change
In “Arte e coscienza d’oggi,” Pirandello conveys the extraordinary mental confusion that reigns in the current consciousness and imprisons man so fiercely—as though he were a blind man trapped in a labyrinth. Pirandello identifies a relativity of perspective, reflective of Friedrich Nietzsche’s “perspectivism,” as replacing the stability of the old norms—a concept that will later become the foundation of many of his fictional masterpieces. Representative of these varying perspectives, there are many possible paths for man to take to liberate himself from the suffering of wandering lost in the labyrinth of life. However, as there is no communal directive to follow and people are unwilling or afraid to reflect upon the values attributed to certain “truths,” the correct path to the exit is continuously hazy and unclear. Pirandello writes:


whereby he found himself imprisoned with in the confines of society and peace” (Keith Pearson and Duncan Large, eds. 419).

18 In The Gay Science (1882), Nietzsche explains his notion of perspectivism: “Our thoughts themselves are continually governed by the character of the consciousness—by the “genius of the species” that commands it—and translated back into the perspective of the herd. Fundamentally, all our actions are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual; there is no doubt of that. But as soon as we translate them into consciousness they no longer seem to be. This is the essence of phenomenalism and perspectivism as I understand them: Owing to the nature of animal consciousness, the world of which we can become conscious is only a surface and sign-world, a world that is made common and meaner; whatever becomes conscious becomes by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd, signal; all becoming conscious involves a great and through corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization. Ultimately, the growth of consciousness becomes a danger; and anyone who lives among the most conscious Europeans knows that it is a disease” (Nietzsche 299-301).
Crollate le vecchie norme, non son ancor sorte o bene stabilite le nuove; è naturale che il concetto della relatività d’ogni cosa si sia talmente allargato in noi, da farci quasi del tutto perdere l’estimativa. (Spav 900)

In our minds and consciousness reigns an extraordinary confusion. The most disparate figures are reflected in this interior mirror. [...] We feel bewildered, rather, a blind man lost in an immense labyrinth, surrounded all around by an impenetrable mystery. There are many paths: which will be the true one? People hurry here and there, and each gives the air of understanding something. [...] Which directive criteria to follow? No one dares to go to the end of his path, we stop ourselves halfway. We want to look back at the others, and doubt comes to our lips: And if I am wrong? Perhaps through there one finds the exit. And we put ourselves on another path. Several people always follow us, like many bodyguards, that imitate our movements, repeat our words, do everything that we do.

The old norms have crumbled, the new ones have not yet been sorted or well-established; it is natural that the concept of relativity of everything is so broadened in us, making us lose judgment almost completely.

As Pirandello deems it, the impenetrable mystery of life surrounds us—full of unexplored paths—yet people are still afraid to go beyond the limits of the consciousness, imposed by the collective unconscious, to discover their own path. Pirandello uses the space of the labyrinth, filled with lost souls and inaccessible exits, to demonstrate the labored steps and repressed impulses of the stymied modern man—a metaphor that he will return to in many of his works. In his fictional pieces, Pirandello aesthetically represents this mental state via the existential trauma of his protagonists as they come to realize that their familiar reality is actually a false construction built upon an unstable foundation. As the characters are confronted with the “illusion” of their reality, they are unnervingly displaced from their former confidence and sense of themselves. Thrust from the safety and comfort of their artificial worlds, they become lost in a vortex of uncertainty and confusion.

Pirandello expresses his concerns for the norms of conduct and morality and the future of ethics, as subjection to such mechanical laws were driving man’s need to satisfy
his individual instincts and vain aspirations. Ultimately, in addition to his concern for social standards and values, the maintenance of the integrity of art is of utmost importance to Pirandello. Expressing his negative estimation of the current state of ethics and aesthetics, the critic writes: “Non mai, credo, la vita nostra eticamente ed esteticamente fu piú disgregata. Slegata, senz’alcun principio di dottrina e di fede, i nostri pensieri turbinano entro i fatti attuosi, che stan come nembi sopra una rovina” [“Never, I think, ethically and aesthetically, was our life was more disgregated. Unbound, without any principle of doctrine and faith, our thoughts swirl in the actuated fates like clouds above doom” (Spsv 901). In The Mirror of Our Anguish, Douglas Radcliff-Umstead explains Pirandello’s pessimism and motivation as a writer:

According to Pirandello, when a society came to be founded on mendacity—as Italy was at the end of the nineteenth century—art could only reflect the falsification of genuine sentiments under an inflexible code of conduct. That lying moral conscience, which represses natural impulses and misrepresents them in compliance with taboos, deprives man of tragic stature and reduces art to being the maidservant of social, religious, and legal obligations. As a writer, Pirandello aspired to demolish the façade of bourgeois respectability in order to reveal the pathetic truths of inner man. (Radcliff-Umstead 22)

Pirandello fears that the current inclination of thought will further cause artistic endeavors to succumb to egotistical imitative reproductions, as for his aesthetic standards, art must reflect the spontaneity of life. 19 He asks the question most pertinent to his passion: “Quale sarà l’arte di domani?” [“What will be the art of tomorrow?”] (Spsv 906). Upon concluding, Pirandello imparts to the reader his perception of modern consciousness as an “agonizing dream”:

Io non so se la coscienza moderna sia veramente così democratica e scientifica come oggi comunemente si dice. Non capisco certe

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19 In “Arte e coscienza d’oggi,” Pirandello criticizes “modern dilettante artists” and their nongenuine aesthetic theory of knowledge (See Spsv 901).
affermazioni astratte. A me la coscienza moderna dà l’immagine d’un sogno angoscioso attraversato da rapide larve torride o tristi o minacciose, d’una battaglia notturna, d’una mischia disperata, in cui s’sagitano per un momento e subito scompaiono, per riapparirne delle altre, mille bandiere, in cui le parti avversarie si siano confuse e mischiate, e ognuno lotti per sé, per la sua difesa, contro all’amico e contro al nemico. È in lei un continuo cozzo di voci discordi, un’agitazione continua. Mi par che tutto in lei tremi e tentenni.

Al calma fiduciosa di certa gente serena non credo. Che avverrà domani? Siamo certamente alla vigilia d’un enorme avvenimento.

I do not know if the modern consciousness is truly democratic and scientific as is commonly said today. I do not understand certain abstract affirmations. To me the modern consciousness gives the image of an anxious dream passed through fleeting or sad or threatening larvae, of a nocturnal battle, a mixture of despair, which agitates for a moment and suddenly disappears, to reappear on the other side, a thousand flags, in which the opposing sides are confused and mixed, and every battle for himself, for his defense, against his friend and enemy. In the consciousness there is a continual clash of discordant voices, agitation continues. It seems to me that everything in it trembles and wavers. I do not believe in the calm faith of certain people. What will happen tomorrow? We are certainly on the eve of an enormous event.

Though the closing conviction that we are on the eve of an enormous event could be inferred to have a positive connotation, it is more plausible that Pirandello’s prediction is pessimistic and disheartening.

Pirandello revisits his condemnation of science and modern philosophy, and discusses their social and emotional implications in the essay, “Rinunzia” (“Renunciation”) (1896). In response to the recent development of the radiotelegraph by Guglielmo Marconi in 1895, Pirandello recapitulates his diagnosis of the spiritually

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20 “Rinunzia” was first published in “La critica” on February 8, 1896 (Spsv 1056).
21 In the Biographical Encyclopedia of Science and Technology, Isaac Asimov writes of Italian electrical engineer, Marchese Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937): “In 1894 Marconi came across an article on the electromagnetic waves discovered eight years earlier by H.R. Hertz and it occurred to him that these might be used in signaling. By the end of the year he was ringing a bell at a distance of thirty feet. He made use of Hertz’s method of producing the radio waves and of a device called the coherer to detect them. […] In 1896, when the Italian government showed itself uninterested in his work, he went to England and sent a signal nine miles. He then applied for and obtained the first patent in the history of radio. […] In 1909 Marconi shared the Nobel Prize in physics with German physicist Karl Braun and in later years
sick spirit to account for modern man’s suffering, describing the spirit as: “lo spirito così invaso da mortale malsanía” [“the spirit so invaded by deadly unhealthiness”] (Spsv 1056). He points to the “rinunzia suprema di fronte al mistero della vita” [“supreme renunciation in the face of the mystery of life”] that science and modern philosophy impose as the cause of man’s insatiable thirst for material gratification (Spsv 1057). In the opening of the essay, Pirandello questions the contrast between the genius and excitement behind the miraculous discoveries and the lethargic state of artistic production and intellectual malaise. He poses the same question he asks in the 1893 essay: “Come si spiega il contrasto tra l’ingegno così agguerrito di vita e lo spirito così invaso da mortale malsanía? Non sappiamo noi dunque guardarci piú intorno a stimare i portenti che l’uomo ha saputo creare in questo tempo? O è già spenta ogni meraviglia per gli occhi e per l’anima? [“How can we explain the contrast between the genius trained to inure life and the spirit thus invaded by mortal illness? Do we no longer know how to look around and within ourselves to valorize the portents that man has created in our time, or has every wonder already faded for the eyes and the soul?” (Spsv 1056).

Pirandello vehemently accuses science and modern philosophy of creating models of consciousness that, “reduce what is exceedingly intricate and mysterious to abstract systems” and thereby, “renounce the full dimensions of both life and consciousness” (Caputi 17).

Pirandello theorizes that man is blinded by the incapacity of the consciousness to reflect outside the scope of the senses and, as a result, he is rendered incapable of experimented extensively with the use of short-wave radio for signaling. He was in charge of Italy’s radio service during World War I, and perfected the “radio beam” along which a pilot could fly blind” (Asimov 650-651).
embracing his whole being (Spalv 1059). The author asks, “Abbiamo veramente una
dottrina infallibile della conoscenza e una nozione precisa dell’universo? Chi potrebbe
darcela? La scienza. Ma questa si basa soltanto su fenomeni e rapporti; conosce la
faccia, non il dentro delle cose” [“Do we truly have an infallible doctrine of knowledge
and a precise notion of the universe? Who would be able to give it to us? Science. But
this is based only on phenomenon and relationships; it knows the face, not the inside of
things.”] (Spalv 1058). Pirandello clearly believes there are crucial intangible elements,
consciousness and the soul in particular that, beyond the mystic tradition in the West, are
neglectfully unexplored by Western traditional science and philosophy—perhaps since
the days of Pythagoras and Plato, whose mystical doctrines broke away from the Greek
tradition of rationalism and humanism. 22 Interestingly, there are striking parallels

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22 Pythagoras and Plato both believed in transmigration and the immortality of the soul. Geoffrey Parrinder writes of Pythagoras: “Pythagoras lived and taught in the second half of the sixth century B.C. at Kroton. He looked upon Orpheus as the chief of his patrons. [Orpheus, said to be a Thracian, appears in Greek history as the prophet of a religious school or sect with a code of rules of life, a mystical theology, and a system of purificatory and expiatory rites]. Pythagoras believed not only in rebirth but in purification of the soul. The cycle of births is regarded as a means for the growth of man’s higher nature. […] A peculiar feature in the asceticism of the Pythagoreans from the fourth century at least seems to have been silence. The Pythagorean order was a religious fraternity. Admission to the fraternity was gained by initiation, i.e. by purification followed by the revelation of truth. Purification consisted not only in the observance of rules of abstinence from certain kinds of food and dress but also in the purification of the soul by theoria, or the contemplation of the divine reality. […] For Pythagoras, pure contemplation is the end of man, the completion of human nature. When by the contemplative process the soul is perfected, that is, purified from the taint of its subjection to the body, there would be no need of further rebirths. […] The mathematical and mystical sides were side by side in Pythagoras and, according to tradition, a split occurred within the school between the Mathematikoi or the rationalists, whose interest was in the theory of numbers, and the Akusmatikoi, who followed up the religious side of the movement. We have in Pythagoras a rare combination of high intellectual power and profound spiritual insight. […] Iamblichus, the biographer of Pythagoras, tells us that he travelled widely, studying the teachings of Egyptians, Assyrians, and Brāhmīns. Gomperz writes: ‘It is not too much to assume that the curious Greek, who was a contemporary of Buddha, and it may be of Zoroaster too, would have acquired a more or less exact knowledge of the East in that age of intellectual fermentation, through the medium of Persia’” (Parrinder 141-143)

Regarding Plato, Parrinder writes: “The religion of Pythagoras was based on the Orphic teaching with its austere asceticism, its voluntary poverty and community of goods, its belief in rebirth and respect for animal life. Aristotle suggests that Plato follows closely the teaching of the Pythagoreans. He took up Orphic and Pythagorean views and wove them into the texture of his philosophy. The essential unity of the human and the divine spirit, the immortality of the human soul, the escape from the restless wheel of the troublesome journey, the phenomenality of the world, the contempt for the body, the distinction between
between the *Upanishads* (or *Upanisads*), and the Greek mystical tradition of the Orphic, the Eleusinian, the Pythagorean and Platonic schools.\(^{23}\)

In the conclusion of “Rinunzia,” Pirandello returns to his supposition of relativity; he conjectures that man will never be able to have a precise notion of the parameters of life, but only sentiments that are changeable and various. Representative of the fourth dimension proposed by modern physics, Pirandello appropriates the geometrical figure of the polyhedron, with its hidden sides as an analogy for the impossibility of embracing the totality of being—one’s own or that of another persons—because of the relative nature of reality. He writes:

> In ogni nostro atto è sempre tutto l’essere; quello che si manifesta è soltanto relazione a un altro atto immediate; ma nello stesso tempo si riferisce alla totalità dell’essere: è come la faccia d’un poliedro che combaci con la faccia rispettiva d’un altro, pur non esclusendo le altre facce che guardano per ogni verso. Ogni conseguenza ricavata da questa manifestazione è perciò necessariamente unilaterale. E da qui l’impossibilità d’abbracciar tutto l’essere, come è impossibile abbracciare

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23 Geoffrey Parrinder distinguishes the *Upanishads* (or *Upanisads*) from the *Rig Veda*: “The collection of hymns which forms the *Rig Veda* is the oldest source of texts on Indian religion, begun perhaps before 1000 B.C. but passed on orally and not written down till much later. The *Upanishads* (*sitting down near* or *secret sessions*) are discourses and dialogues of which the oldest were compiled perhaps between 800 and 500 B.C.” (Parrinder 14).

Describing the parallel of Greek mysticism and the *Upaniṣads*, Parrinder writes: “Ascetic practices developed in the tradition represented by the schools associated with the mystery cults, Pythagoras, and Plato, and in it we may suspect the influence of India directly or indirectly through Persia. Dr. Inge observes that the Platonic or the mystical outlook on life for which religion is at once a philosophy and a discipline ‘was first felt in Asia,’ especially in the *Upaniṣads* and Buddhism. Inge writes: ‘This mystical faith appears in Greek lands as Orphism and Pythagoreanism. In Europe as in Asia it was associated with ideas of the transmigration of souls and a universal law of periodical recurrence. But it is in Plato, the disciple of the Pythagoreans as well as of Socrates, who was probably himself the head of a Pythagorean group at Athens, that this conception of an unseen eternal world of which the visible world is only a pale copy, gains a permanent foothold in the West’” (Parrinder 150-151).

The whole being is always in each of our acts; that which manifests itself is only relative to another immediate action; but at the same time refers to the totality of being: it is like the face of a polyhedron that coincides with the respective face of another, yet not excluding the other faces that look in other directions. Every consequence obtained from this manifestation is therefore necessarily unilateral. And hence the impossibility of embracing the whole being, as it is impossible to embrace all facets of a polyhedron at one time. How then to work, if we lack the science and being eludes us?

Pirandello urgently calls for an evaluation of the detrimental “renunciations” in place at the turn of the century as he felt a reassessment was critical for the moral, ethical and intellectual conduct of society. He reiterates his prophetic admonition that man will suffer his defeat “come un armento verso l’estremo rovina” [“like a herd heading toward extreme ruin”] (*Spv* 1059), if he does not consciously reflect and meditate on this condition, not by reasoning, doing or thinking, but concentrating solely on being. After the turn of the century, Pirandello shifts his focus away from criticism and begins to concentrate on his fictional works. The following sections, with the exception of the analysis of the essay “Da lontano,” demonstrate Pirandello’s early representations of the imprisoned protagonist and their attempts to adapt and overcome their “melancholy positions” in the universe.

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24 Pirandello similarly describes the polyhedron in “Azione Parlata” (“Spoken Action”) (1899), and in his review of G.A. Cesareo’s *Francesca da Rimini* (1905) (Caputi 143).

25 This analogy of the *herd* echoes Friedrich Nietzsche’s argument in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), in which he states that modern European morality is *a herd animal morality*, and therefore, as a free society is responsible for the “degeneration and diminution of man into a perfect herd animal” (Pearson and Large, eds. 299, 344). Pirandello also expresses the threatening sentiment of mankind as a “herd heading toward extreme ruin” in the essay, “Il neo-idealismo” (“Neo-Idealism”) (1896). See *Saggi, poesie, scritti vari* 917.
The Reverse Telescope & the Vantage Point of the Soul

Maledetto il telescopio! Ma ci crede che io li fracasserei tutti quanti? che spazzerei dalla faccia della terra tutti quanti gli osservatorii astronomici? Il telescopio, il telescopio, sissignore, la nostra rovina! ha rovinato l’umanità—sissignore—il telescopio! Perché, mentre l’occhio guarda di sotto, dalla lente piccola, e vede grande ciò che la natura provvidenzialmente aveva voluto farci vedere piccolo, l’anima che fa? salta a guardar di sopra, l’anima, dalla lente più grande; e il telescopio allora che diventa? Un terribile strumento, un microscopio formidabile, che subissa la terra e l'uomo e tutte le nostre glorie e grandezze.²⁶

Though the notion that Copernicus’s discovery that the Earth is not the center of the universe caused man to feel small was not original to Pirandello, his unique execution of the inverted telescope offers the reader an uncharted creative coping mechanism of

²⁶ The original version of the novella, “Dal naso al cielo” (“From the Nose to the Sky”) (1907), discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, contains the earliest reference to the reverse, or inverted, telescope. This passage, fully quoted and translated here, is found in the original version of “Dal naso al cielo” (first published in “Il Marzocco,” April 7th, 1907), but is omitted in subsequent printings. In the following passage (continued from above), the spiritually progressive scientist Vernoni debates with his former, traditional science-oriented professor. Impassioned, Vernoni explains why the telescope has ruined humanity: “Piccolo? Ma scusi, signor professore, dice sul serio? Ma se l'uomo può intendere e concepire la infinita sua piccolezza, vuol dire ch’egli intende e concepisce l’infinita grandezza dell’Universo. E come si può dir piccolo, dunque, l’uomo? Lei scherza! Piccolo? Ma dentro di me dev’esserci per forza, intende? per forza qualcosa di questo infinito, se no io non lo intenderei, come non lo intende quell’albero, putacaso, o il mio cappello…Qualcosa che, se io afflissi gli occhi nel cielo, egregio signore professore, s’apre, e diventa, come niente, plaga dello spazio, in cui roteano mondi, dico mondi, di cui sento e compredo la formidabile grandezza. E vuole, scusi, vuole ch’io chiuda questi occhi che la natura mi ha fatti così penetranti e così desiderosi si vedere, di scoprire, su su, una ragione che m’appaghi e m’acquieti, per ristringermi qua allo studio dei sassolini, dei pesciolini, dei moscherini? … Scienza, non dico di no! ma come vuole che mi contenti, signor professore?” (TLN 2: 1008-1011).

[“Cursed telescope! Do you believe I would break all of them? That I would wipe all the astronomical observatories from the face of the earth? The telescope, the telescope, yes Sir, our ruin! It ruined humanity—yes Sir—the telescope! Because while the eye looks from the smaller lens and sees big that which nature providentially had intended for us to see as small, what does the soul do? The soul jumps to look through the bigger lens at the other end and the telescope therefore becomes a terrible instrument, a dreadful microscope that ruins the land and man and all our greatness and glories. Small? But excuse me, Professor, are you serious? But if man is able to understand and conceptualize the huge infinity of his smallness, it means he can also understand and conceptualize the infinite greatness of the universe. And how is one able to say small, meanwhile, man? You’re joking! Small? But inside me must be something of this infiniteness, of course, understand? inside of me, if not, I would not understand it, like that tree doesn’t understand it, maybe, or my hat. Something that if I fix my eye in the sky, it opens itself, and becomes like nothing, a region of space, in which worlds rotate, I say worlds, of which I feel and understand the dreadful greatness. And you want that I close these eyes that nature made so penetrating for me and so desiring to see, to discover, up up, a reason that satisfies me and quiets me, to restrict myself in the study of small rocks and small fish and gnats? Science, I won’t deny it! but how do you want me to be make myself happy, Professor?”]
detachment for dealing with his Napoleonic complex in the universe. According to Pirandello, when man, from his position on Earth, looks through the smaller to the larger end of the telescope, the immensity of the universe is inconceivable and overwhelming. While man stands still, viewing the infinite stars, his soul unconsciously panics as its vehicle (man), no longer feels grounded or adequate in the world. As Pirandello conveys in *Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal)*, the soul, having its own needs, acts independently from the spirit and consciousness (which are influenced heavily by societal dictates), and does whatever it needs to do in order to right itself:

> Le anime hanno un loro particolare modo d’intendersi, d’entrare in intimità, fino a darsi del tu, mentre le nostre persone sono tuttavia impacciate nel commercio delle parole comuni, nella schiavitù delle esigenze sociali. Han bisogni lor propri e loro proprie aspirazioni le anime, di cui il corpo non si dà per inteso, quando veda l’impossibilità di soddisfarli e di tradurli in atto. (Tr 1: 459)

> Our spirits have their own private way of understanding one another, of becoming intimate, while our external persons are still trapped in the commerce of ordinary words, in the slavery of social rules. Souls have their own needs and their own ambitions, which the body ignores when it sees that it’s impossible to satisfy them or achieve them. (Trans. William Weaver 137)

Pirandello explains that it is his duty as a humorist to reveal the sentiment of the opposite, and he does this by inverting the telescope so that man’s soul can gain a more accurate perspective. In “L’umorismo,” Pirandello describes the telescope as the discovery that “dealt us the coup de grâce”:

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27 In “L’umorismo,” Pirandello illustrates his process of humor, and therefore, the emergence of the “feeling of the opposite,” in the well-known example of the “vecchia signora” (old lady). This elderly woman, whose hair is dyed and smeared with ointment and who is made up like an exotic parrot, appears on the exterior to be the opposite of what a respectable older woman ought to be. At first glance, her appearance is laughable and she seems completely ridiculous. The initial, superficial comic reaction, the instinct to laugh, is what Pirandello terms the “perception of the opposite,” and it is the only reaction that will occur if reflection does not take place. However, for the humorist Pirandello, reflection interjects itself and suggests that perhaps the old lady does not want to dress in such a way and she is making herself up in such a manner “only because she pitifully deceives herself into believing” that if she does so, she will be
Ci diede il colpo di grazia la scoperta del telescopio: altra macchinetta infernale, che può fare il pajo con quella che volle regalarci la natura. Ma questa l’abbiamo inventata noi, per non esser da meno. Mentre l’occhio guarda di sotto, dalla lente piú piccola, e vede grande ciò che la natura provvidenzialmente aveva voluta farci veder piccolo, l’anima nostra, che fa? salta a guardare di sopra, dalla lente piú grande, e il telescopio allora diventa un terribile strumento, che subissa la terra e l’uomo e tutte le nostre glorie e grandezze. (Spv 156)

It was the discovery of the telescope which dealt us the coup de grâce: another infernal little mechanism which could pair up with the one nature chose to bestow upon us. But we invented this one so as not to be inferior. While our eye looks from below through the smaller lens, and sees as big all that nature had providentially wanted us to see small, what does our soul do? It jumps to look from above through the larger lens, and as a consequence the telescope becomes a terrible instrument, which sinks the earth and man and all our glories and greatness. (Trans. Antonio Illiano 142)

Though not man’s intention, as Pirandello explains, the telescope caused man to feel inferior. The invention was meant to allow man to access knowledge of the universe that was previously unavailable, however, this “infernal little mechanism” displaces man’s soul and consequently, makes his existence seem small and meaningless in the vast universe. Fortunately, Pirandello adds, it is his duty as a humorist to reflect on a more profound level than the ordinary person. In order to provoke the feeling of the opposite, Pirandello literally inverts the function the telescope and reveals another, more positive perspective:

Fortuna che è proprio della riflessione umoristica il provocare il sentimento del contrario; il quale, in questo caso, dice: — Ma è poi veramente così piccolo l’uomo, come il telescopio rivoltato ce lo fa vedere? Se egli può intendere e concepire l’infinita sua piccolezza, vuol

attractive and still desired by her much younger husband. Once reflection presents the possibility of another and much more profound reason for the external appearance of the woman, the laughable element, the superficial “feeling of perception” shifts to the “feeling of the opposite,” forcing the witness to enter deeper into awareness (See “L’umorismo” Part Two, II).

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<th>perception of the opposite</th>
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dire ch’egli intende e concepisce l’infinita grandezza dell’universo. E come si può dir piccolo dunque l’uomo? (Spsv 157)

Fortunately, it is in the nature of humoristic reflection to provoke the feeling of the opposite, which in this case says, “But is man really as small as he looks when we see him through an inverted telescope? If he can understand and conceive of his infinite smallness, it means he understands and conceives of the infinite greatness of the universe. How, then, can one say that man is small? (Trans. Illiano 142)

In essence, the telescope becomes a conductor for reflection in the humorist sense; it is the conduit that allows the humorist to demonstrate the move from the perception of the opposite to the sentiment of the opposite. In “L’umorismo” Pirandello describes consciousness as an inner mirror, and emphasizes that it is not a creative power or an internal light distinct from thought. Consciousness, or the mirror, is always internally present, however, circumstance will dictate its capacity to reflect and the result of its reflections. Pirandello explains the consciousness as distinct from the spirit:

La coscienza non rischiara tutto lo spirito; segnatamente per l’artista essa non è un lume distinto dal pensiero, che permetta alla volontà di attingere in lei come in un Tesoro d’immagini e d’idee. La coscienza, in soma, non è una Potenza creatrice, ma lo specchio interiore in cui il pensiero si rimira; si può dire anzi ch’essa sia il pensiero che vede se stesso, assistendo a quello che fa spontaneamente. (Spsv 126)

Consciousness does not illuminate the whole realm of the spirit; particularly in a creative artist consciousness is not an inner light distinct from thought, which might allow the will to draw from it images and ideas as if from a rich source. Consciousness, in short, is not a creative power, but an inner mirror in which thought contemplates itself. One could say rather that consciousness is thought which sees itself watching over what it does spontaneously. (Trans. Illiano 112)

The inverted telescope, therefore, is the instrument that allows for the facilitation of inner vision and the nurturing of intuition. The ultimate lesson from Pirandello regarding consciousness is that man must reflect on his thoughts. It is not enough to have a thought and either act on it or not act on it—one must thoughtfully consider his
mind’s processes through reflection and meditation so that personal intuition can develop and evolve. If, for Pirandello, consciousness is the inner mirror that allows man’s thoughts to be reflected, the humorist must manipulate the angle of telescope’s mirrors so as to bring the proper sentiments into focus. In inverting the telescope, it is Pirandello’s hope that man regains his feeling of importance in the universe merely by becoming aware, via his consciousness, of his powers of understanding and conceiving. Pirandello asks, “Non è anche qui illusorio il limite, e relativo al poco lume nostro, della nostra individualità?” [“Is it not possible that the limits of our individuality are illusory and have to do with our dim-sightedness?”]; he then suggests, “Forse abbiamo sempre vissuto, sempre vivremo con l’universo; anche ora, in questa forma nostra, partecipiamo a tutte le manifestazioni dell’universo?” [“Perhaps we have always lived and shall always live with the universe; perhaps even now in our present form, we participate in all the manifestations of the universe”] (Spsv 156, Trans. Illiano 141). If man can conceive that he is infinitely small, then he can also understand that the universe is infinitely vast; although man’s physicality in the universe is technically small, his ability to work with his consciousness, to reflect and disassemble thoughts, and to recognize contrasts makes him infinitely valuable and integral to the universe as well. Pirandello’s sentiment resembles the anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner’s statement, “If the cosmic whole informs all of its parts—then centrality is inescapable: each of us is at the very center of existence” (Burton and Grandy 225).

**Jacopo Maraventano: Pirandello’s original Doctor-Philosopher**

Sappiamo tutti, purtroppo, a che mai essi han ridotto ora la terra, questa povera nostra terra! Un atomo astrale incommensurabilmente piccolo, una trottoletta volgarissima lanciata un bel giorno dal sole e aggirantesi intorno
The short story, “Pallottoline!” (“Little Pellets!”) (1898), begins with an exclamation of the date: “Ventotto agosto. Benone!” [“The twenty-eighth of August. Very good!”] The narrator is about to explain why this date is so fortuitous when the voices of passersby interrupt the initial brief narration. People are told to be quiet because, “Il professore studia!” [“The professor is studying!”], and the professor, the man examining the calendar, immediately closes the door. The narrator points out that his book is open to page 124, which reads: “L’universo è finito o infinito? Questione antica. È certo che a noi riesce assolutamente impossibile…” [“The universe is finite or infinite? Age-old question. It is certain that for us to reach is absolutely impossible…”] (TLN 1: 433); however, no explanation of this passage is offered. The reader is then told that people are there for the view of the lakes of Albano and Nemi, surrounding Monte Cave. There is an immediate emphasis on the heavy haze as the narrator explains that the days of humid and dense fog have already begun to inhibit the delightful view of the lakes. The reader is finally introduced to the protagonist, Professor Jacopo Maraventano, who for the purpose of weather science, is shut in the small room of the Osservatorio Meteorologico (Meteorological Observatory), and cursing the invading fog. The observatory is on the top floor of an ancient convent, situated with the adjacent little church on the summit of the mount. The juxtaposition of the scientific observatory,
located on the top floor of an empty convent, subtly forewarns the reader of the forthcoming polemic in narrative concerning the creation of the universe. Maraventano and his family who “pativa per tutto l’inverno i rigori crudissimi, la desolazione della neve, l’esiliante assedio della nebbia” [“suffered through the crudest rigors of winter, the desolation of the snow, the exiled siege of the fog”], live in this remote place because of Maraventano’s vocation as a scientist and they entertain only a few tourists in the summer months (*TLN* 1: 433). The professor is always busy studying, as his wife is forced to tell the visitors with a sigh, so she and her daughter are always prepared to demonstrate the use of the meteorological instruments and to answer any questions the visitors may have. The narrator explains Maraventano’s studies and his disdain for the visitors:

Studiava davvero il Maraventano, o almeno stava immerso tutto il giorno nella lettura di certi libracchi che trattavano d’astronomia, unico suo pascolo. La lettura però andava a rilento, poiché egli si lasciava distrarre dalla fantasia, rapire da ogni frase per le infinite plaghe dello spazio, da cui non sapeva poi ridiscendere più, come la moglie avrebbe disiderato. Ma ridiscendere perché? Per mostrare lì alla gente che veniva a frastornarlo, a seccarlo, e da cui una così sterminata distanza lo allontanava, come agisse un pluviomentro o un anemometro, per far vedere i sismografi o i barometri? (*TLN* 1: 435)

Maraventano really studied, or at least he was immersed all day in the reading of certain books that dealt with astronomy, his only nourishment. The reading was slow, however, since he let himself be distracted by fantasy, to ravish each sentence for the infinite expanses of space, from which he no longer knew how then to descend again, as his wife would have desired. But why go back down? To show to the people that came there to distract him, to annoy him, and from which such a vast distance estranged him, how a rain gauge and an anemometer work, or to show them the seismographs or the barometers?

The seminal text, *L’Astronomie populaire (Popular Astronomy)* (1880) by French astronomer Camille Flammarion, is most likely one of the astronomy books referred to in
the passage above. In a letter dated 1897, Pirandello asked for a copy of this book to be sent to him immediately. Maraventano, immersed in his cosmological studies, appreciates and becomes almost obsessed with man’s position in the infinite universe. Feeling the same infinite distance of space between himself and other people, he alienates himself physically, as well as emotionally, from others.

The desolation of the convent is reiterated as the narrator returns to the description of the opaque and humid air. Maraventano’s exile there clearly seems voluntary and his sanity is questioned: “Sembrava certi giorni che tutta l’aria si fosse raddensata in un fumo bianchiccio, umido, accecante: e allora la vetta del monte restava come esiliata dal mondo, e dalla spianata non si sarebbe potuto scorgere neanche a un passo il convento. E tuttavia quell’ultimo matto resisteva li’” [“Some days it seemed that all the air became thicker like a whitish smoke, moist, blinding: and so the peak of the mountain remained as exiled from the world, and one would not have been able to discern even one step of the convent from the esplanade. Yet that last mad man endured there”] (TLN 1: 435). The narrator describes Maraventano as “matto” (“mad”), presumably for staying in such a remote location, and he then recounts another night in which the “nebbia fittissima” [“very thick fog”], metaphorically and literally, estranges

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30 In a letter dated August 21, 1897, Pirandello writes: “Giovanni mi farebbe un vero regalo se mi fa spedire subito il libro fel Flammarion, L’Astronomie populaire (credo che si chiami così); mi bisogna per una novella che ho in composizione” (Tutte le novelle vol. 1: 1115). In Popular Astronomy, Flammarion writes: “But the torch of progress was lit and could not be extinguished. The developments of geography proved that our world has the form of a sphere. The earth was then represented as an enormous ball placed in the centre of the universe, and it was supposed that the sun, moon, planets, and stars turned round us, in circles drawn one beyond the other, as appearances seemed to indicate. For about two thousand years astronomers observed attentively the apparent revolutions of the heavenly bodies, and this attentive study gradually showed them a large number of irregularities and inexplicable complications, until at last they recognised that they were deceived as to the earth’s position, in the same way that they had been deceived as to its stability. The immortal Copernicus, in particular, discussed with perseverance the earth’s motion, already previously suspected for two thousand years, but always rejected by man’s self-love, and when this learned Polish canon bid adieu to our world in the year 1543 he bequeathed to science his great work, which demonstrated clearly the long-standing error of mankind” (J. Ellard Gore, trans. 6).
him from his daughter (*TLN* 1: 435). This particularly foggy night, Maraventano hears, yet has difficulty seeing, his daughter Didina and her summer lover talking about his departure— an indication that, “l’inverno si stabilisse finalmente lassù” [“the winter has finally stabilized itself down there”] (*TLN* 1: 436). He tells her that he must leave, and though he promises to return, she insists that he will not come back. The professor interrupts their private conversation, asking his daughter if she were able to see him through the fog. The disappointed Didina, however, had already disappeared in a flurry of tears to take refuge in her mother’s arms.

**Officially winter, Maraventano is free from distraction and finally able to fully concentrate on his studies.** His reclusion allows him to feel like the king of his castle, with nothing but sky before him: “Jacopo Maraventano restava assoluto padrone della solitudine, libero in mezzo alla nebbia, signore dei venti, piccolo su quell’alta punta nevosa al cospetto del cielo che da ogni parte lo abbracciava e nel quale d’ora in poi poteva tornare a immergersi, a naufragare, non più infastidito o distratto” [“Jacopo Maraventano remained absolute master of solitude, free in the midst of the fog, lord of the winds, small on that lofty snowy point in the presence of the sky that from all parts embraced him, and in which from now on he could return to submerging himself, to shipwreck, no longer annoyed or distracted”] (*TLN* 1: 436).

Pirandello perhaps

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31 There is an interesting comparison to note between Maraventano’s solitude and his penetrating thought into the infinite sky and Giacomo Leopardi’s poem, “L’infinito” (“The Infinite”). Leopardi’s poem, like Maraventano, references the powerful effect of contemplating the immense space of the sky and both works employ the metaphor of the shipwreck to explain their intense submergence of thought. Leopardi writes: “Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati spazi di là da quella / e sovrumani silenzi, e profondissima quïete / io nel pensier mi fingo, ove per poco il cor non si spaura. […] Così tra questa immensità s’annega il pensier mio / e il naufragar m’è dolce in questo mare” [“But sitting here gazing, I find that endless spaces beyond that hedge and more-than-human silences are fashioned in my thought; so much that almost my heart fills up with fear. […] And so in this immensity my thought is drowned and I enjoy my sinking in this sea”] (Leopardi 37; J.G. Nichols, trans. 53).
employs the metaphor of shipwreck to describe Maraventano as drowning in his contempt and frustration, with little hope of salvation. Pirandello perhaps also alluding to shipwreck metaphor applied by Friedrich Nietzsche in his statement regarding the illusion of science in The Birth of Tragedy. Nietzsche writes:

But science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points; and while there is no telling how this circle could ever be surveyed completely, noble and gifted men nevertheless reach, e’er half their time and inevitably, such boundary points on the periphery from which one gazes into what defies illumination. When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail—suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, tragic insight which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy. (Nietzsche 98).

Nietzsche’s passage embodies Pirandello’s mission as an artist to expose the illusion of science as concealed by logic and to demonstrate the disproportionate perception of man as the result of such illusions. As suggested by Nietzsche, when man finally tires of intellectualizing that which cannot understood through reason, the humorist—concerned reflection rather than reason—will be in position to provide protection through awareness of contradictions and illusions. In “Arte e coscienza d’oggi,” Pirandello imparts his belief that art is indeed capable of producing the unique secular book that would point the way out of the tumult and devastation” (Caputi 18). Returning to the metaphor of the stormy sea, Pirandello writes of this hope: “E sorgerà forse anche adesso il genio che stendendo l’anima alla tempesta che appressa, al mare che dilagherà rompendo ogni argine e ingojando le rovine, creerà il libro unico, secolare, come in altri tempi è avvenuto” [“He will rise, perhaps even now, the genius who extending the soul to the approaching storm, to the sea that will flood, breaking every embankment and
engulf the ruins, he will create the unique book, secular, as has happened in other ages”]
(Spsv 906).

In the passage that follows, Pirandello describes Maraventano as having been guided by the imagination to perceive humans as microcosmic particles in the infinite universe. His pessimistic sentiments, and later solution to this crisis—clearly influenced by Blaise Pascal’s *Disproportion of Man*—gets at the core of Pirandello’s illustration of man’s reduced view of himself as the result of science:

32 Pirandello’s passage is rife with similarities to Blaise Pascal’s *Disproportion of Man* from *Pensées* (with the exception of Pascal’s references to God), in which Pascal discusses the infinity of the universe and the tiny microcosms of nature: “I would like us to look also at ourselves and decide whether we have some kind of proportions with [nature], by comparing what we would do with these two things. So let us contemplate the whole of nature in its full and mighty majesty, let us disregard the humble objects around us, let us look at this scintillating light, placed like an eternal lamp to illuminate the universe. Let the earth appear a pinpoint to us beside the vast arc this star describes, and let us be dumb-founded that this vast arc is itself is only a delicate pinpoint in comparison with the arc encompassed by the stars tracing circles in the firmament. But if our vision stops there, let our imagination travel further afield; our imagination will grow weary of conceiving before nature of producing. The whole of the visible world is merely an imperceptible speck in the ample bosom of nature, no idea comes near to it. It is pointless trying to inflate our ideas beyond imaginable spaces, we generate only atoms at the cost of the reality of things. It is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and its circumference is nowhere. In the end, it is the greatest perceivable sign of God’s overwhelming power that our imagination loses itself in this thought. Let man, having returned to himself, consider what he is compared to what is in existence; let him see himself as if lost within this forgotten outpost of nature and let us, from within this little prison cell where we find ourselves, by which I mean the universe, learn to put a correct value on the earth, its kingdoms, its cities, and ourselves. What is man in the infinity? But to present ourselves with another equally astonishing wonder, let us search for what we know in the tiniest things. In its miniscule body a mite shows us parts incomparably tinier: legs with joints, veins in its legs, blood in its veins, humours in the blood, drops in the humours, vapors in the drops. Subdividing these last divisions, we will exhaust ourselves. Let the last object which we can arrive at be the subject of our discussion. We think that there, perhaps, is the ultimate microcosm of nature. I want to make us see within a new abyss. I want to depict for us not only the visible universe, but the immensity of what can be conceived about nature within the confines of this miniature atom. Let us see in it an infinity of universes, of which each has its own firmament, planets, earth, in the same proportion as the visible world, in this land of animals, and ultimately of mites, in which we will find the same things as in the first universe, and will find again in others the same thing, endlessly and perpetually. Let us lose ourselves in these wonders, which are as startling in their minuteness as others are in their immensity. For who will not be amazed that our body, which was not perceptible in an imperceptible universe within the whole, is now a giant, a world, or rather an everything, in comparison with this nothingness we can’t penetrate? Anyone who looks at himself this way will be terrified by himself, and, thinking himself supported by the size nature has given us suspended between two gulfs of the infinite and the void, will tremble at nature’s wonders. I believe that as his curiosity changes to admiration, he will be more disposed to contemplate them in silence then search them out with presumption. For in the end, what is humanity in nature? A nothingness compared to the infinite, everything compared to a nothingness, a mid-point between nothing and everything, infinitely far from understanding the extremes; the end of things and their beginning are insuperably hidden for him in an impenetrable secret. What therefore can he imagine? He is equally incapable of seeing the nothingness
Assistendo, come gli pareva d’assistere con la fantasia, nel fondo dello spazio, alla prodigiosa attività, al lavoro incessante della materia eterna, alla preparazione e formazione di nuovi soli nel grembo delle nebulose, al germogliare dei mondi dall’etere infinito: che cosa diventava per lui questa molecola solare, chiamata Terra, addirittura invisibile fuori del sistema planetario, cioè di questo punto microscopico dello spazio cosmico? Che cosa diventavano questi polviscoli infinitesimali chiamati uomini; che cosa, le vicende della vita, i casi giornalieri, le afflizioni e le miserie particolari, le generali calamità? E di questo suo disprezzo, non che della Terra, ma di tutto il sistema solare, e della stima che si era ridotto a far delle cose umane, considerandole da tanta altezza, avrebbe voluto far partecipi moglie e figliuola, che si lamentavano di continuo ora per il freddo ora per la solitudine, traendo da ogni piccola infelicità argomento di lagni e sospiri. (TLN 1: 436)

Assisting, as it seemed to him assisted by the imagination, in the deep of space, to the prodigious activity, to the painstaking work of eternal matter, to the preparation and formation of new suns in the womb of the nebulae,\textsuperscript{33} to the yielding of worlds from infinite ether: what did this solar molecule, called Earth, become for him, invisible even outside of the planetary system, that is of this microscopic point of cosmic space? What became of these infinitesimal tiny particles called men; what of the vicissitudes of life, the daily cases, the afflictions and particular miseries, the general calamity? And of this contempt, not that of the Earth, but of the whole solar system, and of the estimation that it reduced itself to make of human affairs, considering them from such heights, he would have wanted to involve his wife and daughter, who complained for continuous hours about the cold hours of solitude, drawing from every little affliction reason for complaints and sighs.

Maraventano tries to explain his philosophy to his wife and daughter: “Parlava loro delle meraviglie del cielo” [“He speaks to them of the wonders of the sky”], while they, “infreddolite” [“chilled to the bone”], are gathered in the kitchen, trying to keep warm by

\textsuperscript{33} A nebula is defined as: “A cloudlike, luminous or dark mass composed of gases and small amounts of dust” (Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary 955). This definition is my addition for clarification of terms used in metaphors recurrent in Pirandello’s collection.
the fire (*TLN* 1: 437). As a point of departure, Maraventano ask them to imagine that each star is a world unto itself similar to ours; the stars are accompanied by planets and satellites that rotate around them like the planets and satellites of our solar system around the sun. He asks them to imagine that our solar system is transported to a distance in space equal to the closest stars. He then asks what our great sun would be reduced to in respect to us, and answers that it would become a tiny luminous point amongst other the stars in the sky. His wife and daughter begin to lose patience with his explanation; but Maraventano, though growing frustrated, continues his explanation that a change of cosmic perspective of is necessary to understand man’s illusory claims in the name of God and science. Condemning the man who reasons and attributes the creation of the universe to God, the scientist-philosopher says:

Ma veniamo ai nostri grandi pianeti. Care mie, alla distanza che vi ho detto, s’involerebbero addirittura al nostro sguardo, tutti, meno, forse, Giove … forse! Ma non crediate che potreste scorgere a occhio nudo! Forse con qualche telescopio di prim’ordine; e non lo so di certo. Pallottoline, care mie, pallottoline! Quanto a noi, alla nostra Terra, non se ne sospetterebbe nemmeno l’esistenza. […] Pensare … pensare che la stella Alfa della costellazione del Centauro, vale a dire la stella più vicina a questo nostro cece, alias il signor pianetino Terra, dista da noi trentatré miliardi e quattrocento milioni di chilometri! […] Pensare che la Capra dista da noi seicentosessantatré miliardi di chilometri, e che la sua luce, prima d’arrivare a noi, con quel po’ po’ di velocità che v’ho detto, ci mette settant’anni e qualche mese, e, se si tien conto dei calcoli di certi astronomi, la luce emessa da alcuni remoti ammassi ci mette cinque milioni d’anni, come mi fate ridere, asini! L’uomo, questo verme che c’è e non c’è, l'uomo che, quando crede di ragionare, è per me il più stupido fra tutte le trecento mila specie animali che popolano il globo terraqueo, l'uomo ha il coraggio di dire: “Io ho inventato la ferrovia!” E che cos’è la ferrovia? Non te la comparo con la velocità della luce, perché ti farei impazzire; ma in confronto allo stesso moto di questo cece Terra che cos’è? Ventinove chilometri, a buon conto, ogni minuto secondo; hai dunque inventato il lumacone, la tartaruga, la bestia che sei! E questo medesimo animale uomo pretende di dare un dio, il suo Dio a tutto l’Universo! (*TLN* 1: 437-439)
But now we come to our large planets. My dears, to the distance that I

told you, even they would disappear before our eyes, all but perhaps

Jupiter … maybe! But don’t think you could see it with the naked eye!

Perhaps with some first-class telescope, and I do not know for sure. Little

pellets, my dear, pellets! As for us, our Earth, it would not even suspect

its existence. [. . .] To think…to think that the star Alpha of the

constellation of Centaurus, i.e. the star closest to our chickpea, aka Mr.

planet Earth, thirty-three billion four hundred million miles away from us!

[. . .] To think that the Goat is 663 billion miles from us, and that its light,

before reaching us, with that little bit of speed that I told you, it takes

seventy years and some months, and, if one takes into account the

calculations of some astronomers, the light emitted by some remote

clusters takes five million years, how you make me laugh, asses! Man,

this worm that is there and is not there, the man who, when he believes in

reasoning, is for me the most stupid of all the three hundred thousand

animal species that inhabit the terraqueous globe, the man who has


courage to say: “I invented the railroad.” And what is the railroad? I

won’t compare it for you with the speed of light, because I would make

you crazy, but what is it compared to the same motion of this chickpea

Earth? Twenty-nine kilometers, with good reason, every second; you have

therefore invented the slug, the tortoise, the beast that you are! And this

same animal man claims to attribute to a god, the whole universe to his

God!

Maraventano proposes that if man were to distance himself, using a special kind of

telescope that enabled him to look back at Earth as though from far away, he would see

that humans are only “pallottoline”—tiny particles compared to the infinite universe.

Maraventano does not mean to make his wife and daughter feel small or devalue their

existence; his intention is to help them understand that humans are only one humble

manifestation of the entire universe. According to Maravantano, the only way to restore

accuracy of proportion between man’s perception of himself and the universe is to

equilibrate the incongruity between man’s reduced view of himself, effected when

Copernicus proposed that the Earth is not the center of the universe, and the inflated view

of humans as intellectual super-forces with the ability to invent instruments that

propagate technological advancements and supposedly enhance the human experience.

Pirandello echoes Blaise Pascal’s sentiment that one must consciously use the
imagination against the imagination to re-proportion his view and reverse the extreme
misperception that his existence is either meaningless or exceedingly important. Man
must actively imagine and create a new vision to replace the inaccurate perceptions that
were imposed the imagination through unconscious imagination. As Pirandello frequently
emphasizes, only when the imaginative spirit is freed from the constraints of logic, will
the imagination reveal genuine reality and create truths instead of fictions.\(^\text{34}\) However,
whereas Pascal argues that it is pointless to inflate one’s imagination with the aim of
understanding the vastness of the universe because it is clearly the “greatest perceivable
sign of God’s overwhelming power that our imagination loses itself in this thought,”
Maraventano tries to explain that man needs to expand his imagination even further to see
that God is merely man’s construct that enables him to cope with his feelings of
nothingness in the infinite universe and that He is a superficial means of accounting for
nature’s innate wonders. His wife begs him not to blaspheme but Maraventano, a
professor of cosmology, solidly believes that man is foolish to say that God is solely
responsible for creating the entire infinite universe. He shouts at his wife:

Temi che Dio, perché io bestemmio, come tu dici, ti mandi un fulmine?
C’è il parafulmine, sciocca. Vedi dond’è nato il vostro Dio? Da codesta
paura. Ma sul serio potete credere, pretendere che un’idea o un sentimento
nati in questo niente pieno di paura che si chiama uomo debba essere il
Dio, debba essere quello che ha formato l’Universo infinito? (TLN 1: 439)

Do you fear that God, because I swear, as you say, will send you a bolt of
lightning? There is the lighting rod, stupid. See where your God is born?
From this fear. But are you seriously able to believe, to claim then an idea
or a feeling born in this nothing full of fear that one calls man must be
God, must be what formed the infinite Universe?\(^\text{35}\)

\(^{34}\) See in “L’umorismo” Part Two, V (Spsv 145-157).
\(^{35}\) For Pirandello, the “parafulmine” (“lightning rod”), invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1749, is
another modern scientific discovery that, like the construction of the railway, is causing man to alter his
perspective of himself in the universe. He also mentions the lightning rod in the novella, “Il vecchio Dio”
(“The Old God”) (1901).
At the mention of God, the two women cover their ears and close their eyes as Maraventano, increasingly agitated, throws a fan on the floor and waves his arms wildly, calling them “asine” (“asses”) before shutting himself in his room without dinner (TLN 1: 439). The narrator tells the reader that such scenes occur frequently and neither Didina, nor her mother, are interested in adapting to Maraventano’s philosophy. He calls out to the constellations and stars, Alpha Centaurus, Sirius and Capella, asking them if they know why his daughter is crying. He dismisses her tears, saying aloud that she is only crying because she does not have a new dress to wear to church on Sundays: “Roba da ridere!” [“Stuff to laugh at!”]. Didina, obviously saddened by his remark, responds through her tears: “Roba da ridere; ma io muojo dal freddo” [“Stuff to laugh at; but I’m dying from the cold”] (TLN 1: 439). Maraventano’s relationship with his daughter and wife is certainly strained on account of his own bitter reasoning.

Alluding for the first time to the philosophy of distance, Maraventano resolves his present torment by manipulating his imagination and observing his issues as though from a distant planet. The narrator tells the reader that Maraventano’s method of “retrospingere”—i.e. the process of pushing himself out into space so that he is far from the Earth—is the only thing that abates his torment:

Non a parole soltanto dimostrava egli il disprezzo un cui teneva la terra e tutte le cose della vita. Soffriva di mal di denti, e talvolta la guancia per la furia del dolore gli si gonfiava sotto il borbone come un’anca padre abate: ebbene, senz’altro. Retrospingeva nello spazio il sistema planetario: spariva il sole, spariva la terra, tutto diventava niente, e con gli occhi chiusi, fermo nella considerazione di niente, a poco a poco addormentava il suo tormento. (TLN 1: 440)

Not only in words he showed a contempt for which held the earth and all things in life. He suffered from toothache, and sometimes the cheek for the fury of pain swelled under the bourbon like a being in a pleasant situation:
well, certainly. He pushed back the planetary system in space: the sun disappeared, the earth disappeared, everything became nothing, and with eyes closed, without the consideration of anything, gradually his torment fell asleep.

The reader is offered his first glimpse at what Pirandello will officially term the *filosofia del lontano* (the philosophy of distance), presented eleven years later by Dr. Paolo Post in the article, “Da lontano” (“From a Distance”), and again proposed by Dr Fileno in “La tragedia d’un personaggio” (“A Character’s Tragedy”). Pirandello praises Dr. Post’s method of detachment in “Da lontano,” however, Dr. Fileno’s same strategy is far from well received.

At the end of “Pallottoline!” the narrator says that Maraventano walks to Rome, regardless of the season or weather, to spend time with the greatest enjoyment of his life: the telescope. In addition to the metaphorical distance Maraventano imposes, looking through the material instrument of the telescope provides ample fodder for his cosmic repositioning. As Maraventano observes the magnitude of space, his pain and frustrations diminish because everything recedes into nothingness. His solution can be surmised to be temporary, however, as Pirandello later reveals that freedom from suffering is only attainable by remaining present in the present. Lucio Lagnani writes, “L’unico implicito conflitto è quello tra la saggia follia (o la folle astratta saggezza) del filosofo solitari e la concretezza, la vitalità, l’ignoranza, la fede degli altri, ch’egli non riuscirà mai a persuadere delle sue ragioni” [“The only implicit conflict is that between the wise folly (or the abstract crazy wisdom) of the solitary philosopher and the pragmatism, the vitality, the ignorance, the faith of others, that he will never be able to convince of their rationalizations”] (TLN 1: 1119). By formulating a philosophy in which one must consciously project his thoughts away from the present moment, Professor Maraventano
is merely replacing one form of reasoning and logic with another. His need to convince
and persuade others to understand and join him in his reasoning also inhibits the function
of the philosophy of distance as Maraventano cannot be freed from suffering while he is,
at the same time, continuing to reason in the present moment. In the last line of the story
Maraventano’s voice trails off as he continues to reason about distance and the size of the
earth: “Ma se la Terra è tanta …” [“But if the Earth is so …”] (TLN 1: 440). The ellipsis
indicates that his process and cycle of reasoning and logisticizing continues, perhaps ad
infinitum—leaving the reader with the sense that his contempt and need to philosophize
may never subside but will continue to agitate and annoy him for the rest of his earthly
existence.

The New Science & the Substitution of God

In the essay “Rinunzia,” as well as in the novella “Il vecchio Dio” (“The Old
God”) (1901), Pirandello presents the notion that science, with its mechanistic laws of
the universe, is but another human construction that is merely replacing the man-made
constructs of God and the ethical laws of religion. Pirandello clearly echoes Friedrich
Nietzsche’s controversial sentiment that “God is dead.” In the The Gay Science (1882),
Nietzsche writes of the madman who lights a lantern and runs into the market in the
early morning, crying inscessantly: “I seek God! I seek God!” He then tells proclaims
that God has been murdered in the pursuit of science:

“Whither is God?” he cried; “I will tell you. We have killed him—you and
I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we
drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire
horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?
Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns?
Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all
directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through
an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not
become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as of yet of the divine composition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. (Nietzsche 181)

Like Nietzsche’s madman, Pirandello integrates the notion of the lantern and the believer’s lack of direction, and effectively stages Nietzsche’s statement that “God is Dead”—or at least dying. In “Il vecchio Dio” Pirandello describes the protagonist, Signore Aurelio, as wandering aimlessly in the midst of life, without purpose and having lost all hope, illusions and wealth. The only thing that remains for him is his faith in God, who is for him like a comforting light: “Gli era solo rimasta la fede in Dio ch’era, tra il buio angoscioso della rovinata esistenza, come un lanternino: un lanternino ch’egli, andando così curvo, riparava alla meglio, con trepida cura, dal gelido soffio degli ultimi disinganni” [“The only thing that remained for him was faith in God, that was among the dark agony of ruined lives, like a little lantern: a little lantern that he, going so bent, repaired for the better, with anxious care, from the icy blast of recent disappointments”] (TLN 1: 590). The simile Pirandello uses comparing God to a lantern may initially seem as though he intends for God to be the guiding light of salvation for a disappointed man. However, as the reader of Pirandello will come to learn in Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal), the lanternino (“little lantern”) is actually symbolic of a false belief or illusion. The dark shadow of anguish, in which man finds himself lost, is only cast and made visible because of the fictitious light of illusion from the little lantern that we all carry with in us. Pirandello argues that if the false light were not within us in the first place, man would not have to create illusions, such as believing in God, or construct houses such as churches, to encapsulate our vain illusions. Believing death to be “una
liberazione” [“a liberation”] for those who lived well on earth, Signore Aurelio hopes to live his last years with a “coscienza tranquilla” [“a tranquil conscience”], without fearing his passage from life to death and consoled by knowing that he did not do anything wrong. He maintains his faith the best he can despite the doubts accumulating by science, especially regarding death.\(^{36}\) The doubts, for Signore Aurelio, are like dark clouds blocking his light from God:

He knew the dark doubts accumulated by science like so many clouds covering the bright explanation that faith gives us about death, yes for having read about them in some books, and yes for having almost breathed them in the air; and he regretted that the God of his days, even for him, believing, he could no longer be that which in six days created the world, and had rested on the seventh.

Pirandello boldly concludes with Signore Aurelio’s dream in which the old God dialogues with a sexton. Interestingly, God argues that his role as creator of the universe has been replaced with a theory akin to the Big Bang Theory.\(^{37}\) In the following passage,
God recalls a scientist, “armato del suo cannocchiale” [“armed with his telescope”], who studied the sky and determined that there was no trace of God’s existence:

Ora, il signor Aurelio, riflettendo intorno alla vita e alla morte, considerando amaramente ai meschini profitti dell’anima in questo tanto decantato secolo dei lumi, rivolto col pensiero al vecchio Dio dell’intatta fede dei padri, a poco a poco s’addormentò. E quel vecchio Dio, nel sogno, ecco che gli venne innanzi, curvo, cadente, reggendo a fatica su le spalle la testa enormemente barbuta e chiomata del sagrestano della chiesa; gli sedette accanto e cominciò a sfogarsi con lui, come fanno i vecchietti seduti sul muretto davanti ai gerontocomii:

Mali tempi, figlio mio! Vedi come mi son ridotto? Sto qui a guardia delle panche. Di tanto in tanto, qualche forestiere. Ma non entra mica per me, sai! Viene a visitar gli affreschi antichi e i monumenti; monterebbe anche su gli altari per veder meglio le immagini dipinte in qualche pala! Mali tempi, figlio mio. Hai sentito? hai letto i libri nuovi? Io, Padre Eterno, non ho fatto nulla: tutto s’è fatto da sé, naturalmente, a poco a poco. Non ho creato Io prima la luce, poi il cielo, poi la terra e tutto il resto, come ti avevano insegnato ne’ tuoi grazili anni. Che! che! Non c’entro più per nulla Io. Le nebulose, capisci? la materia cosmica … E tutto s’è fatto da sé. Ti faccio ridere: uno c’è stato finanche, un certo scienziato, il quale ha avuto il coraggio di proclamare che, avendo studiato in tutti i sensi il cielo, non vi aveva trovato neppur una minima traccia dell'esistenza mia. Di’ un po’: te lo immagini questo pover’uomo che, armato del suo cannocchiale, saffannava sul serio a darmi la caccia per i cieli, quando non mi sentiva dentro il suo misero coricino? Ne riderei di cuore, tanto tanto, figliuolo mio, se non vedessi gli uomini far buon viso a siffatte scempiaggini. Ricordo bene quand’Io li tenevo tutti in un sacro terrore, parlando loro con la voce dei venti, dei tuoni e dei terremoti. Ora hanno inventato il parafulmine, capisci? e non mi temono più; si sono spiegati il fenomeno del vento, della pioggia e ogni altro fenomeno, e non si rivolgono più a Me per ottenere in grazia qualcosa. Bisogna, bisogna ch’io mi risolva a lasciare la città e mi restringa a fare il Padreterno nelle campagne: là vivono tuttora, non dico più molte, ma alquante anime ingenue di contadini, per cui non si muove foglia d’albero se Io non voglia, e sono ancora Io che faccio il nuvolo e il sereno. Su, su, andiamo, figliuolo! Anche tu qua ci stai maluccio, lo vedo. Andiamocene, andiamocene in campagna, fra la gente timorata, fra la buona gente che lavora. (TLN 1: 592)

Now, Mr. Aurelio, reflecting about life and death, considering bitterly the petty profit of the soul in this so highly praised Age of Enlightenment,

Friedmann gave an exact solution for an expanding universe. Another important contributor to the big bang theory was Georges-Henri Lemaître, a Belgian astronomer and Jesuit priest, who came to be known as the ‘Father of the Big Bang’” (Engelbert and Dupuis 7).
turned his thoughts to the old God, of the intact faith of the fathers, that gradually fell asleep. And here to that old God, in the dream, came forward the sexton of the church, bent, sagging, barely holding his enormously long-haired and bearded head on his shoulders; he sat down beside him and began to blow off steam with him, as do the elderly sitting on the wall in front of homes for the aged:

Bad times, my son! Do you see how I have been reduced? I am here to guard the benches. From time to time, some visitors. But he does not consider me at all, you know! He comes to visit the ancient frescoes and monuments; also he climbs up on the altars for a better view of the images painted on some shovel! Bad times, my son. Did you hear? have you read the new books? I, the Eternal Father, I have not done anything: everything has been done by itself, naturally, little by little. I did not create the first light, then the sky, then earth and all the rest, as they had taught you in your delicate years. What! what! I don’t come into the picture at all anymore. The nebulae, you know? the cosmic matter … And everything has been done by itself. I’ll make you laugh: there was even one, a scientist, who had the courage to declare that, having studied they sky in every sense, he did not even find a trace of my existence. Tell me about it, can you imagine this little poor man who, armed with his telescope, busily hunting the skies seriously for me, when he didn’t feel me inside his miserable little heart? I would laugh heartily, so much, my son, if I did not see men look favorably upon such nonsense. I remember well when I held them all in sacred awe, speaking to them with the voice of the winds, thunder and earthquakes. Now they have invented the lightning rod, you know? and they no longer fear me; they themselves have explained the phenomenon of the wind, rain and every other phenomenon, and they no longer turn to me to obtain something through grace. It is necessary, necessary, that I resolve to leave the city and restrict myself to be the Eternal Father in the countryside: they still live there, I won’t say much more, but rather of naive souls of peasants, who don’t move of a leaf of a tree if I don’t desire it, and I am still the One that makes the clouds and the calm. Up, up, let’s go, son! Also you are doing poorly here, I see it. Let’s go there, let’s go out in the countryside, among the fearing people, among the good people who work.

In this passage, God despondently mentions the “new books” of astronomy and refers to Professor Maraventano, the scientist “armed with his telescope,” who found no trace of God’s existence in the infinite universe (nor felt His presence in his heart). As in “Pallottoline!” Pirandello alludes to the nebulae, the telescope, and the lightning rod. Just as Maraventano argues that naïve people construct the notion of God and deem Him the
creator of the universe because of their fear of the unknown, now God is experiencing the
same sense of displacement as more and more educated people are beginning to embrace
the scientific explanations of natural phenomena. Interestingly, Pirandello depicts God as
discriminating between the naïve souls in the country, who still fear and respect Him,
versus the progressive city-dwellers, who have access to the new books and are changing
their beliefs according to the modern scientific discoveries.

Signore Aurelio, after having heard the word of God in his dream, feels his
heartstrings pulled and he imagines the balmy air of the countryside. Suddenly he opens
his eyes and sees the Eternal Father standing before him, repeating the words from his
dream, “Andiamo, su andiamo …” [“Let’s go, up, let’s go…”]. In response to this,
Signore Aurelio, terrified by the reality of his dream, stammers: “Ma se è tanto che …”
[“But if it is so that …”] (TLN 1: 593). Signore Aurelio’s last, wavering words resemble
the lack of resolve of Professor Maraventano’s last line: “Ma se la Terra è tanta …” [“But
is the Earth is so …”] Again, the ellipsis indicates an inconclusiveness—a continuing
need to reason, to understand, to gain knowledge through observation and evidence. This
conclusion also points to the failed attempts to reach an understanding and gain
knowledge by such means of investigation.

At this moment the sexton appears, and the story ends with his poignant last
words: “La chiesa si chiude” [“The church is closed”] (TLN 1: 592). The abrupt closing
of the church and the last image of God sitting on an abandoned church pew, are
metaphors for the death of God, resembling Nietzsche’s concluding statement of the
passage of the madman: “What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs
and sepulchers of God?” (Trans. Walter Kauffman 182). Signore Aurelio, baffled by his
vivid dream, is forced to exit the church in a more confused state than he was before entering the church that day. Inundated by knowledge that plunges him in all directions, the protagonist is left suspended between God and the countryside and science and the city.

**The Philosophy of Distance**

In the article, “Da lontano” (“From a Distance”) (1909), Pirandello presents another *doctor-philosopher*: Dr. Paolo Post, inventor of the *filosofia del lontano* (*philosophy of distance*). The *philosophy of distance*, similar in theory to that proffered by Professor Maravento in “Pallottoline!” is the official name given by Dr. Post to his method of treating the present as though one were already in the safe distance of future. Though “Da lontano” maintains more of a fictional overtone than earlier critical essays, with an ambiguous and playful narrative voice of one who seems to be other than Pirandello, there is a tone of political tension and an apprehension concerning an impending war in Europe. Contrasting Maraventano’s passionate rants, Pirandello calmly describes a serious need for a new way and a new leader, as the lives of many are currently in jeopardy.

In an overtly satiric manner, the article begins with an explanation that there is one among many who can save man, and the author states that he believes to have found this savior. Before introducing this savior (who is far from Jesus Christ), however, he discusses the current situation in Europe. He says that luckily, in the present moment, everything is okay; the villages destroyed by a recent earthquake will be rebuilt. Pirandello writes, however, that even the smallest of events are able to make man lose his

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38 Pirandello’s article “Da lontano” was originally published in *La Preparazione (The Preparation)*, a tri-weekly political-military newspaper, in Rome in February of 1909 (*Spsv* 1064).
good sense if he is not careful. He repeats that every thing today is well; though the
European nations are not entirely at peace with each other, everyone utters that the peace
will not be disturbed. He explains the importance of having a new leader/teacher:

E se noi, purtruppo, non li abbiamo, e dobbiamo prevedere che domani,
scoppiando una guerra, ci troveremmo assai male e, durando questa pace,
fors’anche peggio; d’un altro salvatore abbiamo bisogno, che ai mali oggi
lievi e domani più gravi sappia usare un qualche rimedio efficace;
abbiamo bisogno di uno che almeno insegni a guardare le cose da un certo
lato, che ci nasconda o ci attenui le asprezze disgustose e ci insegni a
lamentarci con tristezza decente e con qualche dignità. (SpSV 1066)

And if we, unfortunately, do not have them, and we should expect that
tomorrow, a war breaks out, we would find ourselves in a very bad way
and, during this peace, perhaps even worse; we need another savior,
who knows how to use a few effective remedy for the slight evils of today
and the more serious ones of tomorrow; we need someone who at least
teaches us to look at things from a certain side, that hides or lessens for us
the disgusting harshness and teaches us to lament with decent sadness and
with some dignity.

As he stated in the beginning, the author says he has found this leader. He will tell the
reader, but he cannot disclose this savior’s real name. He explains that, although this man
lives like a hermit among his history and philosophy books and never leaves his house or
reads the newspapers, he would be upset and the narrator would be deprived of his “lumi”
(“illuminations”). So, using a pseudonym, he calls this man “il Dottor Paulo Post” (SpSV
1066).

Pirandello then explains Dr. Post’s method of psychological detachment from
present troubles, for example, the useless minutiae and depressing information from the
daily news that is diffused to every point on the globe via the telegraph and telephones.39
Reading of such miserable quotidian particulars, and all the troubles and dangers of the
world that lack valor and other redeemable qualities, typically oppresses and saddens

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39 The telegraph and telephone were recent technological inventions that contributed to Pirandello’s
skepticism of technology.
man. However, if one assimilates these predicaments as though they already happened, as if in the future and imagining all of these afflictions to be in the past, then he will not be nearly as affected. This, the narrator says, is the method of Dr. Paolo Post, who has proven its effectiveness in his own life: “E con questo metodo egli è guarito di tutti i suoi mali, si è liberato da ogni pena e ha trovato, senza bisogno di morire, la pace: una pace austere e serena, soffusa di quella certa mestizia senza rimpianto, che serberebbero ancora i cimiteri su la terra, anche quando tutti gli uomini vi fossero morti” [“And with this method he cured all his troubles, he liberated himself from every concern and has found, without needing to die, peace: an austere and serene peace, suffused with that certain sadness without regret, that would still keep the cemeteries on the earth, even when all the men were dead”] (Sp sv 1067). The narration continues with the explanation that Dr. Paolo Post reads history books from morning to night. Though he sees the present in the history, he by no means applies past teachings to current issues nor does he try to foretell the future based on the present. The key to his method is proper placement: “Si pone idealmente nell’avvenire per guardare il presente e lo vede come passato” [“He ideally places himself in the future and he sees it as the past”] (Sp sv 1067). In a shocking example, the narrator describes how a few days earlier he had gone to pay his respects to Dr. Paolo Post, whose daughter had recently died. Dr. Post’s composure was so dignified and removed that it seemed as though his daughter had been dead for a hundred years. In a description similar to that in “L’umorismo,” published one year earlier in 1908, Pirandello returns to the reverse, or inverted telescope, and the reorientation of the soul’s vantage point. The narrator writes of Dr. Post’s ability to control his soul:

Ha come un cannocchiale il dottor Paulo Post. Lo apre, ma non si mette già a guardare verso l’avvenire, dove sa che non vedrebbe nulla; ma
persuade l’anima sua a esser contenta di porsi a guardare dalla lente piú grande, volta all’avvenire, attraverso la piccola, appuntata nel presente. E la sua anima cosí guarda col cannocchiale rivolto; e il presente subito s’impiccolisce e s’allontana. (Spv 1067)

Dr. Paolo Post has like a telescope. He opens it, but he does not position himself at all to see toward the future, where he knows that he would see nothing; but he convinces his soul to be content to place itself so as to look from the bigger lens, turned toward the future, toward the small one, aimed at the present. And like this his soul looks with the inverted telescope; and the present immediately shrinks and distances itself.

The inverted telescope is Pirandello’s answer to the problems caused by the original telescope—the “infernal mechanism”—that disoriented man’s soul and made him feel small. Instead of looking through the small lens toward the greatness of the cosmos, causing man to feel miniscule in the infinite universe, the soul positions itself to look back toward the present through the larger lens. The present, therefore, becomes smaller as it is distanced from the observing soul. This perspective is meant to realign the soul, so closely interconnected with the individual, with the infinite vastness of the universe and resemble man’s sense of himself. This form of “extreme detachment,” Anthony Caputi explains, “is not a perspective that Pirandello consistently recommended; it is quite simply one of the extremes among what he might have called the solaces of distance” (Caputi 128). If man is able to comprehend his size in the universe, though it is small, and if he is able to re-direct his thoughts in a positive way, his consciousness will realize its being as a manifestation of the universe and he will experience harmony in his life.

For years, Dr. Post has promised to compose a book, aptly titled Filosofia del lontano (Philosophy of Distance), but in the meantime, the narrator offers these

consolatory, yet pessimistic, concluding words to the reader:

Per consolazione dei lettori di questo giornale, che ne avranno voglia, io mi propongo di sottomettere di tanto in tanto al cannocchiale rivolto del
dottor Paolo Post i fatti piú notevoli, le questioni piú ardenti, gli uomini piú celebri nell’arte, nella politica, nelle scienze dei giorni nostri. Vedremo che bella figura essi faranno veduti da lontano, impostati nel passato, concentrati e reassunti nella storia. Ma ho gran paura che molti non si vedranno piú. (Spv 1068)

For the consolation of the readers of this paper, that desire it, I propose to subject, from time to time to Dr. Paolo Post’s inverted telescope the most notable facts, the most ardent questions, the men most celebrated in art, in politics, in science of our day. We will see that they make a good impression seen from a distance, positioned in the past, concentrated and summed up in the past. But I have a great fear that many will no longer see themselves.

Pirandello’s concern here is that, although positioning oneself as though in the future offers a privileged and more comforting view of the present, the current situation will appear bleak because the notable facts and discoveries, and the celebrated artists, scientists and politicians will be concentrated to a small number in relation to all of history. It can be surmised that Pirandello, despite the advancements made in his day, views the present as lacking in valor. The majority of people will not see themselves when looking back toward the present from the future because they have not made significant enough contributions to life.

**The Tragic Death of a Living Character**

In the 1911 *novella*, “La tragedia d’un personaggio” (“A Character’s Tragedy”), Dr. Fileno, the doctor-philosopher protagonist, presents the same *filosofia del lontano* (philosophy of distance) as Dr. Post in the 1909 article, “Da lontano.” There is, however, a dramatic shift in Pirandello’s representation as now a negative reception of his own created character of the doctor-philosopher emerges. Dr. Paolo Post, earlier revered as a

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40 “La tragedia d’un personaggio” (“A Character’s Tragedy”) was published for the first time in “Corriere della Sera” on October 19, 1911. In 1915 it was included in the collection, *La trappola*, and was part of the fourth volume of “Novelle per un anno,” *L’uomo solo* (TLN 2: 1119).
savior for his contribution of the philosophy of distance, is replaced by Dr. Fileno—whose philosophy will be rejected and his character dismissed. It can be surmised that by 1911 Pirandello had begun to realize that the practice of distancing oneself from the present is not the solution to man’s spiritual crisis. The reader comes to find out, as witnessed for example by the transformation of the protagonist in Uno, nessuno e centomila (One, No one and One Hundred Thousand), that the best solution to life’s struggles is to remain in the present as much as possible—in essence, to die to every moment and be reborn in the next.

Similar to the 1906 novella “Personaggi” (“Characters”), “La tragedia d’un personaggio” opens with the words: “È mia vecchia abitudine dare udienza, ogni domenica mattina, ai personaggi delle mie future novelle” [“It is my old custom to receive, every Sunday morning, the characters of my future short stories] (TLN 2: 624).

One can assume that the narrator is the voice and sentiment of Pirandello himself, as he described this process of character development in the 1925 Preface added to Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore. Also explained in “Personaggi,” the author’s

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41 In the Preface to Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author), Pirandello writes: “È da tanti anni a servizio della mia arte (ma come fosse da jeri) una servetta svettissima e non per tanto nuova sempre del mestiere. Si chiama Fantasia. Un po’ dispettosa e beffarda, se ha il gusto di vestir di nero, nessuno vorrà negare che non sia spesso alla bizzarra, e nessuno credere che faccia sempre e tutto sul serio a un modo solo. Si fica una mano in tasca; ne cava un berretto a sonagli; se lo caccia in capo, rosso come una cresta, e scappa via. Oggi qua; domani là. E si diverte a portarmi in casa, perché io ne tragga novelle e romanzi e commedie, la gente più scontenta del mondo, uomini, donne, ragazzi, avvolti in casi strani da cui non trovan più modo a uscire; contrariati nei loro disegni; frodati nelle loro speranze; e coi quali insomma è spesso veramente una gran pena trattare” [“It seems like yesterday but is actually many years ago that a nimble little maidservant entered the service of my art. However, she always comes fresh to the job. She is called Fantasy. A little puckish and malicious, if she likes to dress in black no one will wish to deny that she is often positively bizarre and no one will wish to believe that she always does everything in the same way and in earnest. She sticks her hand in her pocket, pulls out a cap and bells, sets it on her head, red as a cock’s comb, and dashes away. Here today, there tomorrow. And she amuses herself by bringing to my house—since I derive stories and novels and plays from them—the most disgruntled tribe in the world, men, women, children, involved in strange adventures which they can find no way out of; thwarted in their plans; cheated in their hopes; with whom, in short, it is often torture to deal”] (Luigi Pirandello, Maschere nude 1: 36).
maidservant, Fantasia, presents to him these potential characters—typically miserable and afflicted scourges of the Earth—and he listens as they state their cases for the author should use them in his stories. Fantasia, however, can usher the callers only so far as her employer will always make the last judgment as to their welcome stay or abrupt dismissal. Pirandello’s unique method of “abitudine dare udienza” [“custom of giving audience”] allows him to effectively illustrate to his readers that the potential character, a spirit-like embryo introduced by the imaginative spirit, may be merely ephemeral or may become immortal.

The narrator tells of how he was engrossed by the character of a novel sent to him as a gift from one of his friends. This character, named Dr. Fileno, proclaimed to have found the most effective remedy for any kind of ailment: “Una ricetta infallibile per consolar se stesso e tutti gli uomini d’ogni pubblica o privata calamità” [“An infallible prescription for consoling himself and all men for every public or private calamity”] (TLN 2: 626; Trans. Stanley Appelbaum 74). In an almost verbatim description to that of the philosophy of distance described in “Da lontano,” Dr. Fileno’s method is that of looking at the present as though it were history. He was cured, just as Dr. Paolo Post, of all his sorrows and annoyances and had found that same austere and serene peace without needing to die. Again, the effectiveness of Dr. Fileno’s method is demonstrated with the example that he had easily overcome the recent death of his daughter as though she had already been dead for a hundred years. The narrator offers a description, similar to that in “Da lontano,” of the inverted telescope:

In somma, di quel suo metodo il dottor Fileno s’era fatto come un cannocchiale rivoltato. Lo apriva, ma non per mettersi a guardare verso l’avvenire, dove sapeva che non avrebbe veduto niente; persuadeva l’anima a esser contenta di mettersi a guardare dalla lente piú grande,
attraverso la piccola, appuntata al presente, per modo che tutte le cose subito le apparissero piccole e lontane. E attendeva da varii anni a comporre un libro, che avrebbe fatto epoca certamente: La filosofia del lontano. (TLN 2: 626)

In sum, from that method of his Dr. Fileno made himself a sort of inverted telescope. He opened it, but not to position himself toward the future, where he knew that he would see nothing; he convinced his soul to be content to place itself so as to look from the bigger lens, toward the small one, aimed at the present, so that all things immediately appeared to him small and far away. For years he promised to write a book that would have certainly made the epoch: The philosophy of distance.

It occurs to the narrator while reading about Dr. Fileno, that the author of the novel is not able to fully realize the entire consciousness of this character who is, “contenendo in sé, esso solo, il germe d’una vera e propria creazione” [“containing in himself, him alone, the germ of a real and true creation”] (TLN 2: 626-27). At a certain point, it seems to Pirandello, that this character had succeeded in detaching himself from the hands of author of the novel by standing out amidst the boring events of the narrative. The narrator is proven wrong, however, as the character is suddenly forced back into the plot: “Poi, all’improvviso, sformato e immiserito, s’era lasciato piegare e adattare alle esigenze d’una falsa e sciocca soluzione” [“Then, all of a sudden, disfigured and withered, he yielded himself and adapted to the demands of a false and foolish solution”] (TLN 2: 627). The author, now late for his audience, visualizes the character of Dr. Fileno, seeing in him enough material for a masterpiece, and he is extremely vexed that the novel’s author had so neglected and failed this valuable character; he should have made him the center of the novel instead of such other artificial elements.

When the author finally enters his study, ready to receive his audience, the anguished Dr. Fileno in the flesh, approaches him. Despite the surprise of seeing Fileno in his office, he feels he has already wasted too much time with this periphery character. Dr.
Fileno fights to be heard and he gives a lengthy philosophical discourse persuading the author to re-write his character. Dr. Fileno explains his tragedy and begs for redemption.

He speaks the words that will be repeated by the Father in Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author):

Nessuno può sapere meglio di lei, che noi siamo esseri vivi, più vivi di quelli che respirano e vestono panni; forse meno reali, ma più veri! Si nasce alla vita in tanti modi, caro signore; e lei sa bene che la natura si serve dello strumento della fantasia umana per proseguire la sua opera di creazione. E chi nasce mercè quest’attività creatrice che ha sede nello spirito dell’uomo, è ordinato da natura a una vita di gran lunga superiore a quella di chi nasce dal grembo mortale d’una donna. Chi nasce personaggio, chi ha l’avventura di nascere personaggio vivo, può infischiarvisi anche della morte. Non muore più! Morrà l’uomo, lo scrittore, strumento naturale della creazione; la creatura non muore più! E per vivere eterna, non ha mica bisogno di straordinarie doti o di compiere prodigi. Mi dica lei chi era Sancho Panza! Mi dica lei chi era don Abbondio! Eppure vivono eterni perché—vivi germi—ebbero la ventura di trovare una matrice feconda, una fantasia che li seppe allevare e nutrire per l’eternità. [...] Ma dunque sul serio lei non comprende l’orrore della tragedia mia?

Avere il privilegio inestimabile di esser nato personaggio, oggi come oggi, voglio dire oggi che la vita materiale è così irta di vili difficoltà che ostacolano, deformano, immiseriscono ogni esistenza; avere il privilegio di esser nato personaggio vivo, ordinato dunque, anche nella mia piccolezza, all’immortalità, e sissignore, esser caduto in quelle mani, esser condannato a perire iniquamente, a soffocare in quel mondo d’artifizio, dove non posso né respirare né dare un passo, perché è tutto finto, falso, combinato, arzigogolato! Parole e carta! Carta e parole! Un uomo, se si trova avviluppato in condizioni di vita a cui non possa o non sappia adattarsi, può scapparsene, fuggire; ma un povero personaggio, no: è lì fissato, inchiodato a un martirio senza fine! Aria! aria! vita! Ma guardi … Fileno … mi ha messo nome Fileno … Le pare sul serio che io mi possa chiamar Fileno? Imbecille, imbecille! Neppure il nome ha saputo darmi! Io, Fileno! E poi, già, io, io, l’autore della Filosofia del lontano, proprio io dovevo andare a finire in quel modo indegno per sciogliere tutto quello stupido garbuglio di casi là! […] Mi riscatti lei, subito subito! mi faccia viver lei che ha compreso bene tutta la vita che è in me! (TLN 2: 627-628)

No one is in a better position than you to know that we are living beings, more alive than those who breath and wear clothes; perhaps less real, but truer! There are so many ways of coming to life, sir; and you know very well that nature makes use of the human imagination as a tool
for pursuing its work of creation. And anyone who is born thanks to this 
creative activity which has its seat in the human spirit is ordained by 
nature for a life that is higher than the life of those born from the mortal 
womb of a woman. Whoever is born as a character, whoever has the good 
fortune to be born as a living character, can even thumb his nose at death. 
He will no longer die! The man will die, the writer who was the natural 
instrument of his creation; but the creature will no longer die! And in 
order to live eternally, he hasn’t the slightest need of prodigious feats. 
Tell me, who was Sancho Panza? Tell me, who was Don Abbondio? And 
yet they live eternally because—as living germs—they had the good 
fortune to find a fertile womb, an imagination that was able to raise and 
nourish them! [. . .]

So you seriously don’t understand the horror of my tragedy? To have 
the inestimable privilege of being born as a character, now of all times, 
when material life is so beset with tawdry difficulties which create 
obstacles for, denature and impoverish every existence; to have the 
privilege of being born as a living character, and therefore, petty as I may 
be, ordained for immortality—and just think of it!—to fall into those 
hands, to be condemned to perish unjustly, to suffocate in that artificial 
world in which I can’t draw a free breath or take one step, because its all 
made up, fake, contrived, a sham! Words and paper! Paper and words! If 
a man finds himself entangled in circumstances of living to which he is 
physically or mentally unable to adapt, he can escape, run away; but a 
poor character can’t: he is stuck there, nailed to an endless martyrdom! 
Air! Air! Life! Just look … ‘Fileno’ … He gave me the name ‘Fileno’… 
Do you seriously think that I can be called Fileno? The imbecile, the 
imbecile! He couldn’t even give me a proper name! I, Fileno! And then, I, 
I, the author of The Philosophy of Distance, which that imbecile didn’t 
even see his way to have me publish at my own expense. [. . .] Redeem 
me, at once, at once! You, who have clearly understood all the life there 
is in me, let me live! (Trans. Appelbaum 77)

The author, after hearing this rant, claims he does not work this way and questions if Dr. 
Fileno is really the author of The Philosophy of Distance. Dr. Fileno answers: “È sempre 
per colpa di quel mio assassino! Ha dato appena appena e in succincto, di passata, un’idea 
delle mie teorie, non supponendo neppure lontanamente tutto il partito che c’era da trarre 
da quella mia scoperta del cannocchiale rivoltato!” [“As usual, it is the fault of my 
assassin! He just barely, in brief, in passing, offered an idea of my theories, not even 
remotely supposed all the benefit that could have come from my discovery of the
inverted telescope!”] The author condescendingly responds to Dr. Fileno and his philosophy:

Si lamenta del suo autore; ma ha saputo lei, caro dottore, trar partito veramente della sua teoria? Ecco, volevo dirle proprio questo. Mi lasci dire. Se Ella crede sul serio, come me, alla virtù della sua filosofia, perché non la applica un po’ al suo caso? Ella va cercando, oggi, tra noi, uno scrittore che la consacri all'immortalità? Ma guardi a ciò che dicono di noi poveri scrittorelli contemporanei tutti i critici più ragguardevoli. Siamo e non siamo, caro dottore! È sottoponga, insieme con noi, al suo famoso cannocchiale rivolto i fatti più notevoli, le questioni più ardenti e le più mirabili opere dei giorni nostri. Caro il mio dottore, ho gran paura ch’Ella non vedrà più niente né nessuno. (TLN 2: 629)

You’re complaining about your author; but my dear Doctor, were you really able to derive benefit from your own theory? There, that’s exactly what I wanted to say to you. Let me speak. If you seriously believe, as I do, in the efficacy of your philosophy, why don’t you apply a little of it to your own case? Here you are seeking out from among us a writer who will make you immortal. But look at us all, one by one, putting me at the very end of the line, naturally. And, along with us, look through your celebrated wrong-end-of-the-telescope at the most notable events, the most burning questions and the most admirable accomplishments of our day. My dear Doctor, I’m very much afraid that you will no longer see anything or anybody” (Trans. Appelbaum 78).

The author, doubting the credibility of the philosophy of distance, asks Dr. Fileno if he thinks his own theory is truly efficient. As in the conclusion of “Da lontano,” the narrator says that if Dr. Fileno, who is begging for immortality, applied his own philosophy and looks back at the present as though it were history, he will no longer see anyone. As in “Da lontano,” Pirandello affirms his conviction the present day is lacking in genuine accomplishments.

The most interesting aspect of this story, which along with “Personaggi” serves as the basis for Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore, is that Pirandello is subtly introducing, on a very abstract level, his notion of the living character as the only meaningful and true character. In “La tragedia d’un personaggio,” Pirandello effectively demonstrates—by
dismissing his own original creation, Dr. Fileno, and rejecting his *philosophy of distance*—that despite the fact that some characters are entertaining and some of their philosophies *may* be beneficial, this does not guarantee their immortality. In one of the “Foglietti” (the fragments found in Pirandello’s papers after his death), Pirandello wrote: “L’arte insomma è la vita, non è ragionamento” [“Art, in short, is life, not a reasoning process” (*Spv* 1262; Trans. William Murray xiii)]. Via the author’s rejection of Dr. Fileno’s reasoning, Pirandello expresses his contempt for form and demonstrates that—on his quest to create art that genuinely reflects life—he has little use for characters with an agenda other than to breathe and exude the flux of life. Pirandello shows that certain characters, born from an author’s imagination, have the potential to take on a life of their own while other characters, encountering the obstacles of form, may have a short life-span, or may never even emerge from the author’s consciousness—regardless of the seeds planted by the imagination. For Pirandello, the conception of a character worthy of immortality stems from the author’s imagination, but the character is only truly born when the idea detaches from its creator and thrusts itself into the flux of life. This concept will reach its apex in *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*; although the six characters are “rejected” by the author in the storyline of the play, Pirandello actually grants them immortality as the result of their independent spirit.

**Pirandello’s Rejection of the Philosophy of Distance**

My investigation of the texts in this chapter, and evidenced by the author’s harsh rejection of the “reasoning” doctor-philosopher and his *philosophy of distance*, indicates the beginning of Pirandello’s shift away from a philosophy-based approach to representation. After his conversation with Dr. Fileno, Pirandello dismisses the distance
philosophy as he recognizes it to be yet another fabricated and illusory form that obstructs the spontaneity of life. Unlike the inverted telescope, a pedagogical tool used to exemplify the intuitive soul’s desired emancipation from the solidified form of personality, the philosophy of distance is man’s artificial fixation of time and space. This manipulation of perception, accomplished by imposing an unnatural distance between man and the present, is merely a glorified and temporary coping strategy of escape-avoidance that further separates man from his consciousness. Ultimately, Pirandello abandons the philosophy of distance and the inverted telescope as he alters his protagonists’ relationship with the present moment. The maintenance of a close connection to the present, in direct opposition to the extreme detachment suggested by Dr. Post and Dr. Fileno, proves to be the gateway to spiritual health for the characters as they no longer look to material objects or depend on mental adaptation processes to overcome the anxiety of daily stressors.

In the following chapter, I explore Pirandello’s persistent search for a viable solution to man’s vulnerability to external illusory appearances and the spiritual sickness induced by materialism. Through experimentation with different spiritual approaches, Pirandello disassembles and examines the paradoxical aspects of life, particularly the dualistic forces of life and form, in order to authentically portray the inevitable conflict that arises when man attempts to fix and stabilize the flux of life. He emphatically returns to the representation of fundamental contradictions and the dynamic nature of reality, as for Pirandello, the awareness and comprehension of paradox is essential for surmounting

\[42\] According to the Handbook of Coping: theory, research, applications: “A review of the literature by Carver & Scheier suggests that “avoidance” coping (e.g., wishful thinking, escapism, overt effort to deny, and self-distraction and mental disengagement) typically works against people rather than to their advantage (Moshe Zeidner and Norman S. Endler 514). For more information on the Ego-Psychology Model of coping mechanisms, see Carpenter 32.
mental anguish and living authentically in the universe—beyond the restrictions of form. Via the representation of his characters as liberated from suffering via inner reflection and intense connection with the present (as discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation), Pirandello demonstrates the way for the soul, or the “life within us,” to be in harmony with the flux of life.43

43 In “L’umorismo,” Pirandello writes: “Ma dentro di noi stessi, in ciò che noi chiamiamo anima, e che è la vita in noi, il flusso continua, indistinto, sotto gli argini, oltre i limiti che noi imponiamo, componendoci una coscienza, costruendoci una personalità” (“But within ourselves, in what we call the soul and is the life in us, the flux continues, indistinct under the barriers and beyond the limits we impose as a means to fashion a consciousness and personality for ourselves”) (Saggi, poesie, scritti varii 151; Illiano, trans. 137).
CHAPTER 2

INTO THE MYSTERIOUS ABYSS

*Pirandello’s exploration of non-theistic religions & unconventional science*

E mi pare più giusto il convenire che con tutto il meraviglioso progresso delle nostre cognizioni positive, nel presente anno di grazia mille ottocento ottantaquattro, noi ci troviamo, di faccia a molti fenomeni naturali, nella stessissima condizione dei poveri selvaggi al cospetto di altri fenomeni spiegabilissimi per noi e per essi ancora un mistero. Però noi, selvaggi della civiltà, ammaestrati dalla storia, dovremmo condurci assai diversamente di quelle misere creature poste dalla loro cattiva sorte nei più bassi gradini della gran scala umana. Invece, forse per una severa legge dello spirito, procediamo alla stessa guisa. Inoltre, siamo avvolti nella nebbia dei pregiudizii, tutti, scienzati e non scienzati; tanto i materialisti presi dalla paura di vedersi forzati, dai fatti, ad ammettere l’esistenza di un *qualcosa* non semplicemente materiale; quanto gli spiritualisti atterriti dall’idea di veder quel *qualcosa*, dagli onori di puro spirito immortale, degradato alle condizioni di un che né tutto spirito come essi l’intendono, né tutto materiale come l’intendono quegli altri. E il curioso è che, stringi, stringi, né gli uni sanno di positivo, di veramente scientifico, intorno al loro spirito immortale, né gli altri nulla di positivo, di veramente scientifici intorno alla costituzione della loro materiale! Sì, siamo ancora avvolti nella nebbia dei pregiudizii, tutti, scienzati e non scienzati.44

-Luigi Capuana

Technological and industrial advancements at the *fin-de-siècle* challenged traditional mechanistic and objective thought and precipitated new modes of philosophy,

44 Luigi Capuna Spiritismo? (130-31). Translation: “And I would tend to agree that, in spite of all the wonderful progress of our positive cognitions in this year 1884, we know about many natural phenomena just as little as poor savages do about other phenomena which are easily explicable to us but still mysterious to them. Yet, being savages of civilization, trained by history, we should follow a totally different procedure to that of those miserable little creatures placed by their bad luck on the lower steps of the great human scale. However, perhaps due to a strict law of the spirit, we proceed in the same manner. Moreover, we are still shrouded in a fog of prejudice, all of us, both scientists and laymen, both the materialists, who are caught by the fear to become forced by evidence to acknowledge the existence of something not merely material, and the spiritualists, who are scared by the possibility of seeing that same thing degraded from the honors of the pure immortal spirit to the condition of a thing which is neither wholly spiritual, as they mean, nor entirely materially, as the materialists do. Interestingly, at the end of the day, neither do the materialists have any positive and truly scientific knowledge of the spirit, nor do the spiritualists have any such knowledge of matter! Yes, we are still shrouded in a fog of prejudice, all of us, both scientists and laymen.”
religion and scientific inquiry. In juxtaposition to the increase in secularism and the industrial advancements that characterized the urban centers of Western Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, occultism and age-old spiritual practices regained a popularity that had lain dormant since the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{45} The inception and positive reception of alternative religious movements and the unconventional modes of scientific investigation, such as parapsychology (the scientific investigation of paranormal phenomenon), reflect the acceptant and progressive mind-set at the turn of the century. Though Christianity remained the dominant religion in Europe, the freedom and opportunity to explore different spiritual organizations allowed people to challenge and break away from traditional dogmatic religion. This is especially pertinent for Pirandello as he lived and worked in Rome, the epicenter of the Catholic Church, whose history of religious intolerance and persecution is far from forgotten. In twentieth century Italy, however, Pirandello was able to freely express his non-beliefs in a country where “heretics” such as Giordano Bruno, Girolamo Savonarola and Galileo Galilei had been punished for their independent thinking.\textsuperscript{46}

Pirandello recurrently applied spiritual and supernatural elements throughout his works—from the early novella, “Chi fu?” (“Who was it?”) (1898), to his last dramatic endeavor, \textit{I giganti della montagna} (The Mountain Giants) (1936). In this chapter I concentrate on Pirandello’s spiritual and parapsychical application in: the novelle “Chi fu?” (“Who was it?”) (1898), “La casa del Granella” (“Granella’s House”) (1905),

\textsuperscript{45} The word “occult” is defined by the \textit{Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology} as: “General term (derived from the Latin \textit{occultus, occultere}, to hide) to denote that which is hidden, mysterious, known only to the initiated, imperceptible by normal senses, thus embracing all of the pseudosciences of magic belief and practice, such as alchemy, astrology, demonology, ghosts, miracles, poltergeists, prediction of the future, psychic powers, spells, Spiritism, sympathetic magic, etc.” (Shepard, ed. 2: 1207).

\textsuperscript{46} For more information regarding secularization and contemporary religious consciousness, see \textit{Alienation, Atheism and the Religious Crisis} by Thomas F. O’Dea (NY: Sheed and Ward, 1969)
“Personaggi” (“Characters”) (1906), “Dal naso al cielo” (1907) (“From the Nose to the Sky”); the novel Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal) (1904); and the plays All’uscita (At the Exit) (1916) and Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author) (1921). Born in religiously fervent and superstitious Sicily, Pirandello was exposed from a young age to the mystical tendencies and superstitions of the peasants. The biographer Gaspare Giudice writes of the impact of Maria Stella, the maid-servant working in the Pirandello house, who tried to save the young Luigi’s soul:

It was from her that Pirandello learnt to believe in ghosts—in ghosts both concrete and abstract which could appear at any moment of the day or night and say what they have to say. And, once the superstitions had been exorcised by an aesthetic system rooted in idealist thought, these ghosts could be turned into characters. If ghosts as such, ghosts rattling their chains, pulling away the bed covers, shaking the furniture and ringing the bells, appear frequently in Pirandello’s work this is probably due to Maria Stella. (Trans. Alastair Hamilton 7)

In addition to this exposure in his native Sicily, Pirandello came of age at an exciting time for unconventional spiritual movements and scientific explorations throughout Europe and America. The explosion of Christian revivalism, known as the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830), sparked the “wildfire of spiritual enthusiasm” that spread across the United States (Sarah M. Pike 44). The revivals of Spiritualism in 1848 and Theosophy in 1875 stimulated the initiation of various spiritual societies and restored faith to many lapsed believers. In response to positivism and materialism, many organizations were designed to incorporate spirituality with science. Sarah Pike’s

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47 An autobiographical reference of this nature is found in “La casa del Granella,” discussed later in this chapter. (TLN 2: 928)
48 The following descriptions offer an index of the abounding religious activity in this period. Regarding Theosophy, Charles Webster Leadbeater, one of the founding members of the Theosophical Society, describes Theosophy as: “At once a philosophy, a religion, and a science that, comparatively, offer explanations of life, death, the afterlife, the solar system and the One” (Leadbeater A Textbook of Theosophy 8). Rudolf Steiner, the head of the Theosophical Society in Germany, broke from Theosophy and founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1909 in Dornach, Switzerland. He called his belief system of
description of the lineage of New Age beliefs offers an informative summary of the
varying metaphysical approaches in Pirandello’s day. Pike writes:

New Agers inherited the belief in continuity between matter and spirit
from the western metaphysical tradition that includes Transcendentalism,
Swedenborgianism, Christian Science, New Thought, Theosophy,
mesmerism, spiritualism, and dowsing. Nineteenth century spiritual
healing traditions emerged out of a system of beliefs that scholars have
called “metaphysical” or “harmonial” religion. The central teachings of
harmonial religion—that humans and the universe are ultimately one, that
they are interconnected and the divine is not outside the world but within
human beings as well—has been taken up by the New Age movement.
Nineteenth century figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and
Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), the founder of Theosophy (a religion
blending Asian and western thought), were proponents of the harmonial
view. (Pike 24)

Pirandello availed himself of new non-empirical approaches and untraditional
spiritual practices to explore the spirit, consciousness and soul and to fill the

spiritual science, “Anthroposophy” (Burton and Grandy 222). George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1872-1949)
was born in Russia and spent years searching for esoteric wisdom in Central Asia and the Middle East. Like
Helena Blavatsky (co-founder of the Theosophical Society), “Gurdjieff claims to have been much taken
with the prospect of finding an obscure school or brotherhood whose wisdom, passed down for generation,
keeps the forces of cosmic darkness at bay and unlocks the riddles of existence”; he settled in France where
he opened his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. Gurdjieff offered his students a “method
or system of self-enlightenment presupposing the circumvention of traditional learning experiences. This
meant showing them how to wake up and then stay awake, what he sometimes called ‘esoteric Christianity’
or ‘The Fourth Way.’” Peter D. Ouspensky (1878-1947) was a Russian esoteric philosopher. He met G.I.
Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg in 1915. Ouspensky had just returned from a six-week tour of Egypt, Ceylon and
India with the Theosophist, Annie Besant. Ouspensky wrote The Fourth Dimension (1909), Tertium
Organum (1912), and A New Model of the Universe (1931). He established a school in London to teach
Gurdjieff’s ‘Fourth Way’ and attracted many of his own disciples. Following Albert Einstein’s
identification of time as the fourth dimension, Ouspensky’s teachings evolved into what he called the
‘Fourth Dimension’ (See Burton and Grandy 225-235).

During the time of the Second Great Awakening, Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805-1844) founded the
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism) in 1830 in Hydesville, NY (Burton and Grandy
194). In 1879, Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) founded the Church of Christ, Scientist (Christian Science
religion) in Boston, Massachusetts. Mary Baker Eddy surfaced in 1875 as the author of Science and Health
with Key to the Scriptures, a text seven years in preparation and published with a subvention from her small
circle of students. [...] In the Christian Science system, as conceived by its founder, there are two types of
thought, human and divine. The former is undesirable since physical or mortal perception is illusory,
deceitful, even evil. The latter is of God, the true stuff of creation, and is scientific law—hence the name
Christian Science. It is absolute, unchangeable, virtuous, principled, heavenly and unfailingly
demonstrable, like a mathematical formula. [...] To Eddy, the truth she taught was neither Protestant nor
social: it was an exact science. As she perceived it, Christian Science ‘truth, independent of doctrines and
time-honored systems,’ had begun to ‘twist the knife . . . into the fleshy conventionality of materialism’”
(Stuart E. Knee 9-10).
metaphysical void of materialism and positivism. He was perhaps one of the earliest New Age thinkers, according to Pike’s explanation that “New Agers” criticize scientific and religious reductionism and direct their efforts toward overcoming the false division between matter and spirit (Pike 24). Giovanni Macchia describes Pirandello’s dissatisfaction with traditional science and the failure of positivistic systems to respond to the needs and questions of man. Macchia accounts for the author’s experimental method as the result of his disquieted opinion of positivism:

Ma sempre resterà in lui la consapevolezza della disfatta della scienza come regno naturalistico della certezza. La nebbia che invaseva i confini dell’essere li rendeva incerti e indefinibili, l’allargamento di quei limiti in forza di una coscienza divisa (e qui interveniva il suo Binet, medico e scienzato), l’alterazione della personalità dovuta anche a disastri psichici, una quasi definitiva sfiducia nella funzione equilibratrice e risanatrice della logica: questi e altri motivi possono averlo spinto verso il bisogno di scoprire altre leggi, altre forze, altra vita nella natura, sempre nella natura, per cui dirà Séailles, che anche l’arte è la natura stessa, la quale prosegue l’opera sua nella natura umana. Così, un metodo positivo sperimentale, che inseguita il fenomeno della pluralità delle anime, s’innestava in uno spiritualismo, che esaltava la creazione individuale, e che affrontava persone “vive, libere, operanti” per farne personaggi. (Macchia 51)

But always will remain in him the awareness of the defeat of science as the naturalistic realm of certainty. The fog that invaded the borders of being and made them uncertain and indefinable, the enlargement of those limits by virtue of a divided consciousness (and here his Binet, doctor and scientist, comes in), the alteration of the personality also due to psychic disasters, an almost definitive lack of faith in the equilibrating and healing function of logic: these and other reasons may have pushed him toward the need to discover other laws, other forces, other life in nature, always in nature, as Séailles will say, that art is nature itself, which continues its work in human nature. Thus, a positive experimental method, which followed the phenomenon of the plurality of souls, is grafted in a spiritualism, which exalted the individual creation, and addressed individuals “alive, free, working” to make them characters.

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The influx of spiritual paths offered Pirandello a framework to highlight alternative systems of religion, philosophy and science and to demonstrate man’s need for a spiritual outlet. The ghost-like phenomena of the occult, and the various teachings and scientific investigations regarding the reincarnation of the soul and the after-life, provided Pirandello’s imagination with a wealth of curious ideas. He selectively integrated these eccentric notions into his fictional pieces and his fluency with such approaches clearly contributed to his aesthetic method. I demonstrate in this chapter that the intersection of spirituality and science at the end of the nineteenth century—namely Spiritualism, Theosophy, psychology and parapsychology, and the emergence of Buddhist thought in Europe—undoubtedly fed Pirandello’s spirited imagination and significantly influenced his artistic representation. The analysis of such approaches in Pirandello’s narratives offer the reader a deeper understanding of and insight into his future oeuvre. This investigation substantiates my claim that Pirandello’s theory of life versus form, his unique method of character development, and subsequent arrested development, which would be exploded in his 1921 masterpiece, Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore, find their basis in and should be approached through the lens of the converging trends of alternative modes of spirituality and the developing science of parapsychology.
**Spiritualism**

The movement that initiated modern Spiritualism began in 1848 though the ancestry of spiritualism, including witchcraft and demonology, dates back for centuries. According to the definition adopted by the National Spiritualist Association of the United States of America: “Spiritualism is the Science, Philosophy and Religion of continuous life, based upon the demonstrated fact of communication, by means of mediumship, with those who live in the Spirit World” (Ed. Shepard 2: 1582). Spiritualism offered an alternative to traditional Judeo-Christian religion and aimed to reconcile science with religion by claiming provable facts concerning survival and the after-life. Pirandello’s contemporary, the Scottish author and physician, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859 –1930), wrote *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), though it was not as well known as his crime novels featuring the detective Sherlock Holmes. “Spiritualism,” wrote Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “is a religion for those who find themselves outside all religions; while on the contrary it greatly strengthens the faith of those who already possess religious beliefs” (Ed. Shepard 1583). Pirandello, an outsider to all religions and critical of traditional science, most likely took interest in Spiritualism as it was a “religio-philosophical belief, opposed to materialism and based on the principle of value and the reality of individual consciousness” (Theodore Flournoy x). The séance, a forum for communication with the dead via the guidance of a medium, was integral to the practice of Spiritualism. In addition to Spiritualism, séances were the preferred venue for conducting scientific research as well as an *en vogue* amusement at social gatherings.

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50 For a thorough examination of Spiritualism, see the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (Shepard, ed. 2: 1582-1599).
The origin of modern Spiritualism can be traced to Hydesville, New York, where Margaret and Kate Fox formed the first Spiritualist society in 1848. The Fox sisters gained notoriety when they reported that spirits had contacted them repeatedly in their Hydesville home.\textsuperscript{52} Spiritualism’s revival is also attributed to the American clairvoyant and magnetic healer, Andrew Jackson Davis, who came forth as having prophesied a spiritual revival and as well as claiming to have predicted the happenings at the Fox household. With Davis’s profession of the theory and principle of communication between man and spirit, Spiritualism in America was officially indoctrinated. American mediums brought Spiritualism to Britain as early as 1852, and the trend spread throughout Europe where the Spiritualist writings of Swedish scientist, Emanuel Swedenborg, and the work of the Austrian doctor, Franz Mesmer, (1734–1815), the father of animal magnetism, had already made an impression.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{52} David Chapin writes of the various responses to the Fox sisters’ controversial claims: “In 1848, according to believers, [Margaret] and her sister Kate had begun to communicate with the dead by means of mysterious knocking sounds. Two years later these pale, dark-haired, dark-eyed teenage girls were holding séances in New York City. Hundreds of people came to see the Fox sisters and participate in their séances in the hope that they might contact dead loved ones and thus explore the unknown regions of the afterlife. Some excited witnesses thought that the activities of the Fox sisters heralded the beginning of a new age of spiritual enlightenment, while observers of a more philosophcal bent believed that their séances revealed new mysteries about the workings of the human mind and human spirit. Still others, with more skeptical leanings, thought that the Fox sisters were con artists out to make a profit from deception. Despite these conflicting views, the Fox sisters were a sensation, and their séances attracted both hopeful believers and skeptical critics (David Chapin 3-4).

\textsuperscript{53} Emanuel Swedenborg, (1688–1772), “was a Swedish scientist, authority on metallurgy, mining and military engineer, learned astronomer, reputed physicist, zoologist, anatomist, financier, political economist, seer, and a serious Bible student. In 1734 he published his \textit{Prodomus Philosophiae Ratiocinatrio de Infinite (The Infinite and Final Cause of Creation)}, in which he discusses the relation of the finite to the infinite and of the soul to the body. In this work he sought to establish a definite connection between the two as a means of overcoming the difficulty of their relationship. Swedenborg’s real illumination and interaction with the spirit world in visions and dreams began in 1744. In a conscious state he wandered in the spirit world and conversed with its inhabitants as freely as with living men. He was in a sense, the first Spiritualist. Spiritualism owes much to Swedenborg. He was one of the first to maintain that death means no immediate change, that the spirit world is a counterpart of this world below, that it is ruled by laws which ensure definite progress and that our conditions in the Beyond are determined by the life we live here” (Shepard, ed. vol. 2: 1640-1645).

Franz Mesmer, (1734–1815), an Austrian doctor, “was the originator of the technique of mesmerism, the forerunner of hypnotism. In 1766 he took a degree in medicine at Vienna, the subject of his inaugural thesis being \textit{De planetarum Influxu (The Influence of the Planets on the Human Body)}, in which
The French Spiritualist Allan Kardec, to whom much of the Spiritualist movement in Italy can be attributed, diverged from Spiritualism by incorporating the belief in reincarnation. He espoused the tenets of his new doctrine, Spiritism, in his books, *Le livre des esprits* (*The Book of the Spirits*) (1857), and *Le livre des mediums* (*The Book of Mediums*) (1861). These texts were translated into many languages and spread swiftly throughout Europe and South America.\(^{54}\) In Sicily in 1863, La Società Spirituale di Palermo was formed. More than one hundred “spirit-societies” were in place when the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918) was discovered in Naples in 1872. Prominent Italian scientists, including Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Morselli, founder of “psycho-dynamic” theory, attended séances to study Palladino and confirmed her powers, though she would later admit to occasionally pretending.\(^{55}\)

Hopes were raised of communicating with the dead, as more and more mediums surfaced and claimed to be able to conjure the souls of loved ones. The physical phenomena at séances included: acoustic phenomena (raps, blows, noises, voice, music), apports (disappearance of objects), automatism (automatic writing, drawing, painting), chemical phenomena (psychic lights, perfumes, production of water), levitation, magnetic phenomena, telekinesis (movement of objects, table-turning), and typtology (spelling out he expounded his ideas of ‘animal magnetism.’ In his thesis, he identified the influence of the planets with magnetism, and developed the idea that stroking diseased bodies with magnets would be curative. […] The evolution of animal magnetism into hypnotism was due to James Braid in 1841” (Shepard, ed. vol. 2: 1086-1088). According to *Magic, Mystery and Science*: “For Mesmer, the magnetic fluid was a universal life force, which, if harnessed properly, could promote healing and health. […] He moved to Paris where his ‘animal magnetism’ was readily accepted by the French. During the “healing climax” some patients fell into trances, convulsed or had hysterical fits and the King of France ordered Mesmer to be investigated by a committee of doctors and scientists. The committee insisted mesmerism had no scientific basis and rejected him, forcing him to withdraw from public life, though his mesmerism would continue to flourish in Europe and America” (Burton and Grandy 186-189).

\(^{54}\) In fact, during the decade of the 1940s, Brazil’s population increased 78 percent in Spiritism membership (Conniff, Michael L., and Frank D. McCann, eds. 263).

\(^{55}\) For more on Spiritism, see Flournoy, T. *Spiritism and Psychology* (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1911).
messages) (Gaius Glenn Atkins 287). Such phenomena were also popular in modern literature as evidenced, for example, by Pirandello’s *Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal)*, as well as Italo Svevo’s reference to hypnosis and the séance in *La coscienza di zeno (Zeno’s Conscience)* (1923).⁵⁶

As discussed in the following sections, Pirandello was cognizant of the contemporary trends in spirituality. His interest in Spiritualism and Theosophy finds its greatest expression in *Il Fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal)* (1904), via the eccentric characters of Anselmo Paleari, a Spiritualist and enthusiastic member of the Theosophical Society, and his medium-in-residence, the lovesick and alcoholic Signorina Caporale, without whom Paleari would not be able to conduct his spiritualistic experiments. Pirandello’s protagonist, Mattia Pascal, describes his new roommates:

Anselmo Paleari, quel vecchio che mi era venuto innanzi con un turbante di spuma in capo, aveva pure così, come di spuma, il cervello. […]) Era ascritto alla scuola teosofica.

Lo avevano messo a riposo, da caposezione in non so qual Ministero, prima del tempo, e lo avevano rovinato, non solo finanziariamente, ma anche perché, libero e padrone del suo tempo, egli si era adesso sprofondato tutto ne’ suoi fantastici studii e nelle sue nuvolose meditazione, astraendosi più che mai dalla vita materiale. […] In questi ultimi tempi si era dato anche a gli esperimenti spiritici.

Aveva scoperto nella signorina Silvia Caporale, maestra di pianoforte, sua inquilina, straordinarie facoltà medianiche, non ancora bene sviluppate, per dire la verità, ma che si sarebbero senza dubbio sviluppate, col tempo e con l’esercizio, fino a rivelarsi superiori a quelle di tutte i *medium* più celebrati. Io, per conto mio, posso attestare di non aver mai veduto in una faccia volgarmente brutta, da maschera carnevalesca, un pajo d’occhi più dolente di quelli della signorina Silvia Caporale. […]

È vero per la piccola Adriana, che si dimostrava così instintivamente buona e anzi troppo savvia, non v’era forse da temere: ella infatti più che d’altro si sentiva offesa nell’anima da quelle pratiche misteriose del padre, da quell’evocazione di spiriti per mezzo della signorina Caporale. Era religiosa la piccola Adriana. (*Tr* 1: 435-437)

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Anselmo Paleari, the old man who had appeared to me in a foam turban, had a brain also made more or less of foam. [...] Signor Anselmo Paleari was a member of the theosophical school. He had been prematurely retired from his position as chief clerk in an office of I forget what Ministry, and this retirement had ruined him not only financially, but also, since he was now free, master of his time, it had plunged him entirely into his fantastic studies and his fuddled meditations, separating him more than ever from real life. [...] In recent times he had also dedicated himself to spiritualistic experiments.

In his lodger, the piano teacher Signorina Silvia Caporale, he had discovered exceptional mediumistic talents, not yet fully developed, of course, but which would surely develop with time and practice until she would prove superior to all the most celebrated mediums. For my part, I don’t mind saying that never have I seen a pair of eyes sadder than those of Signorina Silvia Caporale, in a face as vulgar and ugly as a carnival mask. [...] Of course, for little Adriana, so instinctively good and even too kind, there was no reason to fear; in fact, what secretly made her suffer more than anything else were those mysterious practices of her father, who called up spirits through Signorina Caporale. Little Adriana was religious.

Paleari’s unconventional spiritual practices are in perfect juxtaposition with his daughter Adriana’s Christian values. Mattia Pascal, the epitome of a lapsed Catholic, mocks Paleri’s “fantastici studii” (“fantastic studies”), and absent-mindedly puts his cigarette out in the holy water basin that Adriana had placed by his bed. Mattia Pascal admits that the beliefs and practices of these curious people, however strange, induced him to think about his life choices and his own lack of faith.57

57 Mattia Pascal says: “Ogni minimo che—sospeso come già da un pezzo mi sentivo in un vuoto strano—mi faceva ora cadere in lunghe riflessioni. Questo dell’acquasantiera m’indusse a pensare che, fin da ragazzo, io non avevo più atteso a pratiche religiose, né ero più entrato in alcuna chiesa per pregare, andato via Pinzone che mi conduceva insieme con Berto, per ordine della mamma. Non avevo mai sentito alcun bisogno di domandare a me stesso se avessi veramente una fede. E Mattia Pascal era morto di mala morte senza conforti religiosi” (“Thanks to the curious emptiness in which I had been suspended for such a long time, the slightest event now made me sink into long meditations. The matter of the holy water stoup reminded me that since my boyhood days I hadn’t observed any religious practices, nor had I entered any church to pray, after the departure of Tweezer, who used to take me to church with Berto, on Mamma’s orders. I had never felt the necessity to ask myself if I really had any faith. And Mattia Pascal had died a sinful death without the comforts of religion” (Tr 1: 438; Weaver, trans. 118).
During Mattia Pascal’s stay in Rome as Adriano Meis, Paleari hosts a gathering of friends to conjure the spirit of Max through the mediumistic talents of Silvia Caporale. Structurally, the dramatic staging of the séance scene in the dimly lit room—chaotic with levitations, loud table raps, and the t iptotological language “communicated” by Max—provides the opportunity for a thief to enter into Mattia Pascal’s bedroom while he is conveniently moving closer to comfort the frightened Adriana in the darkness of the séance. Antonio Illiano, author of the seminal book *Metapsichica e letteratura in Pirandello* (*Metapsychics and Literature in Pirandello*) (1982), comments on Pirandello’s application of Spiritualism:

Pirandello was aware of the difference between spiritism and theosophy. While polemically motivated against the former—the scene of the séance in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* works both as a structural device and as a topical parody of the misguided adepts whose fanatic credulity is easily manipulated by fraud—his inquisitive mind was predictably intrigued by the philosophical and psychological tenets of the theosophical school. (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 343)

Paleari’s Theosophical beliefs and spiritualistic experiments, and Pascal’s skepticism of these unconventionalities, indeed provide Pirandello a forum for his own social commentary concerning such trends. The application of the varying spiritualities, however, is more than just a topical treatment. Through the illustration of Pascal’s progression from initial skepticism, which yields to his aloof curiosity, and then to reflective contemplation, Pirandello illustrates the existential freedom that come with thinking laterally and challenging conventional assumptions. Thanks to “Adriano Meis’s’’ exposure to new speculations on death, suicide, the spirit, and the potential immortality of the soul, Mattia Pascal is perfectly poised to reflect on the more profound aspects of his
existence, and for the first time, is able to consider the different ways in which he is capable of deceiving himself.  

_The Influence of Luigi Capuana_

Spiritualism and modern Theosophy, as well as the developing fields of psychology and parapsychology, permeated most major European cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, and such was the atmosphere when Pirandello moved to Rome in 1891 after his graduation from Bonn. Shortly after arriving in Rome, Pirandello met the writer Ugo Fleres, a fellow Sicilian from Messina, who introduced him to another Sicilian, Luigi Capuana (1839-1915). Capuana, Pirandello’s mentor and confidant, had two major effects on the young and eager writer. He encouraged Pirandello to abandon his poetry for prose, and directly introduced him to the fashionable occult culture and parapsychology. Capuana invited him to the séances he facilitated where Pirandello had first-hand exposure to current spiritual practices as well as access to Spiritualist texts. Thanks to Luigi Capuana’s encouragement and guidance, Pirandello has been called a pioneer of the “modern” novel for _Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal)_ (1904).

Capuana, author of the realist novel, _Giacinta_ (1879), is typically recognized alongside Giovanni Verga for his role in _verismo_ (akin to French naturalism), though he

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58 I expand upon Pirandello’s application of Theosophy in _Il fu Mattia Pascal_ in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

59 The term _parapsychology_, coined by German psychologist Max Dessoir (1867-1947) in 1889, is used today to indicate the scientific study of the _paranormal_, meaning the phenomena beyond what is normally understood to have a cause an effect. The term _metapsychics_, defined as “a science dealing with mechanical and psychological phenomena due to forces which seem to be intelligent, or to unknown powers, latent in human intelligence,” was proposed by Professor Charles Richet (1850-1935) in 1905, during his inaugural address as elected president of the _Society for Psychical Research_. This term was not generally accepted and alternatively _parapsychics_ was suggested by Emile Boirac (1851-1917). In modern times the term parapsychology encompasses the terms metapsychic and parapsychic, and the term _parapsychical_ is favored to the term _paranormal_ (Shepard, ed. 2: 1257).

60 Pirandello was welcomed into Luigi Capuana’s literary circle in Rome and he attended meetings along with Giuseppe Mantica, Italo Palmarini, Salvatore Saya, and Tomaso Gnoli (Giudice 50-51).
has also written a great deal on the occult and spiritual phenomena. Capuana was most likely to have been influenced by the Scapigliatura, the literary and artistic movement begun in Italy in 1864.\textsuperscript{61} The Scapigliati (literally meaning “disheveled”), the artists of this spirited and rebellious movement, were influenced by German Romantics, such as E.T.A Hoffman and Heinrich Heine, as well as by the French Bohemians and the writings of the American poet, Edgar Allan Poe. This movement precipitated the movements of Decadentism and Symbolism in Italy and paved the way for the supernatural themed works of writers such as Capuana, Antonio Fogazzaro and Remigio Zena.

Capuana’s initial interest in the phenomenon of magnetism led him to conduct spiritual experimentations, and he often referred to himself as a “dilettante” in study of the occult (Cedola 7). His research encompassed conducting séances, observing somnambulism (sleepwalking), hypnosis, hallucination, and experimentation with automatic writing.\textsuperscript{62} Capuana desired to uncover the mysteries of the supernatural, which he believed to be a legitimate aspect of the natural universe. Capuana and Pirandello were fueled by a strong criticism of traditional science that discredited such beliefs, and both writers appealed to spiritualistic approaches to demonstrate the limitations of strictly materialist thinking. Capuana funneled the result of his parapsychological experiments

\textsuperscript{61} The name Scapigliatura, the Italian equivalent to the French Boheme, was derived from the novel La Scapigliatura e il 6 Febbraio by Cletto Arrighi, pen name of Carlo Righetti (1830–1906). Ugo Tarchetti (1839-1869), one of the best-known authors of the Scapigliatura, also wrote i Racconti Fantastici (Fantastic Stories). During this time in Milan, members of the Scapigliati, including Tarchetti, Emilio Praga, contributed to “Luce ed Ombra” (“Light and Shadow”), the most notable spiritualistic publication, founded by Angelo Marzorati in 1894. See Cigliana 41-42.

\textsuperscript{62} It is important to distinguish “automatic writing” from the later “automatism” of the Surrealist Movement, initiated by André Breton in 1924. According to the Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology: “The phenomenon of artistic expression without control of the conscious self belongs to the same category as automatic writing, but neither necessarily involves the other (126). In his first Surrealist Manifesto (Le Manifeste du Surréalisme), published in 1924, Breton defined Surrealism as “pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing or in any other manner, the true functioning of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations” (Ogilvy 500).

Capuana and Pirandello both witnessed the shift in the medical profession during the second half of the nineteenth century as neurologists and other classically trained doctors broadened their study of the brain to encompass the mind as well. In his 1928...
essay, “The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man” (“Das Seelenproblem des modernen Menschen”), Carl Jung explains the need for the study of the mind at the turn of the century:

Whenever there exists some external form, be it an ideal or a ritual, by which all yearnings and hopes of the soul are adequately expressed—as for instance in a living religion—then we may say that the psyche is outside and that there is no psychic problem. [. . .] The need [for psychology] only arose with the enormous division of labour and the growth of specialization in the nineteenth century. So also a spiritual need has produced in our time the “discovery” of psychology. The psychic facts still existed earlier, of course, but they did not attract attention—no one noticed them. But today we can no longer get along unless we pay attention to the psyche.

It was men of the medical profession who were the first to learn this truth. For the priest, the psyche can only be something that needs fitting into a recognized form or system of belief in order to ensure its undisturbed functioning. So long as this system gives true expression to life, psychology can be nothing but a technical adjuvant to healthy living, and the psyche cannot be regarded as a factor sui generis. (R.F.C. Hull trans. 79)

Doctors focused on hysteria, hypnotism, personality dissociation and the new concept of the divided-ego, with pioneers such as the French psychologists Pierre Janet and Alfred Binet, the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, and the Austrian neurologists Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer paving the way. Freud and Breuer concentrated their research on hysteria and they collaborated a new therapeutic method called free association, espoused in the book, Studien über Hysterie (Studies on Hysteria), published in 1895. In his book Pirandello, Binet e Les altérations de la personnalité, Carlo Di Lieto...

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Pirandello to really get a glimpse of a new reality of “another unexpected being,” that lives hidden in the depths of the consciousness.”

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65 Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary defines hysteria as: “A psychoneurotic disorder characterized by by violent emotional outbreaks, disturbances of sensory and motor functions, and various abnormal effects due to autosuggestion (703). Since the 1970s, hysteria as an independent diagnostic entity has been deleted from the official manuals of medical diagnosis.
explains the significance of Breuer and Freud’s findings and the impact on Luigi Capuana, which then filtered to Pirandello:

Hysteria was the illness at the end of the century, when the positivist certainties waned and the “psychic scene” was explored in its unconscious sphere, hitherto dominated by the scientific laws of the Hippocratic tradition.

In those years, Luigi Capuana created in his Stories the figure of the “doctor-philosopher,” and Freud in the five case histories from the Studies on Hysteria maintains that the repressed representation of hysterical symptoms is manifested as a physical pathology. In 1885, Freud is in Paris and meets Charcot (1825-1893); they agree that hysteria is a not an organic disease, but of psychic origin, the “cathartic method” of Breuer and the “free association” of Freud allowed them to deepen the meaning of the hysterical symptoms and to hypothesize the unconscious as psychic activity which is not subject to the command of the conscience. […]

In the psychology of the last years of the nineteenth century, research on hysteria and self-analysis converged in the formulation of the psychic apparatus and the system of the unconscious.

Pirandello was particularly interested in hysteria as his wife, Maria Antonietta Portulano, was diagnosed with this syndrome after the birth of their son, Fausto, in 1899 (Di Lieto 21). Whether his initial interest in psychology was motivated by his wife’s illness or his own personal interest in such subjects as the consciousness and perception, Pirandello
immersed himself in the world of psychology and familiarized himself with contemporary scientists and their research on the enigmatic workings of the mind. Intrigued especially by the possibility of multiple personalities, Pirandello was attracted to Alfred Binet’s seminal study of consciousness and his findings of “coexistant personalities” within the individual. Pirandello references Binet’s *Les altérations de la personnalité* in his critical essays, and the reader is able to discern Pirandello’s transference of Binet’s work on the divided personality and fragmented consciousness of many of his characters including, for example, Mattia Pascal and Moscarda Vitangelo.

The work of Italian psychologist, Giovanni Marchesini, was also fundamental to Pirandello’s aesthetic—particularly his arguments concerning consciousness and how it is affected by the soul, or multiple souls, of the individual. Marchesini wrote *La crisi del positivismo e il problema filosofica (The Crisis of Positivism and the Philosophical Problem)* in 1898, but it is his later work, *Le finzioni dell’anima (The Fictions of the Soul)* (1905), to which many of Pirandello’s postulations regarding the soul can be attributed. Marchesini addresses consciousness, the unconscious, illusions, natural logic versus reason, morals and ethics, responsibility, will, the purification of the soul, the collective soul, the fictions of science and suicide—all themes that Pirandello treats throughout his *oeuvre*. Echoing Marchesini, Pirandello suggests that an individual may have more than one soul vying for control of the personality, which in turn effects the

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66 Binet explains his research in *Les altérations de la personnalité (The Alterations of the Personality)* (1892): “This result, reached by so many different roads, and resting upon such a variety of mental phenomena, is the “alteration of personality,” the division or dismemberment of the self. It is proved that within a great many cases and in very diverse conditions the normal unity of consciousness is broken up and several distinct consciousnesses are formed, each of which may have its own system of perceptions, its own memory, and even its own moral character” (Helen Green Baldwin, trans. x)
individual’s consciousness. In “L’umorismo,” Pirandello writes that we are ignorant of our inner being:

Ma se noi abbiamo dentro quattro, cinque anime in lotta fra loro: l’anima istintiva, l’anima morale, l’anima affettiva, l’anima sociale? E secondo che domina questa o quella, s’atteggia la nostra coscienza; e noi riteniamo valida e sincera quella interpretazione fittizia di noi medesimi, del nostro essere interiore che ignoriamo, perché non si manifesta mai tutt’intero, ma ora in un modo, ora in un altro, come volgano i casi della vita. (Spv 157)

But what if we have with in ourselves four or five different souls—the instinctive, the moral, the emotional, the social—constantly fighting among themselves? The attitude of our consciousness is contingent upon whichever of these souls is dominant; and we hold as valid and sincere that fictitious interpretation of ourselves, of our inner being—a being that we know nothing about because it never reveals itself in its entirety, but now in one way and now in another way, according to the turn of the circumstances of life. (Trans. Illiano 143)

The soul is vulnerable and is easily besieged by the collective soul of society, thanks to what Pirandello calls the “macchinetta infernale” [“devilish machine”] of logic and the “triste privilegio di sentirsi vivere” [“sad privilege of feeling oneself alive”] (Spv 154-155). Man’s exaggerated self-consciousness and his need to control the flux of life is directly opposed to nature, which continually and unconsciously maintains the cyclical process of becoming.

Pirandello integrates aspects from Alfred Binet’s psychological evaluation of the personality and Marchesini’s analysis of the fictions and plurality of the soul and conceptualized his own philosophy concerning the fragmented consciousness and spirit, fictitious illusions versus true reality, and man’s conflict with life and form. In Pirandello and the Crisis of Modern Consciousness, Caputi argues that for Pirandello, consciousness and his understanding of consciousness, is the “key issue.” He writes:

For Pirandello the mind was far from coherent and integrated; it consisted of many faculties and strata, some of them subconscious. As individuals
internalized the world around them, they processed their contacts with it by way of a consciousness that they were continuously structuring and restructuring, even as, at the same time, another part of the mind was monitoring this process. Culture for Pirandello was the experience, dense and authoritative, created within the consciousness. (Caputi 2)

Pirandello postulates that consciousness, or the inner mirror, is affected by the soul, which in turn affects behavior. Consciousness is always internally present, however, circumstance will dictate its capacity to reflect and the result of its reflections. Through unconscious imitation and simulation, the formerly pristine soul becomes inundated with the flood of fictitious constructions, or forms, that humans have created for their psychic survival. This inundation of illusions tampers with the soul, fragments the consciousness and, ultimately, causes the isolation of the individual from his true being (the essence of Self discussed in the following chapter). Subsequently, man experiences a disconcerting and confusing feeling of dis-ease but he is rarely able to articulate his emotions, let alone identify the source of the disruption. Because this division is rooted in the depths of the consciousness, or the subconscious, the psychological crisis manifests itself as a “breakdown” of rational mental processes and coping mechanisms, causing man to feel depressed, frustrated, shamed, dysfunctional and helpless. In Pirandello’s time, before psychology and psychiatry had sophisticated the diagnoses and treatments of such emotional collapses, man believed himself to be “mad,” and therefore, deviant from society. Pirandello often presents his characters as they experience this feeling of “madness”; the only recourse available to them is death or a mental asylum. For Pirandello’s characters, this lack of an outlet drives them to act erratically and inappropriately, like the protagonist of “La carriola,” who abuses his dog in the privacy of his office, or it leads them to renounce their former life, either by appropriating
fictitious personas, such as Enrico IV and Mattia Pascal, or by dissociation with reality such as through the *philosophy of distance*, or they consciously choose to cloister themselves away from the illusions of society, such as Vitangelo Moscarda in *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (*One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*), and Tommasino Unzio in “Canta l’Epistola” (“Sings the Epistle”), and ultimately, the *Scalognati* of *I giganti della montagna* (*The Mountain Giants*).

**Parapsychology**

The year 1882 is considered the key date for the origins of parapsychology as it was the year in which the *Society for Psychical Research*, the first learned society to study the paranormal, was established in London (Beloff 70). The term parapsychology, coined by German psychologist Max Dessoir in 1889, is used today to indicate the scientific study of *psi*, or the *paranormal*, which embraces unusual mental phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and unusual physical phenomena such as psychokinesis (movement of objects without contact)” (Ed. Shepard 2: 1257). Professors William McDougall and J.B. Rhine are considered the pioneers of parapsychology in America, and the popularization of the terms “parapsychology,” “extrasensory

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67 The establishment of the *Society for Psychical Research* is explained: “Its establishment for organized and systematic psychical research was proposed on June 6, 1882, at a meeting by Sir William F. Barrett, and on February 20, 1882, the society came into being. Professor Henry Sidgwick, of Cambridge, was elected president. […] The objects of the society were summed upon the following points: 1. An examination of the nature and extent of any influence which may be exerted by one mind upon another, apart from any generally recognized mode of perception; 2. The study of hypnotism and the forms of so-called mesmeric trance, with its alleged insensibility to pain; clairvoyance and other allied phenomena; 3. A critical revision of Reichenbach’s research; 4. A careful investigation of any reports, resting on strong testimony regarding apparitions at the moment of death, or otherwise, or regarding disturbances in houses reputed to be haunted; 5. An inquiry into the various physical phenomena commonly called spiritualistic; with an attempt to discover their causes and general laws; 6. The collection and collation of existing materials bearing on the history of these subjects.” In 1889 the *American Society for Psychical Research* was affiliated (Shepard, ed. 2: 1543-1544).
In addition to Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Morselli in Italy, many distinguished scientists attended séances to research spiritual phenomenon and study the personality. Scientists, including Émile Boirac, Michael Faraday, Alfred Russel Wallace, Charles Richet, Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner, Albert de Rochas, Pierre Janet, Jean Charcot, William James, Alfred Binet and William Crookes, observed paranormal phenomena and conducted scientific experiments with hopes of establishing an empirical explanation. This scientific approach also lent some credibility to the ideas postulated by Theosophy and Spiritualism. Research of the non-physical, spiritual world, hitherto rejected as a viable scientific pursuit, gained validation with the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research in London, however, whereas psychology “found an uncontested niche in the pantheon of scientific disciplines,” it is not so for parapsychology as critics continue to debate its value (Burton and Grandy 238).

68 The aims and successes of the Society for Psychical Research are described in the Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology: The early activity of the society was devoted to an experimental investigation of thought-transference. They established it to their satisfaction as a fact. Equally important to this achievement was the finding of the authors of Phantasms of the Living (Gurney, Myers and Podmore) that between death and apparitions a connection existed which was not due to chance alone. The report of the committee on the “Census ofHallucinations” came to the same conclusion. It was largely attributed to the S.P.R.’s investigation that hypnotism was officially received by the British Medical Association. Hysteria, haunted houses, Reichenbach’s phenomena, the divining rod, multiple personality, automatic writing and trance-speaking were other subjects taken up in due course. (Ed. Shepard 1544)

69 Burton and Grand write of parapsychology: “Today, some universities offer courses in parapsychology, though precious few (mostly in Europe) have parapsychology departments. The discipline has its share of critics, many of whom wonder if it has brought any clarity to the issues that inspired its
Regardless of the credibility of parapsychology as a discipline, the establishments of the psychical societies in London and New York at the end of the nineteenth century allowed for the formalization and publicity of such non-physical investigations. Pirandello, in fact, had in his personal library a French translation of the book *Research on the Phenomena of Spiritualism (Recherches sur les Phenomènes du Spiritualisme)* by English chemist and physicist William Crookes (Barbina 147). The systematic examination of parapsychological phenomena, and the documentation of experiments conducted by reputable scientists, offered—for the first time—a modern protoscience to fill the spiritual void of traditional science. Pirandello was clearly interested and knowledgeable of parapsychogy as evidenced by the novella “La casa del Granella” (“Granella’s House”), discussed in the next section.

 Critics have tagged parapsychology an occult and unscientific pursuit for at least two reasons. First, some say the presumed existence of psi effects has no evidential backing. […] A second reason for questioning the scientific status of parapsychology concerns its attempt to discover capacities of the mind historically associated with the occult dream of omniscience and total universal power (Burton and Grandy 238).
The Legal Implications of A Haunted House

I topi non sospettano l’insidia della trappola. Vi cascherebbero, se la sospettassero? Ma non se ne capacitano neppure quando vi sono cascati. S’arrampicano squittendo su per le gretole; cacciano il musetto aguzzo tra una gretola e l’altra; girano; rigirano senza requie, cercando l’uscita.

L’uomo che ricorre alla legge sa, invece, di cacciarsi in una trappola. Il topo vi si dibatte. L’uomo, che sta, sta fermo. Fermo col corpo, s’intende. Dentro, cioè con l’anima, fa poi come il topo, e peggio. E così facevano, quella mattina d’agosto, nella sala d’aspetto dell’avvocato Zummo i numerosi clienti, tutti in sudore, mangiati dalle mosche e dalla noja. (From La casa del Granella, TLN 2: 89)

Mice do not suspect the danger of the trap. Would they fall, if they suspected it? But they do not even grasp when they have fallen. They climb up the metal wire squealing; they thrust their pointed noses between one wire and another; they turn, they turn again restlessly, looking for the exit. The man who has recourse to the law knows, instead, about plunging himself into a trap. The mouse will debate. Man, that is, stands still. Motionless, naturally. Inside, that is with the soul, he is then like the mouse, and worse. And so were the numerous clients that morning in August, in the waiting room of the lawyer Zummo, all sweaty, eaten by flies and by boredom.

Pirandello’s familiarity with the current activity of parapsychology is made manifest in “La casa del Granella” (“Granella’s House”) (1905). In this story, Pirandello contextualizes the anti-positivist movement away from the rigidity of material empiricism and confronts the growing interest of conventionally trained scientists to rationally explain the extrasensory perceptions received through channels beyond the five senses. This novella provides fodder for Pirandello to make a social commentary on the intersection of positivism and anti-positivism, as well as points to unexampled entanglements between traditional science, occultism and the law. Based on an actual judicial case in Italy in 1905, Pirandello highlights an interesting and unprecedented

70 “La casa del Granella” (“Granella’s House”) was published for the first time in “Il Marzocco” on August 27, 1905. In 1910 it was included in the collection, La vita nuda (The Naked Life), and in 1922 it was included in the second volume of “Novelle per un anno,” called La vita nuda (The Naked Life) (TLN vol. 2: 927).
byproduct of parapsychology: the implications of paranormal phenomena for the legal system—particularly in the area of real estate (Illiano Metapsichica 47).71 The premise of the story stems from the question: If a house is determined to be haunted, are the tenants or the proprietor financially responsible?

The story begins in the lawyer Zummo’s crowded and dreadfully hot waiting room. The narrator describes the Piccirilli family—a father, mother and daughter—waiting conspicuously among the other impatient clients. The Father and daughter are both pale, thin and cross-eyed, and the mother is overloaded with gold jewelry. She wears large gold earrings, a double-stranded necklace, a large brooch and rings on almost every finger. The others in the room, closely observing this family, are curious to know why they are there. Zummo, thinking he was finished working for the day, is irritated when the family enters his office; he is anxious to hear their case and go home. The daughter begins to explain why they have come but is interrupted by her mother who blurts out: “Cose dell’altro mondo!” [“Things from the other world!] (TLN 2: 92). Serafino Piccirilli then explains to Zummo that they have received a citation forcing them to leave their residence. Zummo immediately assumes they have been evicted, but the father tells him that they have always paid the rent on time, even early. He explains that the proprietor, Granella, is ordering them to leave the house because they have caused the house to become scandalous. Granella demands that they obey their contract and pay for damages. Zummo, trying to understand, asks if they have been conducting illegal business there. The father finally discloses that Granella wants them to leave because he believes that

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71 Antonio Illiano writes that this rare episode is also explained in the chapter, “Case infestate dagli spiriti” (“Houses infested by Spirits”), found in Giurisprudenza italiana sulle case infestate (Italian Giurisprudence on Infested Houses) (Naples 1917) by F. Zingaropoli (Illiano Metapsichica e letteratura in Pirandello 156).
they have brought evil spirits into the house. The father says that these infernal house spirits have followed them for the last three months, and they have even seen them with their own eyes. The hungry and irritated Zummo refuses to listen to such nonsense and leaps to his feet, ready to leave. He calls them crazy and tells them to go directly to the mental institution. The father and the daughter insist that they have both seen these spirits, and the lawyer cruelly says that it may have appeared so because of their crossed-eyes. The mother jumps up and says that she too, with her perfect eyes, has seen the spirits—along with many other witnesses. Zummo becomes interested when he learns that there are neighbors who have seen evidence of the spirits, such as: chairs moving by themselves, a brooch flung from a drawer into her husband’s face, as if thrown by an invisible hand, and the shaking of the dresser and mirror. The daughter, Titina, then tells Zummo that her grandmother had given her a silver thimble. She explains that one day, she reached into her pocket for the thimble, but it was not there; for three days she searched for it without success. She says that one night while she was in bed, she saw something thrown forcefully from the ceiling to the floor; when looked at the object, she saw her thimble, dented. Zummo, amused, tells them to continue with their anecdotes of these prankster spirits. The mother is angered by Zummo’s response; she calls the spirits infernal and rants about how they pull the covers from the bed, sit on her stomach in bed, move the furniture, ring bells—wreaking havoc as though it were an earthquake. She says they have begged Granella to dissolve the contract because they are afraid they will die of fear if they stay in that house. They have asked him to come to the house to see the spirits for himself, but he refuses and continues to threaten them. The mother tells the lawyer that they must have rights, and for this she wants him to handle the case. Zummo
pretends not to hear these last words, and looks at the clock; his family has been waiting
for him to eat for over an hour. Zummo says that he does not believe in their so-called
spirits but he admits that, from a legal standpoint, he is tempted by this new and strange
case. He agrees to do some research on the subject and asks them to come back tomorrow
for his decision on whether or not he will take the case.

The thought of the spirits infiltrated Zummo’s mind and he could not eat or sleep.
He had heard talk of spirits many times, and the stories told to him as a boy by his maid-
servant, reminiscent of Pirandello’s Maria Stella, had frightened him. Zummo then
engages in a long reflection about the soul and asks himself whether or not he believes
the soul to be immortal—as this is the basis for belief in spirits. Though in the past he
never believed in the immortality of the soul, he now admits to doubting his former
conviction. He considers that he has, at times, been afraid when alone—but he does not
know what makes him afraid. Contemplating that man fools himself out of fear of
discovering something unpleasant or unfamiliar about himself or the external world,
Zummo reasons:

Noi spesso fingiamo con noi stessi, come con gli altri. [...] Noi … ecco, noi temiamo di indagare il nostro intimo essere, perché una tale indagine potrebbe scoprirci diversi da quelli che ci piace di crederci o di esser creduti. Io non ho mai pensato sul serio a queste cose. La vita ci distrae. Faccende, bisogni, abitudini. Tutte le minute brighe cotidiane non ci lasciano tempo di riflettere a queste cose, che pure dovrebbero interessarci sopra tutte le altre. Muore un amico? Ci arrestiamo là, davanti alla sua morte, come tante bestie restie, e preferiamo di volgere indietro il pensiero, alla sua vita, rievocando qualche ricordo, per vietarci d’andare oltre con la mente, oltre il punto cioè che ha segnato per noi la fine del nostro amico. Buona notte! Accendiamo un sigaro per cacciare via col fumo il turbamento e la malinconia. La scienza s’arresta anch’essa, là, ai limiti della vita, come se la morte non ci fosse e non ci dovesse dare alcun pensiero. [...] Ma ecco qua: l’anima immortale, i signori spiriti che fanno? vengono a bussare alla porta del mio studio: “Ehi, signor avvocato, ci
siamo anche noi, sa? Vogliamo ficcare anche noi il naso nel suo codice
civile! Voi, gente positiva, non volete curarvi di noi?” (TLN 2: 98)

We often pretend to ourselves, as with others. [...] We ... here, we fear to
inquire into our innermost being, because such an investigation might
enable us to discover differences from that which we like to believe or
have believed. I never thought seriously about these things. Life distracts
us. Affairs, needs and habits. All the minute quotidian troubles do not
leave us time to reflect on these things, which really should concern us
above all the others. A friend dies? We stop there, in front of his death,
like so many reluctant beasts, and we prefer to turn the thought back to his
life, recalling some memory to prohibit us to go beyond the mind, that is,
beyond the point which marked the end for us by our friend. Good night!
Let’s light a cigar with smoke to chase away the disturbance and
melancholy. Science also stops, there, at the limits of life, as if death
weren’t there and we shouldn’t give it any thought. [...] But here it is: the
immortal soul, the lord-like spirits what do they do? they come knocking
at the door of my office: “Hey, sir lawyer, we are here too, you know? We
want to poke our noses in your civil code! You, positivistic people, don’t
you want to take care of us?”

 Pirandello, via Zummo, argues that the majority of men refuse to believe in spirits
because this would force them to think about their own mortality. Death is as natural as
life, and it is a condition of existence that all living beings share. However, it is treated
negatively and is ignored by science. Pirandello offers this debate to bolster his argument
that men create illusions for themselves that, ultimately, cause the disunion between
one’s belief system and their true being.

After his moment of reflection, Zummo is prompted to review the civil codes
concerning the stipulations of real estate contracts. There are only two articles, 1575 and
1577, and neither addresses the issue of spirits. Excited by the challenge, Zummo agrees
to take on the case of the Piccirili family and he gathers the testimonies of the witnesses.
In trying to come up with a defense for this singular legal case of the haunted house,
Zummo passionately and thoroughly familiarizes himself with all available publications
on the subjects of Spiritualism, Occultism and Parapsychology, including a summarized

history of Spiritism and a book on *fakirism*\(^72\) by the French barrister and judge, Louis Jacolliot.\(^73\) The narrator explains that Zummo read, “tutto quanto avevano pubblicato i più illustri e sicuri sperimentatori, dal Crookes al Wagner, all’Aksakof; dal Gibier allo Zoellner al Janet, al de Rochas, al Richet, al Morselli” [“everything that was published by the most illustrious and reliable experimenters, from Crookes to Wagner, to Aksakof; from Gibier to Zoellner to Janet, to de Rochas, to Richet, to Morselli”]; it is interesting to note that Pirandello adds: “E con suo sommo stupore venne a conoscere che ormai i fenomeni così detti spiritici, per esplicita dichiarazione degli scienziati più scettici e più positivi, erano innegabili” [“And with his utmost astonishment he came to know that by now the so-called spiritualistic phenomena, by explicit declaration of the most skeptical and positivist scientists, were undeniable”] (TLN 2: 98). The lawyer is shocked to learn that such highly esteemed scientists have confirmed the occurrence of such phenomena. Zummo expresses a sentiment of skepticism shared by those, within and outside of the scientific community, who considered Parapsychology an unsubstantiated pseudoscience.

While Zummo researches his case, he is confronted and surprised by his own change of perspective regarding his belief in spirits. Until the Piccirilli family came into his office, he had considered himself a “uomo serio, uomo colto, nutrito di scienza positiva” [“a serious man, cultured man, fed on positivistic science”] (TLN 2: 98). After initially accusing the Piccirilli’s of hallucinating, he thinks he may be hallucinating as well. He even considers that maybe he is a medium. There is a disparity between

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\(^72\) A *fakir* is a Moslem or Hindu religious ascetic or mendicant monk (*Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary* 512). According to the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*: “fakir literally means ‘poor man’ in Arabic. As with Hindu wandering holy men, many legends have grown up around alleged psychic miracles of *fakirs*” (Shepard, ed. 1: 564-565).

\(^73\) Louis Jacolliot (1837-1890) is the author of *Le spiritisme dans le monde* (1875) and *Voyage au pays des fakirs charmeurs* (1891). (TLN 2: 930).
Zummo’s positive view of the refined, intellectual and professional man and his negative view one who believes in the spirit world. Despite the new validation by expert scientists in 1905, there was little room to be both socially accepted as a professional and a proponent of the spiritual realm.

At the trial, Zummo amazes the judges, his colleagues and the public by his fervid and passionate opening remarks. He argues against traditional science and spoke of Allan Kardec, one of the founders of Spiritism, as though he were the messiah of the new religion of humanity. Zummo presented, with dramatic eloquence, the miraculous manifestations of the spirits, as confirmed by the most respected men of science: physicists, chemists, psychologists, physiologists, anthropologists and psychiatrists.

Though the spectators were all in awe of Zummo and his persuasiveness, the judges—with an air of presumption—declared that such unreliable theories of so-called spiritual phenomena were not yet admissible in court nor accepted by modern science. In spite of Zummo’s efforts, the Piccirilli family loses the case. As in the actual 1905 trial, the judge discredits the tenants’ defense and he orders them, based on civil code 1577, to pay the money owed to the proprietor, Granella. The public unanimously expressed disapproval of the ruling. Antonio Illiano writes of the decision:

L’esito del processo mette in luce la preterintenzione polemica, sottolineata anche del sapiente impiego dell’elemento corale, nei confronti dell’inefficienza del codice civile e dell’ottusità positivistica dell’amministrazione giudizaria. Ma, oltre i palesi riverberi della volontà satireggiante, l’episodio giudizario, riflettendo il fallimento di una difesa corrobotata da prove scientifiche filosofiche e implicitamente anche giuridiche, costituisce l’anello più importante nel compatto e serrato evolversi della vicenda. (Illiano Metapsichica 49)

The outcome of the trial highlights the controversial element of attribution of responsibility, emphasized also by the wise use of the choral element, in confronting the inefficiency of the civil code and the obtuse positivistic
judicial administration. But, beyond the obvious reverberations of the satirical will, the judiciary episode, reflecting the failure of a defense corroborated by scientific and philosophical evidence and also implicitly legal, constitutes the most important link in the compact and dense evolution of the story.

Granella is the only person who is pleased with the outcome of the trial. He leaves the court room, yelling to anyone who will listen, that he is going home to sleep in the house defamed by the Piccirilli’s; he makes a point to say that he would be alone as his blasphemous tenants ruined all chances of him ever again having a maidservant. After the Piccirilli family abandoned the house, Granella had it rennovated and redecorated in hope that he would be able to rent it again soon; unfortunately, no one wants to live there and Granella fears the expenses. His neighbors note that Granella, perhaps out of fear of the spirits, has armed himself with two pistols. As Granella walks through his empty and dark house, his heart starts to beat rapidly and he is soaked with sweat. He is preparing for bed when he hears what seems to be a knock at the door. This causes his hair to stand up on end and his heart skips a beat; he grabs his pistol and goes out on his balcony. Granella is relieved to find a bat, and assuming this was the source of the noise, he laughs at his foolishness. But in the next moment, he hears a creaking sound coming from his bedroom—which he assumes is from the new wallpaper. He sees a strip of paper on the floor, stretching past the two other rooms, all the way to the open door. Baffled by this, Granella hopes that the workers left the paper on the floor. His fear grows and he realizes it was a mistake to sleep there. Granella, thinking no one would see him leave at this late hour, flees his house in fear but the neighbors see him. They tell Zummo, who receives this news happily, and he announces that he will appeal the Piccirilli case. Sometime after eleven o’clock that night, Zummo, pouncing like a tiger, surprises Granella who, having
hastily left his house, is barefoot and holding his shoes and jacket in his arms. Frightened, Granella drops one shoe and then the other; he leans against the wall petrified and humiliated. Zummo shouts at him: “Ci credi ora, imbecille, all’anima immortale? La giustizia cieca ti ha dato ragione. Ma tu ora hai aperto gli occhi. Che hai visto? Parla!” [“Do you now believe, imbecile, in the immortal soul? Blind justice gave you the right. But now you have opened your eyes. What did you see? Speak!”]; the story then ends: “Ma il povero Granella, tutto tremante, piangeva, e non poteva parlare” [“But poor Granella, trembling all over, was crying and he was not able to speak” (TLN 2: 107).]

By the end of the story, Zummo and Granella, both originally adament disbelievers in spirits, have experienced paranormal phenomena first-hand. Ultimately, the Piccirilli case allows for Zummo to confront his own beliefs concerning death and serves to alter his skepticism of the immortal soul and supernatural spirits. He says, “Per debito di gratitudine, tuttavia, verso quei poveri Piccirilli, i quali, senza saperlo, gli avevano aperto innanzi allo spirito alla via della luce, si risolse alla fine a esaminare attentamente il loro caso” [“For debt of gratitude, however, to those poor Piccirilli, who without knowing it, had henceforth opened him to the spirit to the path of light, he decided in the end to attentively examine their case”] (TLN 2: 99). Through the process of preparing himself for the case and opening himself up to unfamiliar practices, Zummo acquires a metaphysical education and undergoes an unexpected spiritual metamorphosis. Zummo’s willing conversion, as opposed to Granella’s harrowing encounter, demonstrates that one’s approach to such spiritual matters may determine whether his experience with the spirit world is positive or negative.
The Rise of Indology and Buddhism in the West

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It will have to transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Encompassing both the natural and the spiritual, it will have to be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spirited, considered as a meaningful unity. [...] Buddhism answers this description [...] If there is any religion that could respond to the needs of modern science, it would be Buddhism.74

-Albert Einstein

Hindu and Buddhist religious and philosophical teachings, in existence for at least two thousand years, were slow to enter to the West. Translations of sacred Indian scriptures, originally written in Sanskrit, were not begun until the late eighteenth century, and even after coming to light for the first time in the West, they were not readily accessible. Eventually, this ancient wisdom was disseminated through the “labours of Western Oriental scholarship”—exposing Westerners to ancient Eastern belief systems espoused thousands of years prior. Henrik Kraemer writes:

The Eastern Invasion in the West as embodied in the Indian world of religion and metaphysical thought happened mainly, as in the case of Buddhism, through the labours of Western Oriental scholarship since the beginning of the 19th century, and the many neo-spiritualist and other movements called into existence by men and women whose minds were stirred by the mysterious ancient Wisdom of India or its many cultural splendours. An ever-expanding stream of writing, scholarly, popularizing or distorting, has brought this vast world of Indian spirituality and cultural achievement within the horizon of the West and made it, apart from the growing possibilities of direct contact in our planetary world of today, an important element in the welter of opinion and orientation in the modern

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74 Notably, Albert Einstein, Nobel Prize winning physicist, conceding that traditionally monotheistic religion must to yield to a universal cosmic vision. According to The Quantum and the Lotus, this quote is found in Thinley Norbu’s “Welcoming Flowers,” from Across the Cleansed Threshold of Hope: An Answer to the Pope’s Criticism of Buddhism (New York: Jewel Publishing House, 1997) (Ricard and Thuan 282). For more information on Einstein’s view of science and spirituality, see Einstein’s The World As I See It (1949) and Ideas and Opinions (1954), and Philip Frank Einstein His Life and Times (2002).
West, which lived and lives through the critical period of searching for a basis of spiritual unification, which it has lost. (Kraemer 251) 

As translations became available and the mystical wisdom of the East began to circulate, an enthusiasm developed for Indian literature, especially the *Upanishads* (the early sources of the Hindu religion), and particularly among German intellectuals. Portions of the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, the most important text for the Hindū religion and mythology written in India between 400 B.C. and 400 A.D., was translated in Indonesia and India as early as the eleventh century, but only since 1785 was the lofty task undertaken the West (Buitenen xxviii). In 1792, the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder was the first to translate verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the sacred poem found in the *Mahābhārata*, from Sanskrit into German. It is notable that Pirandello owned one of the earliest Italian translations of the *Mahābhārata* (Barbina 153).

Martin Baumann describes the diffusion of Buddhism in Europe through texts and translations:

In contrast to the North American and the Australian experience, the first Buddhists in Germany—and generally in Europe—had not been labour migrants from Asia (i.e. Japan and China), but European converts. The discovery of the teachings of the Buddha began through philosophical treatises and philological translations in the 18th and early 19th century. In Germany, it was particularly through the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) that artists, academics and intellectuals became interested in Buddhist philosophy and ethics. (Baumann 274) 

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75 Henrik Kraemer notes the importance of the Indian author Rabindrananth Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, “who is acknowledged as one of the modern world’s greatest writers” (Kraemer 253). Pirandello was familiar with Tagore and he had a translation of Tagore’s *The Garden* (*Il giardiniere*, Lanciano: Carabba, 1915) in his personal library. See Barbina 161.

76 According to the catalog of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome, Michele Kerbaker, the author of the translation found in Pirandello’s library, published five volumes of *Il Mahābhārata* between 1933-1938. Hippolyte Fauche began a French translation in 1863, but it was left incomplete due to his death in 1870. The first complete English translation of the *Mahābhārata* was published in Calcutta between 1883 and 1896 (Buitenen xxviii).

77 His brother Friedrich (1772-1829), author of *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (*On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*), was interested in a more philological interpretation of the *Gita* (Herling 119). Continuing with Herder’s myth of Indian origins, “Schlegel continued to utilize an important conception of the foundational Hindu doctrine that began to emerge in Herder’s thought: at its core, Hinduism was pantheistic” (Herling 119).
In addition to Arthur Schopenhauer’s active interest in Indology, August Wilhelm Schlegel (1769-1845), German poet and leader of the German Romantic movement, occupied the first chair of Indology, the study of Sanskrit literature and Indian religions, at Bonn in 1818, and translated the entire Bhagavad Gita into Latin in 1823 (Herling 157). This active interest on the part of German scholars is especially pertinent for Pirandello as there are many parallels between his writing and Buddhistic thought—most likely the result of his time spent in Germany—where one finds the earliest European assessment of Buddhism by the German philosophers Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.78 M. John Stella explains the connection between Pirandello and Buddhism:

Among the most important European novelists and dramatists of the twentieth century, Luigi Pirandello should be of especial interest to Buddhists. Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934, he is best known for plays such as *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Henry IV* and *To Find Oneself*, as well as for his major novels: *The Late Mattia Pascal*, *The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio* and *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*. Each of these works challenges conventional notions of personal identity and its attributes; to date, however, readers have not explored the similarities between Pirandello’s thought and Buddhism. While it is well-known that our author spent some three years (1889-1891) studying at the University of Bonn, Pirandello scholars have not taken into account the fact that at the time Germany was the European centre for the research into oriental philosophies. It might be assumed that a young student of philology from a small town in Sicily, eager to broaden his intellectual horizon, would have been fascinated by the possibility of discovering a new world beyond the limited vistas offered by a traditional Italian education at that time—and would therefore have seized the

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78 In fact, in *The Antichrist*, Friedrich Nietzsche writes: “Buddhism is the only genuinely positive religion to be encountered in history, and this applies even to its epistemology (which is a strict phenomenalism). It does not speak of a “struggle with sin,” but, yielding to reality, of the “struggle with suffering.” Sharply differentiating itself from Christianity, it puts the self-deception that lies in moral concepts behind it; it is, in my phrase, beyond good and evil. […] Buddhism, I repeat, is a hundred times more austere, more honest, more objective. It no longer has to justify its pains, its susceptibility to suffering, by interpreting these things in terms of sin—it simply says, “I suffer.” […] The things necessary to Buddhism are a very mild climate, customs of great gentleness and liberality, and no militarism; moreover, it must get its start among the higher and better educated classes. Cheerfulness, quiet and the absence of desire are the chief desiderata, and they are attained. Buddhism is not a religion in which perfection is merely an object of aspiration: perfection is actually normal” (Mencken, H.L. trans. 21-24)
opportunity to read the translations that had aroused such interest in intellectual centres of contemporary Germany. Further, there is hard evidence that, even to the end of his life, Pirandello’s personal library contained copies of the ancient Indian epic, the Mahābhārata, and of Schopenhauer’s *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. (Stella “Self and Suicide in Pirandello”)

Ernesto Monaci, Pirandello’s Romance philology professor at the university in Rome, influenced his student to concentrate on the relatively new field of philology and suggested that he continue his philology studies at the university in Bonn, Germany under the guidance of his colleague, Wendelin Foerster (Giudice 34-53). Pirandello continued with his philology studies at Bonn where he learned the German language and embraced the intellectual culture. At the university in Bonn, Pirandello was immersed in a highly intellectual atmosphere and exposed to a long lineage of reputable German writers and philosophers—from Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), to G.F.W Hegel (1770-1831), to Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who also studied philology at Bonn.  

Anthony Caputi writes of Pirandello’s education at Bonn:

> At Bonn one of [Pirandello’s] three final examinations had been in philosophy and doubtless included extensive work in the German idealists [. . . ] The influence on him of Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, et al., was profound: the assumption that the world exists only as idea, that we create it, ourselves, and our lives, permeates his thought, if, as we shall see, in idiosyncratic form. [. . . ] We must never forget that Pirandello was trained in the German philological tradition and always saw himself, to some extent, as a romance philologist. (Caputi 18)

Pirandello studied German philosophy, the Romantic tradition, and translated Goethe.

The influence of Goethe’s *Bildungsroman*, or the novels of formation, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), and *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795-96), can certainly be

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79 In his book, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers*, John Lechte writes, “After graduating from Pforta in 1864, Nietzsche went to the University of Bonn and studied theology and classical philology. In 1865, he gave up theology and went to Leipzig where he came under the influence of the Schopenhauer of *The World as Will and Idea* (Lechte 278).
seen in Pirandello’s 1904 novel, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, which traces the protagonist’s journey for self-realization. It is also likely that Pirandello was familiar with the works of the fellow Bonn alumnus, Friedrich Nietzsche, as Pirandello’s critical essays clearly echo his critique of moral value and his evaluation of consciousness, religion and science. Nietzsche’s influence is evidenced by Pirandello’s relativism (as similar to Nietzsche’s notion of perspectivism), his reference to Prometheus as the giver of light (from Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* 240), and, ultimately, his belief that “since Copernicus, man seems to have been on a downward path,” as stated in *On the Genealogy of Morals* from 1887 (Nietzsche 344).

Pirandello finished his doctoral thesis, “The Phonetic Development of the Agrigento Dialect,” and graduated from Bonn in 1891. After graduation, the twenty-four year old Pirandello moved to Rome with aspirations of producing great poetry. Though Pirandello addresses the limitations of the Italian language in his early essays, “it was only with many reservations that he had envisaged a philologist’s career after his departure from Rome” (Giudice 48). Anthony Caputi highlights, however, that Pirandello’s early responses to the “crisis of consciousness” are manifest in these essays.  

80 In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern writes of Nietzsche’s philosophy of “perspectivism”: in opposition to the positivists’ belief in the truth of objective facts, he insisted that there are no such things, only points of view and interpretations, and he urged philosophers to ‘employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge’” (Kern 150).

81 The essays Anthony Caputi refers to are: “La Menzogna del Sentimento nell’Arte” (“Dishonesty of Feeling in Art”) (1890), “Prosa Moderna: Dopo la Lettura del Mastro Don Gesualdo del Verga” (“Modern Prose: After Reading Verga’s *Mastro Don Gesualdo*”) (1890), “Come si parla in Italia” (“How We Speak in Italy”) (1895), “Come si scrive oggi in Italia” (“How we write today in Italy”) (1895), and “Ecessi” (“Excesses”) (1896). Caputi writes: “Given his pride in his philological training, it is not surprising that among Pirandello’s earliest responses to the crisis of consciousness were several essays on language and the symptoms of that crisis in language. More remarkable, perhaps, is that instead of drawing him off into narrow, specialized studies, romance philology led him to a deeper reading of the general crisis.” (Caputi 18).
The effect on Pirandello of Arthur Schopenhauer’s advocacy and respect for Buddhism and the Hindu *Upanishads* has been significantly under-estimated. The interest taken by German philosophers in Hinduism and Buddhism is particularly pertinent for Pirandello as he was clearly influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea* (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*) (1819), which is rife with Buddhistic and Vedantic parallels. According to Heinrich Dumoulin, Schopenhauer’s first exposure to “Oriental wisdom” was in the year 1813, in Weimar, when the Orientalist Friedrich Maier gave him a selection of the *Upanishads* in Latin translation—which “evoked great enthusiasm in the young man” (Dumoulin 464). Concerning the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, Schopenhauer wrote in the preface to the first volume of *The World as Will and Idea*:

> If the reader has also received the benefit of the *Vedas*, the access to which by means of the *Upanishads* is in my eyes the greatest privilege which this still young century may claim before all previous centuries, if then the reader, I say, has received his initiation in primeval Indian wisdom, and received it with an open heart, he will be prepared in the very best way for hearing what I have to tell him. It will not sound to him strange, as to many others, much less disagreeable; for I might, if it did not sound conceited, contend that every one of the detached statements which constitute the *Upanishads*, may be deduced as a necessary result from the fundamental thoughts which I have to enunciate, though those deductions themselves are by no means to be found there (Schopenhauer 1: xiii).

Though Schopenhauer claims to have been unaware of the coincidence, the core fundamentals of his philosophical system espoused in *The World as Will and Idea* were congruous with Eastern thought found in *The Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and Buddhist scripture. Schopenhauer was amazed and excited by the similarities between his work and Eastern thought. Though Schopenhauer denied any direct correspondence, he was pleased with the connection made between his work and the Buddhist philosophy, in
which so many people had faith. He wrote in the second volume of *The World as Will and Idea*:

> If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I should have to concede to Buddhism pre-eminence over the others. In any case, it must be a pleasure to me to see my doctrine in such close agreement with a religion that the majority of men on earth hold as their own, for this numbers far more followers than any other. And this agreement must be yet the more pleasing to me, inasmuch as in my philosophizing I have certainly not been under its influence. For up till 1818, when my work appeared, there was to be found in Europe only a very few accounts of Buddhism. (Schopenhauer 2: 371)

Schopenhauer believed that human suffering in the world was primarily due to man’s insatiable cravings, which he called will (*Wille*). There are many similarities between Schopenhauer’s view of suffering and Buddhism. Schopenhauer writes, for example, in the third volume of *The World as Will and Idea*:

> In the whole of human existence suffering expresses itself clearly enough as its true destiny. Life is deeply sunk in suffering, and cannot escape from it; our entrance into it takes place amid tears, its course is at bottom always tragic, and its end still more so. There is an unmistakable appearance of intention in this. As a rule man’s destiny passes through his mind in a striking manner, at the very summit of his desires and efforts, and thus his life receives a tragic tendency by virtue of which it is fitted to free him from the passionate desire of which every individual existence is an example, and bring him into such a condition that he parts with life without retaining a single desire for it and its pleasures. Suffering is, in fact, the purifying process through which alone, in most cases, the man is sanctified, is led back from the path of error of the will to live. (Schopenhauer 3: 462).

Pirandello’s view of craving, vanity and suffering is similar to that of the perspectives of Schopenhauer and Buddhism. Dumoulin describes the parallel between Schopenhauer’s philosophy and the teachings of the Buddha:

> In his work, *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer describes human existence as does early Buddhist literature, as a state of inextinguishable suffering. The First of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, that human life is full of sorrow laden experience, is echoed throughout Schopenhauer’s
writings, but the similarity with Buddhism goes even deeper, as when
Schopenhauer like Buddha sees in the insatiable covetous will the cause of
all suffering. Influenced by Kant, Schopenhauer asserts the primacy of the
blind will, thus approaching the religious teaching of the Buddha: craving
or desire is the cause of suffering. Suffering and desire are inextricable
bound up with each other, for according to Schopenhauer the appearance
of the will “is a vanishing existence, an ever decreasing, always frustrating
striving, and the world which is given to us is full of suffering.”
(Dumoulin “Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy” 465)

Allusions to Schopenhauer’s central work are found in Pirandello’s work as early
as 1902 in his novella, “Quando ero matto” (“When I Was Mad”), and Pirandello had in
his personal library the Italian translation, Il mondo come volontà e rappresentazione, of
both volumes of Arthur Schopenhauer’s The World as Will and Idea, dated 1914-1916
(Barbina 159). Schopenhauer’s concept of will and representation is echoed in Il fu Mattia
Pascal in the ninth chapter, “Un po’ di nebbia” (“A bit of fog”):

Ogni oggetto in noi suol trasformarsi secondo le immagini ch’esso evova e
aggruppa, per cosí dire, attorno a sé. Certo un oggetto può piacere anche
per se stesso, per la diversità delle sensazioni gradevoli che ci suscita in
una percezione armoniosa; ma ben più spesso il piacere che un oggetto ci
procura non si trova nell’oggetto per se medesimo. La fantasia lo
abbellisce cingendolo e quasi irraggiandolo d’immagini care. Né noi lo
percepiamo più qual esso è, ma cosí, quasi animato dalle immagini che
suscita in noi o che le nostre abitudini vi associano. Nell’oggetto,
insomma, noi amiamo quell che vi mettiamo di noi, l’accordo, l’armonia
che stabiliamo tra esso e noi, l’anima che esso acquista per noi soltanto e
che è formata dai nostri ricordi. (Tr 1: 421).

Every object is transformed within us according to the image it evokes, the
sensations that cluster around it. To be sure, an object may please us for
itself alone, for the pleasant feelings that a harmonious sight inspires in us;
but far more often the pleasure that an object affords us does not derive
from the object in itself. Our fantasy embellishes it, surrounding it, making
it resplendent with images dear to us. Then we no longer see it for what it
really is, but animated by the images it arouses in us or by the things we
associate with it. In short, what we love about the object is what we see
put in it of ourselves, the harmony established between it and us, the soul
that it acquires only through us, a soul composed of our memories. (Trans.
Weaver 100)
Pirandello familiarized himself with both volumes of *The World as Will and Idea* and was also acquainted with the modern Theosophical movement that was responsible, in part, for spreading Buddhism in the West. Henrik Kraemer highlights the important role the Western Theosophical Movement played in “putting India on the spiritual map”:

> It is impossible to pass over in silence the great significance in general, and the Theosophical Society and Anthroposophical Movement of Steiner in particular, have had for putting India on the spiritual map of numberless people in Western countries. The history of the Theosophical Society proves that the Indian world in the proper sense of the word occupied a warmer place in the heart of its leaders than Buddhism. India is considered to be the most authentic guardian of the Great tradition of secret wisdom, of esoteric science, the most understanding interpreter of the transcendent unity of all religions, which goes back to the Primitive, Primeval Tradition as it is called. (Kraemer 255).

It is probable that Schopenhauer and Theosophy were the strongest links between Pirandello and Indian mysticism and the influential catalysts for Pirandello’s attraction to the key tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism, primarily: 1) the Hindu concept of *maya*, the false perception or illusion of reality, 2) the Buddhist belief of *nirvana*, defined literally as “blowing out”; the state of absolute existence and absolute consciousness (similar to the Hindu *samādhi*), and 3) *karma*, the metaphysical law of retribution, the resultant of moral actions, shared by Hinduism, Buddhism and Theosophy (Blavatsky 211/232/173). In the section of *The Key to Theosophy* called “Theosophy is not Buddhism,” Blavatsky clarifies that all Theosophists are not followers of Gautama Buddha, though there are in fact many influences and similarities between Theosophy and Buddhism. In fact, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, Henry Steel Olcott published, *Buddhist Catechisms* in 1881, and another member of the Society, A.P. Sinnett, wrote *Esoteric Buddhism* in
1884, in order to “reveal elements of the secret doctrine to the Western reader hitherto limited by European philosophy” (Sinnett vi).82

As Pirandello expresses in “L’umorismo,” and also found in ancient Eastern doctrine, it is only in rare moments of inner silence and meditation—when the soul is “able to strip itself of all its habitual fictions”—that man is granted an intuitive vision that enhances his understanding of life. It is an internal vision that does not require external sight, and it is a comprehension that does not necessitate discernment or judgment. Pirandello describes his personal experience with heightened states of awareness, comparable to experiencing the highest truths of the universe as in the Eastern notions of Supreme Consciousness, or Brahman, and enlightenment, or Nirvana (Dumoulin Christianity Meets Buddhism 18). Pirandello writes of these ephemeral yet unforgettable moments:

In certi momenti di silenzio interiore, in cui l’anima nostra si spoglia di tutte le finzioni abituali, e gli occhi nostri diventano più acuti e più penetranti, noi vediamo noi stessi nella vita, e in se stess la vita, quasi in una nudità arida, inquietante; ci sentiamo assaltare da una strana impressione, come se in un baleno, ci si chiariosse una realtà diversa da quell ache normalmente percepiamo, una realtà vivente oltre la vista umana, fuori delle forme dell’umana ragione. Lucidussumamente allora la compagine dell’esistenza quotidiana, quasi sospesa nel vuoto di quell nostro silenzio interiore, ci appare priva di senso, priva di scopo; e quella realtà diversa ci pare orrida nella sua crudezza impassibile e misteriosa, poiché tutte le nostre fittizie relazioni consuete di sentimenti e d’immagini

82 In *Esoteric Buddhism*, the Theosophist A.P. Sinnett devotes chapters to the Kama-loca, the Buddha, and nirvana, and he addresses the principles of karma, reincarnation, the dissolution of the consciousness and personality. In *Key to Theosophy*, Helena Blavatsky responds to the question, “But are not the ethics of Theosophy identical with those taught by Buddha?”: “Certainly, because these ethics are the soul of the Wisdom-Religion, and were once the common property of the initiates of all nations. But Buddha was the first to embody these lofty ethics in his public teaching, and to make them the foundation and the very essence of his public system. It is herein that lies the immense difference between exoteric Buddhism and every other religion. For while in other religions ritualism and dogma hold the first and most important place, in Buddhism it is the ethics which have always been the most insisted upon. This accounts for the resemblance, amounting almost to identity, between the ethics of Theosophy and those of the religion of Buddha … the schools of the Northern Buddhist Church, established in those countries to which [Buddha’s] initiated Arhats retired after the Master’s death, teach all that is now called Theosophical doctrines, because they form part of the knowledge of the initiates” (Blavatsky 15)
si sono scisse e disgregate in essa. Il vuoto interno si allarga, varca I limi del nostro corpo, diventa vuoto intorno a noi, un vuoto strano, come un arresto del tempo e della vita, come se il nostro silenzio interiore si sprofondasse negli abissi del mistero. Con uno sforzo supremo cerchiamo allora di riacquistar la coscienza normale delle cose, di riallaciar con esse le consuete relazioni, di riconnetter le idée, di risentirci viv come l’innanzi, al modo solito. Ma a questa coscienza normale, a queste idée riconnesse, a questo sentimento solito della vita non possiamo più prestare fede, perché sappiamo ormai che sono un nostro inganno per vivere e che sotto c’è qualcos’altro, a cui l’uomo non può affacciarsi, se non a costo di morire o d’impazzire. È stato un attimo; ma dura a lungo in noi l’impressione di esso, come di vertigine, con la quale contrasta la stabilità, pur così vana, delle cose: ambiziose o misere apparenze. La vita, allora, che s’aggira piccola, solita, fra queste apparenze ci sembra quasi che non sia più per davvero, che sia come una fantasmagoria meccanica. E come darle importanza? Come portarle rispetto? (Spv 153)

In certain moments of inner silence, in which our soul strips itself of all its habitual fictions and our eyes become sharper and more piercing, we see ourselves in life, and life in itself, as if in a barren and disquieting nakedness; we are seized by a strange impression, as if, in a flash, we could clearly perceive reality different from the one that we normally perceive, a reality living beyond the reach of human vision, outside the forms of human reason. Very lucidly, then, the texture of daily existence, almost suspended in the void of our inner silence, seems meaningless, devoid of purpose; and that new reality appears to us dreadful in its sternly detached and mysterious crudeness, for all our fictitious relationships, both of feelings and images, have separated and disintegrated in it. The inner void expands, surpasses the limits of our body, and becomes a weird emptiness that engulfs us as if time and life had come to a stop, as if our inner silence had plunged into the abyss of mystery. With a supreme effort we then try to recapture the normal consciousness of things, to renew our usual relationships with them, to reassemble our ideas and to feel alive in the usual way. But we can no longer trust this normal consciousness, these newly recollected ideas and this habitual sense of living because we now know they are deceptions which we use in order to survive and that underneath them there is something else which man can face only at the cost of either death or insanity. It was only an instant; but its impression last for a long time, as a sort of dizziness which contrasts with the stability, itself so illusory, of things: ambitions or miserable appearances. And life, the small usual life that roams among these appearances, almost seems to us no longer to be real; it is like a mechanical phantasmagoria. How could we give importance to it? How could we respect it? (Trans. Illiano 138)
For Pirandello, the problem is returning to the meaningless and purposeless existence after experiencing this rare and fleeting view of true reality, i.e. barren of all the fictional constructions and created illusions. The forced return is compounded with a knowledge and perspicacity of a more harmonious existence, foreign to and unsought by the masses, which can never be reconciled. Eastern philosophies for centuries have offered practical paths for attaining and maintaining higher consciousness and freedom from suffering. In the West, these ideas have been gaining recognition beginning with the dissemination of Hindu and Buddhist texts in the nineteenth century and also due to the new age movement of the last two centuries. 

Unless man’s inner silence is completely detached from his personal awareness and has disintegrated into the abyss never to see itself again—thereby transcending the individual ego-self by and becoming conscious of the inextricable interconnectedness of all of nature—he has no choice but to return to his contrived reality. As Darwin postulated in 1859, species adapt to survive regardless of the mechanisms used to ensure their survival. Maintenance of normal consciousness, and the twentieth century survival tactic as Pirandello deems it, depends on readily available or easily created deceptions. To go beyond this consciousness, however, is considered a risk factor for survival, and the price is either insanity or death. Unfortunately for Western society, and clearly to Pirandello’s disappointment, healing methods and prescriptions for living authentically

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83 In The New Earth (2005), Eckhart Tolle, a contemporary German spiritual teacher and philosopher, describes the very same moment of inner silence which Pirandello describes in “L’umorismo.” Tolle writes: “Once there is a certain degree of Presence, of still and alert attention in human beings’ perceptions, they can sense the divine life essence, the one indwelling consciousness or spirit in every creature, every life-form, recognize it as one with their own essence and so love it as themselves. Until this happens, however, most humans see only the outer forms, unaware of the inner essence, just as they are unaware of their own essence and identify only with their own physical and psychological form” (Tolle 4)
and harmoniously were not available—despite the advancements of modern psychology.

Robert Thurman describes the limitations of Western psychology:

Western psychology developed during the era of industrialization. Freud and Jung lived in the wealthier societies of central Europe. Members of the middle class finally had a little time and money to explore their general state of being. When their interiors were maladjusted or abused or neglected, they could find someone to work with them. So these early psychologists began to ask themselves: How does the mind work? What are the problems with the mind? How can these problems be fixed? But their main purpose was only to re-adapt these misfits back into the machinery of industrial society so that their patients could work, function and “be normal” again. As Freud himself said, his therapy was designed to help people get rid of neurotic suffering so they could get back to ordinary suffering. There was never any mention of complete freedom from suffering as the definition of health, or even a livable option. (Thurman 38)

The holistic psychology of Buddhism, made available by the Buddha 2500 years ago, offered techniques that yielded insight and freedom from suffering and the methods are still applicable and utilized successfully. The bridge from East to West, however, has been difficult to build. Although comprehensive and explanatory manuals were not available to Pirandello, he intuited Buddhist philosophy and fused its essence into his literature. The day-to-day problems have differed from ancient India to the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, but the human mind has not. The ancient psychological solutions, though generally less appreciated and practiced in the West, continue to provide liberating insight as well as delineate the path for complete well being. Pirandello felt strongly that both science and religion failed to fulfill the vital needs of man, however as the reader will discern in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation, the paths of Buddhistic and Vedantic philosophy effectively fill this void, leading man to liberation from suffering through authentic living.

84 Regarding literature, Pirandello’s view was parallel with the Transcendentalists and precursor to Herman Hesse’s Siddhartha (1922) and the literature of the Beat Generation.
Pirandello was undoubtedly influenced by the religious-philosophical system Theosophy, whose ancient teachings were revitalized by the Theosophical Society in 1875. Rooted in ancient Eastern theology, Theosophy is considered the, “majestic Wisdom-Religion of the archaic ages and is as old as thinking man” (Purucker 172). The Eclectic Theosophical system, the origin of Theosophy, dates back to the second century A.D. and was initiated by Ammonius Saccas, a disciple of Plotinus. The name Theosophy is derived from the Greek for “Divine Wisdom,” *Theosophia* (θεοσοφία), from the Greek compound divine (*theos*) and wisdom (*sophia*), and comes from the Alexandrian philosophers, the Philaletheians (Blavatsky *The Key to Theosophy* 1).

Antonio Illiano describes Theosophy:

> In this system, man is conceived as potentially divine, for he can achieve a mystical union with the One, the embodiment of the supreme sphere of being, through contemplation and self-purification. Within this context, Plotinus also suggested a theory of the education of the soul through reincarnation. The human soul, when it allows itself to be overwhelmed by sensible desire, may become so deeply immersed in matter as no longer to be able to abide completely in the universal soul; yet it can rise from that fallen state and bring back the experience of what it has suffered and learned. (Illiano 341)

There was a considerable decline in Theosophical participation in the following centuries due to the opposition of more orthodox doctrines. It did, however, re-emerge “under varying guises and forms, in the writings medieval and Renaissance mystics from Meister

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85 In *The Key to Theosophy*, Helena Blavatsky, founder of The Theosophical Society (1875), explains the various religious philosophies of the Neo-Platonists, quoting the author of “Eclectic Philosophy”: “The Buddhistic, Vedantic, and Magian systems were expounded along with the philosophies of Greece at that period” (Blavatsky 1972, 4). Blavatsky defines “Theosophists” as: “A name by which many mystics at various periods of history have called themselves. The Neo-Platonists of Alexandria were Theosophists; the Alchemists and Kabbalists during the mediæval ages were likewise so called, also the Martinists, the Quietists, and other kinds of mystics, whether acting independently or incorporated in a brotherhood or society” (Blavatsky *Theosophical Glossary* 328).
Eckhart to Giordano Bruno and Jacob Böhme” along with alchemy, occultism, and Hermeticism (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 341).

Interest in Theosophy waned from the Renaissance until Pirandello’s day, when Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian woman, claiming to be in direct communication with the guardians of the divine knowledge of the universe, founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875 with American lawyer and military officer, Henry Steel Olcott. Maintaining aspects of Buddhistic and Vedantic beliefs as well as the eclectic philosophies of the Neo-Platonists, the aim of modern Theosophy was “to promote the study of comparative religion and philosophy and to investigate the mystic powers of life and matter” in hope that “by going deeper than modern science has hitherto done, into the esoteric philosophies of ancient times, they may be enabled to obtain proof of the existence of an ‘Unseen Universe’” (Shepard 1694-96). Madame Blavatsky, as she was known, compiled her revelations from the Mahatmas and her training in Tibet in the books, Isis Unveiled (1887), and The Secret Doctrine (1888-97), which are described as “an extraordinary mixture of Buddhistic, Brahmanistic and Kabalistic matter with a basic theme of religious unity and the persistence of occult and miraculous phenomena throughout history” (Ed. Shepard 1695). In the preface of The Key to Theosophy (1889), Blavatsky makes clear that care has been taken to distinguish Theosophy from Spiritualism, as for Theosophy had been “the target for every poisoned arrow of Spiritualism” (Blavatsky XII).86 Blavatsky describes the Theosophical Society, or “Universal Brotherhood,” in the informative text, Theosophical Glossary:

86 H.P. Blavatsky responds to the question, “But do you not believe in Spiritualism?”; “If by “Spiritualism” you mean the explanation which spiritualists give of some abnormal phenomena, then decidedly we do not. They maintain that these manifestations are all produced by the “spirits” of departed mortals, generally their relatives, who return to earth, they say, to communicate with those they have loved
Founded in 1875 at New York, by Colonel H.S. Olcott and H.P. Blavatsky, helped by W.Q. Judge and several others. Its avowed object was at first the scientific investigation of psychic or so-called “spiritualistic” phenomena, after which its three chief objects were declared, namely (1) Brotherhood of man, without distinction of race, colour, religion, or social position; (2) the serious study of the ancient world-religions for purposes of comparison and the selection therefrom of universal ethics; (3) the study and development of the latent divine powers in man. At the present moment [1892] it has over 250 Branches scattered all over the world, most of which are in India, where also its chief Headquarters are established. It is composed of several large Sections—the Indian, the American, the Australian, and the European sections. (Blavatsky 328)

In explaining the difference between the original Theosophy and modern Theosophy, Blavatsky says: “The Theosophists of the current century [nineteenth] have already visibly impressed themselves on modern literature, and introduced the desire and craving for some philosophy in place of blind dogmatic faith of yore, among the most intelligent portions of human-kind” (Blavatsky *Theosophical Glossary* 329). Such is true for Pirandello and his mentor, Luigi Capuana, from whom he most likely learned of

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or to whom they are attached. We deny this point blank. We assert that the spirits of the dead cannot return to earth – save in rare and exceptional cases . . . nor do they communicate with men except by entirely subjective means. That which does appear objectively, is only the phantom of the ex-physical man. But in psychic, and so to say, “Spiritual” Spiritualism, we do believe, most decidedly” (Blavatsky *The Key to Theosophy* 28)

87 My footnote insertion: Other prominent figures in the Theosophical Society were English scholar Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934), Annie Wood Besant (1847-1933), and French theoretician Dr. Théophile Pascal (1860-1909).

Theosophy. Illiano describes the international influence of modern Theosophy on literature and culture:

The Theosophical Society did eventually become a sort of cultural phenomenon of international importance for the history of religious and philosophical thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In literature this wave of theosophical interest lent new credence to the old and well-rooted Western tradition of spiritualistic and occultistic concerns, evolving from the Holy Grail to Novalis, Poe, James and other modern writers. Pirandello became interested in this trend around the turn of the century, perhaps in Capuana’s circle in Rome. (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 342)

Capuana’s non-realistic texts, pertaining to themes of the occult and parapsychology, unquestionably allowed Pirandello to consider these notions as viable sources of material. It is this atmosphere to which the impact of spiritual influence on Pirandello’s literary formation can be attributed, and his tactical assimilation of these eccentric elements into his stories contributes to the modern nature of his representation. Though Theosophy dates back many centuries, the Theosophical Society’s emphasis that the purification of the individual soul relieves human moral and physical suffering was strikingly modern. The shift from social to individual development is explained:

With the creation of the Theosophical Society in America in 1875, the beginnings of a switch of emphasis from social to individual preoccupations received an early measure of formal recognition. Not only did the newly formed society institutionalize the growing interest in the nature and development of the individual personality or ego; it also stimulated the serious and systematic investigation of ‘occultism’ – all those mystic, anti-positivist and irrational potencies of life and matter which now, progressively as the century moved toward its turn, occupied the attention of thinkers and writers. Deriving many of its articles of faith from Oriental sources, especially Vedic and Buddhist, but also from Greek and Cabbalistic ideas, theosophy was concerned to effect individual rather than social change as the key to human advancement. […] In flat contradiction to the statistical abstractions of the positivist view of things,

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89 For further reading on Luigi Capuana’s literary application of the scientific and the occult, see “The Scientific and the Pseudo-Scientific in the Works of Luigi Capuana” by Hilda Norman (PMLA 1938 869-885).
it believed ardently in the existence of an ego-entity, the nature of which could not only be changed by spiritual exercise but which could thus contribute effectively to the fuller development of mankind. (Bradbury and McFarlane 75-76)

It is unequivocal that Pirandello’s concepts of the spontaneity of life versus the stagnation of form, illusion versus reality, and his unique method of character development have at their core numerous aspects of Eastern mysticism as conveyed by modern Theosophy.

For a complete comprehension of the impact of Theosophy on Pirandello’s literary collection, it is important to recognize the transformation from the topical treatment and use of Theosophy as a narrative plot function in the early novella, “Chi fu?” (“Who was it?”) (1898), to his characters’ passage from a mocking attitude to acceptance toward Theosophy as demonstrated in the early works Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal) (1904), “Personaggi” (“Characters”) (1906), and “Dal naso al cielo” (“From the Nose to the Sky”) (1907), and finally, to his theatrical representations of the “apparenze” (“appearances”) in All’uscita (At the Exit) and the thought-form type characters in Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Character in Search of an Author) (1921).

Pirandello integrated Theosophical concepts in his texts via references to Theosophical publications, the settings of characters in the astral plane, the limbo region of the Kama-loca, the etheric double, and the transmigration and spiritual evolution of souls through reincarnation. Antonio Illiano analyzes the influence of Spiritualism and Theosophy on Pirandello’s artistic evolution. He is specifically interested in the complex phases of the genesis of Pirandello’s characters and the resulting dialectic tension that constitutes the “elemento vivificante,” (the enlivened element), of his narratives. In the last part of his essay, “Spiritismo?,” Capuana relates how his reflections enter into the production of art. He connects the creation of a character to the vitality that an
unconscious element assumes when conjured via spiritual communication such as

“artistic hallucination” (Capuana 135). Capuana writes of the unconscious incarnation of his work, “Un’incoscienza sui generis,” (“An Unconsciousness of Its Own Kind”):

Avviene non di rado che l’opera d’arte sgorghi fuori dall’immaginazione così intimamente comprenetrata colla forma, così completamente forma, senza preparazioni od elaborazioni di sorta, che la quasi incoscienza del lavoro diventa una piacevolissima sorpresa.

Un’incoscienza sui generis. Non c’è propriamente un vero sviluppo, una vera coordinazione, assimilazione, organizzazione di elementi personali, recenti, remoti, ereditarii; ma bensì una specie di fioritura della immaginazione nella temperatura primaverile dello spirito, sotto una luce raggiante non si sa dove. L’analogia delle produzioni che ne risultano colle comunicazioni spiritiche è spiccatissima. (Capuana 144)

It often happens that the art work gushes out of the imagination so intimately intertwined with the form, so completely form, without preparations or elaborations of any kind, that the nearly unconsciousness of the work becomes a most pleasant surprise.

An unconsciousness of its own kind. There is not exactly a true development, a true coordination, assimilation, organization of personal, recent, remote, hereditary elements; rather a kind of blossoming of the imagination in the spring temperature of the spirit, under a radiant light from where it is unknown. The analogy of the productions that result with the spiritualistic communications is very striking.

This notion of thought, as intertwined with form and capable of taking on a life of its own, is very similar to that of Theosophy’s “plastic essence”—a notion featured in Pirandello’s early works. Capuana claimed that his tale, “C’era una volta” (“Once Upon a Time”), was the direct result of an artistic hallucination, that came from outside of him, as though he were unconsciously assisted by, and taking dictation from, his “fantastici personaggi” (“fantastic characters”) (145-46). Capuana’s discourse on “comunicazioni in forma artistica” (“communications in artistic form”), especially the notion of imaginative production stemming unconsciously from the spirit, would have a strong influence on Pirandello’s own aesthetic of character creation and his concept of life.
versus form (Illiano *Metapsichica* 13). In *Letteratura come anamorfosi* (*Literature as Anamorphosis*), Angelo Mangini writes of the ectoplasmic nature of the character born from the author’s imagination as postulated in the Theosophical text *Thought-forms* (1901), co-authored by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. Mangini argues that Theosophy is one of the sources of Pirandello’s conception of “larval” characters:

The correspondence between these positions and those taken from Capuana developed, as of 1884, from his theory of “Artistic hallucination” should now be evident. To prove how they have deeply influenced Pirandello one is able to cite a text of 1906, the importance of which Antonio Illiano very much insists, and to which the writer wanted to impose an exemplar and programmatic title: *Characters*. As noted by Illiano, in this story appears for the first time two elements that Pirandello will reproduce in the famous *Preface* (1924) of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921): the idea of representing himself as a writer who gives audience to the creatures of his own imagination and the ‘imaginative-personification’ of the maid-servant Fantasy who introduces into his
study a number of ungovernable petitioners. Among them, Dr. Leandro Scoto—direct precursor of Fileno that will be the protagonist of *A Character’s Tragedy* of 1911—which cites once again the same Leadbeater passage that had aroused the passionate interest of Mattia Pascal. [...] The reading of these passages should be sufficient to dispel any doubt that the theosophical idea of “metamorphosis of thoughts into forms of living beings, incorporated by a plastic essence” quoted by Mattia Pascal is among the sources from which Pirandello was stimulated to develop the “larval concept of ‘characters’ that runs throughout all his work and culminated in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. A concept which seems to echo the original and lost semantic ambiguity of the word *larva* which in Latin means both “specter, ghost,” and “mask worn by an actor.”

Pirandello had access to the French and German translations of the Theosophical Society’s publications that were disseminated in various books and magazines. In fact, he had a French translation in his personal library of *The Astral Plane*, a cardinal book by Charles Webster Leadbeater (Barbina 153). Pirandello’s was strongly influenced by *The Astral Plane* and he integrated many of its passages and ideas into his works. The astral plane, also known as the etheric double stage following physical death, is at times called the “realm of illusion.” This dimension most likely interested Pirandello because it is on this lower plane that man must detach from his illusions in order to advance spiritually.

Leadbeater describes the astral plane:

> It has often been called the realm of illusion – not that it is itself any more illusory than the physical world, but because of the extreme unreliability of the impressions brought back from it by the untrained seer. Why should this be so? We account for it mainly by two remarkable characteristics of the astral world – first, that many of its inhabitants have a marvelous power of changing their forms with Protean rapidity, and also of casting practically unlimited glamour over those with whom they choose to sport; and secondly, that sight on that plane is a faculty very different from and much more extended than physical vision. An object is seen, as it were, from all sides at once, the inside of a solid being as plainly open to the view as the outside; it is therefore obvious that an inexperienced visitor to this new world may well find considerable difficulty in understanding what he really does see, and still more in translating his vision into the very inadequate language of ordinary speech. (Leadbeater 6)
Pirandello was undoubtedly impressed by Leadbeater’s descriptions, and he reproduced the following passage of the plastic and elemental essence in “Personaggi,” “Dal naso al cielo,” and in the fifth chapter of the first edition of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, discussed in the following chapter.\(^9\) Leadbeater writes in *The Astral Plane* of the plastic essence:

I have explained that the elemental essence which surrounds us on every side is in all its numberless varieties singularly susceptible to the influence of human thought. The action of the mere casual wandering thought upon it, causing it to burst into a cloud of rapidly moving, evanescent forms has been described; we have now to note how it is affected when the human mind formulates a definite, purposeful thought or wish. The effect produced is of the most striking nature. The thought seizes upon the plastic essence, and moulds it instantly into a living being of appropriate form—a being which when once thus created is in no way under the control of its creator, but lives out a life of its own, the length of which is proportionate to the intensity of the thought or wish which called it into existence. Most people’s thoughts are so fleeting and indecisive that the elementals created by them last only a few minutes or a few hours, but an often-repeated thought or an earnest wish will form an elemental whose existence may extend to many days. Since the ordinary man’s thoughts refer largely to himself, the elementals which they form remain hovering about him, and constantly tend to provoke such repetitions, instead of forming new elementals, strengthen that already in existence, and give it a fresh lease of life. A man, therefore, who frequently dwells upon one wish often forms for himself an astral attendant which, constantly fed by fresh thought, may haunt him for years, ever gaining more and more strength and influence over him; and it will easily be seen that if the desire be evil the effect upon his moral nature may be of a disastrous character. (Leadbeater 72)

This passage is cited and alluded to by Pirandello in his texts, and I argue that the notion of the “plastic essence” is at the very core of his progressive conceptualization of characters without an author.

\(^9\) In the fifth chapter of the first printed 1904 version of *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (later edited out), Pirandello’s protagonist repeats almost verbatim Charles Leadbeater’s description of the “plastic essence.” Mattia Pascal says, “Ho letto testé in un libro che i pensieri e i desideri nostri s’incorporano in un’essenza plastica, nel mondo invisibile che ne circonda, e tosto vi si modellano in forme di esseri viventi, la cui apparenza corrisponde all’intima loro natura. E questi esseri, non appena formati, non sono più sotto il dominio di chi gli ha generati, ma godono d’una lor propria vita, la cui durata dipende dall’intensità del pensiero o del desiderio generatore” (*TLN* 2: 985).
Leadbeater describes Theosophy as, “At once a philosophy, a religion, and a science that, comparatively, offer explanations of life, death, the after-life, the solar system and the One” (Leadbeater A Textbook of Theosophy 8.) Theosophy believes in reincarnation, “the repetitive reimbodiment of the reincarnating Human Ego in vehicles of human flesh,” and claims that all centers of consciousness will incarnate by passing through different planes of existence until the “earthly pilgrimage” is completed (Purucker 172). Reincarnation is controlled by Karma, the metaphysical law of cause and effect, and man will not achieve the seventh principle until the reincarnated Ego has been so directed by Karma (Blavatsky Theosophical Glossary 173-174). Theosophy claims absolute knowledge of the existence of the One eternal principle that emanates cyclically through the universe by way of seven co-existent levels of atomic and molecular substance. These planes comprise the ladder of evolution that regulates the progression of man from the lower to the higher planes; a plane is not a geographic or cosmographic dimension, but a state or condition. Pirandello was clearly interested the idea of the progression of man from the lower to the higher planes, and he used the system of evolution as barometer for his characters’ spiritual progress, as for example, with Mattia Pascal and the “apparenze” (“appearances”) of All’uscita. Discussed later in the chapter, the Theosophical planes of spiritual evolution contribute to Pirandello’s representation of the six characters in search of an author as existing on varying levels of artistic realization. The evolution to the next plane is achieved through a complex system of purifications and cyclical reincarnations regulated by the law of cause and effect, called Karma (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 343-344). The seven principles, governed each by its own laws of time, space and motion, are defined as: 1) Rupa, the physical
body, is the vehicle of all the other “principles” during life; 2) *Linga Sharira*, the etheric double or astral body; 3) *Prana*, Life or Vital principle; 4) *Kama Rupa*, the seat of animal desires and passions (marks the line of demarcation which separates the mortal man from the immortal entity); 5) *Manas*, Mind, Intelligence: the higher human mind; 6) *Buddhi*, the Spiritual Soul, is the vehicle of pure universal spirit; 7) *Atma*, the Universal Spirit or the Supreme Soul, is One with the Absolute, as its radiation. The last principle is akin to the Buddhist concept of *nirvana*, or the cessation of the endless cycles of personal reincarnations as a result of the extinction of individual passion (Blavatsky *The Key to Theosophy* 91-92).

Pirandello appropriated the Theosophical processes of reincarnation and metempsychosis, the passing of the soul at death into another soul through the course of evolutionary peregrinations, to script his characters in their varying levels of consciousness—ranging from acute hyperconsciousness of personal crisis, such as Mattia Pascal, to a general and delusory unconsciousness, as portrayed by the character of the Fat Man in the one-act play, *All’uscita (At the Exit)* (Purucker 105). How fast they progress on the ladder of spiritual evolution depends on their willingness to relinquish their former selves who lived in created realities. Pirandello adapted the cyclical Theosophical planes to metaphorically demonstrate the need to relinquish the illusions of the ego-self. In staging his characters on the astral plane, as with Mattia Pascal and the “appearances” in *All’uscita*, Pirandello effectively stages the need to recognize and detach from one’s illusions and desires. Because the characters have extended vision on this plane, they are able to access the truth by seeing the usually hidden sides of the
polyhedron—Pirandello’s symbol representing the impossibility of seeing all sides of a person. There is also a special limbo or purgatorial dimension, called the Kamaloca, a semi-material subdivision of the astral plane that is inhabited by “shells,” the astral forms of humans and other beings. After death, as the physical body and its etheric double are left to decay, the desire body will linger for an indefinite amount of time, wandering around until all traces of human passions have dissolved, and the ego becomes free to reincarnate. Victims of suicide and depraved humans, referred to as “spooks,” typically reside in the Kamaloca (Ed. Shepard 2: 1694-1696). The Kamaloca is borrowed by Pirandello to represent the ontological suspension of his characters as they come close to experiencing true reality but have not yet relinquished all their passions, vain desires, and illusions.

The analysis of Theosophy in Pirandello’s narratives offers the reader a deeper understanding and insight into the rest of his oeuvre, substantiating my claim that Pirandello’s unique method of character development, and subsequent arrested development, which would be exploded in his 1921 capolavoro, Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore, find their basis in and should be approached through the lens of the converging trends of Spiritualism, modern Theosophy, Buddhism and the developing science of Parapsychology.

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91 As described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Pirandello writes: “In ogni nostro atto è sempre tutto l’essere; quello che si manifesta è soltanto relazione a un altro atto immediato; ma nello stesso tempo si riferisce alla totalità dell’essere: è come la faccia d’un poliedro che combaci con la faccia rispettiva d’un altro, pur non escludendo le altre facce che guardano per ogni verso. Ogni conseguenza ricavata da questa manifestazione è perciò necessariamente unilaterale. E da qui l’impossibilità d’abbracciare un poliedro a un tempo in tutte le sue facce. Come dunque operare, se la scienza ci manca e l’essere ci sfugge? (Saggi 1059). [“The whole being is always in each of our acts; that which manifests itself is only relative to another immediate action; but at the same time refers to the totality of being: it is like the face of a polyhedron that coincides with the respective face of another, yet not excluding the other faces that look in other directions. Every consequence obtained from this manifestation is therefore necessarily unilateral. And hence the impossibility to embrace the whole being, as it is impossible to embrace all facets of a polyhedron at one time.”]

92 See Illiano, Antonio “Pirandello and Theosophy” 1977 (341-351).
“Chi fu?”

Pirandello references the Theosophical astral plane in his fiction as early 1896 in the novella, “Chi fu?” (“Who Was It?”). The story begins in medias res, with the protagonist Luzzi recounting his testimony in court and pleading that his friend, Andrea Sanserra, is innocent. Sturzi tells of the ghostly encounter he had one stormy night in Rome with his ex-fiance’s father-in-law, Jacopo Sturzi, whom he thought to be dead. Luzzi sees Sturzi on the street and he is reasonably shocked and confused by Sturzi’s presence. Sturzi explains to him that he really is dead, but his vices have kept him connected to the physical world. Sturzi says:

Si, son morto, Luzzi, ma il vizio, capisci, è più forte! Mi spiego subito: C’è chi muore maturo per un’altra vita, e chi no. Quegli muore e non torna più, perché ha saputo trovar la sua via; questi invece torna, perché non ha saputo trovarla; e naturalmente la cerca giusto dove l’ha perduta. Io, per esempio, qui, all’osteria. Ma che credi? È una condanna. Bevo, ed è come se non bevessi, e più bevo, e più ho sete. Poi, capirai, non posso concedermi troppe larghezze … (TLN 1: 299)

Yes, I am dead, Luzzi, but the vice, you know, is stronger! I will explain it right away: There are those who die ripe for another life, and those who do not. Those die and never come back, because he knew how to find his way, but these on the other hand return, because he does not know how to find it; and naturally he looks for it right where he lost it. I, for example, here, at the inn. But what do you think? It is a conviction. I drink, and it is as I hadn’t drank, the more I drink, the more I thirst. Then, you will understand, I can not allow myself too much breadth …

Sturzi’s explanation is indicative of the detainment of deceased on the astral plane, the stage immediately following physical death. Charles Leadbeater explains that the purpose of the astral plane is to purify one’s consciousness after physical death. The pace of the

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93 “Chi fu?” was published in “Roma di Roma” in June of 1896. Pirandello never reproduced it, and the story was reprinted only in the Appendix of “Novelle per un anno,” published by Mondadori in 1936 (TLN 1: 1087)
progression through the astral plane, therefore, is determined by the life one has lived and the quality of his thoughts:

A man has to stay upon this lowest subdivision until he has disentangled so much as is possible of his true self from the matter of that sub-plane; and when that is done his consciousness is focussed in the next of these concentric shells (that formed of the matter of the sixth subdivision), or to put the same idea in other words, he passes on to the next sub-plane. [...] Thus we see that the length of a man's detention upon any level of the astral plane will be precisely in proportion to the amount of its matter which is found in his astral body, and that in turn depends upon the life he has lived, the desires he has indulged, and the class of matter which by so doing he has attracted towards him and built into himself. It is, therefore, possible for a man, by pure living and high thinking, to minimize the quantity of matter belonging to the lower astral levels which he attaches to himself, and to raise it in each case to what may be called its critical point, so that the first touch of disintegrating force should shatter its cohesion and resolve it into its original condition, leaving him free at once to pass on to the next sub-plane. (Charles Leadbeater *The Astral Plane* 31-32)

Leadbeater then explains why some people know “the way,” as stated by Sturzi—having died already mature for the next phase:

A man who has led a good and pure life, whose strongest feelings and aspirations have been unselfish and spiritual, will have no attraction to this plane, and will, if entirely left alone, find little to keep him upon it, or to awaken him into activity even during the comparatively short period of his stay. For it must be understood that after death the true man is withdrawing into himself, and just as at the first step of that process he casts off the physical body, and almost directly afterwards the etheric double, so it is intended that he should as soon as possible cast off also the astral or desire body, and pass into the heaven-world, where alone his spiritual aspirations can bear their perfect fruit. The noble and pure-minded man will be able to do this, for he has subdued all earthly passions during life; the force of his will has been directed into higher channels, and there is therefore but little energy of lower desire to be worked out on the astral plane. His stay there will consequently be short, and most probably he will have little more than a dreamy half-consciousness of existence until he sinks into the sleep during which his higher principles finally free themselves from the astral envelope and enter upon the blissful life of the heaven-world. (Charles Leadbeater *The Astral Plane* 30)
A man like Sturzi, however, is not able to find the way because of the attachment he had while living to earthly passions and vices such as alcohol. Leadbeater explains Sturzi’s prolongment in the lower realm of the astral plane:

The only persons who normally awake to consciousness on the lowest level of the astral plane are those whose desires are gross and brutal — drunkards, sensualists, and such like. There they remain for a period proportioned to the strength of their desires, often suffering terribly from the fact that while these earthly lusts are still as strong as ever, they now find it impossible to gratify them, except occasionally in a vicarious manner when they are able to seize upon some like-minded person, and obsess him. The ordinarily decent man has little to detain him on that seventh sub-plane; but if his chief desires and thoughts had centred in more worldly affairs, he is likely to find himself in the sixth subdivision, still hovering about the places and persons with which he was most closely connected while on earth. (Leadbeater *The Astral Plane* 33)

Thus Jacopo Sturzi, still desiring his vices, finds himself in his old haunts and cannot, despite how much he drinks, satisfy his needs—like Tantalus grasping at the fruit dangling above him. Pirandello applies this aspect of the astral plane to demonstrate that the path, or the “way,” to freedom from such torment is found—not in reaching the fruit or satisfying the desires—but in the realization that the suffering is caused by the illusions of reality that foster such cravings. The strength of the will, as found in Schopenhauer, determines the craving and controls man’s perception of reality. If man were aware of this cycle, he could eradicate his delusions and, therefore, free himself of desire. Unfortunately, as Pirandello highlights, man is unaware that he is living in and is trapped by the, “minuscoli mondi artificiali” (“miniscule artificial worlds”), lit by artificial lights that contradict nature and separate him from his authentic self (*TLN* 2: 234).

The Theosophical stratification of the planes of existence, particularly the “realm of illusion” of the astral plane, perfectly lends itself to Pirandello’s aesthetic aim to
represent man as trapped by his false illusions with no recourse to the trap’s exit, or
l’uscita. A passage similar to Jacopo Sturzi’s above is found in the novella “Notizia del
Mondo” [“News of the World”]: “Perché sono nell’idea che c’è chi muore maturo per
un’altra vita e chi no, e che quelli che non han saputo maturarsi su la terra siano condannati a tornarci, finché non avranno trovato la via d’uscita” [“Because I am of the
idea that there are those who die ripe for another life and those who do not and those who
do not know how to mature themselves on Earth are condemned to return there until they have found the path to the exit”] (TLN 1: 582). The theme of the trap with no exit is recurrent throughout Pirandello’s short stories and novels, and is explicitly represented in his one-act play, All’uscita. The development of Pirandello’s motives, from the
humoristic intention of the sentiments expressed by Tommaso Averso in the early story, “Notizia del mondo,” to those in his later theatrical works, is explained:

Here the intention reverts back to the humoristic conduct that characterizes
the journalistic story-directed by the living Tommaso Aversa to the dead Momino. But the motive is destined for an ulterior and more ambitious
development, which takes shape in At the Exit. In the “mystery profane,”
the non-mature for death leave their body in the cemetery and manifest
themselves as “appearances” that will vanish only when they definitively
abstain from the craving, or the resentment, that has dragged them back in
the world. Interest will be aintained in varied conditions later on, the motif
of attachment to the land and life as immaturity that prohibits access to
dimensions of a higher order to the last unfinished pirandellian “myth,” *The Mountain Giants*.

The themes of death and dying and mysteriously arcane forces are constant throughout Pirandello’s writing. As Anthony Caputi explains,

Death is commonplace in Pirandello’s fiction and drama, leaping suddenly out of the dark, calamitous. […] Pirandello wrote often about death because it forced his characters to moments of authenticity, to tear way the masks and social veils to reveal difficult truths. […] Everywhere death shakes situations into clarity. But Pirandello also wrote about it because it is there, the prime evidence of arcane forces waiting, covertly dominant. (Caputi 74).

As I discuss in this following sections, the reader comes to identify Pirandello’s representations of life, death and the immortality of the soul as deeply entwined with his conceptualization of the birth, death and immortality of the character.

### “Personaggi”


Everyone, today, we feel an anguished need to believe in something. An illusion is absolutely necessary for us, and science, as you well know, cannot give it to us. So, I read also a few books of theosophy.

In the 1906 *novella*, “Personaggi” (“Characters”), the reader gets his first glimpse at Pirandello’s unique process of character development (as we saw in our discussion of “La tragedia d’un personaggio” in the last chapter). The first-person narrator, an author, describes how it is his method to listen to the wretched people’s claims for why they should become a “personaggio” (“character”) in his future stories. Not present in “La tragedia d’un personaggio”, however, is the author’s maidservant, Fantasia, who presents

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these types to him. With this appellation Pirandello is clarifying that his ideas come from his imagination or fantasy—a revealing nod to his spiritual influence as the root of the word “fantasia” derives from the Latin for “illusory appearance.” Also in the preface, Pirandello refers to a character or a creature of art, as a “fantasma,” a word with similar etymology to “fantasia,” from the Latin “phantasma,” meaning an apparition or specter. Pirandello could have named his servant something less ethereal, perhaps Cervella or Academia, as a means of indicating the origins of his concepts, however, he chose Fantasia as his personal, domestic “medium”—the vehicle through whom his ideas are delivered. As Pirandello explains in the 1925 preface to Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore, Fantasia continues to assist Pirandello throughout his literary career. She can usher the callers only so far, however, as Pirandello will always make the last judgment as to their welcome stay or abrupt dismissal. This procedure allows him to creatively show his readers that the potential “personaggio,” a spirit-like embryo, depending on the severity of the thought, may either: 1) be immediately rejected as Dr. Fileno and Dr. Scoto; 2) become formed but realized as rejected, as in the case of the six characters in search of an author, or; 3) become immortal like the “late Mattia Pascal,” whose memoir is kept safe and available in the library.

The protagonist of “Personaggi” is Leandro Scoto, a well-dressed doctor of physical science and mathematics. He is escorted by Fantasia to audition as a character for one of the writer’s stories. In response to the writer’s question of what book he is

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95 According to the Etymology Dictionary, the word “fantasia” derives from the Latin phantasia, from the Greek phantasia, meaning appearance, image, perception, imagination,” from phantazesthai “picture to oneself” from phantos “visible,” from phainesthai “appear,” in late Greek “to imagine, have visions,” related to phaos, phos “light,” phainein “to show, to bring to light.” Sense of “whimsical notion, illusion” is pre-1400, followed by that of “imagination,” which is first attested 1530s. Sense of “day-dream based on desires” is from 1926 (www.etymonline.com/sources.php).
carrying with him, Scoto lowers his eyes and tells him that it is an English book, by Leadbeater. At this, the writer groans back, “Il teosofo?” [“the Theosophist?”], and asks how such a reputable doctor of physical science and mathematics could waste his time with such “sciocchezze senza costrutto” [“pointless foolishness”]. The writer dismisses Scoto in a condescending manner:

> Ah, non voglio saperne, sa! Via, via! Se lei viene per esser preso in considerazione con codesti titoli, se ne può andare. Ho già messo un teosofo in un mio romanzo, e basta. So io quanto ho dovuto faticare per non farlo parer nojoso! Basta, basta! […] Mi faccio meraviglia, che un dottore in scienze fisiche e matematiche, come lei pretende di essere, uomo serio dunque, si occupi di siffatte scioecchezze senza costrutto. (TLN 2: 238)

Ah, I don’t want to know about it, you know! Away, away! If you came to be taken into consideration with such titles, you can go away. I already put a Theosophist in one of my novels, and that’s enough. I know how hard I had to work to not make it seem boring! Enough, enough! [...] I find it amazing, that a doctor in physics and mathematics, as you pretend to be, therefore a serious man, occupies himself with such pointless nonsense.

The character of the “Theosophist” that the writer refers to above is Anselmo Paleari from *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (*The Late Mattia Pascal*), discussed in the following chapter.

My analysis of the writer’s abrupt dismissal of Theosophy concludes that Pirandello is not disgusted by Theosophy as a foolish belief system compared to the seriousness of the hard sciences, as it would appear superficially, but he is more interested in demonstrating the persistent power of a thought-form. Scoto asks the writer not to judge him so superficially and says that everyone, today, feels an anxious need to believe in something—an illusion that science fails provide. Because of this need, Scoto explains, he turned to Theosophy books and even admits to laughing about it at first. He explains, however, that he found a curious passage that offers a fundamental truth in the text he
brought with him. He opens the book and recites a passage almost identical to that quoted earlier by Leadbeater. Pirandello adds here that Scoto translates fluently from the English as he reads:

We said that the elemental essence which surrounds us on every side is singularly susceptible, in all its varieties, to the influence of human thought. We described the action of the mere wandering thought upon it, that is the sudden formation of a diaphanous cloud, of forms continually moving and changing. Now we should note what then happens when the human spirit positively expresses a well-defined thought or desire. The thought incurs upon the plastic essence, plunges itself so to speak and instantly models itself in the form of a living being, which has an appearance that takes on qualities of the thought itself, and this being, just formed, is not at all under the control of its creator but enjoys a life of its own, whose duration is relative to the intensity of the thought and desire that generated it: it continues, in fact, depending on the strength of thought that holds together the parts.

Close examination of this passage, and its implications for the incarnation of the character, reveal the capacity of a thought to take on a life form of its own, beyond the control of its creator. This thought-form, whose duration is proportional to the strength of the desire or thought that generated it, may be ephemeral or has the potential to haunt its creator forever. The reference to the plastic essence made is critical to the understanding
of Pirandello’s larger study of illusion, life, form, and his intricate system of character
development as described earlier.

After reading this passage to the author, Scoto continues his plea—arguing that no
one knows better than the author himself that what he read is true. He makes an argument
similar to the description of the novelist and his creation found in the Theosophical text,
Thought-forms (1901), written by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. The authors
explain that the novelist conceptualizes and externalizes thoughts on paper in the same
way that a painter visualizes an image in his mind and then projects it onto the canvas:
“The novelist in the same way builds images of his characters in mental matter, and by
the exercise of his will moves these puppets from one position or grouping to another, so
that the plot of his story is literally acted out before him” (Besant and Leadbeater
Thought-Forms 27). Scoto says:

Ed io, per quanto ancora non sia libero e indipendente da Lei, ne sono la
prova. Ne sono una prova tutti i personaggi creati dall’arte. Alcuni han pur
troppo vita effimera; altri immortale. Vita vera, più vera della reale, sto
per dire! Angelica, Rodomonte, Shylock, Amleto, Giulietta, Don
Chisciotte, Manon Lescaut, Don Abbondio, Taratin: non vivono d’una vita
indistruttibile, d’una vita indipendente ormai dai loro autori? (TLN 2: 239)

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96 This is the passage from Thought-Forms in its entirety: “When a man thinks of his friend he
forms within his mental body a minute image of that friend, which often passes outward and usually floats
suspended in the air before him. In the same way if he thinks of a room, a house, a landscape, tiny images
of these things are formed within the mental body and afterwards externalised. This is equally true when he
is exercising his imagination; the painter who forms a conception of his future picture builds it up out of the
matter of his mental body, and then projects it into space in front of him, keeps it before his mind's eye, and
copies it. The novelist in the same way builds images of his characters in mental matter, and by the exercise
of his will moves these puppets from one position or grouping to another, so that the plot of his story is
literally acted out before him. With our curiously inverted conceptions of reality it is hard for us to
understand that these mental images actually exist, and are so entirely objective that they may readily be
seen by the clairvoyant, and can even be arranged by some one other than their creator. Some novelists
have been dimly aware of such a process, and have testified that their characters when once created
developed a will of their own, and insisted on carrying the plot of the story along lines quite different from
those originally intended by the author. This has actually happened, sometimes because the thought-forms
were ensouled by playful nature-spirits, or more often because some ‘dead’ novelist, watching on the astral
plan of his fellow-author, thought that he could improve upon it, and chose this method of putting forward
his suggestions” (Besant and Leadbeater Thought-Forms 26-27).
And I, although not yet free and independent from you, am proof of it. All the characters created by art are the proof of it. Some have unfortunately an ephemeral life; others immortal. Real life, more true than real, I’m saying! Angelica, Rodomonte, Shylock, Hamlet, Juliet, Don Quixote, Manon Lescaut, Don Abbondio, Taratín: do they not live in an indestructible life, a life by now independent from their authors?

Notably, a the similar list of characters is found in “L’umorismo,” and is later reproduced by the Father in Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore, who also discusses the concept of the character as independent from its author. The writer asks Scoto what point he is trying to arrive at with his “dissertazione teosofico-estetica” [“theosophical-aesthetic dissertation”], and Scoto melodramatically exlaims: “Voglio vivere” [“I want to live”] (TLN 2: 239). Pirandello’s art, as he says, is un’incessante e spasmodica volontà di ‘creare la vita’ [“motivated by a ceaseless and frantic will to ‘create life’”], and his characters want to live (Ed. Pupo 289). Mattia Pascal’s voice echoes, “Io, insomma, dovevo vivere, vivere, vivere!” [“In short: I had to live, live, live!”] (Tr I: 431; Trans. Weaver 109). They not only want to live, but they also long for immortality. This raises speculation as to Pirandello’s desire—not for his own fame or immortality—but for that of the eternal existence of his chosen characters.

97 The following dialogue between the Father and the Director is found in the third act of Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore: Il capocomico: Io vorrei sapere però, quando mai s’è visto un personaggio che, uscendo dalla sua parte, si sia messo a perorarla così come fa lei, e proporla, a spiegalarla. Me lo sa dire? Io non l’ho mai visto! Il padre: Non l’ha mai visto, signore, perché gli autori nascondono di solito il travaglio della loro creazione. Quando i personaggi son vivi, vivi veramente davanti al loro autore, questo non fa altro che seguirli nelle parole, nei gesti ch’essi appunto gli propongono, e bisogna ch’egli li voglia com’essi si vogliono; e guai se non fa così! Quando un personaggio è nato, acquista subito una tale indipendenza anche dal suo stesso autore, che può esser da tutti immaginato in tant’altri situazioni in cui l’autore non pensò di metterlo, e acquistare anche, a volte, un significato che l’autore non si sognò mai di dargli!

Il capocomico: Ma sì, questo lo so! Il padre: E dunque, perché si fa meraviglia di noi? Immagini per un personaggio la disgrazia che le ho detto, d’esser nato vivo dalla fantasia d’un autore che abbia voluto poi negargli la vita, e mi dica se questo personaggio lasciato così, vivo e senza vita, non ha ragione di mettersi a fare quel che stiamo facendo noi, ora, qua davanti a loro, dopo averlo fatto a lungo a lungo, creda, davanti a lui per persuaderlo, per spingerlo” (Maschere nude 2: 105).

98 This passage is quoted in its entirety in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.
The writer asks Scoto if he thinks he really has what it takes to become immortal. Scotto replies to his potential author that in him is the making of a masterpiece: “Creda pure che in me, ad approfondirmi bene, Lei troverebbe la stoffa per un capolavoro” [“Believe that in me, to really know me profoundly, you will find the material for a masterpiece”]. The author responds, “Caro dottor Leandro Scoto: per il capolavoro ripassi domani” [“Dear Dr. Leandro Scoto: for the masterpiece come back tomorrow”] (TLN 2: 240). In the end, Scoto’s appeal to be made into a character is denied—as the writer is not yet convinced that he is valuable, or is perhaps apprehensive that he will not be able to dominate him. This rejection of the writer is the ultimate presentiment for Pirandello’s theatrical masterpiece Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore, which fifteen years later would forge his status as an internationally revered dramatist. Perhaps followed by the thought of this rejected ectoplasmic and embryonic character, and/or having learned how to dominate him, it is probable that Pirandello’s formation of his capolavoro was indeed the result of his imagination—stemming from the seed planted by Theosophical research and manifested through his characters: Dr. Scoto, Dr. Fileno, and the Father and his family.

“L’invisibile”

Capuana’s short story, “L’invisibile” (“The Unseen”), published in 1901, opens with a debate between the protagonist Doctor Maggioli and the Baroness Lanari. The Baroness describes her passion for fables and science fiction stories, and she credits their authors for creating such illusions that allow her to be carried away from reality for a few hours at a time. Immediately, Doctor Maggioli interrupts her with his counter that such fantasies are actually real forces found in nature and he says that he believes that the
authors want to tell the truth about such things. After discussing *The Invisible Man* by H.G. Wells, and whether or not it is possible to become invisible, the doctor describes to his friends the unique case of a man who came to consult him the day before; this man claimed that he could make himself invisible and was able to teleport himself great distances, and he needed to find a way to stop it from happening. Doctor Maggioli explained that the man was a Theosophist: “Era un adepto teosofo, un discepolo di quella scuola religiosa filosofica e scientifica che esiste nell’India e che la signora Blavatsky e i suoi collaboratori cominciano a diffondere in Europa” (“He was an adept Theosophist, a disciple of that philosophical and scientific religious school that exists in India and that Madam Blavatsky and her collaborators are beginning to spread in Europe”) (Cedola 154). The man says that he will prove his condition to the Doctor and return in a few days. After the Doctor recommends that the man take a series of cold showers and sends him on his way, he does not expect to see him again. Two days later, after witnessing the extraordinary re-appearance of his vase of roses on the table from which they had disappeared, the Doctor realizes that this was the man’s attempt to convince him of his situation. However, the Doctor insists that he still has not proven his invisibility. The man agrees, explaining that he tries to avoid making himself invisible because of the sad effects it has on him. He asks the Doctor to open the window, and after a few minutes, the man was enveloped in a white vaporous cloud and he vanished out the window, leaving the sidewalk below looking as though it were smoking. The Doctor, still dumbfounded by the experience, finishes his story—consequently closing the short story with questions indicating confusion about his client’s whereabouts and condition. This type of story, entertaining yet abrupt in its conclusion and devoid of explicit answers or
closure, is a prototype for Pirandello, who often used scientist-protagonists to demonstrate the same conflict of the materialists versus the spiritualists. This structure is apparent in Pirandello’s novella, “Dal naso al cielo,” (“Nose to the Sky”) (1907).

**“Dal Naso al Cielo”**

The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. It was the experience of mystery—even if mixed with fear—that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason to the most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms. (Albert Einstein *Ideas and Opinions* 11)

In the short story, “Dal naso al cielo” (“Nose to the Sky”) (1907), Pirandello’s anti-positivist views are expressed via his character, Professor Vernoni, who argues that man should follow the laws and logic of nature but that he must also consider that there may be things, in nature, that we cannot always see and they should not be ignored or dismissed. These things live naturally on the earth with us, like us and other beings, but our normal state and our own defects of perception will not allow us to see them. Following the anti-postivist argument, Pirandello argues that these unseen forces are also natural but they have been subjected to other laws that our consciousness ignores.

The story takes place at an old hotel built on the grounds of an abandoned convent, at the peak of Monte Gajo—similar to the setting of “Pallottoline” at Monte Cavo. The hotel is honored to be hosting, among its few guests, the distinguished chemist from Lincei in Rome, Romualdo Reda. Reda is there because he has been advised by his doctors to take a break from his intense work schedule after a fainting spell in his lab, and

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99 “Dal naso al Cielo” was first published in *Marzocco* on April 7, 1907. In 1919 it was reprinted in the collection *Il carnevale dei morti* (The Carnival of the Dead) and was also part of the eight volume of the “Novelle per un anno,” called *Dal naso al cielo*. See *TLN* 2: 1008.
he has yet to exchange words with anyone. He is described as very small in stature, almost without a neck with swollen eyelids and leathery, closely shaved skin. Every afternoon he would go to the open space in front of the hotel and sit under where he would immerse himself in newspapers, magazines and some books for hours. The miracle that brings Reda to speak is the new guest, Professor Dionisio Veroni, who immediately makes a bad impression on the other guests and hotel staff. He is described by the narrator in a negative, animal-esque light; he is said to be untidy, slovenly, dripping with sweat, glasses slipping down his nose and with skin hard like that of pig. Veroni, an “incorrigible idealist,” the narrator says, perhaps suffered from the volcanic stirrings of his many passions. Looking at his sweaty face, Veroni is a humoristic sight as one would not believe him to be so idealistic. In describing Veroni, Pirandello’s echoes the sentiments of his essay, “Rinunzia” (“Rinunciation”), discussed in the previous chapter. The narrator says:

Il professor Dionisio Vernoni: un idealista che, anche a costo d’essere scannato, non s’acquietava, non sapeva, non voleva acquietarsi all’irritante rinunzia della scienza di fronte ai formidabili problemi dell’esistenza, al comodo (egli diceva vigliacco) ripararsi del così detto pensiero filosofico entro i confini del conoscibile. (TLN 2: 305).

Professor Dionisio Vernoni: an idealist who, even at the cost of being slaughtered, did not resign himself, he did not know how, he did not want to resign himself to the irritating renunciation of science in the face of formidable problems of the existence, to shelter himself (he said cowardly) in the comfortable, so-called philosophical thought within the boundaries of the knowable.

Vernoni recognizes his old professor from University years ago and approaches Reda sitting under the beech tree. The narrator points out that Vernoni had many former professors because he had at least three or four degrees. Their famously contentious debates at University were re-kindled from that moment though Vernoni alone was now
fervid, as Reda responded bluntly and scornfully. They continue this “intellectual duel” every afternoon and others surround them, entertained by their discussions. The debates are heated with Vernoni jumping up to his feet in protest. The elderly Mrs. Gilli and Miss Green were enthralled with Vernoni’s passionate pleas for his noble and high-minded theories while Reda grew increasingly agitated; the elder scholar had an opposing view to Vernoni concerning the logic of nature. In one debate, Vernoni mutters with bitter disdain, “L’erba, dunque, eh? Come se fossimo tante pecorelle…” [“Grass, then, eh? Grass! As if we were all sheep…” (TLN 2: 306). At this, Mr. Nini Gilli laughs uncontrollably, and the laughter of the others follows, while Reda looks around confused and tells Vernoni he does not understand. Vernoni explains that the grass that grows on the ground is for sheep the only truth that really exists for them—while man can look up and see the stars. The women nod their heads in agreement. Reda recognizes this from Sallustio, and Vernoni confirms this but then argues that if we also look down and look at a mole, we are able to understand the logic of nature. Upon hearing the word ‘nature,’ Reda becomes very serious and says, “Ah no!”; he does not want to discuss it further. At this point, in the original Marzocco version, Vernoni and Reda engage in a polemical discussion; Vernoni argues vehemently against the positivistic views of Francis Bacon.

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100 In “Arte e coscienza d’oggi” (1893), Pirandello quotes the Latin historian and statesman, Gaius Sallustius Crispus (86-34 bc), from his work, Bellum Catilinae (43-40 B.C.), which is indirectly alluded to in the beginning of “Dal naso al cielo.” This is the passage Pirandello cites in its original Latin, in the 1893 essay: “Omni homines, qui sese student praestare ceteris animalibus, summa ope niti decet, ne uitam silentio transeant uelui pecora, quae natura praone atque uentri oboedientia finxit.” The Italian translation is: “It behooves all men who wish to excel beyond other animals to strive with the utmost of their energy, so as not to pass through life in obscurity, like the beasts which nature has made to bow down to the land and become subservient to man’s appetite” (TLN 2: 1010)
and Herbert Spencer and Reda argues for them. Vernoni argues than man wants and needs more from his existence than to have to adapt to the materialistic ways imposed by science. When he asks the elder Professor what will happen if he chooses not to resign himself to such a one-sided view of nature and logic, Reda tells him that, depending on his level of rebellion, he will end up in a mental hospital or in prison—the two options, recurrent throughout Pirandello’s works, for one who does not want to conform to the set ways of society. Vernoni insists on the discussion, asking Reda if he doubts that nature

101 Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was an English philosopher and political and sociological theorist. He was a chief proponent of Social Darwinism. Pragmatism, studied by philosophers Charles Peirce and William James, was a necessary departure from rigid Spencerian dogma; it bridged the gap between nineteenth-century vision and twentieth-century achievement. Pragmatism was the philosophy of experimentation and a departure from inflexible, Spencerian naturalism. According to its proponents there were universal laws, but human beings could comprehend and cope with them. (Knee 4)

Anthony Caputi writes: “Pirandello set up Spencer’s and other philosophical foundations chiefly to knock them down, to argue that like the conception of life provided by modern science, these models of consciousness reduce what is exceedingly intricate and mysterious to abstract system. […] Consciousness for Pirandello was a matrix for other faculties, highly inclusive. But far from reflecting a rational idea of the world, as Herbert Spencer would have it, it suggested its own indeterminacy in its, shifting, changing version of the world” (Caputi 17).

follows its own logic. Vernoni explains that the mole is the perfect proof: the mole has very weak organs because he is meant to stay underground while man is endowed with the ability to look at the stars. He exclaims that there must be a reason for this. At this point in the original *Marzocco* version, but later eliminated, Vernoni launches into a discussion of astronomy and argues, as did Mattia Pascal when he cursed Copernicus, that the telescope ruined humanity because it made man feel like tiny specs compared to the vastness of the infinite universe.\(^\text{103}\)

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\(^\text{103}\) Dionisio Vernoni’s argument of the “cannochiale rovesciato” (“inverted telescope”) was eliminated from the original 1907 version. The original text follows Vernoni’s statement: “Logica della natura. E l’uomo? Scusi, perché deve poter videre le stelle, l’uomo/ Una ragione ci deve essere, scusi!” Vernoni then continues: “Non certo perché possa studiare astronomia…Sarebbe ridicolo!” / RR: “E perché?” – domandava, sorridendo, come stordito da tante stramalderie, il senatore. / “Non per l'astronomia, certo!” – rispondeva subito il Vernoni, sempre più inervorato e vibrante, “Perché senza l'astronomia l'uomo potrebbe vivere benone, come visse per tanti e tanti secoli, credendo le stelle
Vernoni says:

Il telescopio, il telescopio, sissignore la nostra rovina! ha rovinato l’umanità- sissignore – il telescopio! Perché mentre l’occhio guarda di sotto, dalla lente piccola, e vede grande ciò che la natura provvidenzialmente aveva voluto farci vedere piccolo, l’anima che fa?

lampadine, scusi. Scoperto il telescopio…” / “Che vide?” – lo interrompeva il senatore, levando un braccino. / E allora il Vernoni con un prorompimento d’indignazione: “La sua piccolezza, è vero? Maledetto il telescopio! Ma ci crede che io li fracasserei tutti quanti? che spazzerei dalla faccia della terra tutti quanti gli osservatori astronomici? Il telescopio, il telescopio, sissignore la nostra rovina! ha rovinato l’umanità- sissignore – il telescopio! Perché mentre l’occhio guarda di sotto, dalla lente piccola, e vede grande ciò che la natura provvidenzialmente aveva voluto farci vedere piccolo, l’anima che fa? salta a guardare di sopra, l’anima, dalla lente più grande; e il telescopio allora che diventa? Un terribile strumento, un microscopio formidabile, che subissa la terra e l’uomo e tutte le nostre glorie e grandezze. Piccolo? Ma scusi, signor professore, dice sul serio? Ma se l’uomo può intendere e concepire la infinita sua piccolezza, vuol dire ch’egli intende e concepisce l’infinita grandezza dell’Universo. È come si può dir piccolo, dunque, l’uomo? Lei scherza! Piccolo? Ma dentro di me dev’esserci per forza, intende? per forza qualcosa di questo infinito, se no io non lo intenderete, come non lo intende quell’albero, putacaso, o il mio cappello…Qualcosa che, se io affisco gli occhi nel cielo, egregio signore professore, s’apre, e diventa, come niente, plaga dello spazio, in cui roteano mondi, dico mondi, di cui sento e compReda la formidabile grandezza. E vuole, scusi, vuole ch’io chiuda questi occhi che la natura mi ha fatti così penetranti e così desiderosi si vedere, di scoprire, su su, una ragione che m’appaghi e m’acquieti, per ristirgermi qua allo studio dei sassolini, dei pesciolini, dei moscherini?…Scienza, non dico di no! ma come vuole che mi contenti, signor professore?” [“DV: “I am not certain because I am able to study astronomy…it would be ridiculous!” / RR: “And why?”]- the senator asked, smiling, as if bewildered by so many absurdities. / DV: Certainly not for astronomy!”-Vernoni immediately responded, even more impassioned and vibrant. “Because without astronomy man would be able to live very well, as he lived for many centuries, believing the stars little lights. Discovered the telescope…” / RR: “What did he see?”- the senator interrupted, raising his small arm. / DV: “His smallness, isn’t it true? Cursed telescope! Do you think I would break all of them? that I would spit in the face of all the astronomers observing the Earth? The telescope, the telescope, yes sir, the telescope ruined humanity! Because while the eye looks from the smaller lens and sees big that which nature providentially had intended for us to see as small, what does the soul do? The soul jumps to look through the bigger lens at the other end and the telescope therefore becomes a terrible instrument, a dreadful microscope that ruins the land and man and all our greatness and glories. Small? But excuse me, Professor, are you serious? But if man is able to understand and conceptualize the huge infinity of his smallness, it means he can also understand and conceptualize the infinite greatness of the universe. And how is one able to say small, meanwhile, man? You’re joking! Small! But inside me must be something of this infiniteness, of course, understand? inside of me, if not, I would not understand it, like that tree does not understand it, maybe, or my hat. Something that if I fix my eye in the sky, it opens itself, and becomes like nothing, a region of space, in which world’s rotate, I say worlds, of which I feel and understand the dreadfully great size. And you want that I should close these eyes that nature made so penetrating for me and so desiring to see, to discover, up up, a reason that satisfies me and quiets me, to restrict myself in the study of small rocks and small fish and gnats? Science, I would not say no! but how do you want me to be make myself happy, Professor?” (TLN 2: 1012-1013).

Lucio Lugnani comments that Vernoni, in his opposition to Francis Bacon’s inductive reasoning and empiricism, offers his idealistic spiritualism mixed with Theosophy and also takes from the philosophical leanings of Blaise Pascal and his reflections on the misery and greatness of man. This Pirandello borrows from Pascal’s Pensees (Thoughts) #169: “La grandeur de l’homme est grande en ce qu’il se connoit misérable. Un arbre ne se connoit pas misérable. C’est donc estre misérable que de se connoistre misérable; mais c’estre grand que de connoistre qu’on est misérable” [“The greatness of man is great in that he knows his own misery. A tree does not know its misery. So it is misery to know one’s misery, but to know it is to be great”] (See Pascal Pensees 85) (TLN 2: 1012).
salta a guardare di sopra, l’anima, dalla lente più grande; e il telescopio allora che diventa? Un terribile strumento, un microscopio formidabile, che subissa la terra e l’uomo e tutte le nostre glorie e grandezze. Piccolo? Ma scusi, signor professore, dice sul serio? Ma se l’uomo può intendere e concepire la infinita sua piccolanza, vuol dire ch’egli intende e concepisce l’infinita grandezza dell’Universo. E come si può dir piccolo, dunque, l’uomo? Lei scherza! Piccolo? Ma dentro di me dev’esserci forza, intende? per forza qualcosa di questo infinito, se no io non lo intenderei, come non lo intende quell’albero, putacaso, o il mio cappello…Qualcosa che, se io affisso gli occhi nel cielo, egregio signore professore, s’apre, e diventa, come niente, plaga dello spazio, in cui roteano mondi, dico mondi, di cui sento e compReda la formidabile grandezza. E vuole, scusi, vuole ch’io chiuda questi occhi che la natura mi ha fatti così penetranti e così desiderosi si vedere, di scoprire, su su, una ragione che m’appaghi e m’acquieti, per ristringermi qua allo studio dei sassolini, dei pesciolini, dei moscherini? …Scienza, non dico di no! ma come vuole che mi contenti, signor professore?” (TLN 2: 1012-1013; translation in footnote 26).

It was Jacopo Maraventano from “Pallottolline!” who first suggested that if man were to look back at the Earth from the cosmos, humans would look like tiny particles of dust but Dionisio Vernoni goes further and makes the argument that the artificial and unnatural viewpoint of the telescope, offered to the human eye by the invention of scientists, pushes the human spirit to the opposite lens of the telescope, where it sees the world through the larger lens of that “microscopio formidabile” (“wonderful microscope”). Vernoni, despite the elimination from the original version, is said to be the inventor of the “cannocchiale rovesciato” (“inverted telescope”), discussed at length in Chapter One of

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104 As discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Pirandello describes in “L’umorismo,” that the telescope was the discovery that “dealt us the coup de grâce”: “Ci diede il colpo di grazia la scoperta del telescopio: altra macchinetta infernale, che può fare il pajo con quella che volle regalare la natura. Ma questa l’abbiamo inventata noi, per non esser da meno. Mentre l’occhio guarda di sotto, dalla lente più piccola, e vede grande ciò che la natura provvidenzialmente aveva voluta farci veder piccolo, l’anima nostra, che fa? salta a guardare di sopra, dalla lente più grande, e il telescopio allora diventa un terribile strumento, che subissa la terra e l’uomo e tutte le nostre glorie e grandezze” [“It was the discovery of the telescope which dealt us the coup de grâce: another infernal little mechanism which could pair up with the one nature chose to bestow upon us. But we invented this one so as not to be inferior. While our eye looks from below through the smaller lens, and sees as big all that nature had providentially wanted us to see small, what does our soul do? It jumps to look from above through the larger lens, and as a consequence the telescope becomes a terrible instrument, which sinks the earth and man and all our glories and greatness”] (Spav 156; Illiano, trans. 142)
this dissertation: “Se dunque Maraventano è il protofilosofo della lontananza, Dionisio Vernoni, intertestualmente in polemica con lui, è l’inventore del cannocchiale rovesciato che vorrebbe distrutto e che sarà recuperato e posto alla base della filosofia del lontano dal dottor Paolo Post e dal dottor Fileno de La tragedia d’un personaggio” [“If Maraventano then is the proto-philosopher of distance, Dionisio Vernoni, intertextually in debate with him, is the inventor of the inverted telescope that would be layed to waste and will be recuperated and placed at the base of the philosophy of distance of Dr. Paolo Post and Dr. Fileno in A Character’s Tragedy”] (TLN 2: 1013). Vernoni finds comfort in knowing that in him resides the infinite greatness of the universe, and for this, he cannot restrict himself to the empirical and physical study of small rocks but must explore the metaphysical, in order to understand and receive all the wonders that the universe has to offer.

Everyone remained suspended in the moment waiting for Reda’s response to Vernoni’s statement about the logic of nature behind the mole’s weakness and man’s strength. With half-closed, swollen eyes and a smirking smile, Reda recites this passage, in its original Latin, from the Novum Organum, or The New Instrument (1620), by Francis Bacon.105 “Gestit enim mens exsilire ad magis generalia, ut acquiescat; et post parvam moram fastidit experientiam: sed haec mala demum aucta sunt a dialectica ob pompas disputationum” [“Indeed the mind is fond of starting off to generalities, so that it

105 Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an English philosopher, scientist, lawyer and statesman. Asimov writes: “In 1620 came the Novum Organum, that is, the “New Organon,” the reference being to the Organon of Aristotle in which the Greek philosopher had demonstrated the proper method of logic—of reasoning by deduction (arriving at a conclusion by reasoning, infer from facts). Bacon’s book, as the title implies, contains a new method of reasoning. Bacon argued strenuously that deduction might do for mathematics but that it could not do for science. The laws of science had to be induced, to be established as generalizations drawn out of a vast mass of specific observation” (Asimov 98). Interestingly Peter Ouspensky wrote Tertium Organum (1912), which he subtitled “The third canon of thought,” following Aristotle’s Organon and Francis Bacon’s Novum Organum.
may avoid labor, and after dwelling a little on a subject, is fatigued by the experiment. But those evils are augmented by logic, for the sake of the ostentation of the dispute”]

(Trans. Joseph Devey 387).106 In Novum Organum, Bacon writes of his new system of logic and inductive reasoning that he thinks is superior to the traditional Aristotelian syllogism (deductive reasoning, or the logical argument in which the conclusion is inferred from two other premises.) Bacon’s title refers to Aristotle’s work Organon, his treatise on logic and syllogism based on deductive reasoning (facts determined by constructive arguments that give a conclusion based on a set of premises), versus the new Baconian method of inductive reasoning (reasoning based upon observances which allows for the possibility that the drawn conclusion is false, even when the premises are true). This method was the precursor to the scientific method. Isaac Asimov writes of Bacon:

Bacon’s great contribution to experimental science was the respectability he gave it. In 1605 Bacon published a book called Advancement of Learning in which he argued against mysticism and characterized the dead hand of tradition as the true devil threatening mankind. There was no use, he said, in studying magic and trying to work through spirits. Science should concern itself with the actual world that was apparent to the senses, for its true purpose was not that of bolstering religious faith, but of improving the human condition. […] Largely because of Bacon’s influence, experimental science became fashionable among English gentlemen. A group of them began to gather to discuss and practice the new intellectual fad, in imitation of the “House of Solomon,” a community of investigators and philosophers described by Bacon in his book The New Atlantis. This finally developed into the Royal Society, perhaps the most unusual collection of brilliant scientists to forgather in a single city since the great days of Alexandria. Yet Bacon had a real-life model to draw on,

106 In Italian this passage from Bacon is translated: “La mente brama infatti, per trovar quiete di elevarsi a cose più generali: e dopo un breve indugio, l’esperienza le ripugna. Ma quesi mali sono ora resi più gravi dalla dialettica a causa della pomposità delle dispute”; Pirandello most likely borrowed this passage from a note in Giovanni Marchesini’s book Le finzioni dell’anima (The Fictions of the Soul) (TLN 2: 1013)
too; for a similar group, “Accademia dei Lincei,” had been established in Rome earlier by Italian physicist, Giambattista della Porta. Its membership had included Galileo (Asimov 98-98).

Interestingly, Francis Bacon, in whose scientific method of logic and deductive reasoning Reda whole-heartedly believes (and Pirandello vehemently rejects), is connected also to the Accademia dei Lincei—originally exclusively dedicated to the mathematical and natural sciences but after in the modern epoch incorporated the disciplines of philology, history and morality (TLN 2: 1009). In “Rinunzia,” Pirandello argues against Bacon’s principles of logic which, despite progress in science, result, more importantly, in a “mortale malsanìa” (“spiritual sickness”) and “malessere intellettuale” (“intellectual malaise”) (Sp 1-2); to live a harmonious life, man must follow the laws and logic inherent in nature and adapt, not to formulated man-made logic, but to the fluid movement of the universe.

In the next part of the story, all of the guests are alarmed by the screams of Miss Nini Gilli and her mother. Earlier that day, Nini had gone alone into the thicket of the old convent and had had bad encounter; she had come running back, yelling and disheveled. She was now in her room, writhing in a terrible convulsion of nerves. No one understood what had happened to her. Scamozzi calls together the other guests and hotel staff to go down to the old convent and look around, but they are hesitant to leave; they all want to wait to hear the opinion of Professor Reda, who was also a medical doctor. Only Vernoni declared himself ready to follow Scamozzi. The others, having little faith in these two men, pretend not to hear. Finally, Reda appears and tells everyone not to worry—that it is a slight passing psychosis, a “crisi isterica” (“hysteric”). After hearing Reda’s diagnosis, Vernoni says that he knows what happened: Nini must have had a hallucination at the
convent because he too had heard melodical organ music the other day when he was there alone. Vernoni insists that Miss Gilli must have also heard this music but the hotel owner interrupts and dismisses him, welcoming the opinion of the illustrious Dr. Reda.

Everyone begins to laugh at Vernoni and Reda smugly returns to his lounge under the beech tree. Nini’s mother comes rushing out in search of the hotel owner because her daughter had another convulsion, saying that she would die if she remained at the hotel another night. Interestingly, Nini tells her mother that she had heard organ music in the small church of the convent and Vernoni is validated. The others, however, conclude that he too suffers from hysterics. Vernoni ignores them and engages Nini in conversation about the music, and she tells him that all of a sudden she saw lit candles and monks in a procession. Nini is interrupted by her mother, who fearing another convulsion, ushers her back into her room. Vernoni begins talking, with his usual animated fervor, about occultism, mediums, telepathy, premonitions, and materializations. In the first two printings of this story, materializations was followed “di piano astrale di teosofia” [“about the astral plane of theosophy”] (TLN 2: 1014). The narrator says:

E il professor Dionisio Vernoni attaccò subito col suo solito fervore; e cominciò a parlare di occultismo e di medianismo, di telepatia e di premonizioni, di apporti e di materializzazioni: e a gli occhi de’ suoi ascoltatori sbalorditi popolò di meraviglie e di fantasime la terra che l’orgoglio umano imbecille ritiene abitata soltanto dagli uomini e da quelle poche bestie che l’uomo conosce e di cui si serve. Madornale errore! Vivono, vivono su la terra di vita naturale, naturalissima al pari della nostra, altri esseri, di cui noi nello stato normale non possiamo avere, per difetto nostro, percezione; ma che si rivelano a volte, in certe condizioni anormali, e ci riempiono di sgomento; esseri sovrumani, nel senso che sono oltre la nostra povera umanità, ma naturali anch’essi, naturalissimi, soggetti ad altre leggi che noi ignoriamo, o meglio, che la nostra coscienza ignora, ma a cui forse inconsciamente obbediamo anche noi: abitanti della terra non umani, essenze elementali¹⁰⁷, spiriti della natura di tutti i generi,

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, the 1907, 1919 and 1925 versions of “Dal naso al cielo” use the word “elementali” but the Mondadori edition, published in 1937 (after Pirandello’s death), replaced “elementali”
And Professor Dionisio Vernoni immediately attacked with his usual fervor, and began speaking about occultism and mediumship, telepathy and premonitions, and of materializations: and to the eyes of his stunned audience he populated the earth with wonders and phantoms that foolish human pride maintains is inhabited only by men and the few animals known to man and of that which serves him. Egregious error! They live, they live on the land of natural life, the most natural compared to us, other beings, of which we can not have in the normal state, for our failure, perception; but which sometimes reveal themselves, in certain abnormal conditions, and fill us with dismay; superhuman beings, in that they are beyond our poor humanity, but they are also natural, very natural, subject to other laws that we ignore, or better, that our consciousness ignores, but to which perhaps unconsciously we obey even ourselves: non-human inhabitants of the earth, elemental essences, spirits of nature of all kinds, who live among us, in the rocks, and in the forests, and in the air, and in the water, and the fire, invisible, but which can sometimes materialize themselves.

Vernoni is angry that Reda would not engage in this discussion, and he tries to provoke him, bursting into a rant against positive science and against certain so-called scientists who did not see anything beyond their own noses. Everyone grew silent, terrified by Vernoni’s outrage. Reda, who was lounging with his eyes closed, stood up and without saying anything, casually started out toward the abandoned convent.

Later that evening, after Vernoni and Scamozzi escorted Mrs. Gilli and her daughter to the train station, everyone was beginning to worry about Professor Reda because had not yet returned from the convent and had a weak heart. The men volunteer to look for him, and with lit torches, they set out through the thick woods. They searched for about an hour and decided to call off the search until the next morning. The next morning the men continued to look everywhere without any luck until they heard a

with “elementari”—which according to Lucio Lugnani, is a lectio facilior (easier reading) of the original typography (TLN 2: 1014)
scream. There, under a chestnut tree about fifty steps from the convent, lay the body of Romualdo Reda, small and supine, without any signs of violence—perhaps dead from a heart attack. From the top of the tree was spider’s web that extended to the tip of Reda’s nose. The story concludes: “E dal naso del piccolo senatore un ragnetto quasi invisibile, che sembrava uscito di tra i peluzzi delle narici, viaggiava ignaro, su su, per quel filo che pareva si perdesse nel cielo” [“And from the nose of the small senator, a spider almost invisible, which seemed to come out from between the hairs of the nostrils, unaware traveled up, up, through that thread that seemed to be lost in the sky”] (TLN 2: 313).

Pirandello is able to demonstrate his anti-positivist argument using the metaphor of the music and the spider. It can be inferred that Reda’s ultimate undoing is the infinitesimal spider which is a physical manifestation of the inverted telescope. From the perspective of man, a spider is a tiny particle. In his failure to believe in the power and strength of small creatures, the organ music, or that which he could not see or hear, Reda becomes a victim of his own ignorance. He himself did not hear the music nor was he able to see the spider that would ultimately be his demise. Pirandello presents traditional scientists versus those looking to Theosophy and Spiritualism to go beyond empiricism, mysterious happenings, and occult phenomena. In the end, as in Luigi Capuana’s story “L’invisibile” (“The Unseen”), he leaves it to the reader to decipher what really happened. Perhaps Reda’s death was due to his inability to accept the mysterious or feel amazement, as stated by Einstein in the beginning of this section): “The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle” (Einstein Ideas and Opinions 11).
All’uscita

In Pirandello’s one-act play, *All’uscita (At the Exit)* (1916), the main characters—all recently deceased souls—are staged in what can be read as the Theosophical astral plane and its corresponding purgatorial realm, the Kamaloca. Set in a cemetery, the dead wander the grounds in a state of confusion and uncertainty; they are defined and confined by their own perceptions until they are able to free themselves of their human attachments and cast off the shadow of illusion they created for themselves in life. The main characters, called *apparenze* (appearances), are the Philosopher (il Filosofo), the Fat Man (l’Uomo Grasso), the Murdered Woman (la Donna Uccisa), and the Little Boy With a Pomegranate (il Bambino della Melagrana). They are known only by a paired down description of their present appearance. As the title implies, these souls must relinquish their former illusions in order to “exit” the astral plane and continue their journey of spiritual evolution. The other minor characters, called, “Aspetti della vita” (“Aspects of life”), are a passing peasant family and their donkey. Pirandello’s transition from the short story and novel to the stage in *All’uscita*, as well as *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*, demonstrates his growing desire to represent ghost-like and unrealized characters. The venue of the theater allows Pirandello to make use of dramatic lighting to increase the effect of the fantastic reality and to actualize ghost-like appearances, suspended between worlds. According to Antonio Illiano, the central characters can be seen as existing on three different Theosophical levels of consciousness.

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*All’uscita (At the Exit)*, defined by Pirandello as a “mistero profano” (“profane mystery”), was first published in “Nuova Anthologie” in 1916, and the following year it was included in the volume of *novelle, E domani, lunedì… (And tomorrow, Monday...)*. See “I morti ritornano nel mondo in veste di apparenze: All’uscita” (Miro d’Ajeta, Barbara de Il seme, il germoglio e il fiore 59).
Illiano argues that Pirandello’s *apparenze* suffer from an existential crisis that he terms the *Tantalus syndrome*; they are suspended in a purgatorial condition between two planes, having died to their physical selves, but they are not yet free to advance to the next sub plane. According to Illiano, the *apparenze* can be read as existing on three varying levels of Theosophical consciousness. Existing on the *manas*, or mental plane, the Philosopher demonstrates the exasperated need to reason and enlighten others with his philosophical knowledge. The Fat Man, residing in the *kama* state, or emotional plane, is unaware of his condition and cannot resolve to move from the bench where he has been sitting for many days. The character of the Murdered Woman, the wife of the Fat Man, may be interpreted as one of the depraved dwellers or spooks of the *Kamaloca*, and the Little Boy with the Pomegranate represents the life force, or the vital principle of *prana* (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 348). As described earlier in this chapter, the time each character spends on the astral plane is proportional to the strength of their cravings and passions. This accounts for the accelerated progression of the Boy with the Pomegranate. The boy only desires to eat his pomegranate, and he vanishes soon after. He is still young and innocent—not yet burdened by cravings and illusions.

In the beginning of the play, the Philosopher explains to the Fat Man that in order to progress from this dimension he must let go of his regrets, which according to the Philosopher are all illusions anyway. The Fat Man bemoans that his regrets are real but The Philosopher explains that he could not enjoy his beautiful garden while he was alive because his consciousness was too entangled in the pettiness of his thoughts, such as his disappointment over his wife’s taking of a lover. Unwilling to detach from his earthly passions, the Fat Man continues to protest that his reality really was reality and not an
illusion. The Philosopher, with the aim of exposing the deceit of the Fat Man’s illusion, elucidates man’s pattern of needing to create for himself a reality to house all his empty ideas and sentiments. The Philosopher urges him to understand that the affair his wife had with another man could not have had the same reality for her that it had for him, since her betrayal caused her pleasure and him pain. The Philosopher reveals that the source of his suffering was the vain illusion that his wife belonged solely to him. The Philosopher counsels the Fat Man to let go of the shadow of illusion that he is clinging to so that he can continue his spiritual evolution. At this point, the Fat Man’s wife arrives after having been murdered by her lover who, on his own, realized that the perceived joy of having her all to himself was truly an illusion.

The guidance of the Philosopher leads those on the astral plane to closely examine their lives. Illiano writes of the characters’ “exasperated need for self-analysis”:

In an atmosphere of heightened emotionalism, the “appearances” tend to evoke and confess their troubles with keen and compelling voices. This exasperated need for self-analysis is the direct result of their search for either evasion or self-realization, a sort of subliminal anxiety and uncertainty that ties them to their former human condition. The habit of indulging in piecemeal, choked-up, and often self-deprecating confession is not merely a matter of technique; already in such an early play as All’uscita, Pirandello’s major characters are conceived and portrayed as locked in and consumed by a deep-seated feeling of their own existential incompleteness. (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 348)

The apparenze are poised to either accept that they have lived in a created reality and advance spiritually, or they can deny it and remain in the lower plane of the astral world. The torment of the Tantalus syndrome is allievated when the apparenze come to terms with their self-deception. As soon as the Fat Man accepts the Philosopher’s reality/illusion theory, he vanished—leaving only his cane behind. This process is clearly evidenced by the brief appearance of the Little Boy, who having very few earthly desires
and egoic attachments, disappears first. After the Murdered Woman’s emotional encounter with the Boy with the Pomegranate and the little peasant girl, she experiences empathy and, having been granted redemption, she vanishes as well. The Philosopher is the only apparenze that has not vanished at the end of the story.

It is crucial to mention that the Philosopher does not continue to the next phase of his spiritual pilgrimage, but is a fixture in the Kamaloca—albeit as a spiritual guide. In her book Characters and Authors in Luigi Pirandello, Ann Caesar writes of All’uscita, “It is the character of the Philosopher who, trapped at this point of transition and fearing that he will never pass through the gates to the world beyond, will be the founding father of Pirandello’s stage raisonneurs” (Caesar 168). At the end of the play, while finally alone and free to express his emotional state, he says, “Ho paura ch’io solo resterò sempre qua, seguitando a ragionare” [“I’m afraid I alone will always remain here, still reasoning …”] (Maschere nude 10: 20; William Murray, trans. Pirandello’s One-Act Plays 188). I agree with Illiano’s analysis that Pirandello’s conceptual treatment of his characters as suspended “at the exit,” and their placement in the existential limbo of the Kamaloka, provoke the diagnosis of the Tantalus syndrome. If, according to Illiano’s theory, the syndrome is mitigated through the spiritual evolution to the next phase, what conclusion can one draw about the character of the Philosopher, who remains bound to reason while the other inhabitants migrate to a higher plane? This internment of the Philosopher evokes questions as to Pirandello’s own position regarding the role of the philosopher in society. Caesar comments on the Pirandellian philosopher, “All his key male characters— the philosophers, the raisonneurs who speak for the human condition— speak as outsiders. It is not a condition they have been born into, but one that
by accident or design they have acquired. This often means that they are geographically and physically set apart” (Ann Caesar 165). This marginalization is crucial for Mattia Pascal and Vitangelo Moscarda to assess their predicament and elucidate the truth (as will be examined in the following chapters). Similarly, the Philosopher must remain isolated as the thinking principle, amongst the other apparenze, in order to continue to enlighten the confounded dwellers and help guide them on their spiritual journey.

Building upon Illiano’s work, I argue that Pirandello’s character of the Philosopher is the true embodiment of Tantalus as he is endlessly yearning to communicate what he considers to be the truth, and can never abandon his duty as a rational intellectual and advance spiritually. In All’uscita it is the Philosopher who is punished most severely in the end; like Tantalus in the water, condemned to a lifetime of futile attempts to taste the fruit that dangles above him, the Philosopher is obliged to spend his life proselytizing and defending his philosophies. Pirandello’s philosopher does not have the choice to abandon this fundamental role, as he would never consider his own philosophy to be an illusory attachment that perhaps he too has created to house his vain sentiments. I argue that Pirandello is, perhaps, the ultimate philosopher and therefore the greatest sufferer of the Tantalus syndrome, as he clearly experienced a ceaseless yearning that vacillated from his mind to his characters in a lifelong cycle.
Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore

Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore can be seen as both the breaking point within Pirandello’s dramatic production, and as his first attempt to explore the narrow boundaries between fiction and reality in general and on the stage in particular. [...] In this play, Pirandello explores the impossibility of identifying a single source of discourse in an unambiguous instance of signification of a text. Here, one finds and explicit conflict between the author’s subjective stance and the fable that each Character believes to be objective, so that in Sei personaggi, more than in the other texts of the trilogy, ‘the battle of signatures explodes.’ This unresolved conflict extends also to the supposed objectivity of the written text and the subjectivity of author, actors, Characters, and spectators, a conflict which never finds a true resolution in the prevailing Pirandellian text. The absence of a dominant point of view leaves the Characters a prey to their conflicts. (Donato Santeramo 42)

Bearing resemblance to the protagonists, Dr. Scoto and Dr. Fileno, of the short stories “Personaggi” and “La tragedia d’un personaggio,” the six characters serve Pirandello’s aesthetic purpose: to create art that represents the spontaneity and vitality of life. There is a discernible evolution, however, from Pirandello’s presentation and representation of the two doctors to the six characters. The most glaring is the transition from the novella to the stage. Interestingly, Pirandello originally conceived Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author) as a novel, as detailed in a letter to his son, Stefano. It is entirely plausible that his decision to write the theatrical piece came upon Pirandello organically as his characters began to appear before him, acting out their own drama. Pirandello writes in the Preface in 1925:

Posso soltanto dire che, senza sapere d’averli punto cercati, mi trovai davanti, viva da poterli toccare, vivi da poterli toccare, vivi a poterne udire perfino il respiro, quei sei personaggi che ora si vedono sulla scena. E

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109 Pirandello writes of this very type of novelistic experience when describing the independence of his characters during the scripting process of Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore (Six Characters in Search of an Author): “Il bello è questo, che hanno lasciato me e si sono messi a rappresentare tra loro le scene, così come dovrebbero essere. Me lo rappresentano davanti, ma come se io non potessi in alcun modo impedirlo” [“The nice thing is this, that they have left me and they perform the scenes among themselves, as they should be. They represent it in front of me, but as if I could not in any way prevent it”] (Spsv 1257).
attendevano, li presenti, ciascuno col suo tormento segreto e tutti uniti dalla nascita e dal viluppo delle vicende reciproche, ch’io li facessi entrare nel mondo dell’arte, componendo delle loro persone, delle loro passioni e dei loro casi un romanzo, un dramma o almeno una novella. Nati vivi, volevano vivere. (Maschere nude 1: 36)

I can only say that, without having made any effort to seek them out, I found before me, alive—you could touch them and even hear them breathe—the six characters now seen on the stage. And they stayed there in my presence, each with his secret torment and all bound together by the one common origin and mutual entanglement of their affairs, while I had them enter the world of art, constructing from their persons, their passions, and their adventures a novel, a drama, or at least a story. Born alive, they wished to live. (Trans. Eric Bentley 364)

The second appreciable shift from the earlier works is that, as implied immediately by the title, the characters are represented as searching for an author whereas the search for an author ended for both Dr. Scoto and Dr. Fileno as soon as they were initially rejected in the author’s study. The character of Father explains in the play that their author did not finish writing their story so they are, therefore, “rejected” characters.

Like Dr. Fileno, the Father says:

Nel senso, veda, che l’autore che ci creò, vivi, non volle poi, o non poté materialmente, metterci al mondo dell’arte. E fu un vero delitto, signore, perché chi ha la ventura di nascere personaggio vivo, può ridersi anche della morte. Non muore più! Morrà l’uomo, lo scrittore, strumento della creazione; la creatura non muore più! E per vivere eterna non ha neanche bisogno di straordinarie doti o di compiere prodigi. Chi era Sancho Panza? Chi era don Abbondio? Eppure vivono eterni, perché—vivi germi—ebbero la ventura di trovare una matrice feconda, una fantasia che li seppe allevare e nutrire, far vivere per l’eternità! (Maschere nude 1: 59)

In the sense, that is, that the author who created us alive no longer wished, or was no longer able, materially to put us into a work of art. And this was a real crime, sir; because he who has had the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. He cannot die. The man, the writer, the instrument of the creation will die, but his creation does not die. And to live forever, it does not need to have extraordinary gifts or to be able to work wonders. Who was Sancho Panza? Who was Don Abbondio? Yet they live eternally because—live germs as they were—they had the
fortune to find a fecundating matrix, a fantasy which could raise and nourish them: make them live for ever! (Trans. Bentley 218)

The Father never reveals, however, that he and his family went before the author and asked to him to put them in a work of art. Only later in the added Preface, does Pirandello explain that these six, like Scoto and Fileno, were also escorted to him by his maidservant, Fantasy. Antonio Illiano writes in “Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*: A Comedy in the Making”:

It all started one day when Fantasy, the “maidservant” of Pirandello’s art, inexplicably gave birth to six characters. It is not hard to accept this basic fact. These figures, however, have a very peculiar birth defect—one not readily seen. They are deprived of the consciousness of their true paternity: they know they are characters, they know they are rejected characters, they believe they were create and then deserted by some author, but they are completely unaware of the most crucial truth of all, namely, that their blood is truly Pirandellian. Once deprived of their identity, it is easy for the author to have them do whatever he likes. So he has them knock at his door and persistently beg him to write them down, in a play or novel. Not a chance. For a while he argues he has to find meaning for them, a meaning that would justify their artistic existence. Till finally, he has another spark of genius: Why not represent them just as they are, as rejected and unfinished: *This* may well be their meaning! So he grants them a fake passport, so to speak, and makes them believe that they are free to go and search for their promised land. So the six fools walk onto a stage, eager and desperate to achieve what they don't realize is unattainable, that is, what has *a priori* been decreed as such by their creator. On that stage, which the author has purposefully chosen for them, because it is totally unprepared to receive them, they come to face with a most exasperating failure. But this is not all. Not by any means. Where is the author, while both actors and characters engage in a dialogue or cross purposes? Hiding and unseen, the author is watching all of them perform, and writing down his own play: The *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. It turns out that the poor stooges, while trying to enact their own suffering drama, have been used for a completely different purpose, one they do not and cannot suspect. (Illiano “Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*” 6-7).

Like the *apparenze* in *All’uscita*, the six characters are not given names, as were Fileno and Scoto, but are known only by their familial roles. There is a distinct move away from
the storyline of the author listening to Dr. Scoto’s and Dr. Fileno’s calculated philosophical appeals for why they should become immortal characters, and a concentrated move toward the enlivened and spontaneous element of the family. The author scornfully rejected the professional men—mocking Scoto for his foolish interest in Theosophy and dismissing Fileno for his \textit{lanternosophy}. Pirandello perhaps refuses the doctors plea for immortality because of their insistence on dogmatic philosophies as the answer to human suffering. Both men were educated and offered persuasive arguments but unlike the six characters, Pirandello does not even grant them the opportunity to be realized as “rejected.”

In the Preface to \textit{Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore}, Pirandello explains that because he could not find meaning or value in the story of the six characters, he concluded there was no use in making them live. He writes, “I thought to myself: ‘I have already afflicted my readers with hundred and hundreds of stories. Why should I afflict them now by narrating the sad entanglements of these six unfortunates?’” Pirandello then says that he tried to put the characters away from him but, he explains, “Creatures of my spirit, these six were already living a life which was their own and not mine any more, a life which it was not in my power any more to deny them” (Eric Bentley, ed. \textit{Naked Masks} 365, Preface to \textit{Six Characters in Search of an Author}). As discussed in the “Personaggi” section, Pirandello’s testimony of his characters’ detachment echoes the Theosophical supposition of the thought that takes on a form of its own and becomes autonomous from its creator, as explained in \textit{Thought-Forms} (1901) by Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater. This most adequately describes Pirandello’s own description of his unconscious artistic method of character creation. Pirandello writes of this very type of
novelistic experience when describing the independence of his characters—first while he was trying to ignore them, and then again during the scripting of Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore. Pirandello explains the process of his thoughts becoming independent form and his highlights his enlightening moment of reconciliation:

Thus it is that while I persisted in desiring to drive them out of my spirit, they, as if completely detached from every narrative support, characters from a novel miraculously emerging from the pages of the book that contained them, went on living on their own, choosing certain moments of the day to reappear before me in the solitude of my study and coming—now one, now the other, now two together—to tempt me, to propose that I present or describe this scene or that, to explain the effects that could be secured with them, the new interest which a certain unusual situation could provide, and so forth. For a moment I let myself be won over. And this condescension of mine, thus letting myself go for a while, was enough, because they drew from it a new increment of life, a greater degree of clarity and addition, consequently a greater degree of persuasive power over me. And thus as it became gradually harder and harder for me to go back and free myself from them, it became easier and easier for them to come back and tempt me. At a certain point I actually became obsessed with them. Until, all of a sudden, a way out of the difficulty flashed upon me. “Why not,” I said to myself, “present this highly strange fact of an author who refuses to let some of his characters live though they have been born in his fantasy, and the fact that these characters, having by now life in their veins, do not resign themselves to remaining excluded from the world of art? They are detached from me; live on their own; have acquired voice and movement; have by themselves—in this struggle for existence that they have had to wage with me—become dramatic characters, characters that can move and talk on their own initiative; already see themselves as such; have learned to defend themselves against me; will even know how to defend themselves against others. And so let them go where dramatic characters do go to have life: on a stage. And let us see what will happen.” That’s what I did. And, naturally, the result was what it had to be: a mixture of tragic and comic, fantastic and realistic, in a humorous situation that was quite new and infinitely complex, a drama which is conveyed by means of the characters, who carry it within them and suffer it, a drama, breathing, speaking, self-propelled, which seeks at all costs to find the means of its own presentation; and the comedy of the vain attempt at an improvised realization of the drama on stage. First, the surprise of the poor actors in a theatrical company rehearsing a play by day on a bare stage (no scenery, no flats). Surprise and incredulity at the sight of the six characters announcing themselves as such in search of an author. Then, immediately afterwards, through that sudden fainting fit of
the Mother veiled in black, their instinctive interest in the drama of which they catch a glimpse in her and in the other members of the strange family, an obscure, ambiguous drama, coming about so unexpectedly on a stage that is empty and unprepared to receive it. And gradually the growth of this interest to the bursting forth of the contrasting passions of Father, of Step-Daughter, of Son, of that poor Mother, passions seeking, as I said, to overwhelm each other with a tragic, lacerating fury. (Trans. Bentley 365-366)\textsuperscript{110}

Pirandello then explains that though the six characters appear to exist according to varying levels of realization, which he unconsciously intuited as the way to create them, “they are all six at the same point of artistic realization and on the same level of reality, which is the fantastic level of the whole play”] (Trans. Bentley 367).\textsuperscript{111} Antonio Illiano interprets the levels of existence experienced by the six characters and Madame Pace as

\textsuperscript{110} See Maschere nude 1: 37-38.

\textsuperscript{111} Pirandello explains the creation of his characters in the Preface: “Non tutti e sei i personaggi stanno in apparenza sullo stesso piano di formazione, ma non perché vi siano fra essi figure di primo o secondo piano, cioè “protagonisti” e “macchiette”—che allora sarebbe elementare prospettiva, necessaria a ogni architettura scenica o narrativa—e non perché non siano tutti, per quello che servono, compiutamente formati. Sono, tutti e sei, allo stesso punto di realizzazione artistica, e tutti e sei, sullo stesso piano di realtà, che e il fantastico della commedia. Se non che il Padre, la Figliastra e anche il Figlio sono realizzati come spirito; come natura è la madre; ma come “presenze” il Giovinotto che guarda e compie un gesto e la Bambina del tutto inerte. Questo fatto crea fra essi una prospettiva di nuovo genere. Incoscientemente avevo avuto l’impressione che mi bisognasse farli apparire alcuni piú realizzati (artisticamente), altri meno, altri appena appena raffigurati come elementi d’un fatto da narrare e rappresentare: i piú vivi, i piú compiutamente creati, il Padre e la Figliastra, che vengono naturalmente piú avanti e guidano e si trascino appreso il peso quasi morto degli altri: uno, il Figlio, riluttante; l’altro, la Madre, come una vittima rassegnata, tra quelle due creaturine che quasi non hanno alcuna consistenza se non appena nella loro apparenza e che han bisogno di essere condotte per mano” [“If the six characters don’t all seem to exist on the same plane, it is not because some are figures of first rank and others of the second, that is, some are main characters and others minor ones—the elementary perspective necessary to all scenic or narrative art—nor is it that any are not completely created—for their purpose. They are all six at the same point of artistic realization and on the same level of reality, which is the fantastic level of the whole play. Except that the Father, the Step-Daughter, and also the Son are realized as mind; the Mother as nature; the Boy as a presence watching and performing a gesture and the Baby unaware of it all. This fact creates among them a perspective of a new sort. Unconsciously I had had the impression that some of them needed to he fully realized (artistically speaking), others less so, and others merely sketched in as elements in a narrative or presentational sequence: the most alive, the most completely created, are the Father and the Step-Daughter who naturally stand out more and lead the way, dragging themselves along beside the almost dead weight of the others—first, the Son, holding back; second, the Mother, like a victim resigned to her fate, between the two children who have hardly any substance beyond their appearance and who need to be led by the hand”] (Maschere nude 1: 39; Trans. Bentley Naked Masks 367)
corresponding to the Theosophical levels of consciousness. Illiano delineates the
characters according to their Theosophical levels:

The Six Characters, constantly yearning for the stage of completion and
purification, also live on three different theosophical levels of
consciousness: the two children are purely physical existence; the mother
and son exist on a purely emotional level; the stepdaughter and father are
at different stages of development between the emotional and the mental
planes. Accordingly, in the end of their tearful performance, they will
separate. The gunshot will signal the end of the bourgeois plot and their
violent return to different regions of the artistic limbo of the unrealized,
the limbo from which they will be magnetically attracted to the door of
any idle author or to any real or potential stage. The two children will
presumably return to their state of unconscious innocence; the
stepdaughter, leaving the stage with the shrieking laughter of a completed
but still unfulfilled vengeance, will presumably sink close to the sorriest
unredeemed; the father, mother and son are left as a group, on a stage
lighted in green and blue, perhaps sharing a mystical hope for redemption
through religious experience. To still another level, that of pure instinct,
belongs the seventh character, the spook of Madame Pace, the grotesque
portrayal of a sense of peace and harmony that will never be realized, for
it is not sought in earnest. Her flashy dress and vulgar behavior are in tune
with her hybrid jargon, which is not merely the trademark of her
international and intercultural profession but the true indicator and
measure of her lack of perception and moral conscience: she is a character
so grossly vulgar as to shock even the actors. (Illiano “Pirandello and
Theosophy” 349)

As Pirandello explained, the different levels of the characters’ realization serve to
emphasize the enlivened element of the Father and the Step-Daughter, who are motivated
by their passionate need to express their story. Illiano concludes:

The pathetic apparitions or ghosts of All’uscita have naturally developed
into full-fledged theatrical creations. Each character identifies with an
emotion while all of them actualize a new concept which they all
recognize as the essence of their being: the fulfillment of artistic
autonomy. The phantoms have shed all traces of their theosophical genesis
and finally attained the new and original Pirandellian status of artistic
concepts, true, alive and permanent. (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy”
350)
Though throughout his career Pirandello becomes more cognizant of his modus operandi, upon reflection of his work, he himself seems awed by the miraculous way he unconsciously intuited the way to resolve the inevitable problem of trying to represent the realized but rejected characters. Pirandello writes that *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* was conceived in a spontaneous illumination of fantasy that was made possible when all elements of the spirit functioned together in divine agreement. In the preface Pirandello states:

Il fatto è che la commedia fu veramente concepita in un’illuminazione spontanea della fantasia, quando, per prodigio, tutti gli elementi dello spirito si rispondono e lavorano in un divano accordo. Nessun cervello umano, lavorandoci a freddo, per quanto ci si fosse travagliato, sarebbe mai riuscito a penetrare e a poter soddisfare tutte le necessità della sua forma. (*Maschere nude* 1: 39)

The fact is that the play was really conceived in one of those spontaneous illuminations of the fantasy when by a miracle all the elements of the mind answer to each other’s call and work in divine accord. No human brain, working “in the cold,” however stirred up it might be, could ever have succeeded in penetrating far enough, could ever have been in a position to satisfy all the exigencies of the play’s form.\(^{112}\)

The modality of the drama, therefore, is the perfect arena for Pirandello to present characters that have been created and rejected by an author yet are still longing for life.

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\(^{112}\) See *Maschere nude* 1: 39. The translation continues: “Therefore the reasons which I will give to clarify the values of the play must not be thought of as intentions that I conceived beforehand when I prepared myself for the job and which I now undertake to defend, but only as discoveries which I have been able to make afterwards in tranquillity. I wanted to present six characters seeking an author. Their play does not manage to get presented—precisely because the author whom they seek is missing. Instead is presented the comedy of their vain attempt with all that it contains of tragedy by virtue of the fact that the six characters have been rejected. But can one present a character while rejecting him? Obviously, to present him one needs, on the contrary, to receive him into one's fantasy before one can express him. And I have actually accepted and realized the six characters: I have, however, accepted and realized them as rejected: in search of another author. What have I rejected of them? Not themselves, obviously, but their drama, which doubtless is what interests them above all but which did not interest me—for the reasons already indicated. Every creature of fantasy and art, in order to exist, must have his drama, that is, a drama in which he may be a character and for which he is a character. This drama is the character’s *raison d’être*, his vital function, necessary for his existence. In these six, then, I have accepted the “being” without the reason for being” (Bentley, trans. 368).
The physicality of such characters on the stage, enhanced by their exasperated need to find an author, offers the audience an actual representation of Pirandello’s conceptualization of the conflict between life and form—what the critic Adriano Tilgher called “the life-form formula.” Anthony Caputi writes:

Certainly the life-form formula is quintessentially theatrical. Flux, tension, change: these are the conditions of life, or as Pirandello put it more precisely in the letter to Silvio D’Amico, of the movement that is in eternal conflict with form within life. Forms are what we need to bring clarity and a semblance of stability to the welter of experience. They are the roles we play and the masks we assume and then put aside: they are the social games of courtship and marriage and duty that bring meaning to the enveloping mystery. The struggle between form and movement is at the heart of the idea that experience is fundamentally theatrical. (Caputi 108)

It is understandable why this play was not initially well received by the public or the critics—as its brilliance is deeply rooted in a lifetime of conceptualizations and artistic experimentations. The drama on stage is the characters’ drama—they were not written for the audience and so they do not perform as such. Anne Paolucci writes of the inherent dramatic paradox of Sei personaggi:

Like the great heroes of classical tragedy, they are doomed to an inexorable moral compulsion to assert themselves in the one single thrust which is the fullness of their being; but their commitment lacks the awesome confidence of insight into necessity. They cannot explain; they can only narrate and act out the key moment that has shaped them. They come onstage masked; but this too is a paradox, for they are the most alive and, in spite of their straining for precise and unambiguous terms, the most articulate characters on the stage. In them the entire spectrum of emotional life and the painful dialectic which it demands for expression is put forth as the key meaning. And yet, Pirandello will not let us forget, they embody a dramatic paradox too—for, although we may be tempted to look upon them as “real” in the same way way that so many of us regard Shakespeare’s Hamlet as a “real” person, they, no less than Hamlet, are characters playing a part in a provocative and exciting play. Onstage, real actors must play the roles and convince us that they are nevertheless roles beyond the capabilities of “mere” actors! […] Those characters who invade the stage are non an interruption, obviously, but the heart of the
matter. The paradox they contain is extended, through Pirandello’s ingenious use of stage conventions, into the larger paradox of the artistic “illusion” attempted by the actors and, beyond that, to the ultimate confrontation with the audience. (Paolucci 46)

While the characters’ own stories are entertaining, such as the encounter between the Step-Daughter and her Step-Father at the bordello, the vignettes are never given the space to be completely re-enacted for the Manager and cast of actors, as well as for the actual audience. An audience expecting a typical night of entertainment at the theater would most likely have been disappointed by Pirandello’s modern theatrical experiment.

The chaotic intersection of the six characters and the actors, the Father’s need to explain one side and the Manager’s insistence of the other, the dramatic lights, the shocking deaths of the children, and the lack of a conclusive ending, all contribute to the tension of the drama. Pirandello explains in the Preface:

And here is the universal meaning at first vainly sought in the six characters, now that, going on stage of their own accord, they succeed in finding it within themselves in the excitement of the desperate struggle which each wages against the other and all wage against the Manager and the actors, who do not understand them. Without wanting to, without knowing it, in the strife of their bedevilled souls, each of them, defending himself against the accusations of the others, expresses as his own living passion and torment the passion and torment which for so many years have been the pangs of my spirit: the deceit of mutual understanding irremediably founded on the empty abstraction of the words, the multiple personality of everyone corresponding to the possibilities of being to be found in each of us, and finally the inherent tragic conflict between life (which is always moving and changing) and form (which fixes it, immutable). (Trans. Bentley 367)

The tension that arises indicates Pirandello’s successful representation of the conflict between the natural movement of life and the human demands for form. As conferred by Anthony Caputi: “Altogether, the dramatic action that Pirandello has devised here is his most masterful embodiment of his vision of life as theater” (Caputi 118).
CHAPTER THREE

A CURSE ON COPERNICUS!

IL FU MATTIA PASCAL

Reincarnation, Karma & the Tantalus Syndrome

“Oh perché gli uomini,” domandavo a me stesso, smaniosamente, “si affanano così a rendere man mano più complicato il congegno della loro vita? Perché tutto questo sdordimento di machine? E che farà l’uomo quando le machine faranno tutto? Si accorgerà allora che il così detto progresso non ha nulla a che fare con la felicità? Di tutte le invenzioni, con cui la scienza crede onestamente d’arricchire l’umanità (e la impoverisce, perché costano tanto care), che gioja in fondo proviamo noi, anche ammirandole?” […]

La scienza ha l’illusione di render più facile e più comoda l’esistenza! Ma, anch ammettendo che la renda veramente più facile, con tutte le sue machine così difficili e complicate, domando io: “E qual peggior servizio a chi sia condannato a una briga vana, che rendergliela facile e quasi meccanica?”

-Mattia Pascal

The novel Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal) (1904), is in essence, the tormented Mattia Pascal’s personal memoir detailing his journey for psychological realization and spiritual formation. Pirandello represents the psychological crisis of the protagonist, Mattia Pascal, and via the first-person narration, offers the reader a privileged view of Pascal’s labored quest to understand, and ultimately heal, his fragmented conscience and spiritual sickness. In an effort to remove the barrier that

113 From the ninth chapter of Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal), “Un po’ di nebbia” (“A Bit of Fog”), when Pascal, feeling lost in the jostling crowds in Rome, questions the progress of industry and science required of and perpetuated by the modern city (Tr 1: 429-430). Translation: “Oh why”… I asked myself desperately…” does mankind toil so to make the apparatus of its living more and more complicated? Why this clatter of machines? And what will man do when machines do everything for him? Will he then realize that what is called progress has nothing to do with happiness? Even if we admire all the inventions that science sincerely believes will enrich our lives (instead they make it poorer because the price is so high), what joy do they bring us after all?” […] Science has the illusion that it is making our existence easier and more comfortable. But even admitting that it’s easier, with all these difficult, complicated machines, I still ask: what worse turn could they do a man condemned to futile activity than to make it easy and almost mechanical for him? (Weaver, trans. 108)
conceals the individual’s interior thoughts and shields his soul from the scrutiny of the public, just as the Naturalists removed the fourth wall and opened private domestic affairs to public view, Pirandello penetrates the depths of Mattia Pascal’s consciousness and illustrates his search for existential completeness. In addition to his personal interest in the potential cathartic experience in telling one’s own story, as urged by Don Eligio, the “late” Mattia Pascal’s re-telling of his unique story of self-analysis and soul-searching allows for the public exposure of the inner-workings of the psyche and soul of a typical male at the turn of the century. Going beyond the ‘modern’ removal of the internal, psychological wall, however, Pirandello scripts this narration of the novel so that Mattia Pascal, forced to tell his strange story from start to finish, might come to discover the illusory walls of fiction that he had constructed by and within himself. I agree with scholar M. John Stella’s claim that Il fu Mattia Pascal must be read through a Buddhist lens, given the undeniable similarities between Buddhism and Pirandello’s exploration and representation of self-identity and suffering. The metaphorical deaths and the staging of Pascal in the after-life represent the pressing need to typical to Buddhist thought to “kill” the false self within so that the soul and spirit can be reborn. Stella writes:

What could be a more “serious purpose” than this: the total re-formation of one’s life, of one’s character? Mattia is determined to take advantage of his rare opportunity, to start anew with the proverbial clean slate. And in this new identity he will take charge of his destiny, in absolute freedom, setting out for new lands, unencumbered by the errors of the past; he alone will be the artificer of his “self.” Significantly, the very first thing he does is to choose a new name for himself—Adriano Meis—which he compiles from a conversation he overhears on the train. It very much indeed resembles a new “incarnation” for him, with the exhilaration that

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114 M. John Stella explains the Buddhist term for suffering: “For our purposes, we may say that for the first time he is compelled to confront the pervasive element of dukkha, or suffering in existence” (See Stella ‘Self and Suicide in Pirandello’).
accompanies every new birth: the possibilities seem endless, and thus his resolution to live not only a more pleasurable existence, but also a better one, seems quite feasible. This time, it will be different. (Stella “Self and suicide in Pirandello”)  

The novel makes clear, also in accordance with Buddhist thought, that unless there is a willing self-surrender of the ego and one's inner silence has been completely detached from its personal awareness, allowing him to become conscious of the inextricable interconnectedness of the universe, he has no choice but to return to another contrived reality which are conceptions Pirandello appropriates from Buddhist psychology.  

Because Mattia Pascal could not relinquish his need to know himself according to a societal standard, he was never able to surmount his ontological suspension. By decreeing that his book should only be read after his third, and final death, Mattia Pascal ensures that as the “late” Pascal, even though he does not quite know who he is, is leaving a legacy: “Io non saprei proprio dire ch’io mi sia” [“I can’t really say that I’m myself. I don’t know who I am”] (Tr 1: 578; Trans. Weaver 250).

Throughout his oeuvre, Pirandello demonstrates that man’s spiritual sickness is the result of his attachment to false perceptions and his attempts to stop the flux of life by creating stable and determinate forms. Pirandello believed that suffering was the result of man’s vain desires and his strong will, volontà, that drives him to create realities—which interrupt the flux of life by trying to fix forms; therefore, he is bound to live an inauthentic life of illusion. In an interview in 1924, Pirandello explains his conception of the human condition as a harsh struggle between life and form. Pirandello says:

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115 In Psychotherapy without the Self: A Buddhist Perspective, Mark Epstein writes: “As mindfulness develops the ability to discriminate successive moments of awareness, the emphasis is usually first on noting the successive arising of new mind moments. These perceptions begin to shake the foundations of what is termed “false view,” that is, the identification of the individual with the products of his own psyche” (Epstein 31).
Per molto tempo sono stato creduto un pessimista, forse perché c’era nelle mie opere un cerebralismo antiradizionale e reattivo. Ma non ero stato capito. La mia Arte è scevra di quel pessimismo che genera la sfiducia nella vita. E non sono neppure un negatore, perché nell’attività di spirito che mi tormenta e che anima le mie opere c’è un’incessante e spasmodica volontà di ‘creare la vita’. La vera morte consiste nel creare una realtà ed adagiarsela indefinitamente. La vita, invece, si crea e si rinnova in ogni momento. C’è nella mia Arte quasi la volontà di creare il terreno sotto i piedi ad ogni passo che viene mosso dai miei personaggi; e fra un passo e l’altro l’abisso! Io concepisco la vicenda umana come una lotta incessante ed aspra fra la vita e la forma. La vita è dinamica, fluida, multiforme, tesa in un inquieto moto di continuo divenire. La forma è la stasi, il dogma; essa è circoscritta ed immobile. La forma imprigiona la vita e l’anulla…

For a long time I was believed to be a pessimist, perhaps because in my work was an antirational and reactive cerebralism. But I had not been understood. My Art is devoid of that pessimism that generates the mistrust in life. And I am not even a denier, because in the activity of spirit that torments me and that motivates my work is a ceaseless and frantic will to ‘create life’. The real death is to create a reality and to make oneself comfortable in it indefinitely. Life, instead, creates and renews itself in every moment. There is almost sensual delight in my Art to create the ground beneath the feet and every step that is taken by my characters; and between one step and the other the abyss! I conceive of the human story as a harsh and relentless struggle between life and form. Life is dynamic, fluid, multiform, stretching in a restless motion of continuing to become. Form is stasis, dogma; it is confined and immobile. Form imprisons life and cancels it…

Pirandello’s philosophy mirrors that of the Buddha, as described in *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy*: “[The Buddha was] a genuine ‘free thinker’ because he not only conceded to everybody the right to think independently, but because he kept his own mind free from theories, thus refusing to base his teaching on mere beliefs or on dogmas. As a real thinker he tried to find an axiom, a self-evident formulation of truth, which could be universally accepted […] [He started] with [the] universally established principle, based on an experience that is common to all sentient

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116 This interview, titled “L’Arte e il pensiero di L. Pirandello,” was published in “L’Império” from November 11-12, 1924 (Ivan Pupo, ed. 289).
beings: the fact of suffering” (Govinda 48). David Galin’s description of the Buddhist tradition echoes Pirandello’s sentiments of life versus form:

The Buddhist tradition holds that Ordinary Man’s inborn erroneous view of self as an enduring entity is the cause of his suffering because he tries to hold on to that which is in constant flux and has no existence outside of shifting concepts. Therefore, a new corrective experience of self is needed. Buddhism takes great interest in how people experience their self, rather than just their abstract concept of it, because Buddhist practices are designed to lead to a new (correct) experience. It takes arduous training to modify or overcome the natural state of experiencing the self as persisting and unchanging. There is a great literature on the theory and practice of the three main paths leading to a changed experience of self. One path is via meditation trainings (changing mind processes or mind controls). Another is via theoretical argument (changing structure concepts, the contents of mind). The third path is social-behavioral, the life of active service. (Ed. Wallace 109)

For Pirandello, man’s spirit, soul, and consciousness—the essence of his Being—must be in harmony with each other as well as with other beings, people and nature, as all things are intrinsically connected and a manifestation of this universe. The belief in the dynamic and fluid nature of life, and the macrocosmic interconnectedness of all beings and things, are core tenets of various schools of Eastern mysticism. In *The Tao of Physics*, physicist Fritjof Capra writes:

The highest aim for their followers—whether they are Hindus, Buddhists or Taoists—is to become aware of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things, to transcend the notion of an isolated individual self and to identify themselves with the ultimate reality [. . .] In the Eastern view, then, the division of nature into separate objects is not fundamental and any such objects have a fluid and ever-changing character. The Eastern world view is therefore intrinsically dynamic and contains time and change as essential features. The cosmos is seen as one inseparable reality—for ever in motion, alive, organic; spiritual and material are the same. (Capra 24)

The Buddhist tradition’s diagnosis of and remedy for human suffering, embraced by Schopenhauer for its attribution of will and craving as the cause, overlaps Pirandello’s
view of the human situation. Pirandello shares in the Buddha’s refusal of dogma and he aims to impart, via his characters, a similar wisdom concerning man’s condition.

The novel, *Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal)* (1904), is one of Pirandello’s most successful representations of man’s suffering due to his relentless struggle with life and form. Mattia Pascal’s spiritual sickness is representative of such causes, and his failure to completely overcome his sickness is indicative of the inability to fully detach from his need for logic, reason and forms and his incapacity to immerse himself into the flux of life. In the chapter “Il lanternino” [“The little lantern”], Pirandello writes: “Noi abbiamo sempre vissuto e sempre vivremo con l’universo; anche ora, in questa forma nostra, partecipiamo a tutte le manifestazioni dell’universo, ma non lo sappiamo, non lo vediamo” [“We have always lived and always will live with the universe; Even now in our present form, we share in all the manifestations of the universe, but we don’t know it, we don’t see it”] (Tr 1: 488; Trans. Weaver 165). Pirandello’s use of the term “manifestations of the universe” can be compared to the use of the word Nature, as defined by Theosophy: “When a theosophist speaks of Nature, unless he limits the term to the physical world, he never means the physical world alone, but the vast reaches of Universal Kosmos and more particularly the inner realms, the causal factors of the boundless ALL” (Purucker 114). Therefore, for Pirandello, both man and nature, in the physical sense, are manifestations of the universe. Four years after the publication of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, Pirandello writes in “L’umorismo” that man’s crisis is due to his desperate tries to stop or prevent the movement of life, which is constantly in flux:

> La vita è un flusso continuo che noi cerchiamo d’arrestare, di fissare in forme stabili e determinate, dentro e fuori di noi, perché noi già siamo forme fissate, forme che si muovano in mezzo ad altre immobili, e che però possono seguire il flusso della vita, fino a tanto che, irrigidendosi
man mano, il movimento, già a poco a poco rallentato, non cessi. Le forme, in cui cerchiamo d’arrestare, di fissare in noi questo flusso continuo, sono i concetti, sono gli ideali a cui vorremmo serbarci coerenti, tutte le finzioni che creiamo, le condizioni, lo stato in cui tendiamo stabilirsi. Ma dentro di noi stessi, in ciò che noi chiamiamo anima, e che è la vita in noi, il flusso continua, indistinto, sotto gli argini, oltre i limiti che noi imponiamo, componendoci una coscienza, costruendoci una personalità. In certi momenti tempestosi, investite dal flusso, tutte quelle norme fittizie crollano miseramente; e anche quello che non scorre sotto gli argini e oltre limiti, ma che si scopre a noi distinto e che noi abbiamo con cura incanalato nei nostri affetti, nei doveri che ci siamo imposti, nelle abitudini che ci siamo tracciate, in certi momenti di piena straripa e sconvolge tutto.

Vi sono anime irrequiete, quasi in uno stato di fusione continue, che sdegnano di rapprendersi, d’irrigidirsi in questo o in quella forma di personalità. Ma anche per quelle più quiete, che si sono adagiate in una o un’altra forma, la fusione è sempre possibile: il flusso della vita è in tutti. E per tutti però rappresentare talvolta una tortura, rispetto all’anima che si muove e si fonde, il nostro stesso corpo fissato per sempre in fattezze immutabili. (Spsv 151-52)

Life is a continual flux which we try to stop, to fix in stable and determined forms, both inside and outside ourselves, because we are already fixed forms, forms which move in the midst of other immobile forms and which however can follow the flow of life until the moment, gradually slowing and becoming more rigid, eventually ceases. The forms in which we seek to stop, to fix in ourselves this constant flux are the concepts, the ideals with which we would like consistently to comply, all the fictions we create for ourselves, the conditions, the state in which we tend to stabilize ourselves. But with in ourselves, in what we call the soul and is the life in us, the flux continues, indistinct under the barriers and beyond the limits we impose as a means to fashion a consciousness and a personality for ourselves. In certain moments of turmoil all these fictitious forms are hit by the flux and collapse miserably under the barriers and beyond the limits—that which is distinctly clear to us and which we have carefully channeled into our feelings, into the duties we have imposed upon ourselves, into the habits we have marked out for ourselves—in certain moments of floodtide, overflows and upsets everything.

There are restless souls, almost in a continuous state of fusion, who are disdainful of becoming congealed or solidified into a particular form of personality. But even for the most peaceful souls, who have settled into one form or another, fusion is always possible: the flux of life is in all of us. This is why, moreover, our bodies, forever fixed as they are in immutable features while our souls flow and change into new forms, can sometimes be a torture for all of us. (Trans. Illiano 137)
Mattia Pascal is one of these “restless souls”; he is caught between the fictions of his consciousness and the desire to be freed from such forms. The movement of his soul, as it flows and changes, is in conflict with his instinct to stabilize what he believes are his “fixed” forms, ie. his personality, consciousness, habits and routines. Because he does not have a method to reconcile the flux of his soul with the determined forms, Pascal is tortured by this healthy need, as Pirandello sees it, to fuse his life with form. In exposing Pascal to the teachings of Theosophy and practices of Spiritualism, Pirandello aims to demonstrate the limited view man has of the self, as separate from other beings, and his fixed way of, what Robert Thurman calls, “terminal living.” Thurman explains the Buddha’s method of surpassing the limited view of self and overcoming suffering:

[Buddha] discovered and proclaimed that total freedom from suffering—exquisite, enduring joy—is extremely possible for every sensitive being. It is only the unenlightened, self-centered and self-constricted being who is temporarily incapable of real happiness. Most of us have a strong yet unwarranted sense of having a fixed, unchanging, limited ‘self’ that is totally separate from all other beings. This combines with our narrow view that our existence is random and terminal; it only starts when we are born and ends abruptly when we die. Fixed and alienated, random and terminal—together these form a vicious combination. In the end, we are left feeling bereft and slightly depressed, living a life seeming to be utterly devoid of meaning. I call this “terminal living.” We can free ourselves from such a terminal existence simply by becoming aware of our misconceptions and their impact on our way of being. Once we have accepted the fact that we ourselves may be the main cause of our own unhappiness, we become determined to understand the problem fully and to solve it as soon as possible [. . .] The first step toward true contentment lies in confronting the fundamental problem of our rigid self-sense. When we look carefully for our “self,” we cannot find it. We discover the error that is the cause of our problem, and we begin to grasp the concepts of selflessness, interconnectedness to others, and infinite life. Now we can set ourselves free to experience the full satisfaction with ourselves, others, and our world that the Buddhists call “enlightenment” or “awakening.” (Thurman xxii)
Pirandello looks to spirituality as a corrective path for his protagonists and applies fundamental tenets of Spiritualism, Theosophy and Eastern mysticism to *Il fu Mattia Pascal* as both a plot device and as a framework for the psychological and spiritual development of the protagonist, Mattia Pascal, as he attempts to overcome his existential crisis. Initially, it appears that Pascal’s unhappiness is conditional, due to what he calls the “oppressione intollerabile” [“intolerable oppression”] and the “immobility” of his existence, in describing his situation in Miragno, especially the “inferno” of his household (*Tr* 1: 368, 354; Trans. Weaver 48, 36). In the first five chapters of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, Mattia Pascal conveys to the reader that he feels dissatisfied, frustrated, confined and miserable. As described by Douglas Radcliff-Umstead: “It is disgust with a wretched existence in a small Ligurian town that impels the novel’s protagonist, Mattia Pascal, to create a new identity for himself” (Radcliff-Umstead 163). Throughout the novel, however, Pirandello presents Pascal, as well as the reader, with different spiritual philosophies in order to demonstrate Pascal’s need to move—not geographically—but spiritually.

Pirandello’s view of suffering as controlled by the unending cycle of longing to fix forms and create realities, followed by his imprisonment in this illusive realm of unfulfilled desires and disappointments, is in accordance with the Buddhist notion of suffering of bondage: “The Suffering which Buddhism is essentially concerned with is cosmic suffering, the suffering implicit in the cosmic law which chains us to our deeds, good as well as bad, and drives us incessantly round in a restless circle from form to form” (Govinda 51-52). Govinda goes on to explain that the Holy Path offered by the Buddha aims to change one’s perspective of and approach to suffering: “Suffering is no
longer felt as coming from outside, from a hostile world, but as coming from within. It is no longer something foreign or accidental, but a part of one’s own self-created being” (Govinda 52). Mattia Pascal ignorantly thinks that his suffering is due to his miserable situation in the hostile world of Miragno and does not realize, or will not accept, that it is coming from within his own “self-created” being.

To live an authentic life, free of all illusions, Pascal must subjugate his personal ego in order to resolve the profound conflicts of his spirit, consciousness and soul. Pirandello affects this experiment of spiritual advancement by integrating aspects of the current trends of Spiritualism and Theosophy, both of which share the belief that the soul continues to exist after physical death. Specifically, Pirandello allocates Theosophy’s seven planes of existence, denoting the stages of spiritual evolution, and Spiritualism’s practice of the séance, to frame Pascal’s metaphysical journey as well as to provoke him to consider alternative theories of human existence. The systems of Spiritualism, “the

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117 The word ego, from the Latin pronoun, meaning “I,” has varying definitions depending on the context. Ego is defined by Webster’s as: “1. The “I” or self of any person; a person as thinking, feeling, willing and distinguishing itself from the selves of others and from objects of its thought. 2. Philosophy a. the enduring and conscious element that knows experience. b. Scholasticism. the complete man comprising both body and soul. 3. Psychoanalysis. The part of the psychic apparatus that experiences and reacts to the outside world and thus mediates between the primitive drives of the id and the demands of the social and physical environment. 4. egotism, or self-importance. 5. self-esteem or self-image; feelings (Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 456)

According to Theosophy, ego is defined as: “the consciousness in man, ‘I am I’—or the feeling of ‘I-am-ship.’ Esoteric philosophy teaches the existence of two Egos in man, the mortal or personal, and the Higher, the Divine and the Impersonal” (Blavatsky Theosophical Glossary 111).

118 According to Theosophy, the seven planes of existence, governed each by its own laws of time, space and motion, are defined as: (1) the physical body, or gross matter; (2) the etheric double, or astral man; (3) prana, the life force; (4) kama, the principle of all feelings, desires, emotions and passions; (5) manas, the universal thinking principle; (6) buddhi, the vehicle of universal spirit; and (7) atman, pure consciousness of the Universal Selfhood beyond the individual self. The last principle is akin to the Buddhist concept of nirvana, or the cessation of the endless cycles of personal reincarnations as a result of the extinction of individual passion. There is also a special limbo or purgatorial dimension, called the Kamaloca, a semi-material subdivision of the astral plane that is inhabited by ‘shells’, the astral forms of humans and other beings. After death, as the physical body and its etheric double are left to decay, the desire body will linger for an indefinite amount of time, wandering around until all traces of human passions have dissolved, and the ego becomes free to reincarnate. Victims of suicide and depraved humans, referred to as ‘spooks’, typically reside in the Kamaloca. See “Theosophy” in Shepard 2: 1694-96.
state or condition of the mind opposed to a *material conception* of thing, and Theosophy, “a doctrine which teaches that all which exists is animated or informed by the Universal Soul\(^{119}\) or Spirit,” (Blavatsky *Theosophical Glossary* 307), equip Pirandello with the blueprints for the protagonist’s design and destiny. The application of the cyclical reincarnations of Theosophy, and the notion of the mobility of the soul driven by *karma*, not only allow for Pirandello to challenge the authority of traditional Judeo-Christian religions and the positivist and materialist approach to science, but also grant him the artistic space to propose that man, despite his religious affiliation or non-affiliation, is an inherently spiritual as well as physical being.

**The Tantalus Syndrome**

In “Pirandello and Theosophy” (1977), Antonio Illiano discusses Pirandello’s application of Theosophy’s stages of reincarnation as a model for Mattia Pascal’s existential journey:

Pirandello has compressed the scheme of theosophical reincarnation into a short span of human existence. This genial and ingenious application—in addition to providing unity, structural coherence and dramatic tension for his narrative—allows him to realize or stabilize one of the essential trends and patterns in the psychological configuration of his fictional and dramatic characters: what might be called the Tantalus syndrome, a chronic condition of existential incompleteness, yearning without attaining, ontological suspension. (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 346)

In light of Illiano’s analysis, and his appropriation of the *Tantalus syndrome* to describe the typical Pirandellian protagonist in his state of ontological suspension, I contribute a new discourse regarding Mattia Pascal’s condition at the conclusion of the novel and his inability to achieve freedom from his suffering. While the varying levels of

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\(^{119}\) For clarification, Théophile Pascal writes: “We shall set up no distinction between this Soul, which may be called the universal Soul, and the individual soul, which has often been defined as a ray, a particle of the total Soul” (Pascal *Reincarnation: A Study in Human Evolution* 4).
Theosophical evolution serve Pirandello in staging Mattia Pascal as he moves between his different incarnations, the non-theistic philosophy and psychology of Buddhism (one of the many beliefs systems from whose wisdom Theosophy borrows and integrates), provides the desperately needed rehabilitative course for the psychological as well as spiritual evolution of his spiritually sick protagonists. In this chapter, using Illiano’s evaluation of Theosophy and Spiritualism in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* as a springboard, I delineate Pirandello’s application of methods and concepts that clearly parallel practices and beliefs of Buddhism, the spiritual tradition based on the teachings of the Buddha, or the “Awakened” one, and its essential doctrine, the Four Noble Truths. My analysis reveals that the spiritual sickness, or *Tantalus syndrome*, suffered by Pirandello’s protagonist, is not a fundamentally “modern” problem that requires a modern solution but is an ancient conflict between life and form that has been approached and documented by the major Eastern spiritual traditions. The existential crisis is a crisis of consciousness and one gains an understanding of suffering, and finds the recourse to freedom from this suffering, in the core tenets of Buddhism, and its concepts gleaned from Hinduism and manifested in Theosophy, specifically: 1) *maya*, “the fabrication of man’s mind of ideas derived from interior and exterior impressions, hence the *illusory* aspect of man’s thoughts as he considers and tries to interpret and understand life and his surroundings (Purucker 100); 2) *Atman*, “the highest part of man—Self; pure consciousness *per se* (similar to *anatman*, the Buddhist concept of no self (Purucker 11); 3) *nirvana*120, defined literally as “blown out,” is “a state of utter bliss and complete,

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120 To define *nirvana*, (literally “blowing out”), Helmuth Von Glasenapp cites the *Pali Canon*, the earliest intact Buddhist doctrine: “The Pali Canon defines ‘Nirvana’ (Sanskrit), or Nibbana (Pali), as the complete and utter dissolution of the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate, and delusion. It is said of the *tathagata* that on entering Nirvana the *skandhas* (bundles) are completely dissolved, and are rooted out, so
untrammeled consciousness, a state of absorption in pure kosmic Being, and is the wondrous destiny of those who have reached superhuman knowledge and purity and spiritual illumination. It really is personal-individual absorption into or rather identification with the Self—the Highest Self” (similar to the Hindu samādhi) (Purucker 115); and 4) Brahman, “the impersonal, Supreme, and unrecognizable Soul of the Universe, ultimate reality or Being, from the essence of which all emanates and into which all returns; which is incorporeal, immaterial, unborn, eternal, beginning-less and endless” (Blavatsky The Key to Theosophy 322).

**The Relativity of Truth and Cosmological Displacement**

Moving beyond the confines of the individual mind, Pirandello shows Pascal’s ontological suffering is caused by an internal as well as a cosmological crisis. In the “Second Forward” of the novel, Pascal tells Don Eligio, his colleague at the Boccamazza library (tellingly situated in a deconsecrated church), that Copernicus, by discovering the true order of the solar system, ruined humanity forever by making man aware of his smallness in the cosmos—despite all his inventions and discoveries. This discovery, opposing the earth-centered view believed by men and propagated by the Church since the second century A.D., caused him to feel that he is less than nothing in the infinite universe. Man’s devaluation of humanity has been a common source of personal distress and philosophical discourse since Copernicus made his discovery:

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they can never arise again. The five skandhas are: rupa, vedanam samjna, samskara and vijnana, or respectively physical form, feeling, perception (both physical and mental), drives, and consciousness […] It is without foundation, without beginning and without end. It is peace without movement or desire, the end of all suffering […] It is without a substantial self (anatta), the perfect peace, a ‘nothing’ as compared with all visible configurations. It is something that can be expressed in the negative only, for it possesses no specific marks that language can encompass. The Pali Canon even employs the paradox that Nirvana is ‘bliss’ though there is neither a subject to enjoy it, nor the skanda vedana (feeling); the bliss of Nirvana consists indeed in not feeling anything”) (Von Glasenapp 106).
Since the sixteenth century, the place of humanity in the universe has gotten smaller. In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus, a Polish priest, knocked the Earth off its pedestal as the center of the universe and discovered it was just another planet revolving around the Sun. Ever since, the ghost of Copernicus has continued to haunt us. If our planet wasn’t at the center of the universe, then, our ancestors thought, the Sun must be. But along came an American astronomer, Harlow Shapley, who discovered that our sun is just a suburban star among the hundreds of billions of stars that make up our galaxy. We now know that the Milky Way is only one of the hundred billion or so galaxies in the observable universe. Humanity is just a grain of sand on this vast cosmic beach.

This shrinking of our place in the world led to [Blaise] Pascal’s cry of despair in the seventeenth century: “The eternal silence of endless space terrifies me.” Pascal’s words were echoed three centuries later by the French biologist Jacques Monod: “Man knows at last that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he has emerged by chance.” And the American physicist Steven Weinberg remarked, “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.” (Ricard and Thuan 38).

Mattia Pascal shares in Blaise Pascal’s and the other scientists’ pessimistic outlook. In the “Second Forward,” Mattia Pascal repeats “his usual motto” to Don Eligio “Maledetto sia Copernico!”[“A curse on Copernicus!”], and continues to explain his contempt:

Siamo o non siamo su un’invisibile trottolina, cui fa da ferza un fil di sole, su un granellino di sabbia impazzito che gira e gira e gira, senza saper perché, senza pervenir mai a destino, come se ci provasse gusto a girar così, per farci sentire ora un po’ più di caldo, ora un po’ più di freddo, e per farci morire—spesso con la coscienza d’aver commesso una sequela di piccole sciocchezze—dopo cinquanta o sessanta giri? Copernico, Copernico, don Eligio mio, ha rovinato l’umanità, irrimediabilmente. Ormai noi tutti ci siamo a poco a poco adattati alla nuova concezione dell’infinita nostra picolezza, a considerarci anzi men che niente nell’Universo, con tutte le nostre belle scoperte e invenzioni; e che valore dunque volete che abbiamo le notizie, non dico delle nostre miserie particolari, ma anche delle generali calamità? Storie di vermicci ormai, le nostre. (Tr 1: 322-324)

Are we or are we not on a kind of invisible top, spun by a ray of sunshine, on a little maddened grain of sand, which spins and spins and spins, without knowing why, never reaching an end, as if it enjoyed spinning like this, making us feel first a bit of heat, then a bit of cold, making us die—often in the awareness that we have committed only a series of foolish acts—after fifty or sixty spins? Copernicus, my dear Don Eligio,
Copernicus has ruined humanity forever. We have all gradually become used to the new idea of our infinite smallness, and we even consider ourselves less than nothing in the universe, despite all our fine discoveries and inventions. What value can information about our private troubles have, when even mass disasters count for nothing? Our stories are like the biographies of worms. (Trans. Weaver 4-6)

He asks: “[…]?” He goes on to explain that we are left in the dark on the nights when, according to the dates indicated by the city authorities, the street lamps are not lit and it is particularly cloudy. In accordance with the “anthropic principle,” Pascal says:

Il che vuol dire, in fondo, che noi anche oggi crediamo che la luna non stia per altro nel cielo, che per farci lume di notte, come il sole del giorno, e le stelle per offrirci un magnifico spettacolo. Sicuro. E dimentichiamo spesso e volontieri di essere infinitesimali per ripettarci e ammirarci a vicenda, e siamo capaci di azzuffarci per un pezzettino di terra o di dolerci di certe cose, che, ove, fossimo veramente comenatrici di quello che siamo, dovrebbero parerci misere incalcolabili. (Tr 1: 324).

This means that basically even today we believe that the moon is in the sky only to give us light at night, like the sun in the daytime, and the stars are there to afford us a magnificent display. Naturally. And we often gladly forget that we are infinitesimal atoms; instead we respect and admire one another and are even capable of fighting for a scrap of land or of grieving over certain things which, if we were really aware of what we are, would seem incalculably trivial. (Trans. Weaver 6)

Reality for Pirandello, in the truest sense of the word, reveals itself when one discards their constructed and fictitious determinations and realizes that there is no separation between man’s vitality and the totality of the cosmos. The problem for Pascal, as the reader learns early on in the novel, is that he agrees with Don Eligio’s observation that, “per quanti sforzi facciamo nel crudele intento di strappare, di distruggere le illusioni che la provvida natura ci aveva create a fin di bene, non ci riusciamo” [“no matter how hard we try to uproot and cruelly destroy the illusions that Nature has generously provided for our own good, we never succeed”] (Tr 1: 324; Trans. Weaver 6).
Radcliff-Umstead comments on Pascal’s argument of the relativity of truth and cosmological displacement:

Early in the novel, during one of his many polemical discussions with Don Eligio, the protagonist asserts the temporal relativity of truth. Mattia declares that truth is not absolute and unchanging but is modified according to attitudes prevailing at a specific time in history […] The protagonist is truly not so ignorant as to deny the new realities of Copernican astronomy, but he would like to possess the serenity and the feeling of self-importance that he encounters in ignorant peasants who unquestionably hold on to the Ptolemaic system. For Mattia man’s recognition of his own worth is at the most illusory if it is not founded on a cosmology that places human affairs at the center of the world. (Radcliff-Umstead 190).

This paradox is indeed difficult to surmount and that is why the humorist is needed. As Pirandello explains in “L’umorismo,” reflection and intuition are the necessary tools for the humorist so that he can disassemble the superficial situation and reveal the feeling of the opposite. Because so many men believe in the web of illusions, the humorist must penetrate the truth for them. Man’s curse, according to Pirandello, is that we are able to watch ourselves live—as opposed to things in nature, such as the tree which just lives without feeling itself live, just like the rain, wind, air, etc. Because logic abstracts ideas from emotions and attempts to fix what is fluid and changeable, Pirandello argues that the main problem with logic is that it, “tends to give an absolute value to what is relative, and thus it aggravates an ill which is already serious in itself since the prime root of our ills consists precisely in this feeling that we have of

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121 Pirandello explains in “L’umorismo”: Man does not have an absolute idea or conception of life, but rather a feeling that changes and varies depending on the times, the circumstances and luck. Now logic, by abstracting ideas from emotions, tends precisely to fix what is changeable and fluid. It tends to give an absolute value to what is relative, and thus it aggravates an ill which is already serious in itself since the prime root of our ills consists precisely in this feeling we have of life. The tree lives and does not feel itself alive; from its standpoint, the earth, the sun, the air, the light, the wind, and the rain are not things it differs from. Man, instead, is given at birth the sad privilege of feeling himself alive, with the fine illusion that results from it: that of taking this inner feeling, changeable and varying, as something that really exists outside of himself” (Illiano, trans. 140). See Spsv 154-155.
life” (Trans. Illiano 140). Thus, man becomes convinced that the “relative truth” is the “absolute truth,” and not the opposite. This false belief system naturally causes suffering but man, easily distracted (as Don Eligio attests), and a victim of the comfort of the status quo, is not conscious of or does not know how to get out of this darkness, the abyss, the void, the labyrinth, the shadow, as Pirandello so frequently describes this state.

**The Quest for Freedom from Suffering**

The novel offers a privileged view of Pascal’s inner conflict as he attempts to liberate himself from the oppression of his wife, his mother-in-law, his job and his financial responsibilities as a husband and father. Burdened with debt and saddened by the recent deaths of both his mother and baby, Pascal decides to leave his home in Miragno and “escape from the depression that was stifling, crushing [him]” (Trans. Weaver 52). After a lucky winning streak at the roulette table in a Monte Carlo casino, Mattia Pascal is debating whether or not he should return home, and be forced to turn his winnings over to his creditors, when he reads in the newspaper that a body was discovered in the waters of a millrace near his home in Miragno. He is shocked to learn that his wife has positively identified the body as his own, and that the death was concluded to be a suicide—the result of financial pressure. Considering this mistaken identity a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for liberation from his misery, Pascal decides not to return home but to embrace the freedom of a new life, a life that is free from the

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122 In Chapter VI: “Tac tac tac…” (“Click click click…”), Mattia Pascal decides not to return to Miragno and says: “Che avrebbe potuto capitarmi di peggio, alla fin fine, di ciò che avevo sofferto e soffrivo a casa mia? Sarei andato incontro, sì, ad altre catene, ma più gravi di quella che già stavo per strapparmi dal piede non mi sarebbero certo sembrate. E poi avrei veduto altri paesi, altri genti, altra vita, e mi sarei sottratto almeno all’oppressione che mi soffiava e mi schiacciava” [“After all, could anything worse befall me than what I had suffered and was still suffering at home? No doubt, I was only heading for new chains, but surely they wouldn’t seem heavier than the ones I had just ripped from my ankles. And in addition, I would see other countries, other peoples, another life, and I would at least escape from the depression that was stifling, crushing me”] (Tr 1: 372; Weaver, trans. 52)
stifling factors of his past. Disembarking the Miragno-bound train Pascal says, “Il salto che spiccai dal vagone mi salvò […] intravidi in un baleno…ma sì! La mia liberazione la libertà una vita nuova! Avevo con me ottantaduemila lire, e non avrei più dovuto darle a nessuno! Ero morto, ero morto: non avevo più debiti, non aveva più moglie, non avevo più suocera: nessuno! libero! libero! libero! Che cercavo di più?” [“My leap from the train saved me […] In a flash I glimpsed . . . of course! My liberation, the freedom of a new life! I had eighty-two thousand lire with me, and now I wouldn’t have to give the money to anyone! I was dead, dead! I had no debts now, no wife, no mother-in-law. Nobody! Free! Free! What more could I ask for?”] (Tr 1: 396; Trans. Weaver 75). M. John Stella writes of Pascal’s decision to take advantage of this unforeseen opportunity for the “total re-formation” of his life:

Up to the point where Mattia flees Miragno, we may say there has been no real “action” in the novel; like many, during his youth, he accomplishes little, without foreseeing the consequences of his ways. Suddenly, life intervenes with its ennui and suffering, he looks back with regret, and rather than go ‘on and on like that until he dies,’ he absconds to Monte Carlo. At first his action is precipitated solely by the desire to escape the domestic hell of life with Romilda and her mother; hence, after he is blessed by a run of good luck at the casino he entertains the notion of returning home. But his plans take on far greater dimensions after astounding news reaches him in Chapter VII. While on the train, Mattia buys a newspaper and reads an account of his own death: a body found in a millrace had been identified as his own. After he recovers from the initial shock, it occurs to him that since everyone he knows believes him to be dead, he does not have to return home to resume his previous life. Instead, he can start an utterly different one. Thus, he can continue his pilgrimage, not just in better circumstances, but as a completely new man. What could be a more “serious purpose” than this: the total re-formation of one’s life, of one’s character? Mattia is determined to take advantage of his rare opportunity, to start anew with the proverbial clean slate. And in this new identity he will take charge of his destiny, in absolute freedom, setting out for new lands, unencumbered by the errors of the past; he alone will be the artificer of his “self.” Significantly, the very first thing he does is to choose a new name for himself—Adriano Meis—which he compiles from a conversation he
overhears on the train. It very much indeed resembles a new “incarnation” for him, with the exhilaration that accompanies every new birth: the possibilities seem endless, and thus his resolution to live not only a more pleasurable existence, but also a better one, seems quite feasible. This time, it will be different. (M. John Stella “Self and Suicide in Pirandello)

Pascal considers the implications and risks of his newly acquired freedom, but he is immediately gripped by a sense of paranoia and displacement. In this moment of uncertainty, post-Pascal’s first “death,” Pirandello commences to associate his ontological displacement with the unknown territory of the afterlife. Pascal explains his new ghost-like sensation:

I had many things to ponder, and yet the violent reaction I had felt at the news so closely concerning me now revived in me the same black, unfamiliar loneliness; and for a moment I felt myself plunged into the void again […] I seemed frighteningly cut off from life, my own survivor, lost now, waiting to live beyond death, but still unable to glimpse the way ahead. (Trans. Weaver 77)

He calms his nerves by focusing his thoughts toward choosing a name for himself, though finding it is a difficult task. After reading his official obituary in the newspaper, Pascal heaves a sigh of relief and resigns to begin his new life, and “mi posi a far di me un altr’uomo” [“make a new man of himself”] but clarifies, “non tanto per ingannare gli altri, che avevano voluto ingannarsi da sé, con una leggerezza non deplorabile forse nel caso mio, ma certamente non degna d’encomio, quanto per obbedire alla Fortuna e soddisfare a un mio proprio bisogno” [“not so much to deceive the others, who had chosen to deceive themselves with a carelessness perhaps not deplorable in my case, but
certainly not praiseworthy. No, this next step was taken rather to obey Fortune and to fulfill my own personal need”) (Tr 1: 404; Trans. Weaver, 83). Pascal is quick to point out other people’s need to deceive themselves, but at this point, believing that he is following the dictates of Fortune, he is still far from realizing his own vain need for self-deception.

Nervous and excited to be reborn, Pascal wants to remove every trace of his former self. He shaves his beard, changes his hairstyle, and dons glasses to hide his wandering eye. Pascal overhears a conversation on the train between two men talking about Christian iconography and a statue of the Emperor Hadrian, one of which keeps repeating the name Hadrian. When the other man retorts something about Camillo de Meis, Pascal’s new name comes to him and he is reincarnated as Adriano Meis:

“Adriano Meis! Benone! M’hanno battezzato” [“Adriano Meis! Excellent! They’ve baptized me”] (Tr 1: 408; Trans. Weaver 87). Clearly naïve to the fact that his joyous “rebirth” as Meis is temporary, as he will again fall prey to the cycle of craving, Pascal celebrates his happiness and the renewal of his soul, spirit and consciousness. He says:

Recisa di netto ogni memoria in me della vita precedente, fermato l’animo all deliberazione di ricominciare da quel punto una nuova vita, io ero invaso e sollevato come da una fresca letizia infantile; mi sentivo come rifatta vergine e trasparente la coscienza, e lo spirito vigile e pronto a trar profitto di tutto per la costruzione nel mio nuovo io. Intanto l’anima mi tumultuava nella gioia di quella nuova libertà […] Oh levità deliziosa dell’anima; serena, ineffabile ebbrezza! […] Sorridevo. Mi veniva di sorridere così di tutto e a ogni cosa. (Tr 1: 409)

Now that I had cut off any memory of my previous existence, now that my spirit was firmly determined to begin a new life from this point, I was filled and uplifted by a fresh, infantile happiness. My consciousness seemed to have become a virgin, transparent again, and my spirit was alert, ready to use everything to the best advantage in the construction of

123 Angelo Camillo De Meis (1817-1891), author of Dopo la laurea (1868) was a patriot, philosopher and political Italian. (See Illiano Metapsichica 12)
my new self. At the same time my soul was running riot, in the joy of this new freedom [...] Oh, that delicious light heartedness! Serene, indescribable bliss! [...] I smiled. I had a way of smiling at everything now. (Trans. Weaver 87)

With the turn of the page, however, everything turns black for Pascal when he notices his wedding band. He is reminded that, though he has left home and changed his name and appearance, his past will always remain. He stops himself from throwing the ring out of the window of the train, because now his situation obliged him to believe anything possible [“tutto ormai dovevo creder possible”], his mind allowed him to consider the potential repercussions of his actions; a peasant could find the ring and trace it back to him (Tr 1: 410). Discarding this last vestige of his former self, however, does not relieve him of his irritating reflections that plunge him into the past. He is again able to distract himself away from his negative thoughts by creating a back-story for Adriano Meis. This “costruzione fantastica d’una vita” [“imaginative construction of a life”] (Tr 1: 413; Trans. Weaver 92), Pirandello’s metaphor for the illusory fiction that man creates and the inauthentic life this causes him to live, thrusts Pascal (as Meis) into reality, yet forces him to remain apart.

In a state somewhere between the “strange joy” of independence and boundless freedom and a “certain sadness” of being a “walking invention” without roots [“una gioja strana e nuova, non priva d’una certa mestizia” (Tr 1: 413), Pascal wanders listlessly through Europe, witnessing the lives of others and trying to create one for himself. When he is able to remain in the present moment, however, he experiences the sudden happiness of his boundless freedom that uplifts his whole spirit: “Ma io volevo vivere anche per me, nel presente. M’assaliva di tratto in tratto l’idea di quella mia libertà sconfinata, unica, e provavo una felicità improvvisa, così forte, che quasi mi ci smarrivo
in un beato stupore; me la sentivo entrar nel petto con un respiro lunghissimo e largo, che mi sollevava tutto lo spirito” [“But I also wanted to live for myself, in the present. From time to time I would be gripped by the thought of this unique, boundless freedom of mine and I would feel a sudden happiness, so strong I was almost lost in a blissful daze; I felt freedom fill my chest with a long, broad breath which uplifted my whole spirit”] (Tr 1: 415; Trans. Weaver 93). Radcliff-Umstead writes:

During a few moments, especially at the ebullient time of his first flight, Adriano Meis does experience intimations of a higher life beyond the barriers of routine social relationships, but he never fully appreciates the possibility of a genuine spiritual liberation. One evening at dusk, when he was traveling through Turin, he came closest to going beyond the false self of the Other as he watched the play of the dying daylight on the waters of the Po. [. . .] In the evanescent flux of sensations that moved across the stream of flickering impressions on the river’s surface, Adriano Meis almost ceased to be a fictitious reality. At one moment it seemed that he might succeed in piercing that armor plate with which the “ego” shields the true “I,” through identification with the identification with the image of the Other. There is no complete breakthrough in Pirandello’s third novel, and it is not until his final novel, Uno, nessuno e centomila, that the repressed “I” displaces the Other on the mirror of identification. (Radcliff-Umstead 191-192)  

But it is not long before his mystical moment fades and he begins to feel the isolation of a foreigner—alienated even from himself, having undertaken a new identity and experiencing the “painful precariousness that keeps the traveler’s spirit in a state of suspense” (Weaver 1995 100). The initial crisis that Pascal experienced when he felt trapped at home is compounded as he faces the reality that, as Adriano Meis, he is marginalized from society and extremely lonely. Radcliff-Umstead describes Meis:

124 In the passage I am quoting, Radcliff-Umstead condenses a quotation from Il fu Mattia Pascal. I am providing the full quotation here: “Ah, I remember the sunset in Turin, in the first months of that new life, near the bridge over the Po where a dam checks the rush of the water and makes it churn there angrily. The air was marvelously transparent; everything in the shadows seemed enameled in that transparence; and I, while I stood there looking on, I felt so intoxicated with my freedom that I feared I would go mad” (Weaver, trans. 94).
Unable to soar beyond his conventional being, the protagonist gradually recognized the narrow bounds of his social prison” (Radcliff-Umstead 192). Longing for company, Pascal sadly discovers he is unable to do or own anything that requires proof of identification, even purchase a dog off the street. Walking away from the puppy, he thinks for the first time that his boundless freedom was “no doubt beautiful but that it was also something of a tyrant” (Weaver 1995 97). The problem for Mattia Pascal is that he is ignorant of the cycle of craving that causes suffering. M. John Stella explains the Buddhist view, which is curiously similar to the Schopenhauer’s philosophy of craving:

The reasons are deeply imbedded in the very nature of identity, of “being” itself. According to Buddhism, chief among them is *tanha*, which is normally translated as “hunger” or “craving”; but much of the time the craving is so subtle that we are often unaware of it. *tanha*, we may recall, has three distinct aspects to it: *kamatanha*, the desire for pleasure and comfort; *bhavatanha*, the desire to be, to continue personal existence; and *vibhavatanha*, the desire for “unbeing”, the undoing of present circumstances. […]

According to *paticcasamuppada*, being and death are inextricably linked to craving: they are all conascent. The formula runs as follows: “With ignorance, [there arise] the determinations, with determinations, consciousness; with consciousness, the senses; with the senses, contact; with contact, feeling; with feeling, craving; with craving, grasping, [“holding onto experience”]; with grasping, being; with being, birth; with birth, aging-and-death, sorrow-lamentation-suffering-grief-and despair come into being.” […] Usually we understand craving in only one of its aspects, as *kamatanha* or the desire for pleasure. This desire includes not just the erotic, but also those of freedom, comfort, excitement and so on which Adriano mentions at the beginning of Chapter VIII.

For the Buddhist, then, pleasure is pleasure, and desire is desire—wanting a beautiful woman is not substantially different from wanting a beautiful panorama or some other sensual pleasure considered “more refined.” The drive of *kamatanha* is so latent in us that it is extremely difficult to perceive, let alone abandon, and it becomes even more subtle when it operates in conjunction with the other two aspects of *tanha*. For craving is the very foundation of existence, as Schopenhauer contends: “Therefore what is always to be found in every animal consciousness … in fact what is always its foundation, is the immediate awareness of a longing, and of its alternate satisfaction and non-satisfaction … Thus we know that the animal wills, and indeed what it wills, namely existence,
well-being, life, and propagation.” Thus whenever there is kāmataṃhā, the craving for sensual pleasures, there are also bhavataṃhā and vibhavataṃhā, or craving for being and also craving for “unbeing” (we hasten to say that the latter is not necessarily a death-wish). That is, when we crave pleasure, we also crave the continuance of attā, or our (imagined) “self” in a pleasant state.

The gratification of a sensation or experience reinforces desire and consequently the ego-conceit, as the “I” tries to hold on to the pleasurable as long as possible. In the process of “grasping” there is … [a] “projection” of desire … whereby the split in experience widens into a definite gap between a subject and an object. “Becoming” or “existence” is the make-believe attempt to bridge this gap, which, however, remains forever unbridged, for the material on which it relies is perpetually crumbling underneath. Yet it somehow props up the concept of an ego—the conceit “I am” (asmināna) … The ego now finds itself “born” into a world of likes and dislikes, subject to decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. (Stella “Self and Suicide in Pirandello”)

Therefore, Mattia Pascal—if he truly wants to find lasting happiness and bliss (nirvana)—he cannot look to the external world for objects to gratify him or for a scapegoat to place blame. He must reflect internally to gain awareness of the cycle of craving (taṃhā) and suffering (dukkha), and overcome his imagined self (attā) in order to find liberation from the actual oppressor, the ego (asmināna).

In the ninth chapter, “Un po’ di nebbia” (“A Bit of Fog”), Pirandello returns to the metaphor of the fog as an indication of Pascal’s hazy uncertainty as Adriano Meis. In a restaurant, Pascal meets the “ingegnoso” [“ingenious”] Cavalier Tito Lenzi, and it is his open conversation concerning the tendencies of “la coscienza” (“consciousness”) that liberates Pascal from recent bout of depression (Tr 1: 419; Trans. Weaver 102). Lenzi explains the relativism of one’s consciousness and its insufficiency to serve as a personal guide because of all the inclinations of others that become reflected in our own individual conscience. Unable to confide his secret in this stranger, Pascal returns to his hotel room and, because he could not converse with others, he began to talk to a canary. Imitating
bird sounds, the canary welcomed the communication; he excitedly began to flit about his cage, and then would grow quiet, waiting for a response. Pascal was moved by the interaction with the bird though he admits that he did not know what he had communicated to him. Pascal says:

Ebbene, a pensarci, non avviene anche a noi uomini qualcosa di simile? Non crediamo anche noi che la natura ci parli? E non ci sembra di cogliere un senso nelle sue voci misteriose, una risposta, secondo i nostri desiderii, alle affannose domande che la rivolgiamo? E intanto la natura, nella sua infinita grandezza, non ha forse il più lontano sentore di noi e della nostra vana illusione. (Tr 1: 430)

And yet, when you think about it, doesn’t something similar happen among us humans? Don’t we also believe that nature speaks to us? And don’t we think we find a meaning in her mysterious voices, an answer—according to our desires—to the anxious questions that we ask her? And nature, in her infinite greatness, perhaps hasn’t the faintest idea of us and our vain illusions. (Trans. Weaver 109)

Caught between logic and nature, Pascal fears that spending so much time alone with his thoughts is turning him into philosopher. Here is an early glimpse of the interaction with nature that Pirandello will emphasize in *Uno, nessuno, e centomila*. Vitangelo Moscarda, having relinquished all need for logic and reason, will immerse himself into the flow of nature, but Pascal, anxiously questioning, dismisses such musings and continues to live as though he were separate from nature. Desperate for revivification, decides that it is time to start living: “Io, insomma, dovevo vivere, vivere, vivere!” [“In short: I had to live, live, live!” (Tr 1: 431; Trans. Weaver 109).]
Buddhist Psychology

Continuing with our discussion in the previous section, Mattia Pascal clearly wants “to live.” Unfortunately he will not attain authentic existence because he craves a life that is motivated by the perception of his ego. M. John Stella comments:

After a period of relative freedom, represented by peregrinations throughout Europe and the absence of relationships and attachments, he is bored with it all, and wants to end his existence as a ‘foreigner to life’. Therefore, he ceases his travels and settles in Rome. But this “rebirth” leads him to establish a new persona and to involve himself in a new set of “karmic entanglement”, which, despite his best intentions, necessarily incurs sorrow and death. Thus the irony at the end of Chapter IX, which concludes with the asseveration ‘In sum, I had to live, live, live.’ (Stella “Self and Suicide in Pirandello”)

In The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy, Lama Govinda explains the source of mental disharmony, which Pascal clearly exhibits, called avijja, or ‘Self’-delusion, and its influence on the individual:

Under the influence [of] avijja everything will be valued from the egocentric standpoint of desire (tanha). According to the preconceived idea of a permanent ego-entity there arises longing for a lasting world with lasting pleasures, and as such a one cannot be found, the result is disappointment, suffering, despair. The sankharas, or mental tendencies which are conditioned by the illusion of self-hood (‘Ego’-ism) produce a consciousness (vinnana) and a psycho-physical organism (nama-rupa) which uses its senses (salayatana) as instruments of craving (tanha). As far as this craving is satisfied it results in clinging (udhana) to the objects of satisfaction. As far as it is not satisfied it results in an intensified longing (lobha) for such objects and in aversion (patigha, dosa) against the obstacles on the way towards its fulfillment. […] It is on account of our clinging to these forms of life that again and again we produce them. This is the law of Karma, namely the law of action. It is our will, our ardent desire which creates the world in which we live, and the organism which corresponds to it. (Govinda 54)

Buddhism, as well as Theosophy, postulates that the law of karma accounts for an individual’s will, desires, creations, and suffering or joy. The dictates of karma are removable, however, the individual must be willing to change profoundly his egocentric
perception of himself and the world around him. Govinda explains, “If this world were an absolute, static world and if this our life would remain the same for ever, there would be no possibility of liberation. It is therefore not the ‘world’ or its transitoriness which is the cause of suffering but our attitude towards it, our clinging to it, our thirst, our ignorance” (Govinda 55). In order to change one’s karma and overcome suffering, the result of individual desire in conflict with the laws of existence, the Buddha devised the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path in order to help people revaluate themselves and change their desires by reorienting their self-perception and learning to alter states of consciousness. It is therefore required of Mattia Pascal, if he genuinely wants to be free from suffering, that he must change much more than his external surroundings and his physical appearance and name. To achieve freedom from his suffering, Pascal must redirect the law of karma by gaining a new awareness of the world—starting first with his relationship to his own being. To truly change his emotional unhappiness he must overcome the mental tendencies and obstacles of the ego-self and learn to quell his desires and longings.

Mattia Pascal’s existential crisis, like many other Westerners, is due to the conflict between the “anthropic principle,” espoused by Western cosmologists and Buddhism’s notion of “relative truth” versus the “absolute truth.” The “anthropic principle,” from the Greek anthropos, meaning “person,” is the argument put forth by cosmologists that: “the universe was so finely tuned in order to allow it to produce life, consciousness, and finally an intelligent observer capable of appreciating its beauty and harmony […] According to this view, humanity has gained pride of place in the world once more—not at the center of the universe, but by being the very reason the universe
was designed as it is” (Ricard and Thuan 41).

Relative and absolute truth, according to Buddhism, are explained as such:

Buddhism considers that phenomenon aren’t really “born,” in the sense that they pass from nonexistence into existence. They exist only in terms of what we call “relative truth,” and have no actual reality. Relative, or conventional, truth comes from our experience of the world, from the usual way in which we perceive it—that is, by supposing that things exist objectively. Buddhism says that such perceptions are deceptive. Ultimately, phenomena have no intrinsic existence. This is the “absolute truth.” […] In terms of absolute truth, there is no creation, no duration, and no end. This paradox is a good illustration of the illusory nature of the world of phenomena. It can reveal itself in an infinite number of ways because its final reality is emptiness. In terms of the relative truth of appearances, we say that the conditioned world, called samsara, is “without beginning” because each state must have been caused by the previous one. (Ricard and Thuan 29)

The hindrance for Mattia Pascal in his quest for freedom from suffering is that he continues to believe in and attach to the “relative truth”; he is incapable of sustaining inner peace because he cannot separate his emotional states from objects and people. He has to convince himself that he is fortunate to be free the life he abandoned—his wife, his mother-in-law, his debts, and the “humiliations of his first life.” Though “free” of all the negative aspects of his former life, Pascal does not know who he is as a person without their presence. Pascal, though perhaps unaware, is granted the opportunity to hone his intuition and develop his true self. Unencumbered by external obstacles, he is poised for a spiritual transformation, as according to the Buddhist theory of non-ego (anatta), “man must undergo a conversion, a breakthrough or awakening, in order to become his true self and gain access to what is authentically real” (Dumoulin 82). The teachings of Buddhism

125 This idea can also be discussed in terms of Post-Human Thought. See Lechte (332-364) for further information regarding Posthumanism.

induce man to, “break through the categories of logical thinking” (Dumoulin 18); but Pascal, easily influenced, is confronted with a contrary opinion when he meets Cavalier Tito Lenzi who tells him that an individual’s consciousness alone is an insufficient guide that depends on external ideas.\footnote{127} It is not until Pascal meets Anselmo Paleari in Rome that he is exposed to unconventional spiritual practices and mysticism. Whether or not Pascal fully breaks through his own barriers, the reader shares the experience of the protagonist as he realizes the complexity of the consciousness, spirit and soul and witnesses the disconnect between man and his true being. A.L. Castris eloquently describes this new breed of Pirandellian protagonist:

> Pirandello’s man, who has acquired the responsibility of a new dimension, i.e., of a consciousness mirroring and dramatizing himself, forced as he is from now on to experience the crisis personally, replaces the choral testimonial of the first Pirandellian “crowd.”

> The different fictional perspective is rendered by style, by the humorous detachment which renews the narrative’s tone and structure. A deep decoloration of the milieu, to purge it of earlier violent and distorting traits which imbued its figures and outlines with grimness, takes place here, in the new novel, through direct narration. Now consciousness sees itself live and confesses itself, and at the outset claims its wants to reduce the proportion of drama, as befits a perspective shaped by awareness of the petty scope of the human adventure [. . .]

> Thus, in the petty-bourgeois milieu of a Roman boarding house, that sense of an elusive something, of a life worn out in an ambiguous silence, stylistically signals the occasional nature of situations and persons vis-à-vis the subtle, inward and atomistic process of consciousness. (Ed. Glauco Cambon 92)

Integrating aspects of mysticism and religion, Western as well as Eastern, Pirandello illustrates the exigency of gaining spiritual awareness and detaching from all so-called “realities,” or “relative truths”—created by science, philosophical systems or the individual himself—essentially creations stemming from, and insisted upon, by the skewed perceptions of man’s mind.

\footnote{127} See also Pirandello’s \textit{L’esclusa} (1901) and Caputi’s \textit{The Crisis of Modern Consciousness} 26.
**Theosophy**

Theosophy, maintaining the Hindu and Buddhist beliefs in *karma*, reincarnation and spiritual purification, as well as offering its own theories of the personality and the ego, provided Pirandello with ample ideas for the staging of Pascal’s two metaphorical “deaths” and subsequent rebirths. Pirandello appropriates the Theosophical processes of metempsychosis, the passing of the soul at death into another soul through the course of evolutionary peregrinations, and reincarnation\(^\text{128}\), the belief that all centers of consciousness will incarnate by passing through different mental purifications and planes of existence, until the spiritual evolution is completed, to script Pascal in his varying psychological states—ranging from acute hyperconsciousness of and attachment to his personal crisis (astral plane), to an intellectual search for understanding (*manas*) to a peaceful awareness (*buddhi*) (Purucker 105, 142). Theosophy’s astral plane, the stage immediately following physical death, at times called the “realm of illusion” (Leadbeater 8), serves as a perfect holding place for Pascal on his journey. Pirandello parallels the astral plane, and its purgatorial subdivision, the *Kamaloca*, with Mattia Pascal’s limbo-like condition after his mistaken suicide and during his transformation to Adriano Meis. Pirandello applies the tenets of reincarnation, controlled by *karma*, to Mattia Pascal’s reincarnation as Adriano Meis, and subsequent reincarnation as the “late” Mattia Pascal. Theosophy’s untraditional system of evolution offers Pirandello a forum for experimenting with the ontological crisis of his protagonist. Illiano highlights the role of *karma*:

\(^{128}\) As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Plato most likely learned of reincarnation and transmigration from Pythagoras—who, it is assumed, gained access to these beliefs in his travels to India. Transmigration and reincarnation are core tenets of Theosophy so it quite plausible that these beliefs were passed from Plato to Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists and early Theosophists.
Nell’ambito della complessa visione teosofica la monade umana, microcosmo dell’universo creato come manifestazione dell’assoluto, non si evolve secondo un sistema tradizionale di retribuzione emesse o legittimate da esseri, entità o istituti trascendenti. La morale teosofica postula invece che ogni uomo subisca le conseguenze delle proprie azioni. La legge che regola il progresso etico e spirituale è il principio della causalità, karma, la norma inflessibile secondo cui ognuno raccoglie ciò che ha seminato. L’ignoranza induce a definire accidentalmente gli eventi le cui cause non sono ovvie, mentre l’esperienza insegna che ogni pensiero e ogni azione costituisce un anello che lega il passato al futuro in un ininterrotto e insolubile rapporto di causa-effetto. È, naturalmente, nel comportamento umano che tale rapporto si esplica in tutta la sua varia e complessa casistica. Quale particella del creato l’uomo deve ubbidire alle leggi che regolano la vita dell’universo. Quale microcosmo indipendente, compreso di senso vitale e di tutte le facoltà volitive e intellettive, egli può – se ha chiara cognizione delle funzioni delle legge karmica e chiara coscienza del proprio io – darsi un destino, crearsi e ricrearsi, e persino trascendere il rapporto antitetico tra forze deterministiche e libero arbitrio, tra fortuna e volontà, tra l’imprevedibile e ciò che è presumibile e quindi anche realizzabile: può cioè impegnarsi in un’esercizio esistenziale che comporta notevoli rischi e che richiede, oltre ad eccezionali doti di spregiudicatezza e presenza di spirito, ingegno non commune e salda fiducia nelle proprie forze. (Illiano Metapsichica 30)

Within the complex theosophical view the human monad, the created microcosm of the universe as a manifestation of the absolute, does not evolve according to a traditional system of payment issued or legitimized by beings, entities or transcendent institutions. The Theosophical moral postulates instead that every man submits to the consequences of their own actions. The law governing the ethical and spiritual progress is the principle of causality, karma, the unyielding law according to which each reaps what he has sown. Ignorance leads to define accidentally events whose causes are not obvious, but experience teaches that every thought and every action forms a ring that links the past to the future in an uninterrupted and insoluble relationship of cause-effect. It is, naturally, in human behavior that such a relationship expresses itself in all of its various and complex surveys. That God’s particle, man, must obey the laws that govern the life of the universe. Such an independent microcosm, comprised of vital sense and all intellectual and volitional faculties, he can – if he has a clear understanding of the functions of the karmic laws and clear consciousness of the self – give himself a destiny, to create and recreate himself, and even transcend the antithetical relationship between deterministic forces and free will, between luck and will, between the unpredictable and what is expected and therefore also feasible: he can, that is, engage in an existential exercise that imposes serious risks and that requires, in addition to exceptional qualities of
ruthlessness and presence of mind, unique intelligence and firm confidence in its strength.

Pascal’s perspective of distance from his own story, and his need to find the appropriate language to explain the gamut of his psychological and spiritual states, adds to the original crisis of representing man’s inner thoughts. To overcome this added layer of crisis, Pirandello transforms Mattia Pascal, the character, into an open book—not only for the reader’s entertainment, but to allow Pascal the opportunity to analyze his past thoughts and to uncover and contemplate facets of his consciousness that he did not recognize, or could not access, during the real-time span of his story. The notion of karma and the Theosophical planes of existence, demonstrating the varying degrees of the soul’s maturity dependent on one’s personal actions, become a pedagogical tool for Pirandello to show the consequences and negative effects of living falsely, according to constructed illusions. Pirandello aims to enact a new way of thinking about the norms of society, and expresses the need for man to reflect on his consciousness—lest his ignorance continue to follow the same course of action with the same negative outcomes.

As stated by Radcliff-Umstead: “Pirandello’s novel Il fu Mattia Pascal (1904) is generally regarded as the ‘point of arrival’ where the author for the first time fully worked out the tragic dichotomy between an individual’s longing for complete freedom and the forms of life which society imposes upon him” (Radcliff-Umstead “Pirandello and the Puppet World” 16).

In the original 1904 version of Il fu Mattia Pascal,\(^{129}\) in the chapter called

\(^{129}\)The first version of Il fu Mattia Pascal was issued in segments between April 16 and June 16, 1904, in the “Nuova Antologia” (a magazine of science, letters, and art) in Rome. This version was later modified and published in 1910 by Fratelli Treves, and issued again by the same publishing house in 1918, which is considered the definitive version. In 1921, an edition of Il fu Mattia Pascal, which included the addition of the preface and the “Avvertenza sugli scrupoli della fantasia” at the end, was published by
“Maturazione” (“Maturation” or “Ripening”), the “late Mattia Pascal” recalls a certain passage that he says he will paraphrase. Pascal summarizes for the reader the passage regarding the “plastic essence” from Theosophist Charles W. Leadbeater’s book, *The Astral Plane*. In the beginning of the chapter, Pascal offers the reader a modified version of Leadbeater’s text from the section titled “Artificial,” in which the third type of inhabitants on the astral plane are described:

> Ho letto testé in un libro che i pensieri e i desiderii nostri s’incorporano in un’essenza plastica, nel mondo invisibile che ne circonda, e tosto

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130 Though Pirandello does not cite the name of the book nor the author, the passage is clearly taken from *The Astral Plane* (1896) by Charles Webster Leadbeater. Pirandello had the French translation, *Le plan astral* (1899), of Leadbeater’s *The Astral Plane* in his personal library (Barbina 153). Pirandello reproduces the same passage of the “plastic essence” (not paraphrased but verbatim) two years later in the novella, “Personaggi” (“Characters”). The passage is read by Dr. Scoto who claims that “in it he has found a fundamental truth.”

131 In *The Astral Plane*, Leadbeater writes in Section III. Artificial (from Chapter III. Inhabitants): “I have explained that the elemental essence which surrounds us on every side is in all its numberless varieties singularly susceptible to the influence of human thought. The action of the mere casual wandering thought upon it, causing it to burst into a cloud of rapidly moving, evanescent forms has been described; we have now to note how it is affected when the human mind formulates a definite, purposeful thought or wish. The effect produced is of the most striking nature. The thought seizes upon the plastic essence, and moulds it instantly into a living being of appropriate form—a being which when once thus created is in no way under the control of its creator, but lives out a life of its own, the length of which is proportionate to the intensity of the thought or wish which called it into existence. Most people’s thoughts are so fleeting and indecisive that the elementals created by them last only a few minutes or a few hours, but an often-repeated thought or an earnest wish will form an elemental whose existence may extend to many days. Since the ordinary man’s thoughts refer largely to himself, the elementals which they form remain hovering about him, and constantly tend to provoke such repetitions, instead of forming new elementals, strengthen that already in existence, and give it a fresh lease of life. A man, therefore, who frequently dwells upon one wish often forms for himself an astral attendant which, constantly fed by fresh thought, may haunt him for years, ever gaining more and more strength and influence over him; and it will easily be seen that if the desire be evil the effect upon his moral nature may be of a disastrous character. […] If the wish be merely indefinite, for his general good, the elemental essence in its wonderful plasticity will respond exactly to that less distinct idea also, and the creature formed will expend its force in the direction of whatever action for the man’s advantage comes most readily to hand. In all cases the amount of such force which it has to expend, and the length of time that it will live to expend it, depend entirely upon the strength of the original wish or thought which gave it birth; though it must be remembered that it can be, as it were, fed and strengthened, and its life-period protracted by other good wishes or friendly thoughts projected in the same direction. Furthermore, it appears to be actuated, like most other beings, by an instinctive desire to prolong its life, and thus reacts on its creator as a force constantly tending to provoke the renewal of the feeling which called it into existence. It also influences in a similar manner others with whom it comes into contact, though its rapport with them is naturally not so perfect” (Leadbeater 72-74).
vi si modellano in forme di esseri viventi, la cui apparenza corrisponde all’intima loro natura. E questi esseri, appena formati, non sono più sotto il dominio di chi gli ha generati, ma godono d’una loro vita propria, la cui durata dipende dall’intensità del pensiero o del desiderio generatore. / Per fortuna, i pensieri della maggior parte degli uomini sono così vaghi e indeterminati, che gli esseri che ne risultano han labilissima vita e momentanea: bolle di sapone. Ma un pensiero che spesso si riproduce o un desiderio vivo e costante formano un essere che può vivere anche parecchi giorni. E poiché naturalmente i nostri pensieri e i nostri desiderii spessissimo son per noi stessi, avviene che attorno a noi dimorino tanti di questi esseri, che tendono a provocare di continuo la ripetizione dell’idea, del desiderio ch’essi rappresentano, per attingere forza e accrescimento di vita. / Chi dunque insista e batta costantemente su un desiderio, viene a crearsi come un camerata invisibile,* legato a lui dal proprio pensiero, quasi un cagnolino incatenato, senz’obbligo di muserola ed esente di tassa. Questo camerata, però, potrà anche essere un canaccio che morde, un vile mastino; e allora son guai! Ma dipende da noi. E dunque, fin qui, nulla di male. / Ho letto però nel medesimo libro che, quando i pensieri e i desideri nostri non riguardino più noi stessi ma s’indirizzino altrui, gli esseri che ne risultano vanno a loro destino, come saette, ad esercitare quel potere di cui gli abbiamo investiti, rafforzato per giunta da quella tremenda ripetizione, a cui ho accennato più su, suggerita da loro stessi per il desiderio istintivo di prolungar la vita.** / Ma si drizzano ora i capelli su

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* My insertions for clarification: In the notes accompanying this passage, Giovanni Macchia explains that because Pirandello translated directly from the French version of The Astral Plane, the Italian word “camerata” comes from the French translation, “compagnon astral” which in the original English is termed the “astral companion” (Giovanni Macchia, ed. Tr 1: 1012).

** At this point, Pascal begins to interject his own thoughts regarding his mother-in-law, applying ideas from the same section III. Artificial, in which Leadbeater writes: “A feeling of envious or jealous hatred towards another person sends an evil elemental to hover over him and seek for a weak point through which it can operate; and if the feeling be persistent, such a creature may be continually nourished by it and thereby enabled to protract its undesirable activity for a long period. It can, however, produce no effect upon the person towards whom it is directed unless he has himself some tendency which it can foster – some fulcrum for its lever, as it were. From the aura of a man of pure thought and good life all such influences at once rebound, finding nothing upon which they can fasten, and in that case, by a curious law, they react in all their force upon their original creator. In him by the hypothesis they find a congenial sphere of action, and thus the karma of his evil wish works itself out at once by means of the very entity which he himself has called into existence. It occasionally happens, however, that an artificial elemental of this description is for various reasons unable to expend its force either upon its object or its creator, and in such cases it becomes a kind of wandering demon. It is readily attracted by any person who indulges in feelings similar to that which gave it birth, and equally prepared either to stimulate such feelings in him for the sake of the strength it may gain from them, or to pour out its store of evil influence upon him through any opening which he may offer it. If it is sufficiently powerful to seize upon and inhabit some passing shell it frequently does so, as the possession of such a temporary home enables it to husband its dreadful resources more carefully. In this form it may manifest through a medium, and by masquerading as some well-known friend may sometimes obtain an influence over people upon whom it would otherwise have little hold. What is written above will serve to enforce the statement already made as to the importance of maintaining a strict control over our thoughts. Many a well-meaning man, who is scrupulously careful to do his duty towards his neighbour in word and deed, is apt to consider that his thoughts at least are nobody's
la fronte a pensare che razza di demonii, di terribili creature deve avermi portato in casa e avventato addosso quella donna esecrabile che fu mia suocera. Credo che, se avessi letto allora questo libro, io mi sarei messo a girare tutto il giorno, come un trottolone, su un piede, per non dar presa a tutti quei ceffi d’inferno che dovevano essere le idée inique, i feroci desiderii di colei, stretti attorno a me. Non li vedevo; ma vedevo lei, purtroppo, diventata, dopo il mio matrimonio, più brutta di prima (non l’avrei creduto possibile!) più gialla, più magra; e ne so ora la ragione: sfido! Doveva nutrir di sé tutti quegli esseri orrendi che m’assedievano e mi toglievano il respiro. (Tr 1: 1010-1013)

I have just read in a book that our thoughts and desires are incorporated in a plastic essence, in the invisible world that surrounds them, and soon they are molded into forms of living beings, whose appearance corresponds to their intimate nature. And these beings, newly formed, are no longer under the domination of those who generated them, but they possess their own life, the duration of which depends on the intensity of the thought or the desire of the generator. / Fortunately, the thoughts of most men are so vague and indeterminate, that the beings that result have a fleeting and momentary life: bubbles of soap. But an often-repeated thought or a living and constant desire form a being that can live for several days. And since naturally our thoughts and our desires are usually for ourselves, it often happens that around us dwell so many of these creatures, that tend to provoke the continuous repetition of the idea, of the desire that they represent, to draw strength and growth of life. / Who then insists steadily on a desire, creates for himself an invisible comrade,* bound to him by his own thought, almost a chained puppy, without the need of a muzzle and free of charge. 132 This comrade, however, can also be a nasty dog that bites, a mean mastiff; and then troubles! But it depends on us. And so, so far, nothing bad. / But I read in the same book that, when our thoughts and desires no longer hold us in regard but direct themselves toward others, the beings that result go to their destiny, like arrows, to exercise that power to which we have invested, moreover, reinforced by that terrible repetition, which I mentioned above, as suggested by themselves for the instinctive desire to prolong life.** / But now the hair stands on end to think what kind of demons, what kind of horrific creatures must have brought me to that house and hurled me on the woman who was my abhorrent mother-in-law. I think that if I had read this book then, I would have set myself spinning all day, like a top, upon one foot, to not give power to all those thugs in hell that must have been wicked ideas, the fierce desires of that woman, tight around me. I did not see them; but I saw her, unfortunately, become, after my marriage, uglier than before (I

business but his own, and so lets them run riot in various directions, utterly unconscious of the swarms of baleful creatures which he is launching upon the world” (Leadbeater The Astral Plane 74).

132 See footnote on previous page for explanation.
would not have believed it possible!) more yellow, thinner, and now I know the reason why: I am certain! She had to nourish all these horrible beings that surrounded me and took my breath away.

With this passage Pascal demonstrates his knowledge of the astral plane while highlighting the animosity he feels toward his mother-in-law, who he feels has unleashed horrible demons on him. He shares how if he had known about the potency of one’s thoughts and desires before that time, he would have conducted himself differently so as to avoid Marianna Pescatore’s wickedness. Immediately following, and in keeping with the tone of the above passage, Pascal describes his antagonistic relationship with his jealous mother-in-law and laments that his poor mother was forced to live in the “inferno” of his household.

The reader will come to learn later, in the tenth chapter, “Acquasantiera e portacenere” (“Holy Water Stoup and Ashtray”), that Pascal becomes familiar with the Theosophical astral plane and its features after renting a room (as Adriano Meis) from Anselmo Paleari in Rome. Pascal/Meis recognizes the book, *The Astral Plane*, on his landlord’s bookshelf as a Theosophic text, and he later consults this book to learn about the dead. In it he identifies his condition with that of the “shells” who dwell in the

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133 In his description of the different inhabitants (living, dead, or artificial) on the astral plane, Charles Leadbeater explains the two types of *shells* that fall into the “dead” category. He clarifies: “This very word "dead" is an absurd misnomer, as most of the entities classified under this heading are as fully alive as we are ourselves – often distinctly more so; so the term must be understood simply as meaning those who are for the time unattached to a physical body.” He describes the *Shell*: “This is absolutely the mere astral corpse in the later stages of its disintegration, every particle of the mind having left it. It is entirely without any kind of consciousness or intelligence and drifts passively about upon the astral currents just as a cloud might be swept in any direction by a passing breeze; but even yet it may be galvanized for a few moments into a ghastly burlesque of life if it happens to come within reach of a medium's aura. Under such circumstances it still exactly resembles its departed personality in appearance, and may even reproduce to some extent his familiar expressions or handwriting, but it does so merely by the automatic action of the cells of which it is composed, which tend under stimulation to repeat the form of action to which they are most accustomed. Whatever amount of intelligence may lie behind any such manifestation has no connection with the original man, but is lent by the medium or his "guides" for the occasion. It is, however, more frequently temporarily vitalized in quite another manner, which will be described under the next head. It has also the quality of being still blindly responsive to such vibrations – usually of
Because of his situation of mistaken identity as a victim of suicide, Pascal is specifically interested in the placement on the Kamaloka of those who commit suicide, or have been the victim of a sudden or accidental death. Leadbeater explains in The Astral Plane: “It will be readily understood that a man who is torn from physical life hurriedly while in full health and strength, whether by accident or suicide, finds himself upon the astral plane under conditions differing considerably from those which surround one who dies either from old age or

the lowest order – as were frequently set up in it during its last stage of existence as a shade, and consequently persons in whom evil desires or passions are predominant will be likely, if they attend physical séances, to find these intensified and as it were thrown back upon them by the unconscious shells. There is also another variety of corpse which it is necessary to mention under this head, though it belongs to a much earlier stage of man's post-mortem history. It has been stated above that after the death of the physical body the astral vehicle is comparatively quickly rearranged, and the etheric double cast off – this latter body being destined to slow disintegration, precisely as is the astral shell at a later stage of the proceedings. This etheric shell, however, does not drift aimlessly about, as does the variety with which we have hitherto been dealing; on the contrary, it remains within a few yards of the decaying physical body, and since it is readily visible to any one even slightly sensitive, it accounts for many of the commonly current stories of church-yard ghosts. A psychically developed person passing one of our great cemeteries may see many of these bluish-white, misty forms hovering over the graves where are laid the physical vestures which they have recently left; and as they, like their lower counterparts, are in stages of disintegration, the sight is by no means pleasant. This also, like the other kind of shell, is entirely devoid of consciousness and intelligence; and though it may under certain circumstances be galvanized into a horrible form of temporary life, this is possible only by means of some of the most loathsome rites of one of the worst forms of black magic, about which the less said the better. It will thus be seen that in the successive stages of his progress from earth-life to the heaven-world, man casts off and leaves to slow disintegration no less than three corpses – the dense physical body, the etheric double, and the astral vehicle – all of which are by degrees resolved into their constituent elements and their matter utilized anew on their respective planes by the wonderful chemistry of Nature”; and the Vitalized Shell: “This entity ought not, strictly speaking, to be classified under the head “human” at all, since it is only its outer vesture, the passive, senseless shell, that was once an appanage of humanity; such life, intelligence, desire, and will as it may possess are those of the artificial-elemental animating it, and that, though in truth a creation of man's evil thought is not itself human. It will therefore perhaps be better to deal with it more fully under its appropriate class among the artificial entities, as its nature and genesis will be more readily comprehensible by the time that part of our subject is reached” (Leadbeater The Astral Plane 42-43).

134 According to the Theosophical Glossary, the Kamaloka is defined as: “The semi-material plane, to us subjective and invisible, where the disembodied “personalities,” the astral forms, called Kamarupa remain, until they fade out from it by the complete exhaustion of the effects of the mental impulses that created these eidolons of human and animal passions and desires. It is the Hades of the ancient Greeks and the Amenti of the Egyptians, the land of Silent Shadows” (Blavatsky 171-172).
from disease” (Leadbeater 44). After learning this, Pascal begins to consider and examine his existence in a different light.

Though the passage from The Astral Plane recited by Pascal was eliminated from all subsequent versions of the novel, the book from which it came remains as one of the texts in Anselmo Paleari’s library. It is not clear why this passage is eliminated in the following editions and all other Theosophical references were maintained. However, the knowledge that it was included in the first version confirms the influence of modern Theosophy on Pirandello at that time, especially the concept that a thought could become a form (a thought-form), or an etheric double (astral companion), that will surface and

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135 Concerning the placement of suicides on the astral plane, the Theosophist W.Q. Judge writes: “The fate of the suicide is horrible in general. He has cut himself off from his body by using mechanical means that affect the body, but cannot touch the real man. He then is projected into the astral world, for he has to live somewhere. There the remorseless law, which acts really for his good, compels him to wait until he can properly die. Naturally he must wait, half dead, the months or years which, in the order of nature, would have rolled over him before body and soul and spirit could rightly separate. He becomes a shade; he lives in purgatory, so to say, called by the Theosophist the “place of desire and passion,” or “Kama Loka.” He exists in the astral realm entirely, eaten up by his own thoughts. Continually repeating in vivid thoughts the act by which he tried to stop his life's pilgrimage, he at the same time sees the people and the place he left, but is not able to communicate with any one except, now and then, with some poor sensitive, who often is frightened by the visit. And often he fills the minds of living persons who may be sensitive to his thoughts with the picture of his own taking off, occasionally leading them to commit upon themselves the act of which he was guilty” (W.Q. Judge 366-370).

136 In the book, Thought-Forms, Charles Leadbeater and Annie Besant explain thought-forms as belonging to either the mental plane or the higher or lower region of the astral plane (the second type on the astral plane being the “artificial” kind referred to in the passage cited by Pascal from Leadbeater’s, The Astral Plane): “The mental and the desire (astral) bodies are those chiefly concerned with the appearance of what are called thought-forms. Man, the thinker, is clothed in a body composed of the subtle matter of the mental plane, this body being more or less refined in its constituents and organized more or less fully for its functions, according to the stage of intellectual development at which the man himself has arrived. The mental body is an object of great beauty, the delicacy and rapid motion of its particles giving it an aspect of living iridescent light, and this body becomes an extraordinarily radiant and entrancing loveliness as the intellect becomes more highly evolved and is employed chiefly on pure and sublime topics. […] When the man’s energy flows outward toward external objects of desire, or is occupied in passionate and emotional activities, this energy works in a less subtle order of matter than the mental, in that of the astral world. […] A man of a higher type has his desire-body composed of the finer qualities of astral matter . . . while less delicate and less radiant than the mental body, it forms a beautiful object, and as selfishness is eliminated all the duller and heavier shades disappear. The desire (or astral) body gives rise to a second class of entities, similar in their general constitution to the thought-forms already described, but limited to the astral plane, and generated by the mind under the dominion of the animal nature. […] Such a thought-form has for its body this elemental essence, and for its animating soul the desire or passion which threw it forth; according to the amount of mental energy combined with this desire or passion will be the force of the
persist according to its own will, depending on the severity of the thoughts and desires of the individual. Giovanni Macchia points to Leadbeater’s concept of the plastic essence when describing Pirandello’s arrival at his experimental method that, “inseguiva il fenomeno della pluralità delle anime, s’innestava in uno spiritualismo, che esaltava la creazione individuale, e che affrontava persone ‘vive, libere, operanti’ per farne personaggi” [“followed the phenomenon of the plurality of souls, grafted itself in spiritualism, that exalted the individual creation, and that confronted ‘alive, free, working’ individuals to make them characters (Macchia 51). Macchia writes:

Penso che sia giunto all’idea dello “spirito,” come di un agente personale, un doppio, o un ausiliare. Gli “spiriti” invadevano il nostro spazio come forme, modellate plasticamente, dei nostri pensieri e dei nostri desideri: prima concezione larvale di “personaggi.” E il testo che in tal senso forniva a Pirandello pasto abbondante era il libro di Leadbeater, The Astral Plane, del 1897, tradotto in francese sotto il titolo di Le Plan Astral due anni dopo. (Macchia 51)

I think that it was reached by the idea of the “spirit” as a personal agent, a double, or an auxiliary. The “spirits” invaded our space as form, molded of plastic material, of our thoughts and our desires: the first larval conception of “characters.” And the text that in this sense provided Pirandello an abundant meal was the book by Leadbeater, The Astral Plane, of 1897, translated in French under the title Le Plan Astral two years later.

¹³⁷ My footnote insertion: Here Giovanni Macchia is referencing Giovanni Marchesini’s conception that an individual may have more than one soul. Helena Blavatsky also writes of the plurality of souls: “The doctrines of Theosophy are simply the faithful echoes of Antiquity. Man is a Unity only at his origin and at his end. All the Spirits, all the Souls, gods and demons emanate from and have for their root-principle the SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE--says Porphyry (De Sacrifice). Not a philosopher of any notoriety who did not believe (1) in reincarnation (metempsychosis), (2) in the plurality of principles in man, or that man had two Souls of separate and quite different natures; one perishable, the Astral Soul, the other incorruptible and immortal; and (3) that the former was not the man whom it represented—‘neither his spirit nor his body, but his reflection at best.’ This was taught by Brahmins, Buddhists, Hebrews, Greeks, Egyptians and Chaldeans; by the post-diluvian heirs of the prediluvian Wisdom, by Pythagoras and Socrates, Clemens Alexandrinus, Synesius, and Origen, the oldest Greek poets as much as the Gnostics, whom Gibbon shows as the most refined, learned and enlightened men of all ages” (Blavatsky, “Theories About Reincarnation and Spirits” 14).
Concerning Pirandello’s application of the “double” in *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, Antonio Illiano notes the author’s addition of an unknown “I” in the 1918 version. Illiano writes:

Shortly after his arrival in Pisa, Mattia Pascal/Adriano Meis, by now caught in his own scheme, not knowing what to do, as he puts it, and hoping to find some distraction from so many problems, decides to take the two “dead” out for a stroll. It is worth noting that in the revised edition (1918) the author should have felt obliged to add a few touches and bring into the open a new active principle that was not so readily discernible in the original edition: “Il meglio era non dar confienza a nessuno dei due. O bianco campanile, tu potevi pendere da una parte, io, tra quei due, né di qua né di là.” The reader has by now acquired a reasonably clear understanding as to who the two “dead” are, or think they are; but who is this new “I” stuck between them, resolved to ignore them, and unable to lean to either side? Is it a third fleeting personality suddenly emerging, or is it rather the thinking principle [Manas], the noumenal sense of individuality that has been implicitly operative from the beginning and explicitly suggested by such revealing elements as Mattia Pascal’s features, particularly his beard and squinting eye, and by the other hints as the names Pascal-Meis, both closely connected to philosophical thinking? Or is it possibly a transitory form of non-personality that will soon have to settle for the shell of what once was Mattia Pascal? The protagonist himself does not know. All [the “late Mattia Pascal”] can do now is to take Pelligrinotto’s advice and turn writer, a choice warranted by his talent and apprenticeship as a librarian, reader and intellectual. This may also imply that his writing is a kind of report-memoir drafted while he was still in *Kama-loca*, a ledger-record of experience for safekeeping and possible future use. After all, if we choose to overlook the projected eventuality of a continuing education through rebirth, what is left worth existing for, for the late Mattia Pascal? (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 346)

Illiano raises some interesting questions regarding the spiritual and intellectual development of Mattia Pascal throughout the novel. Because all knowledge is not equally beneficial, however, the student of Theosophy must be able to distinguish between the knowledge gained by the terrestrial and egoic “I” versus the spiritual and Higher Ego “I” (Blavatsky *The Key to Theosophy* 158). At the end of the novel, the “late Mattia Pascal” is not a part of life but lives as an outsider; he has become, in essence, another zombie-like incarnation—a “living” dead—similar to that of Pascal as Meis. Pascal’s choice to
return to the library and the suggestion offered by Illiano that his report-memoir was
drafted in the *Kama-loca*, has notable implications for the role of the writer and the virtue
of literature. Macchia indicates that even more important for Pirandello was the book
*Thought-Forms* (1901) by Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater (discussed in Chapter Two
of this dissertation), as it treats the novelist on the mental plane. This could plausibly
account for the “late Mattia Pascal’s” novelistic endeavor—perhaps as the double of
Pirandello, the novelist.

It is precisely in the fifth chapter of the novel, aptly called “Maturazione”
(“Maturation” or “Ripening”), that Mattia Pascal, as narrator, begins to describe the
initial stage of his spiritual conversion. The comical episode of the flour fight between
Pascal, Aunt Scolastica and his mother-in-law, the widow Pescatore, marks the initial
moment in which Pascal consciously notices, and reports to the reader, that his
perspective of himself started to change and even mature. In true Pirandellian humoristic
fashion, Pascal examines himself in the mirror, and says: “Posso dire che da allora ho
fatto il gusto a ridere di tutte le mie sciagure e d’ogni mio tormento. Mi vidi, in
quell’istante, attore d’una tragedia che più buffa non si sarebbe potuta immaginare […]
Ero ancora come ebbero di quella gajezza mala che si era impadronita di me quando m’ero
guardo allo specchio” [“I may say that, from that day on, I have made a habit of laughing
at all my misfortunes and torments. At that moment I saw myself as an actor in tragedy
that could hardly have looked more comical. […] I was drunk on bitter hilarity that had

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138 Macchia writes: Ma è ancor più importante che in un altro saggio scritto in collaborazione con
Annie Besant lo stesso Leadbeater trascini sul palcoscenico mentale un essere che fino allora nessuno
aveva toccato, tranquillo nel docile sopore della coscienza: il romanziere” [“But it is even more important
that in another essay written in collaboration with Annie Besant, the same Leadbeater dragged onto the
mental stage a being that until now nobody had touched, quiet in the docile stupor of consciousness: the
novelist”] (Macchia 53). Macchia is referring to the book *Thought-Forms* (1901).
Pascal looks at his reflection in the mirror, and seeing his beard full of flour and his face scratched and wet, he barely recognizes himself; it is as though he were looking at an actor playing the tragic role of his life. Pascal admires his wandering eye that he says had begun, out of sheer desperation and on its own account, to look off more than ever in the wrong direction. Radcliff-Umstead describes Pascal’s experience at the mirror as, “his first genuine flash of illumination” (179). Radcliff-Umstead continues:

His experience is to see himself living (vedersi vivere), which actually results in the momentary detachment of the conscious self from the stream of life’s turbulent events. Not only does the mirror reveal his abject condition, but it also attests to the constantly distorted vision caused by Mattia’s cockeye, which asserts its independence even at times of the most intense anguish. Mattia Pascal has been permitted to see the ridiculousness of his roles as husband and son. The earlier Pascal was in effect blind to everything around him. This glimpse of truth marks the first step in the protagonist’s conversion. (Radcliff-Umstead 180).

Desperation has forced Pascal’s consciousness, for the first time, to separate his ego-self from his true Self. In Buddhism & Science, David Galin explains the Buddhist view of the Self:

In the Buddhist “correct view” the Self is seen not as an entity, or as a substance, or as an essence but as a dynamic process, a shifting web of relations among evanescent aspects of the person such as perceptions, ideas, and desires. The Self is only misperceived as a fixed entity because of the distortions of the human point of view. Ultimately, no separation is to be found between these dynamic processes and the universal frame of reference or ground of being; all is interdependent and changing. Thus, in this sense, there is no Self separable from a Nonself. (Ed. Wallace 109).

Pirandello was interested in the power of self-consciousness and he himself experienced the sensation of having a greater and a lower self. Anthony Caputi writes: “Pirandello was acutely aware of this dimension of consciousness [its reflexive capacity] throughout
his life and career, beginning at least with his letter to Antonietta of 5 January 1984, where he traced the relations between his great self and his little self” (Caputi 49). Like his eye that wanders without instruction from Pascal, Pascal’s spirit is thrusting upon him a new view of himself; it is as though he were looking at himself from outside of himself. In this moment, Pascal is more connected to the reflection of himself as the tragic actor in the mirror, and is becoming less attached to the man who is looking at the reflection. Pascal’s experience at the mirror, Pirandello’s ultimate symbol of the inner mirror of consciousness that reflects upon its thoughts, stimulates the awareness that he is not just one Pascal and shows him that he has the ability to manipulate his perspective and correct his distorted vision. Pirandello later commented on the functionality of the mirror: “I have had the audacity of placing a mirror at the centre of the stage. It is the mirror of intelligence. Man, while alive, lives, but does not see himself. Sentiment by itself is blind; I have therefore so managed that this blind man at a certain point should open his eyes and should see himself in that mirror and should stand as if frozen by the unthought-of image of his own life” (Caputi 50).

Pascal’s “disperate condizioni” [“desperate conditions”] force him to find a better way to support his family. Thanks to his friend Pomino’s father’s connection with the City Councilor for Education, Pascal is offered a job as a librarian in the Boccamazza library, where he will help the aging and senile Romitelli organize the rotting books in the damp and rat-infested deconsecrated little church, Santa Maria Liberale. Fleeing from his house as though it were a prison, Pascal takes refuge in the library where “mangiato dalla noja” [“devoured by boredom”], he works alone after Romitelli’s death (Tr 1: 367; Trans. Weaver 48). In the library Pascal reads a bit of everything, but mostly philosophy,
which he says made his already confused brain spin and distract him even more. He describes how in these spells of frustration he would try to calm his nerves down by leaving the library and laying on the sand at the beach, but the sight of the sea plunged him into a “kind of dazed horror, which gradually turned in intolerable oppression” [“La vista del mare mi faceva cadere in uno sgomento attonito, che diveniva man mano oppressione intollerabile”] (Trans. Weaver 48; Tr 1: 368). Angrily shouting, “Why?” at the strange thoughts inspired by his fear of the immobility of his existence, Pascal’s shoes get wet and receives what he believes to be a warning, sent to him from the waves, that he should ask the “why” of certain things and that he should avoid philosophy books—lest he ruin his shoes and hurt his brain. When he is told that his wife is in labor, Pascal runs home but he says: “Ma più sfuggire a me stesso, per non rimanere neanche un minuto a tu per tu con me, a pensare che io stavo pere avere un figliulo, io, in quelle condizioni, un figliulo!” [“It was more to flee from myself, to avoid being left alone even for a moment to reflect that I was about to have a child—in my situation—a child!” (Tr 1: 369; Trans. Weaver 49). Though Pascal recognizes that his existential situation is clearly unstable, his first mistake is in thinking that it is ever possible to flee from oneself, especially one’s subconscious. Pascal’s consciousness, like his wandering eye, will direct Pascal’s thoughts. What Pascal has yet to learn is that, although one can never stop the mind’s activity, one can learn to detach from the mind and quiet its thoughts. Pascal’s grief over the death of his twin baby girls and his mother practically drive him to madness. At the very end of the chapter “Maturazione,” however, Pascal’s tone changes as he tells the reader that he spent the money, sent to him by his brother for his mother’s burial, on himself and that it was the occasion of his “first” death: “Poi servirono per me;
e furono – come dirò – la cagione della mia prima morte” (Trans. Weaver 47; *Tr* 1: 371).

Mattia Pascal quotes Giovan Vittorio Soderini’s explanation of “the first cause of ripening” of fruit (through part heat and part cold), found in *Trattato degli Arbori* (*Treatise on Trees*)—a book that Pascal probably picked up from the floor of the library. Pascal goes on to state that Giovan Vittorio Soderini was unaware that fruiterers had invented, in addition to heat, another *first cause of ripening*. Pascal explains: “Per portare la primizia al mercato e venderla più cara, essi colgono i frutti, mele e pesche e pere, prima che sian venuti a quella condizione che li rende sani e piacevoli, e li maturano loro a furia d’ammaccature” [“In order to carry early fruit to the market and sell it at high prices, they gather apples or peaches or pears before they have reached the stage which makes them sound and flavorsome, and the vendors ripen them by the simple expedient of bruising them”]. Pascal’s explanation of this other *first cause of ripening*, though subtle, is extremely telling as he follows this explanation with the statement, “Ora così venne a maturazione l’anima mia, ancora acerba” [“And this was how my spirit, still green, ripened to its maturity. In a short time I became a different man” (*Tr* 1: 367; Trans. Weaver 47). In his description of the fruits that do not ripen naturally but are prematurely ripened by the vendors, Pascal foreshadows his incomplete spiritual transformation.

Attempting to find consolation in settling down, Pascal chooses Rome as his new home as the city seemed suited to receive foreigners with indifference. He rents a room from the eccentric Anselmo Paleari who lives with his daughter Adriana, his son-in-law Terenzio Papiano, and another tenant, Silvia Caporale, described by Paleari to have excellent mediumistic talents that he was helping her develop. Paleari, recognized by Pascal as a member of the Theosophical School, takes an instant liking to Meis (as Pascal
is known to Paleari), and during Pascal’s stay, Paleari passionately tries to enlighten his new tenant with teachings of Theosophy and exposure to Spiritualist séances. Paleari shows Meis his library which is filled with French translations of texts by key figures of the Theosophical Society: ‘La Mort et l’au-delà – L’homme et ses corps – Les sept principes de l’homme – Karma – La clef de la Théosophie – A B C de la Théosophie – La doctrine secrète – Le Plan Astral—ecc., ecc’ (Tr 1: 435). These texts are: *Death and After*, *Man and His Bodies*, *The Seven Principles of Man*, and *Karma* by Annie Besant, *The A B C of Theosophy* by Théophile Pascal, *The Key to Theosophy* and *The Secret Doctrine* by Helena P. Blavatsky, and *The Astral Plane* by C. W. Leadbeater. Despite Paleari’s enthusiasm, Pascal is neither interested in the “fantastici studii” [“fantastic studies”] of the proprietor who “aveva pure così, come di spuma, il cervello,” [“had a brain made more or less of foam,”] like his turban, nor in his collection of Theosophical treatises (Tr 1: 435; Trans. Weaver 114-15). Pascal is immediately presented with the dichotomy of spiritual beliefs in the Paleari residence: Anselmo Paleari, a Spiritualist/Theososophist, his daughter Adriana, a devout Catholic, Silvia Caporale, a drunk medium, and Pascal himself, who has not observed any religious practices since his boyhood days.

Instantly attracted to Paleari’s daughter, Adriana, Pascal is suddenly confronted with his “condizione assai speciosa” [“very singular situation”] of having been mistaken as a victim of suicide and claiming a new identity (Tr 1: 101, Trans. Weaver 118). Though Pascal initially felt Paleari’s spiritual studies and meditations on death separated Paleari from reality, he turns to the philosophies he had originally dismissed to help him understand his complicated existence. Paleari’s rants about death, and the other lodgers in
the house, help to ground Pascal by sending him into long meditations, bringing him back from his feeling of suspension in the void: “Ogni minimo che – sospeso come già da un pezzo mi sentivo in un vuovo strano – mi faceva cadere in lunghe riflessione” [“Thanks to the curious emptiness in which I had been suspended for such a long time, the slightest event now made me sink into long meditations”] (Tr 1: 438; Trans. Weaver 118).

Realizing he has solved nothing concerning his problem of death, Pascal retreats to Paleari’s library:

Mi trovavo ora coi libri d’Anselmo Paleari tra le mani. Questi libri m’ insegnavano che i morti, quelli veri, si trovavano nella mia identica condizione, nei “huski” del Kámaloka, specialmente i suicidi, che il signor Leadbeater, autore del Plan Astral […] raffigura come eccitati da ogni sorta d’appetiti umani, a cui non possono soddisfare, sprovvisti come sono del corpo carnal, ch’essi però ignorano d’aver perduto.” (Tr 1: 101)

Now I found myself with Anselmo Paleari’s books in my hands, and these books taught me that the dead—the really dead—were in my very same condition, the “husks” of the Kamaloka, suicides especially, whom Mr. Leadbeater, author of the Plan Astral, depicts as ravaged by all human appetites but unable to satisfy them, since these spirits are without their carnal body, but are unaware that they have lost it. (Trans. Weaver 118)

Instead of gaining the relief he was looking for, Pascal feels a sense of madness infecting him as he processes this new information. He considers that perhaps he really did drown in the millrace, and questions whether he is merely deceiving himself with the notion that he is still alive. Pascal says:

Si sa che certe specie di pazzia sono contagiose. Quella di Paleari, per quanto in prima mi ribellassi, alla fine mi s’attacò. Non che credessi veramente di esser morto: non sarebbe stato un gran male, giacché il forte è morire, e, appena morti, non credo che si possa avere tristo desiderio di ritornare in vita. Mi accorsi tutt’a un tratto che dovevo proprio morire ancora: ecco il male! (Tr 1: 439)

It’s well known that certain kinds of madness are contagious. Paleari’s, though I rebelled against it at first, ended up by infecting me. Not that I really believed I was dead, though it would have done no harm if I had:
the hard thing is dying; once you’re dead, I don’t believe you can harbor
the sorry desire of returning to life. No, I suddenly realized that I would
have to die again: that was the trouble! (Trans. Weaver 119)

Paleari’s impetuous talk of death begins to shed light on the bizarre reality of Pascal’s
situation and provides him with some comfort. Pascal says, “Del resto, la dottrina e la
fe de del signor Paleari, tuttoché mi sembrassero talvolta puerili, erano in fondo
confortanti; e, poiché purtroppo mi s’era affacciata l’idea che, un giorno o l’altro, io
doovevo morire sul serio, non mi dispiaceva di sentirne parlare a quel modo” [“Besides,
though Signor Paleari’s faith and doctrine sometimes seemed puerile to me, they were at
least comforting; since I now realized that one of these days I would have to die properly,
I wasn’t sorry to hear death spoken of in this way’”] (Tr 1: 440; Trans. Weaver 119). As
discussed in the next section, Paleari continues to enlighten Mattia Pascal. Though Pascal
is physically blind, Paleari helps him access his inner vision.

**Lanternosophy**

Paleari takes the opportunity to give Pascal a lecture on “lanternosofia,”
(“lanternosophy”) while he is recovering from eye surgery and is trapped in the darkness,
as both eyes are bandaged for forty days. Paleari’s lanternosophy is Pirandello’s modern
fusion of Western as well as Eastern mystical and philosophical concepts ranging from
aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism, to Plato’s allegory of the cave, to the postulations

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139 In *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, S. Radhakrishnan explains the similarities between
Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* and the Hindu doctrine of māyā: “The dominating thought in Plato is that the
ordinary man is not truly awake but is walking about like a somnambulist in pursuit of phantoms. So long
as we are subject to passions, dreams are taken for reality. When the truth is realized, the shadows of the
night pass away and in the dawn of another sun we see no longer in signs and symbols enigmatically, but
face to face as the gods see and know. The simile of the cave reminds us of the Hindu doctrine of māyā, or
appearance. Plato compares the human race to men sitting in a cave, bound, with their backs to the light
and fancying that the shadows on the wall before them are not shadows but real objects. We live in the
darkness of the cave and require to be led out of it into the sunlight. Again, to the ordinary Greek the body
counted for a good deal. To Plato it is a fetter to which we are chained. Our affections must be fixed on a
future world in which we will be freed from the body. ‘If we would have pure knowledge of anything, we
by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal,\textsuperscript{140} that unlike the trees that do not consciously watch themselves live, man’s greatness lies in that he is able to recognize his own wretchedness. Paleari explains to Mattia Pascal that because humans, unlike the trees, are born with the sad privilege of feeling themselves alive and the illusion results, causing man to: “insistently mistake our external reality for our inner feelings of life, which varies and changes according to the time, or chance, or circumstances” [A noi uomini, invece, nascendo, è toccato un triste privilegio: quello di sentirci vivere, con la bella illusione che risulta: di prendere cioè come una realtà fuori di noi questo nostro interno sentimento della vita, mutabile e vario, secondo i tempi, i casi e la fortuna”] (Trans. Weaver 165, \textit{Tr} 1: 484). This false sense of life, according to Paleari, acts like a little lantern that each person carries with him:

And for Signor Anselmo this sense of life was like a little lantern that each of us carries with in him, alight; a lantern that makes us see how lost we are on the face of the earth, and reveals good and evil to us. The lantern

\textsuperscript{140}Blaise Pascal wrote in \textit{Pensées}: “Man’s greatness lies in his capacity to recognize his wretchedness. A tree does not recognize its wretchedness. So it is wretched to know one is wretched, but there is greatness in the knowledge of one’s wretchedness” (Honor Levi, trans. 37).
casts a broader or narrower circle of light around us, beyond which there is a black shadow, the fearsome darkness which would not exist if our lanterns were not lighted. And yet, as long as our lantern is kept burning, we must believe in that shadow. When at the end the light is blown out, will the perpetual night receive us after the brief day of our illusion? Or won’t we remain at the disposal of Existence [Being], which will merely have shattered our trivial modes of reasoning? (Trans. Weaver 163)

Paleari’s *lanternosophy* mirrors the Hindu and Buddhist concepts of *maya*, *Brahman*, *nirvana* and rebirth. Particularly notable is similarity between Pirandello’s conception of “l’*Essere*” [“Existence/Being/Essence”], and the concept of *Nirguna Brahman*, or non-dual *brahman* (signified by the unity of *Brahman* and *Atman*), from the *Advaita Vedanta* school of Hindu philosophy. As Buddhism is deeply rooted in Hindu philosophy, *lanternosophy* can also easily be read in terms of the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, described as such:

The First Noble Truth states the outstanding characteristic of the human situation is *duhka*, which is suffering or frustration. This frustration comes from our difficulty in facing the basic fact of life, that everything around us is impermanent and transitory. ‘All things arise and pass away,’ said the Buddha, and the notion that flow and change are the basic features of nature lies at the root of Buddhism. Suffering arises, in the Buddhist view, whenever we resist the flow of life and try to cling to the fixed forms which are all *maya*, whether they are things, events, people or ideas […]

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141 The noun is defined as both “being” and “existence” according to the context: “*Essere*: 1. (*organismo vivente*): being; ~ *umano*, human being; ~ *vivente*, living being 2. (*esistenza*): being, existence” (Concise Oxford Paravia Italian Dictionary 2009).

142 S. Radhakrishnan writes: “*Brahman*, which is the Sanskrit word for the Absolute, is the principle of search as well as the object sought, the animating ideal and its fulfilment. The striving of the soul for the infinite is said to be *Brahman*. The impulse that compels us to raise the question of the true, the divine, is itself divine. *Brahman* stands for the breath, ‘the breath of the power of God,’ as it is said in the Wisdom of Solomon. It is man’s sense of the divine as well as the divine, and the two meanings coalesce. The transcendent self stoops down as it were and touches the eyes of the empirical self, overwhelmed by the delusion of the world’s work. When the individual withdraws his soul from all outward events, gathers himself together inwardly and strives with concentration, there breaks upon him an experience, secret, strange, and wondrous, which quickens within him, lays hold on him, and becomes his very being. Even if God be an idea and has no reality apart from one’s ideation, that which frames the idea of God and strives to realize it is itself divine. Our longing for perfection, our sense of lack, our striving to attain consciousness of infinity, our urge to the ideal, are the sources of divine revelation. They are to be found in some measure in all beings. The very fact that we seek God clearly proves that life cannot be without Him. God is life. Recognition of this fact is spiritual consciousness” (Radhakrishnan 22).
The Second Noble Truth deals with the cause of all suffering, *rishna*, which is clinging, or grasping. It is the futile grasping of life based on a wrong point of view which is called *avidya*, or ignorance, in Buddhist philosophy. Out of this ignorance, we divide the perceived world into individual and separate things and thus attempt to confine the fluid forms of reality in fixed categories created by the mind [...] This vicious circle is known as Buddhism as *samsara*, the round of birth-and-death, and it is driven by *karma*, the never-ending chain of cause and effect. The Third Noble Truth states that the suffering and frustration can be ended. It is possible to transcend the vicious circle of *samsara* to free oneself from the bondage of *karma*, and to reach a state of total liberation called *nirvana*. In this state, the false notions of a separate self have forever disappeared and the oneness of all life has become a constant sensation [...] To reach *nirvana* is to attain awakening, or Buddhahood. The Fourth Noble Truth is the Buddha’s prescription to end all suffering, the Eightfold Path of self-development which leads to the state of Buddhahood [and gives] the rules for the Buddhist way of life, which is a Middle Way between opposite extremes (Capra 95-96).

In terms of The Four Noble Truths, Paleari explains that each person carries within himself a lantern (our inner sense of life) that casts a shadow (*maya*, the illusion of reality) around us. Surrounded by the shadow cast by the light from our individual lanterns, we begin to perceive it and the darkness that extends beyond as real darkness, and this perception causes us to feel lost and afraid. Logically, Paleari explains, if the lantern were not there to make us conscious of the shadow and darkness, our fear would not exist. Paleari then asks Pascal to imagine what would happen if our lanterns were blown out, and to consider whether we would then be surrounded by fictional darkness (*maya*), and left to exist in a perpetual night. Or, he asks, would we really be at the mercy of ‘Essere’, (Existence/Being/Essence or *Brahman*), which has broken down the insubstantial forms of our Reason (*maya*). In a language reflective of Pirandello’s critical essays, Paleari asks: “E se tutto questo bujo, quest’enorme mistero, nel quale indarno i filosofi dapprima specularono, e che ora, pur rinunziando all’indagine di esso, la scienza non esclude, non fosse infondo che un inganno come un altro, un inganno della nostra
mente, una fantasia che non si colora?’” [Supposing all this darkness, this great engulfing mystery in which the philosophers of the ages have speculated in vain and which Science, though it refuses to investigate it, does not preclude, were, after all, only a delusion, a fiction of our minds, a fancy we are somehow unable to brighten with gay colors?] (Tr 1: 487; Trans. Weaver 165).

Paleari asks Mattia Pascal to consider that, perhaps, the concept of death is a false construction that man created and has assigned to mean ‘the extinction of life.’ He suggests that death should not be construed as a frightening passage from living to the end of life, but should be embraced as a gust of wind which blows out the light in our lanterns, extinguishes our painful and terrifying sense of life, and frees us from suffering (nirvana); [“un soffio che spegne in noi questo lanterno, lo sciagurato sentimento che noi abbiamo di essa, penoso, pauroso”] (Tr 1: 487, Trans. Weaver 158).143 Because we mistake our inner feeling of life for external reality, this false light of the lantern that resides within us must be extinguished. This ‘blowing out’ of the lantern, or the extinction of maya, allows us to return to Brahman, our ultimate reality: living as one with the Universe. Using an approach akin to The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism,

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143 From “Lanterino”: “And, when it is at last extinguished by the blow of death, will we really be received by that fictitious shadow, will be received by the eternal night following the misty day of our illusion, or is it not more likely that we will be left to the mercy of Being, which will have shattered only the vain forms of human reason? All that shadow, that enormous mystery, which so many philosophers have vainly speculated about and which now science, even though it refuses to investigate it does not exclude- could it perhaps not be after all, a deception like any other, a deception of our minds, a fantasy which does not acquire any coloration? What if all this mystery, in short, did not exist outside of us, but only in us, and unavoidably so on account of the famous privilege, the feeling that we have of life? What if death were only the breath that extinguished this feeling in us, a feeling so painful and terrifying because it is limited and defined by that ring of fictitious shadow beyond the slight circle of faint light which we project around us and in which our life remains imprisoned, as if excluded for some time from eternal and universal life, which it seems to us that we shall someday rejoin, whereas we are already in it and shall forever remain in it, but without this sense of exile that grieves us? […] But we have always lived and always will live with the universe; Even now in our present form, we share in all the manifestations of the universe, but we don’t know it, we don’t see it because, alas, this was unfortunately the spark that Prometheus chose to give us enables us to see only within the small sphere of light that it casts. (Weaver, trans. 158)
Paleari prescribes the path to acquiring knowledge of true and freedom from suffering:

1. gaining the awareness of lantern light of misguided reasoning (*avidya*) and recognizing the fictitious reality of fixed forms (*maya*) that separates the individual from its authentic existence, or Being (*Brahman*); (2) detaching oneself from the illusion of the shadow (*maya*) and viewing all things as connected and in a constant state of becoming; (3) maintaining the ability to recognize that one’s suffering (*duhka*) is caused by the creation of and futile grasping at false constructions (*rishna*); and (4) extinguishing the lantern, thereby, annihilating all false notions of being a separate self and freeing oneself from the cycle of reincarnation (*samsara*). Paleari’s way, akin to the Middle Way proffered by the Buddha, requires that the individual gain the perspective of seeing himself from the outside, as though looking through the eyes of another—disconnected from the false sense of self yet not attached to the view of the observer. Once freed from the boundary of illusion that the shadow imposes, man is able to live naturally and authentically—not as an individual, vain entity but as a manifestation of the interconnected universe: *a spiritual being in the form of a human body*.

Pirandello demonstrates how the consequences of trusting the light too much, or placing one’s faith in constructed enterprises, can cause turmoil and further the separation between man and the universe—completely denying the interconnectedness of the all things in the universe. Pirandello wants the reader to recognize that death is not the unknown darkness, but something that is already a part of us. It is not a matter of light as good and dark as bad, but of positioning oneself at the right angle to understand that that the shadow cast from the light is not the truth. In *The Astral Plane*, Leadbeater writes of this ancient belief:
For the seventh or lowest subdivision of the astral plane also, this physical world of ours may be said to be the background, though what is seen is only a distorted and partial view of it, since all that is light and good and beautiful seems invisible. It was thus described four thousand years ago in the Egyptian papyrus of the Scribe Ani: “What manner of place is this unto which I have come? It hath no water, it hath no air; it is deep, unfathomable; it is black as the blackest night, and men wander helplessly about therein; in it a man may not live in quietness of heart.” For the unfortunate human being on that level it is indeed true that “all the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations”, but it is darkness which radiates from within himself and causes his existence to be passed in a perpetual night of evil and horror – a real hell, though, like all other hells, entirely of man’s own creation. (Leadbeater *The Astral Plane* 20)

We must understand that the dark is a natural state but we are frightened because we only see the dark shadow. This is one place where relativism should not pertain because, though the shadow may be perceived as different shades of dark, the shadow itself is an imaginary construction created from the false perception of the light.

Still skeptical of Paleari’s methods and not willing to indulge Paleari with a conversation beyond the literal instrument of the lantern, Mattia/Meis’s only response is to question why Paleari would put a lantern with red glass in his room for spiritualistic experiments—seeing as though he is so critical of the lantern each of us carries within. Always ready with an answer, Paleari says that it’s a “corrective”—to help see beyond the harmful electric light. He concludes his diatribe saying, “Noi vogliamo scoprire altre leggi, altre forze, altra vita nella natura, sempre nella natura, perbacco! oltre la scarsissima esperienza normale; noi vogliamo sforzare l’angusta comprensione, che i nostri sensi limitati ce ne danno abitualmente,” [“We want to discover other laws, other forces, other life in nature, but always in nature, outside our restricted normal experience. We want to break out beyond the narrow scope of our habitually limited senses”] (*Tr* 1: 488; Trans. Weaver 166).
Pirandello demonstrates, via Paleari’s “lanternosophy,” that there is a remedy for the “spiritual sickness”: One must gain awareness of his misconceptions and experience the fragmentation of self-alienation in order begin the process that will heal his plagued psyche and mend the disconnect between his perception of himself, other people, nature and ultimately, his own soul and consciousness. The realization that one is not the rigid and fixed self he believed himself to be is indeed frightening, but this awakening of consciousness is the necessary first step toward returning to a state of wholeness and self-satisfaction for those who wish to overcome their suffering. Man may acknowledge that his personal perception of the world is faultily based on his subjective belief system, but to achieve true lasting inner peace he must be willing to completely detach from his prior way of sensing the world—his view of himself included.

_Tantalus’s Unforgiving Karma_

A few evenings after the night of the séance, Pascal wonders whether Paleari ever suspects that Signorina Caporale and Papiano might be deceiving him but concludes that Paleari’s faith does not waver. With a hint of sarcasm Pascal says:

> Quanto alla meschinità affliggente e puerile dei risultati, la teosofia s’incaricava di darglie una spiegazione plausibilissima. Gli esseri superiori del Piano Mentale, o di più sù, non potevano discendere a comunicare con noi per mezzo di un medium; bisognava dunque contentarsi delle manifestazioni grossolane di anime di trapassati inferiori, del Piano Astrale, cioè del più prossimo al nostro: ecco. (Tr 1: 489)

As to the melancholy wretchedness and childishness of the results, theosophy itself was ready to give a plausible explanation. The superior beings on the Mental Plane, or those still higher, couldn’t come down and communicate with us through a medium; so we had to be content with the coarser manifestations of the spirits of inferior beings on the Astral Plane, the plane nearest us”] (Trans. Weaver 160).
The séance calls forth Max and his “exploits” and in the confusion Pascal kisses Adriana for the first time. Right after, there is a thunderous rap on the table and, to everyone’s surprise, the table began to levitate; even Pascal is amazed. He confesses that the memory of Adriana’s kiss was momentarily erased by his amazement of the mysterious force that came from an invisible spirit. Pascal’s mind becomes filled with things he had read in Paleari’s books and, shuddering, he thinks of the unknown man who drowned in the millrace. He is unable to sleep that night because he is plagued by thoughts of the man buried in Miragno under his name. Pascal worries that he had exploited the man’s intentions for his own good, and was afraid that he his ghost had come to haunt him. Instead of reveling in the kiss with Adriana, Pascal has horrifying dreams.

Mattia Pascal recognizes that as Meis he is but “un’ombra d’uomo” [“a shadow of a man”] (159) and that he can no longer maintain his illusory existence without suffering emotionally to the point of madness. Pascal comes to the realization that he will have to die again if he wanted to retain his sanity. The disheartening truth for Pascal/Meis is that it was his wife who remained free of him, and not he from his wife. Though he believed his mistaken death to be an opportunity to create a better life with a fresh start, Pascal unknowingly sets himself up for an even more detrimental identity crisis than he suffered in Miragno. Pascal realizes that he needs to relinquish his second incarnation in order to be free of his intense passions. He quickly comprehends the deceit of his illusions, and recognizes that his new identity as Adriano Meis is limited and uncompromising. He has fallen in love with Paleari’s daughter Adriana, but he cannot act on his emotions unless he exposes himself as a liar. Confronting the devastating fact that the only way to prolong his illusion is to remain silent and alone in exile. Pascal, having presumably read
Paleari’s copy of The Seven Principles of Man by Théophile Pascal and The Astral Plane by C.W. Leadbeater, both texts that compare the man on the stage of the astral man with Tantalus, says:

Io mi vido escluso per sempre dalla vita, senza possibilità di rientrarvi. Con quel lutto nel cuore, con quell’esperienza fatta, me ne sarei andato via, ora, da quella casa, a cui mi ero già abituato, in cui avevo trovato un po’ di requie, in cui mi ero fatto quasi il nido; e di nuovo per le strade, senza meta, senza scopo, nel vuoto. La paura di ricadere nei lacci della vita, mi avrebbe fatto tenere più lontano che mai dagli uomini, solo, solo, affatto solo, diffidente, ombroso; e il supplizio di Tantalo si sarebbe rinnovato per me. (Tr 1: 168)

I saw myself excluded from life forever, with no possibility of returning to it. With this mourning in my heart, with this experience behind me, I would now leave that house to which I had become accustomed, where I had found a little peace, where I had almost settled down. And again I would be on the streets, aimless, without a destination, in the void. The fear of falling again into life’s trap would make me stay farther than ever from mankind; alone, utterly alone and distrustful, gloomy; and Tantalus’s torment would be renewed for me. (Trans. Weaver 199)

In “Arte e coscienza d’oggi,” Pirandello aptly referenced Tantalus from Greek mythology, a son of Zeus, whose punishment of being eternally hungry and thirsty yet unable eat or drink the fruit or water that tempts him, has made him the archetype for the tantalizing experience of fruitlessly grasping at an elusive desire. Pirandello explained the frustrating cycle of constant yearning and temporary relief:

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144 In Antonio Illiano’s chapter on Theosophy in Metapsichica e letteratura in Pirandello, he quotes the original French from Les sept principes de l’homme by Théophile Pascal: Lorsqu’un homme a passé sa vie dans la jouissances materielles, son “Corps des désirs,” nourri à profusion et intensément vitalisé persiste très longtemps après la mort e jouit d’une conscience considérable. Il souffre alors plus ou moins, selon l’intensité de ses desires, car le corps physique n’est plus là pour lui permettre de les satisfaire e il subit ce que l’antiquité a symbolisé par le “Supplice de Tantale e de Sisyphe.” Illiano continues to explain, “Il titolo stesso può essere interpretato come risultanza del convergere dei nomi di Blaise Pascal, del quale Pirandello conosceva i pensieri sul relativismo psicologo e di Théophile Pascal, moderno teosofo francese e autore di un volume sui sette principi dell’uomo…” (Illiano 33)

145 According to Greek legend, Tantalus is the son of Zeus and reigned as the king of Sipylis. He was the intimate friend of Zeus and the other gods but he abused the divine favor by revealing the secrets he had learned in heaven to mankind. Tantalus’s punishment entailed that he stand up to his neck in water, which flowed away from him when he tried to drink it. Hungry, he attempted to eat the fruit that dangled over his head, but the wind wafted it away whenever he tried to grasp it (Webster 401).

We don’t want to suffer any longer in the same position. Changing, our yearnings accept themselves for a bit.—Ah!— one heaves a big sigh. *Like this I am ok!* And we seem to be seated at the throne of Zeus. But soon our yearnings begin again. We look for this, we want the next… And there is always something, that is there in front of us and that we are not able to seize. It is the eternal torture of Tantalus! Freedom? Rhetoric! We are at the discretion of life.

Pirandello’s reference to Tantalus in “Arte e coscienza d’oggi” and *Il fu Mattia Pascal* was most likely influenced by Theosophy’s application of the Tantalus myth to demonstrate man’s placement in the astral plane.¹⁴⁶ In *The Astral Plane*, Pirandello’s number one Theosophical reference manual, in the section called “The suicide and victim of sudden death,” Charles Leadbeater describes how one with insatiable appetites in his physical life, will be directed after death, by *karma*, to remain in the astral plane until he is able to detach from the persisting desire-body. Leadbeater explains:

Though if men's earth-lives have been low and brutal, selfish and sensual, they will be conscious to the fullest extent in this undesirable region; and it is possible for them to develop into terribly evil entities. Inflamed with all kinds of horrible appetites which they call no longer satisfy directly now they are without a physical body, they gratify their loathsome passions vicariously through a medium or any sensitive person whom they can obsess; and they take a devilish delight in using all the arts of delusion which the astral plane puts in their power in order to lead others into the same excesses which have proved so fatal to themselves. (Leadbeater 45)

¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, Blaise Pascal also references Tantalus, as well as a labyrinth, in his *Le Progrès Selon Mme De Stael*. Please see *De L’autorité & Du Progrès en Philosophie* by Blaise Pascal in which Pascal writes: “Nous errons dans un labyrinthe dont notre vie parcourt à pieu quelque pas, et peu nous importe qu’il y ait une entrée et une issue dans ses inextricables detours. Triste destinée du genre humain! Pour jamais enchaîné malgré ses longs efforts, à la roue d’Ixion ou au rocher de Sisyphé, ou condamné au supplice de Tantale!” (Pascal 303) [We wander in a labyrinth in which our life traverses with full steps, and it matters little to us that there is an entry and an exit in its inextricable turnings. Sad destiny of mankind! Forever connected in spite of its lengthy efforts, to the wheel of Ixion or the rock of Sisyphus, or condemned to the torment of Tantalus!]
In his book *The Inner Life*, Leadbeater illustrates the Tantalus myth to describe the desiring man’s prolongment in the astral plane after death. He explains the cycle of desire and yearning:

You probably know the myth of Tantalus. He was a man condemned to suffer in hell eternal thirst, while water surrounded him on all sides, but receded from his lips as soon as he tried to drink. The meaning of this is not difficult to see, when once we know what the astral life is. Every one who leaves this world of ours full of sensual desires of any kind—as, for example, a drunkard, or some one who has given himself up to sensual living in the ordinary meaning of the word—such a man finds himself on the astral plane in the position of Tantalus […] Remember that when a man dies he does not change at all. His desire is still as powerful as ever. But it is impossible to gratify it, because his physical body, through which only he could drink, is gone. There you have your Tantalus, as you see, full of that terrible desire, always finding that the gratification recedes as soon as he thinks he has it. (Leadbeater 81)

The application of the Tantalus myth to depict the arrested “spiritual” development of man on the astral plane was also found in the book *The Seven Principles of Man (Les sept principes de l’homme)*, written in 1895 by the French Theosophist, Théophile Pascal. In the chapter on Theosophy in Antonio Illiano’s *Metapsichica e letteratura in Pirandello*, he quotes from *Les sept principes de l’homme* by Théophile Pascal:

When a man has passed his life in the material pleasures, his “Desire-body,” nourished profusely and intensely vitalized, persists for a very long time after death and he enjoys a considerable conscience. He suffers then more or less, according to the intensity of his desires, because the physical body is no longer there to enable him to satisfy them and he undergoes what antiquity has symbolized by “The Torment of Tantalus and Sisyphus.

Pirandello evokes the mythological figure Tantalus to illustrate the frustration and existential suspension between two incarnations that Pascal/Meis experiences—having renounced his old identity as Mattia Pascal, yet not fully realized in his new persona as
Adriano Meis. Like Tantalus, Mattia Pascal experienced the dissatisfaction of his unfulfilled desires. He yearned for liberation from his life in Miragno, and as Adriano Meis, he experienced a brief taste of freedom. However, he soon finds himself longing for Adriana and tormented by another hunger that can never be satisfied. His desperation inevitably returns because he merely eclipses one illusion with another. Pascal’s inner lantern is still burning; though at times the shadow retracts, it never completely vanishes. Overcome with anguish, he realizes that Adriano Meis must disappear forever. Mattia Pascal, reborn as Adriano Meis, was liberated from his former life but was equally burdened by his new one. In a moment of either madness or revelation, Pascal resolves to ‘kill’ Meis in a manner much like Mattia Pascal’s mistaken suicide.

After a two-year period of crushing unhappiness as Adriano Meis, roaming like a shadow in that illusion of life beyond death [“essermi aggirato due anni, come un’ombra, in quella illusione di vita oltre la morte”], Pascal resolves to kill off his persona as Adriano Meis, and avenge himself by coming alive again as Mattia Pascal (Trans. Weaver 220; Tr 1: 546). Unable to fight a duel and avenge his honor in front of Adriana, as a dead man has no recourse to the code of chivalry, Pascal runs away without knowing where to take refuge. In a moment similar to that of Pascal’s experience of detachment while looking at his reflection in the mirror in the chapter, “Maturazione,” Pascal says:

E andai, andai all’impazzata; poi, man mano rallentai il passo e alla fine, arrangolato, mi fermai, come se non potessi più trascinarti l’anima. […] rimasi un pezzo attonito; poi mi mosso di nuovo, senza più pensare, alleggerito d’un tratto, in modo starno, d’ogni ambascia, quasi istupido; e ripresi a vagare, non so per quanto tempo, fermandomi qua e là a guardar nelle vetrine delle botteghe, che man mano serravano, e mi pareva che si serrassero per me, per sempre; e che le vie a poco a poco si spolassero, perché io restassi solo, nella notte, errabondo, tra case tacite, buje, con tutte le porte, tutte le finestre serrate, serrate per me, per sempre: tutta la vita si rinserrava, si spegneva, ammutoliva con quella notte; e io già la
vedevo come da lontano, come se essa non avesse più senso né scopo per me. Ed ecco, alla fine, senza volerlo, quasi guidato dal sentimento oscuro che mi aveva invaso tutto, maturandomi dentro man mano, mi ritrovi sul Ponte Margherita, appoggiato al parapetto, a guardare con occhi sbarrati il fiume nero nella notte. […] Restai, come abbagliato da una strana luce improvvisa. Vendicarmi! Dunque, ritornar li, a Miragno? uscire da quella menzogna che mi soffocava, divenuta ormai insostenibile? (Tr 1: 547)

I walked on and on, heading nowhere; then gradually I slowed my pace and finally stopped, breathless, as if I could drag my soul no farther. […] For a while I stood there in a daze, then began to move again, my mind blank, suddenly, strangely relieved of all my woe, almost stupefied. And I began to wander once more, I don’t know for how long, stopping here and there to look in the windows of shops, which were gradually closing. They seemed to be shutting me out, forever. Little by little the streets became deserted, so that I was left alone in the night, wandering among silent, dark houses, all the doors and windows shut, locked against me. Locked out forever. Life was being locked up, extinguished, falling silent with the night; and I already saw it as from afar, as if it no longer had any sense or purpose for me. And then, finally, unconsciously, as if led by the dark emotion that had invaded me, ripening slowly within me, I found myself again on the bridge, the Ponte Margherita, leaning on the railing, staring at the river, black in the night. […] I stood there, as if dazzled by a strange, sudden light. Avenge myself! Return there, to Miragno? Free myself from the lie that was stifling me, which had become unbearable now? (Trans. Weaver 219-220).

Pascal’s spirit, once again ripening, urges him to detach from his “assurda finzione” [“absurd fiction”] as Meis that had tortured him for two years. As in the episode in front of the mirror, Pascal views his created reality as Adriano Meis from the distanced perspective of afar (a return to the “da lontano” of the Filosofia della distanza). He has a moment of liberation when he detaches from his illusions and allows his mind to go completely blank. He knows that he needs to relinquish his identity as Meis, as it no longer serves his purpose—if it ever did. The quietness and darkness of the night especially allow Pascal to consider himself as separate from the life he created for himself in Rome. Relieved that he does not have to commit actual suicide, Pascal is uplifted by a sudden joy and, despite trembling as if were actually going to killing
someone, Pascal says: “Ma il cervello mi s’era d’un tratto snebbiato, il cuore alleggerito, 
e godevo d’una quali ilare lucidità di spirito” [“But [my] brain was suddenly clear, my 
heart light, and I felt an almost joyous lucidity of spirit”] (Tr 1: 547; Trans. Weaver 221).

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heart light, and I felt an almost joyous lucidity of spirit”] (Tr 1: 547; Trans. Weaver 221).

**Reincarnation**

In the chapter entitled “Rincarnazione” (“Reincarnation”), Pascal expresses his 
joy at returning to life again as ‘Mattia Pascal’ and he excitedly boards a train to 
Miragno. He needed to relinquish his second incarnation as Adriano Meis to be free of 
his intense passions; he was bound by the desire to be with Adriana and live within 
society and all that it offers. Believing that he had overcome his mental suffering (or, 
spiritually, his karmic cycle of reincarnations) by returning to Miragno as the resurrected
Mattia Pascal, he is surprised at his still feeling as though lost and homeless, “solo, senza casa, senza meta” [“alone, without a home or a destination”] (Tr 1: 575; Trans. Weaver 248). Irritated and sad that people do not recognize him, Pascal feels that he had never existed; he says, “Nel disganno profondo, provai un avvilimento, un dispetto, un’amarezza che non saprei ridire” [‘Profoundly disillusioned, I was annoyed, depressed, embittered more than I can say’] (Tr 1: 575; Trans. Weaver 248). Though Pascal says he lives peacefully with his aunt, he sleeps in the bed his mother died in, and spends most of his day in the dusty library. He concedes his legal position is complicated, and he considers himself as living ‘outside’ of life. Despite don Eligio’s encouragement that writing the confessional will be beneficial, Pascal laments: “Ma io gli faccio osservare che non sono affatto rientrato né nella legge, né nelle mie particolarità. Mia moglie è moglie di Pomino, e io non saprei proprio dire ch’io mi sia” [“But then I point out to him that I am far from being in a sound legal position, nor have I regained my individual characteristics. My wife is the wife of Pomino, and I can’t really say that I’m myself. I don’t know who I am”] (Tr 1: 578; Trans. Weaver 250). Instead of achieving the hoped for reincarnation as a new and improved Mattia Pascal, he becomes the “late Mattia Pascal,” remaining alive but dead according to the law—clinging to the concepts of identity and death. In search of a happier existence, Pascal fails to overcome his limited perception and illusions of his self-hood. As subtly alluded to by Pascal’s description of his still green spirit, and revealed to the reader at the end of the novel, Pascal’s spiritual sojourn allows him to learn some new things but he does not attain the freedom from suffering he sought out to attain.
It is here that my analysis intersects with that of Antonio Illiano’s. Illiano writes of Mattia Pascal’s accelerated spiritual progression:

The working of karmic law is a cardinal factor in the development of self-knowledge in all human beings at a stage of advanced intelligence and perception. This is precisely the stage reached by Mattia Pascal, a genial character whose charismatic nature is consistently attuned to his enterprising quest for self-knowledge through a forcibly stepped-up pace of *maturazione* which would normally require several lives. (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 344-345)

Illiano argues that Pascal/Meis evolves from the lower plane of the astral world to higher, fifth principle, *Manas*, from the Sanskrit for mind, because of his “enterprising quest for self-knowledge.” He explains that Pascal distinguishes himself as having evolved from the astral plane of desires to the plane of intelligent and moral beings because:

“Mattia Pascal/Adriano Meis is constantly reflecting on, or confronting himself with, the wisdom of his decisions and the value of the outcome of his actions”; and in the chapter “Reincarnazione” (“Reincarnation”), when Pascal admonishes himself for believing the delusion that a tree trunk could live when cut off from its roots, Illiano claims: “The protagonist is not only questioning the soundness of his original plan but finally waking up to his own fundamental ignorance of himself” (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 345). I argue, however, that Mattia Pascal advances from the lower realms of the astral plane and achieves his highest levels of spiritual evolution (whether Pascal ever ascends to *Mansas* is debatable) in the moments preceding his two incarnations: First, when Mattia Pascal was to become Adriano Meis, and second, when Pascal decides to “kill” Adriano Meis and “resurrect” the original Mattia Pascal. These instances of lightness of

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147 *Manas* is defined as: “The mental faculty which makes the man an intelligent and moral being, and distinguishes him from the mere animal. *Esoterically*, however, it means, when unqualified, the Higher Ego, or the sentient reincarnating Principle in man. When qualified it is called by Theosophists *Buddhi-Manas* or the Spiritual Soul in contradistinction to its human reflection—*Kama-Manas* (literally, “the mind of desire”) (Blavatsky *Theosophical Glossary* 202).
spirit, clarity and detachment from egoic illusions demonstrate the strongest moments of
the protagonist’s spiritual growth as Mattia Pascal is more strongly connected to the
sentiments of his spirit and soul than to his identity and personal desires. The moments
are unfortunately transitory, as Mattia Pascal cannot relinquish his thoughts, passions and
desires. It is his clinging to mental and physical desires that prevents Pascal from
evolving to the higher planes, as Helena Blavatsky explains, “The future state and the
Karmic destiny of man depend on whether Manas gravitates more downward to Kama
rupa, the seat of animal passions, or upwards to Buddhi, the Spiritual Ego. In the latter
case, the higher consciousness of the individual Spiritual aspirations of mind (Manas),
assimilating Buddhi, are absorbed by it and form the Ego, which goes into Devachanic
bliss”\(^\text{148}\) (Blavatsky *The Key to Theosophy* 92). Pascal experiences small doses of higher
consciousness but they do not persist long enough to advance him to *Atman*,\(^\text{149}\) the
highest level of the spiritual ladder, and stop the karmic cycle of reincarnation. Illiano

\(^{148}\) The following terms are defined in *The Key to Theosophy*: Kama Rupa: Metaphysically and in
our esoteric philosophy it is the subjective form created through the mental and physical desires and
thoughts in connection with things of matter, by all sentient beings: a form which survives the death of its
body. After that death, three of the seven “principles”—or, let us say, planes of the senses and consciousness
on which the human instincts and ideation act in turn—viz., the body, its astral prototype and physical
vitality, being of no further use, remain on earth; the three higher principles, grouped into one, merge into a
state of Devachan, in which state the Higher Ego will remain until the hour for a new reincarnation arrives,
and the *eidolon* of the ex-personality is left alone in its new abode. Here the pale copy of the man that was,
vegetates for a period of time, the duration of which is variable according to the element of materiality
which is left in it, and which is determined by the past life of the defunct. Bereft as it is of its higher mind,
spirit and physical senses, if left alone to its own senseless devices, it will gradually fade out and
disintegrate. But if forcibly drawn back into the terrestrial sphere, whether by the passionate desires and
appeals of the surviving friends or by regular necromantic practices—one of the most pernicious of which
is mediumship—the “spook” may prevail for a period greatly exceeding the span of the natural life of its
body. Once the Kama Rupa has learnt the way back to living human bodies, it becomes a vampire feeding
on the vitality of those who are so anxious for its company. In India these *Eidolons* are called *Pisachas,*
and are much dreaded” (340); Devachan: “The ‘Dwelling of the Gods.’ A state intermediate between two
earth-lives, and into which the Ego (Atma-Buddhi-Manas, or the Trinity made one) enters after its
separation from Kama Rupa, and the disintegration of the lower principles, after the death of the body, on
Earth” (328); Buddhi: “The ‘Universal Soul or Mind.’ also the Spiritual Soul in man (the sixth principle
exoterically), the vehicle of Atma, the seventh, according to the exoteric enumeration” (323) (See
Blavatsky *The Key to Theosophy*).

\(^{149}\) *Atman*, or *Atma* is defined: “The Universal Spirit, the divine monad, ‘the seventh Principle,’ so
called, in the exoteric ‘septenary’ classification of man. The Supreme Soul” (Blavatsky *The Key to
Theosophy* 319).
concedes that Pascal/Meis returns to the lower realm, adding: “Whatever the case may be, the late Mattia Pascal, after his unusual journeying, is back in the limbo of Kama-loka, still alive but unable to live—a true outsider” (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 346). As Mattia Pascal does not recover from the Tantalus syndrome at completion of the novel, I challenge Illiano’s claim that *Il fu Mattia Pascal* is “the first, and most sophisticated Bildungsroman of the twentieth century” (Illiano 345).150 Perhaps looking to the *Bildungsroman* as a point of departure, Pirandello manipulates the genre’s traditional representation of the protagonist’s maturation from youth to adulthood, and instead concentrates on the adult protagonist’s psychological and spiritual development. Pirandello’s novel is a retrospective analysis of an intense period of change in the life of Mattia Pascal, however, the protagonist does not undergo the positive transformation that he sets out to achieve by leaving Miragno. According to Illiano’s analysis, Pascal (as Adriano Meis) reaches *Manas*, the Theosophical stage of advanced intelligence and perception, thereby gaining the self-knowledge representative of the typical protagonist of the *Bildungsroman*. Illiano goes on to say, however, that: “The ‘late Mattia Pascal,’ after his unusual journeying, is back in the limbo of *Kama-loca*, still alive but unable to live—a true outsider. All he can do now is to take Pelligrinotto’s advice and turn writer, a choice warranted by his talent and apprenticeship as a librarian, reader and intellectual” (Illiano 1977, 346). Though Pascal has undergone a spiritual journey, he does not have a spiritual transformation, and according to Illiano, he remains paralyzed in the *Kamaloca* until his third and final death.

150 Antonio Illiano goes on to explain: “The name itself suggests a convergence of the names of Blaise Pascal, whose thoughts on human personality Pirandello knew, and Dr. Théophile Pascal, the French theosophist whose book on the seven principles pointed, with a telling Socratic epigraph (*connais-toi*) printed on the title page, to the complexities of the problem of man’s self-determination” (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 345).
Given Pirandello’s familiarity with *The Astral Plane*, it is reasonable that he knew the *karmic* outcome of men who die by their own hand. Mattia Pascal’s mistaken “suicide,” as well as the fabricated suicide of Adriano Meis, provided Pirandello a sophisticated framework to demonstrate Mattia Pascal’s desire and need for change and his failure to transcend the realm of illusion represented by the astral world. Notably, in the section concerning suicides in *The Astral Plane* that so interested Mattia Pascal at Paleari’s boardinghouse, a comparison is made between tearing the stone from an unripe fruit and the withdrawal experienced by the victim of suicide or accidental death.

Leadbeater explains:

> In the case of the accidental death or suicide none of these preparations have taken place, and the withdrawal of the principles from their physical encasement has been aptly compared to the tearing of the stone out of an unripe fruit; much of the grossest kind of astral matter may still cling round the personality, which will consequently be held in the seventh or lowest subdivision of the plane. This has already been described as anything but a pleasant abiding-place, yet it is by no means the same for all those who are compelled for a time to inhabit it. (Leadbeater 44)

According to Theosophy, it is plausible that Mattia Pascal does not fully spiritually evolve due to the premature and inauthentic undertaking of his maturation process. However, this Theosophical strata of reincarnation is meant to delineate the spiritual progression of man after the actual death of his physical and do not account for the man who is actually alive—as is Mattia Pascal. This is why the Buddhist concept of the rebirth of the consciousness, as parallel to Paleari’s concept of death as blown out lantern in ‘lanternosophy,’ is a more applicable for the living Mattia Pascal than the Theosophical view of reincarnation after physical death. Illiano explains that Pascal’s, “evident limitations and character defects—impressionability, caution, shrewdness, tendency to pretend and compromise, recrimination, rationalization, selfishness, etc.—are
often connected to or dictated by his deep-seated need for self-analysis” which lead him to self-recognition and traumatic insights (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 345). In such moments of self-awareness, Illiano argues that Pascal/Meis achieved the higher level Manas, the thinking principle, but in the end of the novel, “the late Mattia Pascal” regresses to the astral plane, a lower plane on the spiritual ladder. Illiano’s examination returns Mattia Pascal full circle to his detainment in the Kamaloka where he will remain as “a true outsider” (Illiano “Pirandello and Theosophy” 346). Though Mattia Pascal “died” and was reborn as Adriano Meis, he was not liberated from his former life at all but further oppressed by the fictions of his new one. Pascal does not have the proper support or corrective path to overcome these defects and achieve genuine freedom from suffering, the Buddhist nirvana.\(^{151}\) The tendencies of centralization and growth explained by Buddhism can account for Pascal’s failed liberation:

> Life has two fundamental tendencies: the one is contraction (centralization) [or unification], the other expansion [or differentiation/growth]. If growth prevails over unity it results in disorganization, disintegration, chaos and decay. In organic life hypertrophy leads to the final destruction of the organism (‘cancer’). In mental life growth without unity (centralization) leads to insanity, mental dissolution. If centralization prevails over growth it results in atrophy and finally in the complete stagnation of life, whether physical or mental. (Govinda 53).

If the ‘principium individuationis,” the individual principle which enables an individual to be conscious of itself, falls out of balance with the principle of assimilation (bodily or mental), then the principle outgrows its own function and develops, as in the case of

\(^{151}\) Nirvana is defined: “According to the Orientalists, the entire ‘blowing-out,’ like the flame of a candle, the utter extinction of existence. But in the exoteric explanations it is the state of absolute existence and absolute consciousness, into which the Ego of a man who had reached the highest degree of perfection and holiness during life, goes after the body dies, and occasionally, as is the case of Gautama Buddha and others, during life” (Blavatsky The Key to Theosophy 115).
Mattia Pascal, the “hypertrophic ‘I’-consciousness, which constructs an unchangeable entity, an absolute ‘Self’ or permanent ego in contrast to the rest of the world, [and] the inner balance is destroyed and reality appears distorted in form (Govinda 54). According to this explanation, Pascal’s unhappiness and his sense of immobility and disintegration in Miragno, as well as his sensation of existential suspension as Adriano Meis, can be attributed to his mental growth prevailing over unity.

At the end of Pascal’s unique experience, he has not had closure and is driven to retell his story. In the fourth chapter, “Fu così” (“It was so”), Mattia Pascal interrupts his explanation of how he came to marry Romilda and says: “Ragoniamo un po’, arrivati a questo punto. Io n’ho viste di tutti i colori. Passare anche per imbecile o per…peggio, non sarebbe, in fondo, per me, un gran guajo. Già – ripeto – son come fuori della vita, e non m’importa più di nulla. Se dunque, arrivato a questo punto, voglio ragionare, è soltanto per la logica” [“At this point, let’s try to think rationally for a moment. I’ve been through all sorts of things in my time. To pass for an imbecile or for…worse…would be no great misfortune for me. As I’ve told you, I am outside of life, and nothing matters to me anymore. So if, at this point, I choose to discuss the situation, it’s merely for the sake of logic”] (Tr 1: 353; Trans. Weaver 31-32). Radcliff-Umstead writes:

By writing down the memoirs of his two lives, the protagonist, who works from the vantage point of his third existence, attempts to discover the meaning behind his experiments and the resulting failures of the masks that he wore in society […] The novel would then reveal a sense of logic in the events of his lives that could not be seen at the time those events occurred. As usual with confessional literature, there is the danger that the narrator might impose a meaning on past happenings that would not correspond to their true significance at the moment they actually took place. In Pirandello’s novel the spirit of inquiry and constant debate prevent the protagonist from arriving at facile conclusions. It is not the task of Mattia Pascal to compose a reassuring book about the reasons for his acts; the memoirs are not to be considered an apology but rather the
exploration of the two masquerades that the protagonist felt compelled to perform before the false world. The account of his past actions and his reflections would then provide a meaningful statement about an individual’s failure to lead and independent and authentic life of his own. (189)

The novel, motivated by Pascal’s need for a logical and reasonable explanation, therefore becomes the next incarnation of Pascal’s attempted and unattained spiritual evolution. Despite the self-knowledge Pascal may have gained by looking back on his experience, Fritjof Capra’s explanation in The Tao of Physics accounts for his inability to feel part of life.

As long as our view of the world is fragmented, as long as we are under the spell of maya and think that we are separated from our environment and can act independently, we are bound by karma. Being free from the bond of karma means to realize the unity and harmony of all nature, including ourselves, and to act accordingly. The [Bhagavad] Gita is very clear on this point: All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the forces of nature, but the man lost in selfish delusions thinks that he himself is the actor. But the man who knows the relation between the forces of Nature and actions, sees how some forces of Nature work upon other forces of Nature, and becomes not their slave. (Capra 89)

Through the representation of Pascal’s stagnated condition of living outside of life as “the late Mattia Pascal,” and his full-circle return to his unhappy existence in the Boccamazza library, Pirandello demonstrates the unavailability of a proper spiritual path and the difficulty in overcoming the “absolute” sense of self and “I” consciousness. As stated by Radcliff-Umstead: “The creation of a new personality is only superficially achieved through tonsorial, sartorial, and surgical alterations, for the one true transformation must come from within the self: […] The protagonist therefore becomes the prisoner of his own fictions, never attaining the freedom that was the original goal of his new life of evasion” (Radcliff-Umstead 181). In writing his memoir, the “late Mattia Pascal” is able
to continue his creation of fictions, if he so chooses, as the reader never knows all sides
of a person’s entire story.

The novel closes with the image of Pascal next to his tombstone in the Miragno
cemetery. When a person who has heard his story passes and asks who he is, he shrugs
his shoulders and responds with brilliant last words, “Io sono il fu Mattia Pascal” [“I am
the Late Mattia Pascal”] (Tr 1: 578; Trans. Weaver 250). He did not find closure as
Mattia Pascal, nor does he know who he is at the present moment. Unable to detach from
his own story, his only option is to write a novel about his experience. As illustrated by
The Four Noble Truths and lanternosophy, unless the individual completely detaches
from maya by extinguishing his lantern of illusion by becoming conscious of the
interconnectedness of all things in the universe, he will not transcend the frustrating
karmic cycle of samsara. As Capra explains, “As long as this view prevails, we are
bound to experience frustration after frustration. Trying to cling to things which we see as
firm and persistent, but which in fact are transient and ever-changing, we are trapped in a
vicious circle where every action generates further action and the answer to each question
poses new questions” (Capra 95). Pascal has no choice but to return to another contrived
reality, especially in trying to find the answer to the question, “Who is the late Mattia
Pascal?”
Conclusion

Pirandello offers a challenging yet hopeful prognosis of the “spiritual sickness.” Mental and spiritual angst may potentially result in man’s madness or death unless he discovers “selflessness” and “oneness” by detaching from his illusions and false constructions of reality. Ultimately, he must gain awareness of “no-self” and nothingness in order to find the lasting bliss of nirvana, the “state of absolute exemption from the circle of transmigration”—in which one is entirely freed from all forms of existence (Blavatsky 232). For Pirandello, the “spiritual sickness” and the lack of a readily available solution, is especially prevalent in modern society where the cycle of craving for capital growth and status, and the resultant gratification and eventual disappointment, overwhelms the spiritual path of self-discovery impedes enlightenment. Freedom of liberated consciousness, and reunion of mind, soul and spirit, is achieved when man consciously practices detachment from his selfish desires and false beliefs, and learns to live selflessly in harmony with himself, others, and nature—not in the universe but as a manifestation of the universe.

After a close analysis of the novel Il fu Mattia Pascal and the final words of Mattia Pascal, I conclude that Pirandello tantalizes Pascal with a solution to his crisis of identity and consciousness but does not allow him to reach it, perhaps in order to demonstrate the pitfalls of logic and reason. Pirandello effectively illustrates the difficulty in achieving freedom from suffering due to the strength of the individual’s will to create and believe in its creations. Just as life is continuously in the process of becoming, man must unite his consciousness with the incessant change of mental and bodily elements (Govinda 54). Echoing Pirandello’s sentiments that man does not recognize the relativity
of his perception, and that real death means creating one’s own reality and remaining
comfortable there, Govinda writes of man’s apprehension to change:

This change either appears as birth or growth or as death and decay, though both these aspects are inseparably connected with each other like the two sides of the same coin. Just as the same door may be called entrance or exit according to the standpoint of the observer, so it is the same process which we call birth or death according to our limited perception, our one-sided point of view. By not seeing the unity of these sides we fail to realize that we cannot desire one without inviting the other. Clinging to life means clinging to death. The very essence of life is change, while the essence of clinging is to retain, to stabilize, to prevent change. This is why change appears to us as suffering. (Govinda 55)

Pascal’s return to Miragno does not go according to his plan because life has gone on without him. Life, as it is meant to, changes in every moment. Pascal is upset by the changes in Miragno even though he was unhappy with the way was it was before he left. Mattia Pascal’s fundamental problem is that he cannot change himself to be harmony with the changes inherent in life. Pascal is unable to detach from his false “self,” and cannot cope with the dynamic changes of life, so he remains imprisoned in the cyclical rotation of karma.

This analysis is not intended to confine or restrict Pirandello’s philosophies into pre-established categories but aims to highlight the importance in assessing Pirandello’s application of spiritual approaches. Upon analysis of his texts in the following chapter, however, it can be discerned that Pirandello seems to favor the Eastern spiritual tradition and Buddhist psychology over the methods of Western psychology and traditional religion. Whether or not Pirandello was conscious of the established philosophy of Buddhism, as its teachings had only recently come to light through modern Theosophy and translations of Buddhist and Hindu doctrines, the dogma is not important—especially not for Pirandello. The important objective for Pirandello as a humorist is to present such
concepts in the hopes that they will be reflected upon through meditation and be applied without needing reason and logic. As portrayed by his typical protagonists, Pirandello is well-aware that changing the self in such a way (i.e. obliterating the self and yielding to Self), is a challenging commitment that not every man will choose or be able to undertake, especially without spiritual guidance. Pirandello articulates in *Il fu Mattia* that to be free of psychological suffering caused by cravings and delusions, man does not need to conform to one religious practice or another, but he must reconcile the disparity between form and life by: 1) overcoming the boundaries imposed by society and the collective consciousness;\(^{152}\) 2) gaining self-knowledge, becoming aware of and transcending his individual, egocentric self-consciousness (ego-self); and 3) learning to

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\(^{152}\) This is addressed by Pirandello in “L’umorismo.” As stated in the introduction, Pirandello’s concept that the soul and consciousness are affected by a history of collective beliefs, was highly influenced by Giovanni Marchesi. Pirandello writes in “L’umorismo”: “E mentre il sociologo descrive la vita sociale qual’essa risulta dalle osservazioni esterne, l’umorista armato del suo arguto intuito dimostra, rivela come le apparenze siano profondamente diverse dall’essere intimo della coscienza degli associati. Eppure si mentisce psicologicamente come si mentisce socialmente. E il mentire a noi stessi, vivendo coscientemente solo la superficie del nostro essere psichico, è un effetto del mentire sociale. L’anima che riflette se stessa è un’anima solitaria; ma non è mai tanta la solitudine interiore che non penetrino nella coscienza le suggestioni della vita comune, con gl’inlingimenti e le arti trasfigurative che la caratterizzano, Vive nell’anima nostra l’anima della razza o della collettività di cui siamo parte; e la pressione dell’altrui modo di giudicare, dell’altrui modo di sentire e di operare, è risentita da noi inconsciamente: e come dominano nel mondo sociale la simulazione e la dissimulazione, tanto meno avvertite quanto più sono divenute abituali, così simuliamo e dissimuliamo con noi medesimi, sdoppiandoci e spesso anche moltiplicandoci. Risentiamo noi stessi quella vanità di parer diversi da ciò che si è, che è forma consustanziata nella vita sociale; e rifuggiamo da quell’analisi che, svelando la vanità, ecciterebbe il morso della coscienza e ci umilierrebbe di fronte a noi stessi” [While the sociologist describes social life as it appears from external manifestations, the humorist, armed with his keen intuition, reveals how profoundly different the outer appearances are from what takes place in the inner consciousness. Yet we lie psychologically just as we lie socially. And, since conscious life extends only to the surface of our psychic being, lying to ourselves is a result of social lying. The soul that reflects upon itself is a solitary soul, but this inner solitude is never so great that the suggestions from collective life, with its typical dissimulations and transfigurative devices, do not penetrate the consciousness. There lives in our soul the soul of the race of the community of which we are a part. We unconsciously feel the pressure of other people’s way of judging, feeling, and acting; and as simulation and dissimulation dominate in the social world—the more habitual they become, the less they are noticed—we too simulate and dissimulate with ourselves, doubling and often even multiplying ourselves. We, as individuals, experience something which is inherent and essential to social living, the vanity of seeming different from what we really are, and we avoid any analysis which, unveiling our vanity, would prompt our remorse and humiliate us before ourselves”] (*Spsv* 149; Illiano, trans. 134).
embrace the true Self (*anatta* in Hinduism), similar to the concept of “no-self” (*anātman* in Buddhism). Pirandello illustrates, via the cycles of Mattia Pascal’s suffering and frustration, that the ancient beliefs of Buddhism are as applicable in the early twentieth century as they were two thousand years ago. Pirandello’s application forces us to ask the question, “Have traditional Western philosophical, religious, and scientific practices derailed man’s ability to live authentically in the universe?”
CHAPTER FOUR
FROM THE TRAP TO THE EXIT

Mystical Consciousness and the Language of Paradox

La vita è l’essere che vuole se stesso. Che si dà una forma. È dunque l’infinito che si finisce. In ogni forma c’è un fine e dunque una fine. In ogni forma è una morte. Dunque l’essere s’uccide in ogni forma, o si nega. Diceva in questo senso Spinoza\textsuperscript{153} che ogni affermazione è negazione. Perché l’essere vivesse bisognerebbe che s’uccidesse di continuo ogni forma; ma senza forma l’essere non vive. Ecco l’eterna contraddizione. Perché l’essere viva è necessario che egli uccida di continuo ogni forma, nell’attimo stesso che la crea, cosicché ogni affermazione di vita è nello stesso tempo una morte; una morte-vita.\textsuperscript{154}

-Luigi Pirandello

The majority of Pirandello’s protagonists suffer because they ignorantly mistake their subjective view of the world, which they mold from the vain desires and cravings of their will, for true reality. Recurrently throughout his canon, Pirandello presents these characters as miserably trapped in their artificial worlds—the result of a consciousness confined by created illusions and personal attachments. In the statement above,

\textsuperscript{153} My footnote insertion: Baruch Spinoza (1634-1677) was a Dutch philosopher. According to Bertrand Russell: “Spinoza’s metaphysic is the best example of what may be called “logical monism”—the doctrine, namely, that the world as a whole is a single substance, none of whose parts are logically capable of existing alone” (Russell 577). Particularly pertinent for Pirandello is: “Spinoza is concerned to show how it is possible to live nobly even when we recognize the limits of human power. […] Take, for instance, death: nothing that a man can do will make him immortal, and it is therefore futile to spend time in fears and lamentations over the fact that we must die. To be obsessed by the fear of death is a kind of slavery; Spinoza is right in saying that ‘the free man thinks of nothing less than death.’ […] What should be avoided is a certain kind of anxiety or terror; the necessary measures should be taken calmly, and our thoughts should, as far as possible, be then directed to other matters. The same considerations apply to all other purely personal misfortunes” (Russel 578). My footnote insertion

\textsuperscript{154} From “Foglietti” Inediti (Spav 1275-76). Translation: “Life is the being that desires itself. That gives itself a form. It is thus the infinite that ends itself. In each form there is an aim and therefore a conclusion. In every form is a death. So the being kills itself in any form, or denies itself. Spinoza said in this sense that every assertion is a negation. In order for the being to live, it would need to kill itself continuously of any form; but without form the being does not live. This is the eternal contradiction. Because the being lives, it is necessary that it continuously kills in him every form, in the same moment that he creates it, so that every affirmation of life is at the same time a death; a death-life. “
Pirandello describes the bondage of life to form and highlights the inevitable conflict in equilibrating the dualistic forces. The constant imbalance of life and form negatively affects the mind and causes the suffering at the root of the human condition.

Human suffering and the path to overcoming this suffering are at the core of Buddhist psychology and the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha acknowledged the universal human vulnerability to mental pain and he devised it as the First Noble Truth: “There is suffering (dukkha)” (Frits Koster 15). In The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy, Lama Govinda describes the dualistic conflict between life and form and he illustrates the unsuccessful attempts to resolve it:

Bondage presumes a dualism, namely, a force and something which obstructs this force, thus, the relationship of tension between two opposed systems, the ‘I’ and the ‘world.’ The attempt to adjust this tension consists, on the one hand, in designs for the satisfaction of desires, that is, in the attempt to incorporate parts of one system in the other; and on the other hand, in aims at annihilating the opposing forces, that is, to drive back the forces of one system with those of the other and in driving them back, make an end of them. The attempt miscarries in both phases. Every blow occasions an equally strong counter-blow, every counter-will again begets willing, every act of obstruction begets resistance. Craving increases in the exact degree it is yielded to. Every deed done for its satisfaction is the germ, the continuously acting cause of new craving. […] The impossibility of the equilibration of the state of tension, the total discrepancy between subjective willing and objectively given facts, the disharmony between ideation and actuality, is what we call suffering. (Govinda 79-80)

The tension and disharmony described above echoes that of the tense interaction between the six characters (representing life) in their search for an author, and the Managers and the actors (representing form). The characters long for life but they are also bound by their desire for an author to write their story, and therefore, grant them immortality. Most

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155 Frits Koster explains: “The Buddha himself used the Pali term dukkha. The meaning of the word dukkha can probably be rendered best as the unsatisfactory, unfulfilled, frustrating, conflicting and painful nature of life” (Koster 15).
of Pirandello’s characters, like Mattia Pascal and Bernardo Sopo, do not overcome their anguish because instead of eradicating the cause itself, they attempt to adjust the tension by countering with the system of reasoning or by imposing another obstacle of form.

Buddhism postulates that man’s belief that the ‘ego’ is an absolute, when it is actually an illusion, is the major obstruction to equilibrating the dualistic forces. Lama Govinda describes the way to freedom from suffering is through “directed consciousness” and annihilation of the vacuum of illusion:

The conquest of this disharmony, of these idiosyncrasies, the losing of the [above-mentioned] tie, in short, the release into the state of inner freedom, does not come about through the suppression of the will, but through the removal of the vacuum, that is, through the annihilation of the illusion. All suffering arises from a false attitude. The world is neither good nor bad. It is solely our relationship to it which makes it either the one or the other. With reference to the goal of deliverance, two main modes of consciousness can be distinguished: the directed or the undirected. Directed consciousness is that which, in recognition of the goal, has entered the stream and is wholly bent upon freedom, which means that the decisive reversal or attitude has ensued. Undirected consciousness, on the contrary, allows itself to be driven hither and thither by instinct-born motives and external impressions. On account of its dependence on the external world it is designated as worldly or mundane (lokiya) consciousness. In contradistinction to this, directed consciousness is held to be supra-mundane (lokuttara). (Govinda 80)

“Directed consciousness,” or higher-world consciousness, detaches from external distraction and maintains focus internally on the goal of freedom from suffering while “undirected consciousness,” or everyday consciousness, is motivated by external impulses and impressions. Govinda describes the three basic planes of consciousness as:

“The consciousness that dwells in the domain of the sensuous, of forms or craving 
(kamavacara-citta); the consciousness which dwells in the domain of Pure Form 
(rupavacara-citta); and the consciousness which dwells in the domain of the formless, of Non-Form (arupavacara-citta), which is the intermediary between the other two”
Mattia Pascal, frequently changing identities and moving from place to place, can be described as having undirected consciousness. The characters with directed consciousness, such as Tommasino Unzio of “Canta l’Epistola” and Moscarda Vitangelo of Uno, nessuno e centomila, focus their attention on nature and intuit the essence of reality. These characters, immersed in meditation, allow reason and logic to be extinguished and they recognize the interconnectivity of the natural universe. As a result, they abandon their illusions, individual affairs, hopes and vain desires. There is a pronounced transformation from the painstaking self-consciousness (the ‘I’-bound domain of forms) of the early Pirandellian protagonist, Mattia Pascal, to Vitangelo Moscarda’s detached mystical consciousness (the ‘I’-freed domain of Pure Form or Non-Form)—or the state described as, “the peace which passeth all understanding” (James Ogilvy 591). The success or failure of these characters depends on the path they take to find freedom from suffering. That the path determines the outcome is best evidenced by the different conclusions of the spiritual and psychological journeys of Mattia Pascal and Vitangelo Moscarda. As discussed later in this chapter, Moscarda’s path, akin to the Middle Way proffered by Buddhism, leads him to a state of nirvana while Mattia Pascal’s path motivated by undirected consciousness, leads him back to the physical, psychological and spiritual place of dis-ease from which he started.

The non-dogmatic and non-theistic practical teachings of Buddhism and Eastern mysticism’s approach to the paradoxes of life, though perhaps gleaned indirectly by Pirandello through various manifestations (via Arthur Schopenhauer and modern Theosophy, for example), provide the author with the antidote to his characters’ spiritual sickness. Pirandello demonstrates that the disintegration of spirit, induced by living in a
mechanistic world dominated by reason, is able to become whole again by following the path of the ancient belief system of Buddhism. Regardless of whether Pirandello’s tendency toward Eastern mystical philosophies were inadvertent or not, as demonstrated in this chapter, Pirandello’s representation of the path to liberation and the rendering of his characters’ experience of mystical consciousness—unbound by form, time and space—ultimately advocates a metaphysical system of thought closest to the non-theistic teachings of Buddhism. The reader is able to discern the shift from Pirandello’s pessimistic representation of the protagonist as “trapped” to that of his positive illustration of the protagonists’ experience of mystical consciousness and his rehabilitative “exit” from suffering. This transition is exemplified in “Quando ero matto” (“When I Was Mad”), “Leviamoci questo pensiero” (“Let’s Dispose of This Worry”), “La trappola” (“The Trap”), “Canta l’Epistola” (“Sings the Epistle”), “Di sera, un geranio” (“In the Evening, a Geranium”), and culminating in its greatest expression, *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (*One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*).
Pantheism Versus Mysticism

The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the power of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I belong to the rank of devoutly religious men.156

-Albert Einstein

Pirandello’s depictions of his characters in their moments of acute awareness of nature and attainment of higher consciousness resemble the mystical experience. The characters, in such moments of illumination, detach from their limited consciousness, gain wisdom of true reality and experience enlightenment, or nirvana, the liberation of all suffering, as this mystical state is known in Buddhism. In “Mysticism and Human Reason,” W.T. Stace describes mysticism as a universal phenomenon that is found in every country, age, culture and major religion and shares common elements, despite its strong association with Christian mysticism. Stace offers a brief history of mysticism and highlights the correspondence between the word “mysticism” in the West and the word “enlightenment” in the East:

Those ancient inspired documents, the Upanishads, which go back in time from 2,500 to 3,000 years, and which are the fountainheads both of the Hindu religion and of the Vedanta philosophy, are a direct report of mystical experience. Buddhism, too, is a mystical religion throughout. It is founded on the mystical experience of Gautama Buddha. In the East, in India, the word “mysticism” or any word corresponding to it is generally not used. It is called “enlightenment” or “illumination.” But the enlightenment experience in the East is basically the same as what is called the mystical experience in the West. In the Mohammedan religion the Sufis were the great representatives of mysticism. Mysticism in China

156 See Frank, Philipp Einstein: His Life and Times 284.
appears in connection with Taoism. The Tao is a mystical conception. Judaism produced notable mystics. The history of Christianity is rich with the names of great mystics and some of those names are household words: Meister Eckhart, Saint Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and many others. Even outside the boundaries of any institutional religion, in the ancient Greco-Roman Pagan world, not attached, perhaps, to any particular religion, Plotinus was one of the supremely great mystics. (Ed. Ogilvy 590)

Though mystical experiences have typically been associated with the mystic’s ecstatic union with God, Maragaret Smith explains the union with the One, not exclusively in terms of “God”—but with the One true reality.

Mysticism, then, is spiritual and transcendent in its aims, but it holds that the Object of its quest, the World-Soul, the Absolute, the One Reality, is also the Beloved, and as lovers the mystics seek for union with the One. That union they believe can be attained only by passing through certain definite stages, which they call the treading of the Mystic Way, so that Mysticism is active and practical; it means discipline and a rule of life, and much upward striving before the mystic can hope to attain the heights. Mysticism, since it is permeated through and through by the power of Love, can never be self-seeking, for the end can only be attained by self-stripping; moreover, what is given in full measure to the mystic must be shared with others. (Margaret Smith 24)

Pirandello’s representation of the mystical experience involves man’s realization of the interconnectivity of all things in nature. My analysis does not intend to portray Pirandello’s characters as mystics, but to illustrate the similarities between the protagonists’ experience of unity with nature and the mystical experience. This representation of man immersed in nature, though perhaps inspired by the German reception of the “vital Pantheism” found in Hinduism, has been incorrectly identified

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In *The German Gita*, Bradley L. Herling investigates the German reception of Indian thought during the years 1778 to 1831: “At a rather early point, prominent figures in German intellectual life associated the “mind” of India, as exemplified by the *Gita*, with a crusade against the disenchantment of the world, which had supposedly been caused by the Enlightenment. As a primordial source of cultural wisdom, India could provide an antidote to a mechanistic world dominated by *Verstand* (reason) and a rejoinder to an elitist, rarefied philosophy dominated by *Vernunft* (common sense). In response to the degeneration that the Enlightenment had instigated, the ideas and the texts of India could promote a German cultural renewal. For its Romantic detractors, the alternative to Enlightenment rationality was
by critics as Pantheism as Pirandello does not identify “God” with the all the aspects of the universe. In the book, *General Sketch of the History of Pantheism*, Constance E. Plumtre defines pantheism as, “the name given to that system of speculation which in its spiritual form identifies the universe with God” (Plumtre 24).

Pirandello embraces an interconnected vision of the universe, but as a self-proclaimed atheist, he is far from representing or advocating a pantheistic belief system. Parallel to the accusation that Henri Bergson’s *Élan vital* was pantheistic, Anthony Caputi comments that “pantheism”—as some critics have called Pirandello’s holistic vision of the universe—“is not a fortunate term for this response” (Caputi 128). Caputi

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159 In the book, *General Sketch of the History of Pantheism*, Constance E. Plumtre defines Pantheism: “Pantheism, in the generally accepted meaning of the word, is the name given to that system of speculation which in its spiritual form identifies the universe with God. Its antiquity is undoubtedly great, for it is prevalent in the oldest known civilization of the world. The Hindu Pantheism is taught especially by the Vedas, which are religious books; by the Vedanta, which is a philosophy; and by the Bhagavadgita, which is a poem partly religious, partly philosophic. Hindu Pantheism is purely spiritual in character; matter and (finite) mind are both absorbed in the fathomless abyss of illimitable and absolute being” (Plumtre 24).

160 The Vatican placed Henri Bergson’s work on the Index in 1914. R.C. Grogin explains: “The Vatican believed that Modernism was a well-organized conspiracy dedicated to the subversion of the Catholic faith. When Rome issued the encyclical *Pascendi Gregis* in 1907 it dealt a mortal blow to Modernism, and eliminated what it felt was a great danger to formal religion. *Pascendi* and the decree which followed it, *Lamentabili sane exitu*, thoroughly condemned the modernist theses. In 1908 Alfred Loisy was excommunicated, modernist journals were forced to close, and the works of the leading modernists were placed on the Index. What then followed was, according to a recent historian of the subject, nothing less than an “anti-modernist witchhunt” which lasted until the 1920s. A purge followed *Pascendi* in which modernists and those presumed to be modernists were fired from administrative and teaching positions in seminaries and universities. Moreover, argus-eyed vigilance committees serving the bishop in each diocese were to see to it that anyone affiliated with a Catholic institution or publication who expressed a "different" view on such subjects as biblical exegesis or scholasticism was to be purged. These efforts to stamp out the modernist heresy reached a peak in 1910 when the Holy See, believing that Modernism still enjoyed a clandestine existence, imposed an anti-modernist oath on all priests having a pastoral charge or entering major orders” (R.C. Grogin 165-166).
cites the novella, “Quando ero matto” (“When I Was Mad”) (1902), as an early example of a work that has been misconceived as pantheistic. The protagonist, Fausto Bandini, begins the story with an admission that he is now “savio”—a word that can be translated as either wise or sane. He says: “Prima di tutto chiedo licenza di permettere che ora sono savio. Oh, per questo, anche povero. Anche calvo. Quando’ero ancora io, voglio dire, il reverito signor Fausto Bandini, ricco, e in capo avevo tutti i miei bellissimi capelli, è però provato provatissimo ch’ero matto” [“First of all, I ask permission to state upfront that now I am sane/wise. Oh, for this, also poor. Also bald. When I was still myself, that is, the revered Mr. Fausto Bandini, rich, and I had all my beautiful hair on my head, it was very much proven however that I was mad”] (TLN 1: 761). He explains that one day, to his wife’s chagrin, the idea came to him to offer a poor girl a job as a servant in his house. Bandini says:

E si badi: qualifico pazzia quest’idea improvvisa, non tanto per la trepida gioja che mi suscitò e che riconobbi in prima benissimo, per averla altre volte provata tal quale, quand’ero matto: specie d’ebbrezza abbarbagliante che dura un attimo, un lampo, nel quale il mondo sembra dia un gran palpito e sussulti tutto dentro di noi; quanto per le riflessioni da povero savio con cui cercai subito di puntellare quell’ebbrezza in me. (TLN 1: 762-763).

And mind you: I qualify as madness this sudden idea, not so much for the anxious joy that excited me and that I recognized very well at first, for it having other times so tested me, when I was mad: kind of dazzling drunkenness that lasts a moment, a flash, in which the world seems to give a great blast and shakes everything inside of us; for as long as the reflections from a poor wise/sane man with which I immediately sought to strengthen that intoxication in me.

Fausto Bandini receives a message from the universe and he experiences a flash of joy so dazzling that he construes it as madness. Like so many other Pirandellian characters who experience mystical consciousness and gain wisdom of true reality, Bandini believes that
he was “mad” because his new perspective marginalized him from the artificial world of illusions that makes up society. Therefore, Pirandello’s choice of the word “savio” is significant in that it is possible that Bandini is wiser and more sane than he was before his mystical experience, yet the implication remains that before he was “crazy.”

Bandini explains that when he was mad, he was alienated from himself in such a way that recalls the detachment from the ‘I’-bound domain of forms: “Quand’ero matto, non mi sentivo in me stesso; che è come dire: non stavo di casa in me. Ero infatti divenuto un albergo aperto a tutti” [“When I was mad, I did not feel myself in myself; that is to say: I was not at home in myself. I had become in fact a hotel open to everyone”] (TLN 1: 764). Bandini goes on to explain the sensation of detachment from his ego-self and the experience of unifying vision that he experiences as he offers his help and services those less fortunate:

Non potevo dir: io, nella mia coscienza, che subito un’ecco non mi ripetesse: io, io, io … da parte di tanti altri, come se avessi dentro un passerao. E questo significava che se, poniamo, avevo fame e lo dicevo dentro di me, tanti e tanti mi ripetavano dentro con loro: ho fame, ho fame, ho fame, a cui bisognava provvedere, e sempre mi restava il rammarico di non potere per tutti. Mi concepivo insomma in società di mutuo soccorso con l’universo; ma siccome io allora non avevo bisogno di nessuno, quel “mutuo” aveva soltanto valore per gli altri. (TLN 1: 764).

I could not say: I, within my consciousness, that instantly an echo would not repeat: I, I, I … from the part of many others, as if I had chirping inside. This meant that if, let us suppose, I was hungry and I said it within me, more and more they would repeat from inside: I am hungry, I am hungry, I am hungry, for which provisions would be necessary, and not being able to provide for all of them, I was always left with regret. In short I thought I was in a mutual aid partnership with the universe; but since at that time I did not need anyone, that “mutual” only had value for others.

Bandini, in thinking of the others’ needs as though they were his own, embodies selflessness and compassion. He says that his first wife considered his behavior an
indication of a kind craziness of the times—perhaps akin to the multiple personality disorder being studied at the time by Freud, Binet and others. Bandini, however, offers an explanation that would sound perfectly sane to Buddhists in his treatise, *Fondamento della morale* (*Foundation of Morality*), namely that it is his wife who does not understand the shared commonality of suffering that resides in every individual. It is interesting to note that Radcliff-Umstead looks to Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* to bolster the proposition that Bandini was indeed “mad” while in the same year that “Quando ero matto” was written, William James noted the similarity between the mystic and schizophrenic experience. (Kenneth Wapnick 321).

Radcliff-Umstead describes the techniques Pirandello applies to represent the unconscious and demented mind:

> Through the technique of the interior monologue the narrator also enters into debate with his audience in an effort to demonstrate his position and prove his contention that to pursue wisdom and beve morally will only provide convincing evidence of a demented mind. In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault declared that the necessity of madness is bound to the possibility of history. Bandini’s personal history arises out of the madness of social relationships that Pirandello’s paradoxical art probes. In dichotomies like *matto* / *savio* or *ricco* / *mendicante*, the signifying terms of the story establish reflexive relations as the tale turns on itself in an examination of an individual’s nocturnal nature, which the narrative method allows the reader to explore. The reader becomes an internal observer as the author eliminates the initial narrator / reader distance and reproduced the schizoid annihilation of ordinary chronological time in order to transform present and past into eternity. With its starts, interruptions, and winding back upon itself, the interior monologue serves

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161 In “Mysticism and Schizophrenia,” Kenneth Wapnick writes: “William James noted the similarity between the mystic and schizophrenic experience as far back as 1902. He distinguished between two kinds of mysticism; a higher and a lower. The former included the classic mystical experiences, while the latter James identified with insanity, which he termed a ‘diabolical mysticism.’ James concluded that in both forms is found: ‘The same sense of ineffable importance in the smallest events, the same texts and words coming with new meanings, the same voices and visions and leadings and missions, the same controlling by extraneous powers . . . It is evident that from the point of view of their psychological mechanism, the classic mysticism and these lower mysticisms spring from the same mental level, from that great subliminal or transmarginal region of which science is beginning to admit the existence, but of which so little is really known. That region contains every kind of matter: ‘seraph and snake’ abide there side by side” (Wapnick 321).
here to represent the linguistic structures of the unconscious. (Radcliff-Umstead 55)

Maragret Smith, on the other hand, approaches the annihilation of self and time from the perspective of the mystical experience: “Self-loss, withdrawal from self, self-annihilation, these are essential to those who would approach the Absolute. Only when all images of earth are hushed and the clamor of the senses is stilled and the soul has passed beyond thought of self can the Eternal Wisdom be revealed to the mystic who seeks that high communion with the Unseen” (Smith 21). Thus, one is able to discern the possibility of mistaking mental illness, or what Radcliff-Umstead calls Bandini’s “schizoid annihilation,” mistaking mental illness for mystical consciousness and experience.

The following description of Bandini’s experience of inner silence and intimacy with nature is at the heart of the debate between the claim of Pantheism and Caputi’s dispute of such label. Bandini describes a certain day in the country in which he experiences the ecstasy of a divine vision:

Sul cadere della sera, in villa, mentre da lontano mi giungeva il suono delle cornamuse che aprivano la marcia delle frotte dei falciatori di ritorno al villaggio con le carrette cariche del raccolto, mi pareva che l’aria tra me e le cose intorno divenisse a mano a mano più intima; e che io vedessi oltre la vista naturale. L’anima, intenta e affascinata da quella sacra intimità con le cose, discendeva al limitare dei sensi e percepiva ogni più lieve moto, ogni più lieve rumore. E un gran silenzio attonito era dentro di me, sicché un frullo d’ali vicino mi faceva sussultare e un trillo lontano mi dava quasi un singulto di gioia, perché mi sentivo felice per gli uccelletti che in quella stagione non pativano il freddo e trovavano per la campagna da cibarsi in abbondanza felice, come se il mio alito li scaldasse e li cibassi di me.

Penetravo anche nella vita delle piante e, man mano, dal sassolino, dal fil d’erba assorgevo, accogliendo e sentendo in me la vita d’ogni cosa, finché mi pareva di divenir quasi il mondo, che gli alberi fossero mie membra, la terra fosse il mio corpo, e i fiumi le mie vene, e l’aria la mia anima; e andavo un tratto così, estatico e compenetrato in questa divina visione.
Svanita, restavo anelante, come se davvero nel gracile petto avessi accolto la vita del mondo. Mi mettevo a sedere a piè d’un albero, e allora il genio della mia follia cominciava a suggerirmi le più strambe idee: che l’umanità avesse bisogno di me, della mia parola esortatrice: voce d’esempio, parola di fatto. A un certo punto m’accorgevo io stesso che deliravo, e allora mi dicevo:: “Rientriamo, rientriamo nella nostra coscienza …” Ma ci rientravo, non per veder me, ma per vedergli altri in me com’essi si vedevano, per sentirli in me com’essi in loro si sentivano e volerli com’essi si volevano.

Ora, concependo e riflettendo così nello specchio interiore della coscienza gli altri esseri con una realtà uguale alla mia e per tal mezzo anche l’Essere nella sua unità, un’azione egoistica, un’azione cioè nella quale la parte si erige al posto del tutto e lo subordina, non era naturale che mi apparisse irragionevole?

Ahimè, sì. Ma mentre io per le mie terre camminavo in punta di piedi e curvo per vedere di non calpestare qualche fiorellino o qualche insetto, dei quali vivevo in me la tenue vita d’un giorno, gli altri mi rubavano la campagna, mi rubavano le case, mi spogliavano addirittura.

E ora, eccomi qua: ecce homo! (TLN 1: 766-767)

As evening fell in the country, [...] it seemed to me that the air between me and the things around me slowly became more intimate: and I saw beyond the natural view. The soul, absorbed and fascinated by that sacred intimacy with things, went down to the threshold of the senses and perceived every slight movement, every slight noise. And a great blank silence was inside me, so that a flutter of wings made me wince, and almost gave me a sob of joy, because I felt happy for the little birds that did not suffer from the cold that season and ate in abundance throughout the countryside; happy, as if my breath warmed them and as if I fed them myself.

I penetrated also into the life of plants and, gradually, from the stone, from the blade of grass, welcoming and feeling in me the life of everything, until I seemed to become almost the world, that the trees were my limbs, the earth was my body, and the rivers my veins, and my soul the air; and suddenly I was so ecstatic and permeated in this divine vision. Dissolved, I remained breathless, as if truly in my weak chest I had received the life of the world.

I was sitting at the foot of a tree, and then the genius of my insanity was beginning to suggest the most outlandish ideas: what humanity needed of me, of my exhortatory word: Voice of example, word of fact. At a certain point I realized that I was delirious, and then I said to myself: “Let’s return, let’s return to our consciousness …” But I returned there, not to see me, but to see others in me as they saw themselves, to feel them in me as they felt in themselves, to want for them as they wanted for themselves.
Now, so conceiving and reflecting in the inner mirror of the consciousness the other beings with a reality equal to mine and by such means also Being in its unity, an egotistical action, an action that is in which the part one builds in place of everything and subordinates it, was it not natural that it would appear unreasonable to me?

Alas, yes. But while I was walking across my land and tiptoed so as to see not to step on some flower or some insect, through which lived in me the tenuous life of a day, the others stole the country from me, they stole from me the houses, they even undressed me.

And now, here I am: this is man!

Bandini experiences a sense of oneness with the universe when all of nature seems to penetrate his consciousness and fill his soul. After the moment of inner silence passes, Bandini’s ego-self tries to make him return to everyday consciousness and causes him to think that he is delirious. He remains conscious of the feelings, views and desires of the others that he felt with in himself, however, he mistakes this comprehension of the unity of Being, or the higher Self, as being egotistical—when it is really the opposite. Bandini, stripped of his blinders, transcends the ego-self and experiences a vision of the universe at it really is—comprised of nature and Beings that are a manifestation of nature.

Caputi is most likely referring to Radcliff-Umstead’s label of “pantheism” to describe Bandini’s relationship with nature. Radcliff-Umstead writes:

Hoping to win his first wife, Mirina, over to his views, he composed a treatise called The Foundation of Morality, also in the form of a dialogue with his spouse in which he defended his belief in an immanentist philosophy with its vision of a harmonious world. Mention of the dialogue treatise adds another narrative level to the tale that proceeds from the present of sanity to a past of madness and then to the pantheistic text with its debates. Bandini’s longing to experience continual empathy with the surrounding world, even to penetrating the life of the plants, belongs to the same kind of mystical lunacy as that of St. Francis D’Assissi and follows an inclination studied by Freud of the conscious desire to adhere to the unconsciousness. Within this tale’s multiple levels the narrator wishes to show his former pantheism as an error, for when he thought he was living a divinely inspired existence, his employees were robbing him. (Radcliff-Umstead 56)

Anthony Caputi argues against the label of Pantheism assigned to Fausto Bandini’s
consciousness of nature:

What looks less like a healing attitude and more like a self-consciously derived solution to the problems of human life, and what such discerning critics as Arminio Janner, Giovanni Calendoli, and Douglis Radcliff-Umstead propose as Pirandello’s answer, is his periodic interest in what they call pantheism, but what is more accurately a giving over of the struggle altogether in favor of sinking into the flux of nature. We see an early version of it in “When I Was Mad” (1902), the story of Fausto Bandini’s discovery that he had been mad all those years when he had housed a great many selves, most of them imposed by others. To be mad is to lose oneself among the chaos of selves within, to see neither oneself nor the world for oneself. With this recognition Fausto’s sense of himself as an individual begins; he gives up reasoning, that is, accommodating the perspectives of others, and he becomes “wise.” His state of being approaches something like pantheism on the night when, wandering outside the villa where his beloved sister-in-law awaits burial, he learns that his wife has a lover. As he dismisses all conventional responses to the betrayal, a dismissal that will later certify another kind of madness for the others, he is acutely conscious of the clouds and the wind and the vast mystery surround man’s petty imperatives. He does not identify himself with this nature, yet perceiving it in this way he embraces the nonreasoned, nonstructured, almost prerational acquiescence that we shall see is central to Pirandello’s so called pantheism. But “pantheism” is not a fortunate term for this response. (Caputi 128)

This description of the protagonist correlates to experiencing mystical consciousness, which is the precursor to the mystical experience, or enlightenment. Pirandello does not describe Bandini as recognizing God in all the elements of nature, rather, he is described as experiencing nature in himself. While I agree that Pantheism is not the proper term, I challenge Radcliff-Umstead’s quick dismissal of Bandini’s experience as “mystical lunacy,” and, contrary to Anthony Caputi, I consider the embodiment of such wisdom to be intuited by a higher consciousness and a healing attitude, rather than a “self-consciously derived solution to the problems of human life.” Pirandello’s representation of Fausto Bandini’s awareness of nature and his “nonreasoned, nonstructured, almost prerational acquiescence,” as well as his representation of characters in even more intense
moments of heightened consciousness and immersion in nature is, indeed, incorrectly labeled as a pantheistic rendering. However, this experience claims more substantiality than merely the, “giving over of the struggle altogether in favor of sinking into the flux of nature,” as it is called by Caputi. This experience of detachment from the ego-self and relinquishing of all illusions is indicative of nirvana, defined by the early Buddhist doctrine, the Pali Canon, as:

‘Nirvana’ is the complete and utter dissolution of the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate, and delusion. It is said of the tathagata that on entering Nirvana the skandhas (bundles) are completely dissolved, and are rooted out, so they can never arise again. The five skandhas are: rupa, vedanam samjna, samskara and vijnana, or respectively physical form, feeling, perception (both physical and mental), drives, and consciousness […] It is without foundation, without beginning and without end. It is peace without movement or desire, the end of all suffering. […] It is without a substantial self (anatta), the perfect peace, a ‘nothing’ as compared with all visible configurations (Helmuth Von Glasenapp 107).

The “Unifying Vision”

Pirandello’s belief that it is an illusion to think of oneself as living independently from nature, and his belief that man can transcend the consciousness limited by his quotidian routine through the reunion with nature, is similar to what is known as the “unifying vision” in mysticism. W.T. Stace explains that this “unifying vision,” or “unitary consciousness,” is the fundamental characteristic of all mystical experience. Similar to the characters’ need to gain a perspicacious awareness of and transcend the illusions fostered by the routines and obligations of everyday life, Stace describes the “unifying” vision versus the vision of “multiplicity”:

We may contrast the mystical consciousness with our ordinary, everyday, rational consciousness. Our ordinary, everyday consciousness is characterized by multiplicity. I mean that both the senses and the intellect, which constitute our everyday consciousness, are in contact with and are
aware of a vast number, a plurality, a multiplicity of different things. In our ordinary consciousness we discriminate between one thing and another. But the mystical consciousness transcends all differences and all multiplicity. In it there is no multiplicity and no division of interest. (Ed. Ogilvy 591)

Pirandello’s protagonist Moscarda Vitangelo, confronted by the idea of one hundred thousand varying visions of himself, best embodies this everyday consciousness of multiplicity. Pirandello stresses that many men, unable to remove the blinders that inhibit the view of true reality, remain unaware that they are able to attain a higher mode of consciousness. Reason and logic fuel man’s ignorance and it is challenging to break down the barriers imposed by everyday consciousness. However, when man accesses the wisdom of true reality, he comes to understand the eternality of nature; all forms, including conclusions, are illusions and not part of true reality. This transcendent view of man as a manifestation of nature, and nature as eternal, shows a distinct move away from Blaise Pascal’s warning that one’s eternity will be either heaven or hell, depending on the strength of his monotheistic Christian faith. Pirandello, maintaining his criticism of traditional science and religion, demonstrates the need to move toward a non-religious and non-dogmatic spirituality that offers a prescription for authentic living. Via his representation of the enlightenment of the modern man, Pirandello confirms the effectiveness of the Buddha’s Middle Way to equilibrate the inherent imbalance of life and form.
By the time of his death it was quite certain that Luigi Pirandello was one of the great dramatic artists of this century. There was no unanimity, however, in the reasons given for this greatness, for, appropriately enough, Pirandello’s plays about the puzzling nature of experience were themselves puzzling. Since then twelve years have passed, and it is perhaps now possible to consider his purpose without the hysteria of partisanship that obscured so much of the criticism. Today Pirandello as author is in the unusual position that his works are historical yet contemporary. [...] There is a complexity of attitude and of approach to character and experience that is typical of some of the more intellectual men of letters of the century. It is characteristic of Shaw, to whom Pirandello is most often compared, of Ibsen, of Strindberg, perhaps of J. M. Synge. In Pirandello this complexity gives rise to a constant sense of paradox. (Fiskin 44)

According to Pirandello, man is able to achieve freedom from the suffering imposed by the everyday consciousness by observing nature and seeing himself as a manifestation of the natural world around him. The conflict for man lies in the paradoxical reality that to live truly authentically, that is, as immersed in the dynamic flow of the universe, one must die and be reborn in each moment—eternally, with no conclusion. Remaining present in this perpetual state of becoming is necessary to avoid the tantalizing compulsion to create conclusions and forms, and therefore, cling to the illusion death. Pirandello clearly delineates such ideas in his critical essays, but he faces a new crisis of representation in illustrating mystical consciousness and the ineffable experience of enlightenment, or nirvana. Pirandello’s aim to create art that represents life is not hindered by this challenge, and he succeeds in representing the paradox of the “death-life” (quoted in the beginning of this chapter) by calibrating the natural fluctuations of the characters’ consciousness with the flux and movement of life manifested in nature. I argue that Pirandello, via his stratagem of not concluding, intuits a way to represent the mystical experiences of his characters as they realign themselves
with nature and overcome the “eternal contradiction” of the conflict between life and form.

As evidenced in this chapter, Pirandello not only represents man’s recognition of nature as not concluding, but also rises to the challenge of representing life, and therefore art, as not concluding. W.T. Stace describes the ineffability and timelessness of the mystical experience:

Closely connected with, and perhaps as a result of this characteristic of transcending all multiplicity, discrimination, and division are other characteristics common to the mystical experience in all religions. It is non-sensuous, non-intellectual, and non-conceptual. And since all words except proper nouns stand for concepts, this means mystical experience is beyond all words, incapable of being expressed in any language; “ineffable” is the usual word. Another characteristic is that what is experienced is beyond space and time. It is timeless; and timelessness is eternity. And therefore the mystical consciousness, even though it lasts only for a very short while, perhaps only a moment, it is nevertheless eternal. For that moment gathers into itself all eternity. It is an eternal moment. (Stace 591)

Ultimately, Pirandello wants to represent characters, such as Unzio and Moscarda, in this “eternal moment” of awakening, or enlightenment, as living parts of nature yet dying in every instant. Nirvana is, in essence, expressed in the negative, and is therefore also outside of the scope of communicative language:

[‘Nirvana’] is something that can be expressed in the negative only, for it possesses no specific marks that language can encompass. The Pali Canon even employs the paradox that Nirvana is ‘bliss’ though there is neither a subject to enjoy it, nor the skandha vedana (feeling); the bliss of Nirvana consists indeed in not feeling anything. (Helmuth Von Glasenapp 107).

162 Regarding the ineffability of the mystic experience, Arthur Deikman writes in Understanding Mysticism: “Mystic experiences are ineffable, incapable of being expressed to another person. Although mystics sometimes write long accounts, they maintain that the experience cannot be communicated by words or by reference to similar experiences from ordinary life. They feel at a loss for appropriate words to communicate the intense realness, the unusual sensations, and the unity cognition already mentioned. However, a careful examination of mystic phenomena indicates that there are at least several types of experiences, all of which are “indescribable” but each of which differs substantially in content and formal characteristics. Error and confusion result when these several states of consciousness are lumped together as “the mystic experience” on the basis of their common characteristic of ineffability” (Deikman 256).
Thus, it becomes clear that Pirandello’s reinforcement of the “not having” and “being without” in his description of Tommasino Unzio’s, and later Vitangelo Moscarda’s, moment of liberation is deliberately executed to compensate for the lack of adequate language to describe this particular state of ‘nothingness’: “Non aver più coscienza d’essere, come una pietra, come una piñata; non ricordarsi più neanche del proprio nome; vivere per vivere; senza sapere di vivere, come le bestie come le piante; senza più affetti, né desiderii, né memorie, né pensieri; senza più nulla che desse senso e valore alla propria vita” [“To have no consciousness of being, like a stone, like a plant; to no longer recall even one’s own name; to live for the purpose of living, without knowing about it, like the animals, like the plants, no longer with feelings or desires or memories or thoughts, no longer with anything that might give a sense of value to one’s life”] (Na I 446; Caputi 129). Fritjof Capra highlights the paradoxical situations confronted by Eastern mysticism and modern physics:

Eastern mysticism has developed several different ways of dealing with the paradoxical aspects of reality. Whereas they are bypassed in Hinduism through the use of mystical language, Buddhism and Taoism tend to emphasize the paradoxes rather than conceal them. […] Here we find a striking parallel to the paradoxical situations which confronted physicists at the beginning of atomic physics. As in Zen, the truth hidden in paradoxes that could not be solved by logical reasoning, but had to be understood in the terms of a new awareness; the awareness of the atomic reality. The teacher here was, of course, nature, who, like the Zen masters, does not provide any statements. She just provides the riddles. (Capra 47, 49)

Nature has always been, and will always be, man’s teacher. Pirandello aims to represent this truth in his art with the additional challenge of not producing a symbolic art that is trapped by its own form. Perhaps for Pirandello, the humorist, this paradoxical aspect of reality provided the perfect paradigm for provoking the awareness and sentiment of the
opposite on the most visceral level: in order to truly live, one’s consciousness must die and be reborn in every moment.

Pirandello’s philosophical narration in stories such as “La trappola” give way to the artistic representation of the “uscita,” or exit from suffering through the contemplation of nature. Despite Pirandello’s, as well as the characters’ recognition of the illusion of concluding, the mystical experiences in the novelle, “Canta l’Epistola” (“Sing the Epistle”) and “Quando ero matto” (“When I Was Mad”), for example, are ensconced by the narration of the characters’ story and, bound by traditional form, they offer the reader clear conclusions. However, as best illustrated by the lack of conclusion of the novel, Uno, nessuno e centomila, Pirandello effectively overcomes this crisis of representation in his rejection of narrative finality—which Pirandello indicates explicitly by calling the last of the novel, “Non conclude.”
The Beginning of “Non conclude”

Bisogna che l’essere accada, crei a sé stesso la sua apparenza: il mondo. Il mondo è l’attività dell’essere, un’apparenza, un’illusione, a cui l’essere stesso dà valore di realtà. Questa realtà non può dunque non scoprirsi quello che è, cioè un’apparenza, un’illusione necessaria; perché necessario è questo: che l’essere accade. E se l’essere è eterno, eterno sarà l’accadere, e dunque un accadere senza fine, e dunque senza un fine, e dunque un essere e un accadere che on concludono mai. La vita non conclude.  

Pirandello’s emphasis on the conflict between the endless and eternal duration of the natural universe versus illusionary man-made finite conclusions are observable as early as 1909. From then on, there is a notable shift from his pessimistic representation of man as trapped by the vain illusions of his ego-self to a more optimistic rendering of man’s existence in the universe and the harmonious reconciliation with his true Self. Pirandello no longer focuses solely on man’s view of himself as an insignificant, suffering entity on the linear path from birth to death, but aims to demonstrate that man, his consciousness included, is a manifestation of the eternal lifecycle of nature. Pirandello began his novel Uno, nessuno e centomila (One, No one and One Hundred Thousand) in 1909, though he did not complete it until 1925. Also in 1909, Pirandello wrote the article, “Non conclude” (“It Does Not Conclude”), which shares its title with that of the last chapter of Uno, nessuno e centomila. This obscure yet telling article offers insight to Pirandello’s view of

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163 Luigi Pirandello from “Foglietti” Inediti (Spsv 1275). Translation: “It is necessary that being occurs, to believe in oneself, an appearance: The world is the activity of being, a form, an illusion, to which the being himself gives value to reality. This truth cannot therefore discover itself that is an appearance, a necessary illusion; because this is necessary: that being happens. And if being is eternal, eternal will be the occurrence, and therefore an infinite happening, therefore without end, and therefore a being, an occurrence that will never be concluded. Life does not end.”

164 Pirandello’s article, “Non conclude,” was published in “La Preparazione” six months after “Da lontano” in August of 1909. “Non conclude” was republished by Giancarlo Mazzacurati in the appendix of Effetto Sterne. La narrazione umoristica in Italia da Foscolo a Pirandello (Sterne Effect. The Humoristic Narration in Italy from Foscolo to Pirandello) Pisa: Nistri-Lischi 1990 437-439 (TLN 2: 1093-1094).
nature as non-concluding and man’s need to create conclusions. Pirandello explains that these conclusions, merely another form of illusion, are formulated because man wears “il paraocchi” (blinders) that inhibit his view of the world around him. When man takes off his blinders, an action similar to the soul that jumps to look through the larger lens of the telescope, a different and more accurate vision of reality is revealed. Pirandello writes:

And then man realizes, that for a while, in order to come to a conclusion, he had put on blinders, which excluded him from the view of the other things all around. Now, taking away the blinders, one sees the goal reached as lost among all the other things around, that call, attract and take pleasure away from the gain. / What have I concluded? –the man then asks. / But the stronger recognition of having concluded nothing happens when, abstracting from the ephemeral eventualities of quotidian troubles, from passions, from desires, from the obligations that we set for ourselves, from the routines that we have mapped out, we knock down the illusory limits of our present consciousness, we expand the boundaries of our habitual vision of life, we rise to impartially contemplate and consider nature from of a tragic and solemn loftiness. / It is the recognition of the old ways, that precisely moves one close again to the eternal womb of nature. / And from this returning to nature one derives the recognition.
Because nature, in its eternity, does not conclude. And we who are in it [nature], who are it [nature] itself, but who for some time we have seen and treated ourselves as parts for our own selves detached and separate, when the moment approaches to go back and lose ourselves in it [nature], in its eternity, we recognize every one of our conclusions as vain, illusory, arbitrary, we recognize that really we do not conclude at all. Nature remains eternal after each of us: eternal because it does not conclude.

In order to have an accurate outlook and appreciation of life as it really is, it is necessary for man to take off his blinders, thereby separating his true Self from that of his predominant limited consciousness (which is confined by quotidian chores and driven by egocentric passions).

One finds similar passages to those from “Foglietti Inediti” and “Non conclude,” quoted above, in Pirandello’s novelle, “Leviamoci questo pensiero” (“Let’s Dispose of This Worry”) (1910) and “Quando s’è capito il giuoco” (“When the Game is Understood”) (1913).165 The protagonist of “Leviamoci questo pensiero” is the recently widowed and anxiety-ridden, Bernardo Sopo. In trying to unburden himself of all worry,

165 In “Quando s’è capito il giuoco” (“When the Game is Understood”) (1913), protagonist Memmo Viola, the apathetic amateur cook-philosopher, is called upon to fight a duel in order to avenge his wife’s honor. He explains to Gigi Venanzi before the duel: “Del resto, caro mio, tutte sciocehuzze. Inutile parlarne! Cristina vuole lavato l’oltrag, e non se n’esce. Perderei la libertà; e invece, con questa occasione, io me la voglio guadagnare intera. Vedrai che ci riuscirò. Va’, va’; pensa a tutto, tu che te n’intendi. Io ti aspetto a casa. Sto leggendo un bel libro sai? su i Massimi Problemi. Tu non ci hai mai pensato; ma il problema dell’oltretomba è formidabile, Gigi! No, scusa, scusa... perché... senti questo: l’Essere, caro mio, per uscire dalla sua astrazione e determinarsi ha bisogno dell’Accadere. E che vuol dire questo? dammi una sigaretta. Vuol dire che... – grazie – vuol dire che l’Accadere, poiché l’Essere è eterno, sarà eterno anch’esso. Ora un accadere eterno, cioè senza fine, vuol dire anche senza un fine, capisci? un accadere che non conclude, dunque, che non può concludere, che non concluderà mai nulla. È una bella consolazione. Dammi un fiammifero. Tutti i dolori, tutte le fatiche, tutte le lotte, le imprese, le scoperte, le invenzioni ...” [“... After all, my dear, all nonsense. It’s useless to talk about it! Cristina wants the outrage washed, and it doesn’t come out. I would lose my freedom; and instead, with this occasion, I want to earn the whole thing. You will see that I will succeed. Go, go, think about everything, you who understands it. I will wait for you at home. I am reading a good book, you know? on the Greatest Problems. You would never have thought it; but the problem of the afterlife is formidable, Gigi! No, sorry, sorry ... because ... listen to this: Being, my dear, to exit its abstraction and determine itself needs the Occurrence. And what does this mean? Give me a cigarette. It means that ... – thanks– it means that the Occurrence, since the Being is eternal, it will be eternal also. Now an eternal occurrence, that is without end, means even without an intention, understand? an occurrence that does not conclude, therefore, that is not able to conclude, that will never conclude anything. It’s a nice consolation. Give me a match. All the pain, all the efforts, all the struggles, businesses, discoveries, inventions ... “] (TLN 2: 834).
Sopo aims to eradicate all thoughts and worries as soon as possible. Pirandello describes the protagonist Bernardo Sopo:

La vita era per Bernardo Sopo profondamente oscura; la morte, uno sbuffo di più densa tenebra nell’oscurità. Né al lume della scienza per la vita né al lume della fede per la morte riusciva a dar credito; e in tanta oscurità non vedeva profilarsi altro, a ogni passo, che le sgradevoli, dure, ispide necessità dell’esistenza, a cui era vano tentar di sottrarsi, e che si dovevano subito perciò affrontare o subire, per levarsene al più presto il pensiero.

Ecco, sì, levarsene il pensiero! Tutta la vita non era altro che questo: un pensiero, una sequela di pensieri da levarsi. Ogni indugio era una debolezza. […] Non voleva confessare, non che agli altri, ma nemmeno a se stesso, che nel fondo più recondito di quella oscurità che si sentiva dentro e che né il lume della scienza né quello della fede riuscivano mai a stenebrare neppur d’un primo frigo pallor d’alba, gli palpitava come un’ansia indefinibile, l’ansia di un’attesa ignota, un presentimento vago, che nella vita ci fosse da fare qualche cosa, che non era mai quella delle tante a cui correva dietro per levarsene subito il pensiero. Ma pur troppo, sempre, quando di queste s’era levato il pensiero, restava come sospeso e anelante in un vuoto smarrito. Gli rimaneva quell’ansia, dentro: ma l’attesa, ahimè, era sempre vana, sempre. (TLN 2: 528)

Life was for Bernard Sopo profoundly dark; death, a puff of denser darkness into obscurity. He was not able to give credit the light of science for life nor to the light of faith for death; and in so much darkness he did not make out other, in every step, than the unpleasan, hard, bristly necessity of existence, to which he was in vain trying to escape, and that for this reason, should be immediately confronted or suffered, to remove the thought as soon as possible.

That’s it, yes, remove the thought! All life was none other than this: a thought, a series of thoughts to dispose of. Each delay was a weakness. […] He did not want to confess, not just to the others, but even to himself, that in the most hidden depths of that darkness he felt inside and that neither the light of science nor that of faith could ever succeed in illuminating even the frigid pallor of the first dawn, it shook him like an indefinable anxiety, the anxiety of an unknown anticipation, a vague presentiment that in life there was something to do, that he was never one of the many to whom he ran behind to immediately dispose of the thought. But unfortunately, always, when these had taken away the thought, he remained as if suspended and yearning in a vacuum. The anxiety remained inside him: but the anticipation, alas, was always futile, always.
Pirandello returns to the notion that man, unsatisfied with science and religion, needs spiritual guidance when in the throes of an existential crisis. Sopo, clearly suffering from anxiety or another psychological illness of sorts, tries to escape the stress of the eventualities of life by removing a thought or worry from his mind as soon as possible. He establishes that clinging to thoughts is a weakness, and though he vows to renounce each worry as they arise, another anxious thought or anticipation of worry always returns. Though Sopo, in true Buddhist fashion, directs his consciousness away from the ego and redirects it toward detachment from thought, his method proves to be nothing more than the inadequate coping mechanisms of escapism and repression. He remains as if suspended in a vacuum and does not find relief from his anxiety. In An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology, Pamasiri de Silva describes anxiety and the pathological behavior that may result from defense mechanisms:

Anxiety and vexation (kodaupayasa) may be generated by one’s attempt to obtain specific objects in the external world or by some haunting inner disquiet. While analyzing the specific fears and anxieties, the Buddha always takes us into the level of basic anxiety fed by the various forms of ego-illusion. […]

When [such] fears are repressed and pushed beyond awareness the seeds of anxiety develop. After repression, the person feels afraid, but does not know exactly what he is afraid of. What is called objectless anxiety is such a diffuse state of uneasiness. […]

In general, conflicts and anxieties emerge in three types of situations: the relationship between the self and the outer world, between the self and other selves, and finally between the discordant aspects of one’s own self. The difficulty in seeing through the conflicting welter of ego-attitudes and ambiguities in these relationships is due to the condition of half-obsccurity and ignorance that colours the emotional conflicts of people. It is the root delusion that explains this phenomenon, by way of the diverse forms of ego-illusion, which the Buddha presents as the twenty forms of wrong personality-belief (sakkaya-ditthi). The link between the ego and forms of anxiety is central to the teaching of the Buddha. (Pamasiri de Silva 93-94).
This explanation accounts for the description of life for Sopo as dark, with him plunging into obscurity. Sopo, due to his ignorance, continues to repress his anxiety and does not uncover the underlying delusion that is the root cause. Therefore, he remains suspended in the vacuum of illusion.\footnote{See the quotation by Lama Govinda regarding the “vacuum of illusion” on p. 3 of this chapter.}

As the years go by, Sopo grows more and more apathetic and dissatisfied with life. He determines that the dreams of the poets, the mental architecture of the philosophers and the discoveries of science are all illusions and clever jokes. He asks, “Che concludevano?” [“What did they conclude?”] (\textit{TLN} 2: 530). Sopo is by now convinced that man on the earth is not able to conclude anything, and that all the man-made conclusions are illusory and arbitrary. The narration continues:

L’uomo è nella natura, è la natura stessa che pensa, che produce in lui i suoi frutti di pensiero, frutti secondo le stagioni anch’essi, come quelli degli alberi, effimeri forse un po’ meno, ma effimeri per forza. La natura non può concludere, essendo eterna; la natura, nella sua eternità, non conclude mai. E dunque, neppur l’uomo!

Se n’accorgeva bene Bernardo Sopo, quando, nel tempo che sempre gli avanzava, si astraeva dalle volgari contingenze, dalle brighe quotidiane, dai doveri che s’era imposti, dalle abitudini che s’era tracciate, e allargava i confini della consueta visione della vita e si sollevava, spassionato, a contemplare da questa altezza tragica e solenne la natura. S’accorgeva che, per concludere, l’uomo si metteva un paraocchi, che gli facesse vedere per alcun tempo una cosa sola; ma, quando credeva di averla raggiunta, non la trovava più, perché, levandosi quel paraocchi e scoprendogli la vista di tutte le cose intorno, addio conclusione!

Che restava dunque a non volersi illudere coscienzientemente, quasi per uno scherzo? Ahimè, nient’altro che le dure necessità dell’esistenza, da subire o da affrontare subito per levarsi il pensiero al più presto. Ma allora, tanto valeva uccidersi, per levarsi subito il pensiero di tutto. Bravo, si! Uccidersi … Poterlo fare! Bernardo Sopo non poteva: la sua vita era purtroppo una necessità, di cui non si poteva levare il pensiero. Aveva fuori tanti parenti poveri, per cui doveva vivere. (\textit{TLN} 2: 530)

Man is in nature, he is the very nature that thinks, which produces in him the fruits of thought, fruits in season too, like of those of trees, perhaps a bit ephemeral, but necessarily ephemeral. Nature cannot
conclude, being eternal; nature, in its eternity, never concludes. And therefore, even man!

Bernardo Sopo realized it, when, in the time that always advanced him, he abstracted himself from the vulgar contingencies, from the daily quarrels, from the duties that he had imposed, from the habits that he had outlines, and he extended the boundaries of the normal view of life and sprung up, impartially, to contemplate nature from this tragic and solemn loftiness. He realized that, to conclude, man put on blinders, that made him see for some time only one thing: but, when he thought he achieved it, he could not find it anymore, because, taking off those blinders and discovering the view all around him, farewell conclusion!

What remained, therefore, not wanting to deceive himself consciously, almost as if a joke? Alas, nothing but the hard necessity of existence, to suffer or to be addressed immediately, to disperse the thought as soon as possible. But then, it was worth it to kill himself, to immediately take away the thought of everything. Bravo, yes! kill himself… to be able to do so! Bernardo Sopo could not: his life was unfortunately a necessity, of which could not dispose of the thought. He had many poor relatives for whom he had to live.

In this passage, echoing the sentiments from “Foglietti” Inediti and “Non conclude” quoted in the beginning of this section, Pirandello returns to the notion that man must remove his blinders if he wishes to see reality as it truly is. Separating himself from the daily routines and struggles, Bernardo Sopo removes his blinders and realizes that all conclusions are illusions as nature is eternal and man is part of nature. The problem lies in reconciling this newly found cosmic wisdom with the artificial quotidian contrivances of man. Sopo does not see the worth of existing among men who unconsciously deceive themselves and he contemplates suicide. He cannot go through with it, however, as he has many relatives for whom he must live.

Bernardo Sopo’s ignorance of the discordant aspects of his own self leads to pathological behavior and alienation as his relationships with others are strained. Driven by his need to hastily accomplish tasks so as to free himself of that worry, he is inconsiderate to others and has become a nightmare for everyone; “era divenuto un
incubo per tutti” (TLN 2: 531). One day while Sopo is out walking, he stops in a deserted piazza to think about what he has to do next. He closes his eyes and slowly repeats to himself, “Io dovevo fare qualcosa…” [“I had something to do…”]. In a tragic turn of events, Sopo is hit by a car, loses consciousness, and is rushed to the hospital. A few moments before he dies, Sopo opens his eyes and repeats with his last breath: “Io dovevo fare qualcosa…” [“I had something to do…”] (TLN 2: 532). Scopo dies without ever having a moment of peace.

**Discarding the Blinders of Ignorance**

As seen with Bernardo Sopo, Buddhist psychology explains that suffering is rooted in ignorance (*avijja*), or “not understanding or misunderstanding reality.” Frits Koster explains: “This ignorance is not at all a lack of intellectual knowledge; it is not being (clearly) aware of or interpreting unwisely sensory input and mental and physical experiences the moment they arise” (Koster 19). The reader is able to relate Pirandello’s metaphor of wearing blinders (that limit one’s vision and cause suffering) to the Buddhist concept of ignorance as described in the following passage:

In Buddhist psychology it is said that ultimately all problems arise from ignorance. Not being aware and being blinded in relation to pleasant impulses result in desire and attachment. With unpleasant impulses they cause aversion, hatred, fear or jealousy, and with neutral impulses they lead to confusion, uncertainty, boredom or apathy. In this way we as human beings create unconsciously or only half consciously all kinds of patterns in our thinking and acting that keeps us in bondage and cause suffering. We may be searching all our lives for a mirage or a castle in the air; we can see it, but it is always just out of reach. (Frits Koster 19)

The Buddhist concept of ignorance as the main obstacle to freedom from suffering is akin to Pirandello’s blinders; the blinders prohibit man’s vision and cause him to ignore fundamental truths of reality. Man suffers because of his ignorance, however, the Four
Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path of Buddhism are designed to spiritually educate man and show him the way to recognize this ignorance, and therefore, overcome suffering. In his description of the Third Noble Truth, the truth of the ending of suffering (*nirodha sacca*), Koster writes:

The Buddha once said, *Oh monks, I only teach one thing: suffering and the ending of suffering*. According to the early Buddhist scriptures, walking the Eightfold Path—condensed as the path of virtue, meditation and wisdom—leads to harmony and insight. This insight culminates in the realization of the third noble truth: the truth of the eradication or ending of suffering. In Pali the word used in this context is *nirodha*, which can be translated as ‘not being in bondage, or no longer being in bondage.’

When meditative insight is profound enough, and when the meditator and the situation are ready, a specific and purifying experience may happen which is called ‘enlightenment.’ This experience bears no relation to any worldly experience and therefore cannot be described. (Koster 22-23)

Parallel to the Buddha’s recommendation of meditation, Pirandello espouses the best way to gain wisdom and break down the barriers of the consciousness is to contemplate and concentrate on nature. From an effortless meditation on nature, man can derive the understanding that the natural universe is constantly evolving and metamorphosing—like clouds become rain and the caterpillar becomes the butterfly.\footnote{167 See the conclusion of Pirandello’s novella, “Soffio” (“Breath”) (1931).}

This natural process is dynamic and eternal while man’s illusive conclusions are ephemeral and his existence is short-lived. Pirandello aims to show that even death is an illusion. Man’s misconception of death as the ultimate conclusion is perhaps his greatest existential obstacle. Because man perceives death as the end of life, and not as part of the natural lifecycle that continues long after our individual physical bodies have expired, he lives in fear of this end and his ability to live authentically is compromised. Man must consider himself a microcosm of the eternal macrocosm—not separate and detached from
nature but as smaller representation of the universe itself. When we realign ourselves with this truth, Pirandello attests, all of the man-made deceptions and misconceptions are brought to light and man is forced to recognize the pervasive superficiality and artificialities from which his blinders had been blocking from his vision.

“La trappola”

In the novella, “La trappola” (“The Trap”) (1912), the reader is able discern Pirandello’s impression of man as “trapped”—caught between the flux of life and his desire to create forms. The unknown narrator, “un ragionatore tagliente e rabbiosa” (“a sharp and angry reasoner”), relays his philosophy directly to the reader as no other characters are mentioned. He begins with strong conviction, stating: “Quello che sento io, senti anche tu, e sentono tutti” [“What I feel, you and everyone else feels”], and then asks, “Perché avete paura di svegliarvi la notte?” [“Why are you afraid to wake up the night?”] The narrator makes the assumption that the reader is, indeed, afraid of the dark and then answers his own question: “Perché per voi la forza alle ragioni della vita viene dalla luce del giorno. Dalle illusioni della luce” [“Because for you the force of reason comes from the light of day. From the illusions of the light”] (TLN 2: 695). Pirandello then distinguishes between natural sunlight versus the sad artificial light of a candle burning in a dark, quiet room. The narration follows:

Come la mano, trema tutta la vostra realtà. Vi si scopre fittizia e inconsistente. Artificiale come quella luce di candela. E tutti i vostri sensi vigilano tesi con ispasimo, nella paura che cotto a questa realtà, di cui scoprite la vana inconsistenza, un’altra realtà non vi si riveli, oscura, orribile: la vera. Un alito…che cos’è? Che cos’è questo scricciolio?

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168 “La trappola” was published for the first time in “Corriere della Sera” May 23rd, 1912 and was later included in the fourth volume of “Novelle per un anno”, L’uomo solo (1922) (TLN 2: 1156)
E, sospesi nell’orrore di quell’ignota attesa, tra brividi e sudorini, ecco davanti a voi in quella luce vedete nella camera muoversi con aspetto e andatura spettrale le vostre illusioni del giorno. (TLN 2: 695).

Like your hand, your whole reality trembles. You discover it fictitious and inconsistent. Artificial like that light of the candle. And all your senses monitor attentively with a pang, in fear that beneath this reality, of which you discover the vain inconsistency, another reality will not reveal itself to you, obscure, horrible: the true reality. A breath…what is it? What is this squeaking?

And, suspended in the horror of the anticipation of that unknown, between shivers and sweat, here in front of you in that light you see your illusions of the day move themselves with a spectral appearance and movement.

Pirandello argues that because life is fluid and dynamic, death is every form that arrests the movement of life. Life is the movement of the wind, the sea, and fire—not the form the earth assumes. Pirandello writes:

Ma che vuol dire, domando io, darsi una realtà, se non fissarsi in un sentimento, rapprendersi, irrodirsi, incrostarsi in esso? E dunque, arrestare in noi il perpetuo movimento vitale, far di noi tanti piccoli e miseri stagni in attesa di putrefazione, mentre la vita è flusso continuo, incandescente e indistinto.

Vedi, è questo il pensiero che mi sconvolge e mi rendo feroce!
La vita è il vento, la vita è il mare, la vita è il fuoco; non la terra che si incrosta e assume forma.
Ogni forma è la morte.
Tutto ciò che si toglie dallo stato di fusione e si rapprende, in questo flusso continuo, incandescente e indistinto, è la morte.
Noi tutti siamo esseri presi in trappola, staccati dal flusso che non s’arresta mai, e fissati per la morte . . .
Abbiamo finito di morire. E questo abbiamo chiamato vita!
Io mi sento preso in questo trappola della morte, che mi ha staccato dal flusso della vita in cui scorrevo senza forma, e mi ha fissato nel tempo, in questo tempo!
. . . È vero, sì, caduto più nella trappola, avrei allor odiato quell’altra forma, come odio questa: avrei odiato quell’altro tempo, come ora questo, e tutte le illusioni di vita, che noi morti d’ogni tempo ci fabbrichiamo con

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169 Pirandello describes this “ignota attesa” [“anticipation of the unknown”] earlier in “Leviamoci questo pensiero” (1910): “Non voleva confessare, non che agli altri, ma nemmeno a se stesso, che nel fondo più recondito di quella oscurità che si sentiva dentro e che né il lume della scienza né quello della fede riuscivano mai a stenere neppur d’un primo frigido pallor d’alba, gli palpivava come un’ansia indefinibile, l’ansia di un’attesa ignota” (TLN 2: 528)
quel po’ di movimento e di calore che resta chiuso in noi, del flusso continuo che è la vera vita e non s’arresta mai.

Siamo tanti morti affaccendati, che c’illudiamo di fabbricarci la vita.

Ci accoppiamo, un morto e una morta, e crediamo di dar la vita, e diamo la morte…Un altro essere in trappola! (TLN 2: 696-97)

But what does it mean, I ask, to give oneself a reality, if not to fix oneself in a sentiment, to set oneself, to be made stiff, encrusted in it?

And, meanwhile, to stop the perpetual vital movement in us, to make us so many small and miserable stagnant pools waiting to rot, while life is a continuous flow, incandescent and indistinct.

See, this is the thought that troubles me and makes me ferocious!

Life is the wind, life is the sea, life is fire; not the land that encrusts it and assumes its form.

Every form is death.

All that is removed from the state of fusion and congeals itself in this continuous flow, incandescent and indistinct, is death.

We are all trapped beings, removed from the stream that never stops, and fixed for death. . .

We finished dying. And this we called life!

I feel caught in this trap of death that has detached me from the flow of life in which I used to flow without form, and that fixed me in time, in this time! . . .

It is true, yes, having fallen more into the trap, then I would have hated that other form, as I hate this: I would have hated that other time, as now this, and all the illusions of life, that we dead every time we fabricate for ourselves with that bit of movement and heat that remains closed in us, of the continuous flow that is real life and does not ever stop.

We are so many dead bustlers that delude ourselves to fabricate life for ourselves.

We pair, a dead man and a dead woman, and we believe to give life, and we give death … Another being entrapped!

Pirandello does not discriminate between individuals but says that we all are trapped because we all create illusions that cause the perpetual flow of life to stagnate and be reduced to static, lifeless form. This theoretical passage, similar to Pirandello’s discourse in “L’umorismo,” according to Lucio Lugnani, “viene sviluppato un mito primario Pirandelliano; e perciò il testo manifesta una inusitata densità e rigidità tematica, attualizzando in forma per così dire pura una rete di relazioni opposte” [“a primary Pirandellian myth is developed; and for that reason the texts manifests an unusual density
and thematic rigidity, actualizing in form so to speak a pure net of opposite relations”; he goes on to explain the distinction between the concepts of continuous, timeless life of the “primordial, mythic order” versus that of the life fixed in time by the “real order” (TLN 2: 1161).^170

Upon further analysis, it become clear that the Pirandellian philosophy, or the “myth” that emerges, falls somewhere between his reconciliation of the mystical theology of Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées*, Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea*, Buddhist philosophy and Pirandello’s own thoughts on the soul, life and death. Pirandello’s recognition that life, like the sea and the wind is fluid and in continual motion, is akin to the mythical order and the Buddhist belief in the dynamic nature of consciousness.

Pirandello’s concept of death here indicates a stop to the flow of life, as described by the “real” order of life—not a transitional and integral phase of the life, death and rebirth cycle. This rigidity is perhaps due to Pirandello’s affinity for the apologetic writings of Pascal, whose primary concern is to persuade man to live in such a way that would allow his soul eternal salvation in the afterlife, or perhaps due to a fear of eternal damnation, having declared himself an atheist and admitting his skepticism of religion, despite growing up and living immersed in religious Catholic culture (Giudice 38). Pascal writes in *Pensées*: “You do not need a greatly elevated soul to realize that in this life there is no

[^170]: In the notes for “La trappola,” Lucio Lugnani writes: “Nell’ordine ideale, mitico e primigenio, precedente a ogni nascita d’uomo, la vita è flusso continuo (atemporale) e indistinto; nell’ordine reale, la vita è separatezza, distacco (ossia distinzione), fissazione nel tempo e incombente immobilità. Perciò nascere significa cominciare morire. Il grande mito, nostalgico e regressive, è non nascere; la sua traduzione pratica è l’ostinata renitenza ad aderire ad una identità immutabile, a immedesimarsi in un ruolo e a conformarvisi, a lasciar consolidare le consuetudini, a intrappolarsi fino in fondo facendo ciò che fanno. (TLN 2: 1161) [“In ideal, mythical and primordial order, prior to the birth of every man, life is continuous flow (timeless) and indistinct; in the real order, life is separation, detachment (or distinction), fixed in time and impending immobility. So to be born means to begin to die. The great myth, nostalgic and regressive, is not to be born, and its practical translation is the stubborn unwillingness to adhere to an unchanging identity, to identify with a role and to conform to it, to let the customs be made solid, to trap them all the way doing what they do.”]
and true firm satisfaction, that all our pleasures are simply vanity, that our afflictions are infinite, and lastly that death, which threatens us at every moment, must in a few years infallibly present us with the appalling necessity of being either annihilated or wretched for all eternity” (Trans. Levi 160). Though Pirandello rejects this religious notion for himself, he shares Pascal’s belief that man is wretched, vain and trapped in the dark. Concerning temporality, Pascal fundamentally believes that there is an “eternity” of either salvation or damnation after death, and that our short lives are indicative of what will happen to our souls when physical death inevitably arrives. Pascal goes on to describe the prideful and unenlightened man, lacking conviction and “cloaked in impenetrable darkness,” because he is indifferent to the immortality of his soul. Pascal writes as though this man were speaking:

‘I do not know who put me in the world, nor what the world is, nor what I am myself. I am terrifyingly ignorant about everything. I do not know what my body is, or my senses or my soul, or that part of myself which thinks that what I am saying, which reflects on everything and itself, and does not know itself any better than the rest. I see the terrifying expanses of the universe which close around me, and I find myself pinned to a corner of this vast space, without knowing why I have been put in this place rather than in another, nor why the short time given to me to live is assigned to this moment rather than another in all eternity which has preceded me and shall come after me.

‘I see nothing but infinities on all sides, enclosing me like an atom, or a shadow which lasts only for a moment and does not return.

‘All I know is that I must shortly die, but what I know least about is death itself, which I cannot avoid.’ (Trans. Levi 161)

Echoes of Pascal are clearly heard when the narrator of “La trappola” says: “I feel caught in this trap of death that has detached me from the flow of life in which I used to flow without form, and that fixed me in time, in this time!” (TLN 2: 697). Lama Anagarika Govinda describes this in The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy:
According to the knowledge of the transitory character of all phenomena of life that is represented internally in the fleeting processes of the consciousness, externally in the slow but continuous change of the body, the Buddhist compares existence to a river, having its source in birth and its mouth in death [. . .] In fact every moment is the transition to a new form of life, since in every moment something becomes past and dies, while something new appears or is born. The expression for birth, respectively rebirth, is patisandi, which literally means ‘reunion’, and in this case, is not to be understood in the physiological but in the psychological sense. The term for death his cuti, literally, ‘falling’ decay. (Govinda 129)

Pirandello, at this stage, seems to also be trapped between the notion of the end of physical life, or death, causing the onset of the decay and disintegration, and not yet reconciled with the possibility of a ‘rebirth’ of consciousness. Despite the uninterrupted and flowing ‘stream of consciousness’ represented in contemporary modern literature, Pirandello argues that the forms man fabricates will arrest the flow—rendering man as the “living-dead.” As I demonstrated in Chapter Three of this dissertation, Pirandello experiments with psychological rebirth in Il fu Mattia Pascal but Mattia Pascal’s two rebirths fail to reunite him with his consciousness because he still sees himself as living outside of life. Instead of becoming reborn into the flow of life, in which all things—including consciousness—are interconnected, Mattia Pascal remains fragmented and disconnected, in yet another trap.

“Canta l’Epistola”

In the novella, “Canta l’Epistola” (“Sings the Epistle”) (1912), Tommasino Unzio has a mystical experience similar to that of Fausto Bandini’s in “Quando ero matto” (“When I Was Mad”) (1902). Tommasino Unzio, a former seminary student, is called Sing the Epistle because he had reached this stage in his priesthood preparations before losing his faith. His soul was unfulfilled by the routine practices of the Catholic religion
and he craved a different sort of spirituality. Suffering from the sickness of his spirit, Unzio listens mockingly to the desperate meditations of the Father and he retreats into himself (“si chiuse in sé”)—leaving his room only to walk alone through the forest or to meditate at the abandoned church of Santa Maria di Loreto. He spends his days lying in the grass, meditating and concentrating on the nature around him. Unzio becomes very protective of a certain patch of grass and he comes to respect and marvel at “lo spettacolo che si spalancava sotto, della verde, sconfinata pianura” (“the show that stretched below him, of the green, boundless open plain”); he nurtures one particular blade of grass with a “maternal tenderness” (“Lo aveva seguito, quasi con tenerezza materna, nel crescere lento tra altri più bassi che gli stavano attorno”) \( (TLN\ 2: 640) \). Concentrating on the movement of the wind and clouds, Unzio recognizes that the vain ambitions of men are as transitory and ephemeral as the clouds in the sky: “Tutte le illusioni e tutti i disinganni e i dolori e le gioje e le speranze e i desiderii degli uomini gli apparivano vani e transitorii” [“All the illusions and all the deceptions and the pain and the joy and the hopes and the desires of men appeared to him vain and transitory”] \( (TLN\ 2: 638) \). His blinders have been removed and his vision is clear. The narrator describes Unzio’s transformation of consciousness:

Non aver più coscienza d’essere, come una pietra, come una pianta; non ricordarsi più neanche del proprio nome; vivere per vivere; senza sapere di vivere, come le bestie come le piante; senza più affetti, né desiderii, né memorie, né pensieri; senza più nulla che desse senso e valore alla propria vita. Ecco: sdrajato li su l’erba, con le mani intrecciate dietro la nuca, guardare nel cielo azzurro le bianche nuvole abbarbaglianti, gonfie di sole; udire il vento che faceva nei castagni del bosco come un fragor di mare, e nella voce di quel vento e in quel fragore sentire, come da un’infinità lontananza, la vanità d’ogni cosa e il tedio angoscioso della vita.

Nuvole e vento.

Eh, ma era già tutto avvertire e riconoscere che quelle che veleggiavano luminose per la sterminata azzurra vacuità erano nuvole. Sa
forse d’essere la nuvola? Né sapevan di lei l’albero e le pietre, che ignoravano se stessi.

E lui, avvertendo e riconoscendo le nuvole, poteva anche—perché no?—pensare alla vicenda d’acqua, che divien nuvola per ridivenir poi acqua di nuovo. E a spiegare questa vicenda bastava un povero professoruccio di fisica; ma a spiegare il perché del perché?

Su nel bosco dei castagni, pigi’ d’accetta; giù nella cava, pigi’ di piccone.

Mutilare la montagna; atterrare gli alberi, per costruire case. Li, in quel borgo montano, altre case. Stenti, affanni, fatiche e pene d’ogni sorta, perché? Per arrivare a un comignolo e per fare uscir poi da questo comignolo un po’ di fumo, subito disperso nella vanità dello spazio.

E come quel fumo, ogni pensiero, ogni memoria degli uomini. [...] Tutte le illusioni e tutti i disinganni e i dolori e le gioie e le speranze e i desiderii degli uomini gli apparivano vani e transitori, di fronte al sentimento che spariva delle cose che restano e sopravanzano ad essi, impassibili. Quasi vicende di nuvole gli apparivano nell’eternità della natura i singoli fatti degli uomini. Bastava guardare quegli alti monti di là dalla valle tiburina, lontani lontani, sfumanti all’orizzonte, lievi e quasi aerei nel tramonto. (TLN 2: 638-639)

To have no consciousness of being, like a stone, like a plant; to no longer recall even one’s own name; to live for the purpose of living, without knowing about it, like the animals, like the plants, no longer with feelings or desires or memories or thoughts, no longer with anything that might give a sense of value to one’s life. Here: stretched on the grass, with his hands clasped behind his head, watching the dazzling blue sky, white clouds, swollen with the sun; to hear the wind that made the chestnut trees of the forest like the sound of the sea, and to hear in the voice of that wind and thunder, like an infinite distance, the vanity of everything and the agonizing tedium of life.

Clouds and wind.

Ah, but indeed he already glimpsed and recognized that those that sailed for the bright blue endless emptiness were clouds. Perhaps it knows it’s a cloud? Neither the tree nor the stones knew of it, they ignored themselves.

And he, glimpsing and recognizing the clouds, could also—why not?—think about the fact of water, which becomes a cloud, to become water again. And this was enough for a poor physics professor to explain; but to the why of the why?

Up in the woods of chestnut trees, blows of axes; down in the quarry, blows of picks.

To mutilate the mountain; to cut down trees to build houses. There, in that mountain village, other houses. Hardships, troubles, struggle and pain of all sorts, why? To arrive at a chimney and then to have a little bit of
smoke come out of this chimney, immediately dispersed in the emptiness of space.

And like that smoke, every thought, every memory of men. [...] All the illusions and all the disappointments and sorrows and joys and hopes and desires of the men appeared to him vain and transitory in the face of the feeling that disappeared and were outweighed by the things that remained, unmoved. The individual facts of men appeared to him almost like clouds in the eternity of nature. It was enough to look at those high mountains across the Tibur valley, far away, fading on the horizon, light and almost planes in the sunset.

Interestingly, this same passage is found in Uno, nessuno e centomila to describe Vitangelo Moscarda’s similar experience mystical consciousness.\(^{171}\) I contend that in that

\(^{171}\) The following passages are found in Chapter IX. “Nuvole e vento” (“Clouds and Wind”) and Chapter X. “L’uccellino” (“The Little Bird”) of Uno, nessuno e centomila (One, No One and One Hundred Thousand). From Chapter IX. “Nuvole e vento”: “Ah, non aver più coscienza d’essere, come una pietra, come una pianta! Non ricordarsi più neanche del proprio nome! Sdrajati qua sull’erba, con le mani intrecciate alla nuca, guardare nel cielo azzurro le bianche nuvole abbarbaglianti che veleggiavano gonfie di sole; udire il vento che fa lassù, tra i castagni del bosco, come un fragor di mare. Nuvole e vento. Che avete detto? Ahimè. Ahimè. Nuvole? Vento? Eh non vi sembra già tutto, avvertire e riconoscere che quelle che veleggiavano luminose per la sterminata azzurra vacuità sono nuvole? Sa forse d’essere la nuvola? Né sanno di lei l’albero e la pietra, che ignorano anche se stessi; e sono soli. Avvertendo e riconoscendo la nuvola, voi potete cari miei, pensare anche alla vice (è perché no?) che divien nuvola per divenir poi acqua di nuovo. Bella cosa, sì. E basta a spiegarsi questa vicenda un povero professuruccio di fisica. Ma a spiegarsi il perché del perché?” [“Ah, to be unconscious, like a stone, like a tree! Not to remember even your own name anymore! Stretched out here on the grass, hands clasped behind your head, to look into the blue sky at the dazzling white clouds that sail past, swollen with the sun; to hear the wind up there, among the chestnuts of the wood, making a sound like the din of the sea. Clouds and wind. What did you say? Alas, alas. Clouds? Wind? And doesn’t it seem to you all, all: to glimpse and to recognize that those luminous things sailing up there through the boundless blue void are clouds? Do they perhaps know they are clouds? Nor do the tree and the stone know, since they don’t know themselves either; and they are alone. Glimpsing and recognizing the cloud, my dear friends, can you think also about the fact of water (and why not?) that becomes cloud only to become water again. Fine thing, yes. And to explain this process to you any poor physics teacher will do. But to the why of the why?”] (TLN 2: 774-775; Weaver, trans. 1990 37). From Chapter X. “L’uccellino” (“The Little Bird”): “Sentite, sentite: su nel bosco dei castagni, picchi d’accetta. Giù nella cava, picchi di piccone. Mutilare la montagna, atterrare alberi per costruire case. Lì, nella vecchia città, altre case. Stenti, affanni, fatiche d’ogni sorta; perché? Ma per arrivare a un comignolo, signori miei; e per fare uscir poi da questo comignolo un po’ di fumo, subito disperso nella vanità dello spazio. E come quel fumo, ogni pensiero, ogni memoria degli uomini. Siamo in compagnia qua; il linguare ci ha sciolto le membra; è naturale illusioni e disinganni, dolori e gioie, speranze e desideri ci appajano vani e transitori, di fronte al sentimento che spira dalle cose che restano e sopravanzano ad essi, impassibili. Basta guardare là quelle alte montagne oltre valle, lontane lontane, sfumanti all’orizzonte, lievi nel tramonto, entro rosei vapori. Ecco: sdrajato, voi buttate all’aria il cappellaccio di feltro; diventate quasi tragico; esclamate: Oh ambizioni degli uomini!” [“Listen, listen: up in the chestnut woods, blows of axes. Down in the quarry, blows of picks. To mutilate the mountain, to chop down trees to build houses. There, in the old city, other houses. Hardships, troubles, toil of every kind: why? Why, to arrive at a chimney, gentlemen: and to have emerge from this chimney a bit of smoke, immediately scattered in the emptiness of space. And like that smoke, every thought, every memory of men. We are in the country here; the languor has relaxed out limbs; it’s natural that illusions and disenchantments, sorrows and joys, hopes and desires should appear to us vain and transitory, compared to the feeling that wafts from the things that remain and
‘eternal moment,’ Unzio experiences mystical consciousness and glimpses true reality. The sight of the clouds moving in the sky is hypnotic, and the sound of the trees relaxes his mind. His senses are overcome by nature and his consciousness, too, has a reprieve. He recognizes that the clouds are constantly in the process of becoming and this allows him to surpass his limited view of the self as fixed and unchanging; he then is able to comprehend the transitory and vain ambitions of men and their narrow path of existence.

Robert Thurman explains the Buddha’s method of surpassing this limited view of self and, therefore, overcoming suffering:

[Buddha] discovered and proclaimed that total freedom from suffering—exquisite, enduring joy—is extremely possible for every sensitive being. It is only the unenlightened, self-centered and self-constricted being who is temporarily incapable of real happiness. Most of us have a strong yet unwarranted sense of having a fixed, unchanging, limited ‘self’ that is totally separate from all other beings. This combines with our narrow view that our existence is random and terminal; it only starts when we are born and ends abruptly when we die. Fixed and alienated, random and terminal—together these form a vicious combination. In the end, we are left feeling bereft and slightly depressed, living a life seeming to be utterly devoid of meaning. I call this “terminal living.” We can free ourselves from such a terminal existence simply by becoming aware of our misconceptions and their impact on our way of being. Once we have accepted the fact that we ourselves may be the main cause of our own unhappiness, we become determined to understand the problem fully and to solve it as soon as possible [. . .] The first step toward true contentment lies in confronting the fundamental problem of our rigid self-sense. When we look carefully for our “self,” we cannot find it. We discover the error that is the cause of our problem, and we begin to grasp the concepts of selflessness, interconnectedness to others, and infinite life. Now we can set ourselves free to experience the full satisfaction with ourselves, others, and our world that the Buddhists call “enlightenment” or “awakening.” (Thurman xxii)

Unzio begins to grasp, as Thurman explains above, “the concepts of selflessness,
interconnectedness to others, and infinite life”; the thought of man cutting down trees to make houses makes him angry, and he is repelled by man’s illusions and vain desires. Unzio’s mind reverts to everyday consciousness, however, when he begins to ponder metaphysical questions and attaches to the need for the explanation of the natural experience. The connection with nature, however, has penetrated his spirit and widened his outlook of reality.

Tommasino Unzio, like Fausto Bandini, exhibits extreme selflessness, as he is more concerned with protecting his patch of grass than his personal struggles or complying with the expectations of society. Pirandello chooses the word “ineffabile,” explained earlier in this chapter by W.T. Stace as the “usual word” used to recount the mystical experience, in the description of Unzio’s joy found in caring for the grass. Pirandello writes:

And each day, for one or two hours, contemplating it and sustaining its life, he had shaken with it during each little breath of air; trembling anxiously he was heart-broken on days of strong wind, or for fear of not arriving in time to protect it from a herd of goats, so that every day, at the same hour, he passed behind the little church and often lingered a little among the rocks to tear out some tufts of grass. Until now, the wind like the goats had respected that blade of grass. And Tommasino’s joy at
finding it there again, intact, with its bold plume on top, was ineffable. He
caressed it, stroking it with two very delicate fingers, delicate, almost
protecting it with his soul and his breath; and, leaving it, in the evening, he
entrusted it to the first stars that rose in the twilight sky, so that all the
others watched over it during the night. And, with his mind’s eye, from a
distance, he saw his blade of grass, between two boulders, under the thick
dense stars, twinkling in the black sky that watched over it.

Through contemplation and compassionate acts, Unzio, like many other caregivers,
experiences the rewarding sense of happiness that comes when helping other people,
fauna and flora. Robert Thurman describes the “transcendent virtue” of contemplation as
providing “the central strength that empowers you to achieve a new level of focus and
serenity. With it, you gain the full benefit of your wondrous mind, your compassionate
spirit, which encodes your subtlemost soul, the core nexus of your infinite relationships
with all sensitive beings” (Thurman 95). This sheds light on Pirandello’s description of
Unzio’s nurturing and protecting the grass as though his compassion emanated from his
soul and breath. Thurman explains the transcendent quality of contemplation, as well as
the other virtues of generosity, justice, patience and creativity:

All of these virtues are transcendent because they are indivisible from the
understanding of the true, selfless nature of reality that is wisdom. Once
we have begun to enjoy freedom from being driven around by our rigid
self-sense, we can start to dismantle our enslavement to the dictates of our
formerly domineering “I.” We already know that we will continue to
suffer as long as we remained trapped by self-preoccupation. Of all the
negativities that arise out of our traditional, self-centered view of the
world, selfishness is one of the most difficult and critical for us to
overcome. (Thurman 96)

The wisdom Unzio gains through contemplation, compassion and selflessness allows him
to be freed from the trap of self-preoccupation and illusion. As with Pirandello’s personal
description of the difficulty in returning from those moments of inner silence, Unzio is
later confronted by the challenge of reconciling his newly found clarity with a population shrouded by illusion.

Similar to Fausto Bandini, Unzio becomes acutely aware of and immersed in nature and for this reason, Caputi explains, “Canta l’Epistola” is “a story always cited to support the argument for pantheism” (Caputi 128). Caputi disagrees, and I as well, with the label of pantheism. Unzio’s curiosity and respect for nature grows throughout the story, and he is devastated when he sees Signorina Fanelli selfishly rip his favorite blade of grass from the ground. Caputi argues that, as with Fausto Bandini, “the term ‘pantheism’ does not get at the special character of this engagement in nature” (Caputi 129). Caputi writes:

Tommasino Unzio, the former seminarist called “Sing the Epistle” because that was as far as got in his preparation for the priesthood, settles into an attitude very like nature worship. For him too winds and clouds are crucial: the wind continuously moving, agitating, driving the clouds and leaves; the clouds, recently water, soon to be water again, constantly changing form. Before the “spectacle of nature” he feels himself little by little possessed by an “absentminded melancholy.” […] He becomes enchanted by tiny, delicate things, and the more fleeting the thing the greater his tenderness for it. Hence his fatal response to Signorina Fanelli’s pulling out and chewing on one of his favorite blades of grass. Yet here too Pirandello was primarily interested in Sing the Epistle’s attitude not because it led him to see in nature myriad manifestations of God, but as an alternative to the perpetual effort of marshaling the consciousness against the flux. […] The term “pantheism” does not get at the special character of this engagement in nature. For Sing the Epistle, “tired of the burden of his stupid flesh,” his new-found peace is not so distinctly a form of worship, though it is also that, as it is a giving over of himself to clouds and wind, to a kind of blissful passivity that asks very little and rejoices in it” (Caputi 129).

Similar to what Caputi calls Bandini’s, “giving over of the struggle altogether in favor of sinking into the flux of nature,” Unzio finds peace in nature and demonstrates what I claim is mystical consciousness and enlightenment. The term pantheism is clearly inaccurate, however, the problem with Caputi’s description is that these characters must
first immerse themselves in nature in order to then be freed of the struggle of everyday consciousness—not the other way around. The blissful passivity that Unzio experiences, akin to Buddhist nirvana, results from his contemplation of nature (mindfulness), directed consciousness (right effort), and right concentration—all of which are included in the Buddha's Eightfold Path.¹⁷² Lama Govinda explains the last step of the Path:

*Right concentration* (samā Samādhi.) is the eighth step of the [Eightfold] Path. Its objects are those of the seventh step [mindfulness], its chief factors those of the sixth step [right effort]. But while there the seven factors of enlightenment exist only as germs, they attain their full maturity in samādhi. And while the objects of the seventh step still remain in the realm of the discursive (or conceptual) thought, they are raised to the realm of intuitive consciousness of realization on the eighth step. Concentration, though it does not exhaust the meaning of samādhi, is its chief characteristic, but we have to bear in mind that concentration in this connexion is equal to a transformation of consciousness: it eliminates the tension between subject and object, or rather the creation of such a conceptual discrimination, through the synthesizing force of pure experience. I call this experience pure because it is not reflected or coloured by the medium of thought or preconceived ideas, and therefore free from illusion and its concomitants, attraction and rejection, greed and aversion. If this experience is deep enough to penetrate our whole consciousness, down to its very roots (sankhārā) and fundamental motives (hetu), liberation (nibbāna) is attained. But even if such experiences are of lesser intensity and have only a temporal or otherwise limited influence on our mind, yet they will widen our outlook, strengthen our confidence, deepen out views, lesson our preconceptions, and purify our intentions. (Govinda 69)

In recognizing the deceptions and vanities of man and the transitory nature of life, Unzio transforms his consciousness and is closer to sustaining inner peace through selflessness.

Though Unzio’s experience may not have penetrated his entire consciousness, as

¹⁷² Lama Govinda writes: “The sixth step of the Eightfold Path is *right efforts* (sammā vāyāma) which consists of four phases: (1) the effort to destroy the evil which has arisen (in our mind), (2) the effort to prevent the evil which has not yet arisen, (3) the effort to produce good which has not yet arisen, (4) the effort to cultivate the good which has arisen. [...] The seventh step [mindfulness] is described as a fourfold contemplation, namely, concerning the body (kāya), the sensations (vedanā), the mind (citta) and the phenomena (dhammā). These contemplations are chiefly analytical. They anticipate in many respects the methods and efforts of modern psychoanalysis. But the Buddhist system of psychic culture goes one step farther. It does not confine itself to the analysis and control of consciousness as it is, but it proceeds to a higher synthesis or intensification of consciousness through samādhi” (Govinda 69).
explained above, his outlook is widened and his preconceptions are greatly reduced. In his moment of enlightenment, Unzio transcends his everyday consciousness and sees through the illusions and artificial worlds of men. He recognizes the cycles of nature, thereby overcoming the false perception of “terminal living,” and he experiences selflessness to the point of not even remembering his own name: “Non aver più coscienza d’essere, come una pietra, come una pianta; non ricordarsi più neanche del proprio nome; vivere per vivere; senza sapere di vivere, come le bestie come le piante; senza più affetti, né desiderii, né memorie, né pensieri; senza più nulla che desse senso e valore alla propria vita” [To have no consciousness of being, like a stone, like a plant; to no longer recall even one’s own name; to live for the purpose of living, without knowing about it, like the animals, like the plants, no longer with feelings or desires or memories or thoughts, no longer with anything that might give a sense of value to one’s life”] (TLN 2: 638). Thus, because of the crisis of representing nirvana with words, it becomes clear that Pirandello’s reinforcement of the “not having” and “being without” in his description of Unzio’s moment of liberation was deliberately executed to compensate for the lack of adequate language to describe this ineffable state of nothingness.

The story ends tragically, however, when Unzio is killed in a duel with Signorina Fanelli’s fiancé, De Venera. Unzio, generally serene and non-confrontational, is greatly saddened and angered when Signorina Fanelli plucks his favorite blade of grass and chews on it. He calls her “stupid” for this callous action and De Venera slaps him and challenges him to a duel. Unzio, “stanco dell’inutile vita” [“tired of the useless life”], accepts the challenge on the condition that they fight until one of them is gravely injured or killed. De Venera, an experienced military officer, shoots Unzio in the chest and for
four days he suffered from a fever that seemed to make him delirious. To please his
religious mother, Unzio agrees to receive his last rites from a priest. When the priest asks
why he did what he did, Unzio smiles sweetly and answers simply: “Padre, per un filo
derba …” [“Father, for a blade of grass …”] (TLN 2: 642). Everybody believed that
Unzio’s last words were the result of his delirium. They were his true sentiments
however; if Unzio had to live in a world where people did not respect nature, then he did
not want to live at all.

Again, Pirandello aims to represent the existential crises fostered by a society
dominated by science and religion. He highlights man’s need live beyond imposed
boundaries and stresses the need to question the “why” of the “why” of existence that is
veiled yet not inaccessible. Luigi Chinatti writes in “Pirandello e la scienza”:

Perché? Questa è la domanda che si fa sempre l’uomo, che si fa sempre Pirandello. L’uomo, “l’animale metafisico,” cioè, “un’animale che sa di dover morire,” cerca sempre il senso della vita e della morte. […] Perandello, la scienza non spiega il perché del perché, come lo definisce nella novella “Canta l’Epistola.” Parlando della natura, della nuvola che diventa acqua che diventa nuvola che diventa acqua, il protagonista Canta l’Epistola si perde nel mistero e pensa che a spiegare queste vicende della natura la scienza non basta, cioè, basta fino a un certo punto: a spiegare il perché “bastava un povero professore di fisica; ma a spiegare il perché del perché?” La scienza riesce a descrivere la vicenda fisica, ma questo è solo l’aspetto fisico; la scienza così è superficiale, guarda solo l’esterno, la forma—possiamo dire—che non è vita. La vera sapienza guarda l’interno, l’essenza della vita. La scienza è falsa sapienza per Pirandello. La scienza non arriverebbe mai a spiegare perché Canta l’Epistola sacrifica la sua vita per un filo d’erba. La sapienza della natura è superiore a quella della scienza.

La scienza rappresenta per il Nostro un aspetto della filosofia moderno (come il determinismo e il positivismo) di cui non si fida. Non solo non riesce a spiegare il perché del perché—inutile allora la scienza in questo senso—ma è anche pericolosa: minaccia di distruggere il mistero della vita e le illusioni dell’uomo—il suo concetto di se stesso, degli altri, di Dio. (Chinatti 814)
Why? This is the question that man always asks of himself, the one that Pirandello continuously questions. Man, “the metaphysical animal,” that is, “an animal that knows that it must die,” is always in search of the meaning of life and death. […] 

For Pirandello, science does not explain the why of why, how he defines it in the short story, “Canta l’Epistola.” Speaking of nature, of a cloud that becomes water, that becomes a cloud, that becomes water, the protagonist of “Canta l’Epistola” loses himself in mystery and reasons that science is not enough to explain nature’s occurrences, that is, it is limited: to explain why “all that was needed was a poor little professor of physics; but to explain the why of why?” Science is only able to describe physical occurrences, but this is only the physical aspect; science in this way is superficial, it looks only to the external, the form—we may say—that is not life. True knowledge looks to the internal, the essence of life. Science, for Pirandello, is false wisdom. Science would never be able to explain why Sings the Epistle sacrifices his life for a strand of grass. Nature’s wisdom is superior to that of science.

Science represents for us an aspect of modern philosophy (like determinism or positivism) of which it does not trust. Not only is it unable to explain the why of why—science, then is useless in this sense—but it is also dangerous: it threatens to destroy life’s mystery and man’s illusions—his concept of himself, of others, of God.

The natural landscape, for Tommasino Unzio, had been taken over by the artificial worlds of man. In the end, to die having experienced an eternal moment truth was better than to live inauthentically amongst deluded men and their vain ambitions.

“Di sera, un geranio”

What is significant in psychic life always lies below the horizon, and when we speak of the problem of modern man we are speaking of things that are barely visible—of the most intimate and fragile things, of flowers that open only in the night. In daylight everything is clear and tangible, but the night lasts as long as the day, and we live in the night-time also. There are people who have had bad dreams which even spoil their days for them. And for many people the day’s life is such a bad dream that they long for night when the spirit awakes. I believe that there are nowadays a great many such people. (C.G. Jung 93)

“Di sera, un geranio” (“Each Evening, a Geranium”) (1934), written two years
before Pirandello’s death, may be read as the author’s acceptance of his own mortality.

The story begins with a description of the alienation from the senses and body that one experiences when asleep. This disaggregation from all sensation and freedom from the weight of the body and mind, a motif recurrent in Pirandello’s later work, is described as liberation. The story is the embodiment of Anselmo Paleari’s lecture on “lanternosofia” (“lanternosophy”), as the dying man comes to realize that death is merely the extinction of the false light of illusion. Pirandello describes the innermost thoughts of a man on the verge of death, as he experiences the separation of his spirit (or soul) from his physical body. The narrator describes the sleeping man, whose bald-head and beard closely resemble Pirandello, on his death-bed:

Alienato dai sensi, ne serba più che gli avvertimenti il ricordo, com’erano; non ancora lontani ma già staccati; là l’udito, dov’è un rumore anche minimo nella notte; qua la vista, dov’è appena un barlume; e le pareti, il soffitto (come di qua pare polveroso) e giù il pavimento col tappeto, e quell’uscio, e lo smemorato spavento di quel letto col piumino verde e le coperte giallognole, sotto le quali s’indovina un corpo che giace inerte; la testa calva, affondata sui guanciali scomposti; gli occhi chiusi e la bocca aperta tra i peli rossicci dei baffi e della barba, grossi peli, quasi metallici; un foro secco, nero; e un pelo delle sopracciglia così lungo, che se non lo tiene a posto, gli scende sull’occhio.

Lui, quello! Uno che non è più. Uno a cui quel corpo pesava già tanto. E che fatica anche il respiro! Tutta la vita, ristretta in questa camera; e sentirsi a mano a mano mancar tutto, e tenersi in vita fissando un oggetto, questo o quello, con la paura d’addormentarsi. Difatti poi, nel sonno …

Alienated from the senses, he cherishes the memory more than the premonitions, as they were; not yet distant but already detached; there the ear goes, where there is even a slight noise during the night; here the eye goes, where there is just a glimmer; and the walls, the ceiling (how dusty it seems from here) and below the floor with the rug, and that doorway, and the absent-minded fear of that bed with the green down comforter and the yellowish pillowcases, under which one surmises a body that lies inert; the bald head, sunk on the disheveled pillows; eyes closed and mouth open between the reddish hairs of the mustache and of the beard, big hairs, almost metallic; a dry, black orifice; and an eyebrow hair so long, that if
not held in place, would come down over his eye.

He, that one! One that is no more. One whose body already weighed so much. And even breath is a struggle! His whole life, closed in this room; and feeling little by little to be missing everything, and holding onto life fixating upon an object, this one or that one, with fear of falling asleep. In fact then, in sleep…

The dying man, slowly detaching from all sensation yet clinging to life, tries to fixate on an object for fear of falling asleep, never to wake up again. Pirandello illustrates the irony that even in the face of death, man longs for the fixation of form to keep him alive. Like the apparenze (appearances) of All’uscita (At the Exit), the man must let go of all his preconceived notions of life.

The patient has a brief exchange with his doctor who tells him that an operation at this stage would be futile. These words, the last he will ever express in life, sound strange to the dying man. The sentence that follows, “La lampada rosea, sospesa in mezzo alla camera, è rimasta accesa invano” [“The rose-colored lamp, suspended in the middle of the room, remains lit in vain”], has a double meaning when considered in the context of “lanternosophy.” As Paleari explained to Mattia Pascal, humans are born with the sad privilege of feeling themselves alive—unlike the flora and the fauna, which simply exist in nature. Because of this so-called privilege of self-consciousness, an illusion results which causes man to mistake his external reality for his inner feelings of life—which varies and changes according to different circumstances. For Paleari, this mistaken sense of life is like a little lantern that resides with in each person and whose light reveals the world to us. However, this light imposed by the privilege of self-consciousness, casts a dark and frightening shadow that would not exist if the lantern were not lit in the first place. Man will believe in the illusion and fear the shadow as long as the lantern remains
lit with in him. Paleari suggests that death, like the shadow, is commonly feared because of man’s misperception that the cessation of physical life is subsequently followed by permanent existence of darkness. Instead of fearing death as the end of one’s existence, he proposes that the final breath of life extinguishes the false light of the little lantern, allowing man to finally experience true Existence—freed from the obstacles of illusion: “Spento alla fine a un soffio, ci accoglierà la notte perpetua dopo il giorno fumoso della nostra illusione, o non rimarremo noi piuttosto alla mercè dell’Essere, che avrà soltanto roto le vane della nostra ragione?” [“When at the end the light is blown out, will the perpetual night receive us after the brief day of our illusion? Or won’t we remain at the disposal of Existence, which will merely have shattered our trivial modes of reasoning?”] (Tr 1: 485; Trans. Weaver 156). The rose-colored lamp does not remain lit “in vain” because the man is ill and does not require light because he will soon be dead, but because he is quickly approaching death, and therefore, closer to the breath that will extinguish the false light of illusion and free him from the shadow of artificial reality.

Growing closer to death, the spirit detaches further from the body and the dying

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174 See also the Lanternosophy section in Chapter Three of this dissertation. In Chapter XIII of Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal), entitled “Il lantermino” (“The Little Lantern”), Anselmo Paleari says to Mattia Pascal: “A noi uomini, invece, nascendo, è toccato un triste privilegio: quello di sentirci vivere, con la bella illusione che risulta: di prendere cioè come una realtà fuori di noi questo nostro interno sentimento della vita, mutabile e vario, secondo i tempi, i casi e la fortuna”; the narration continues: “E questo sentimento della vita per il signor Anselmo era appunto come un lantermino che ciascuno di noi porta in sé acceso; un lantermino che ci fa vedere sperduti su la terra, e ci fa vedere il male e il bene; un lantermino che proietta tutt’intorno a noi un cerchio più o meno ampio di luce, di là dal quale è l’ombra nera, l’ombra paurosa che non esisterebbe, se il lantermino non fosse acceso in noi, ma che noi dobbiamo pur troppo creder vera, fintanto ch’esso si mantiene vivo in noi. Spento alla fine a un soffio, ci accoglierà la notte perpetua dopo il giorno fumoso della nostra illusione, o non rimarremo noi piuttosto alla mercè dell’Essere, che avrà soltanto roto le vane della nostra ragione?” [“And for Signor Anselmo this sense of life was like a little lantern that each of us carries with in him, alight; a lantern that makes us see how lost we are on the face of the earth, and reveals good and evil to us. The lantern casts a broader or narrower circle of light around us, beyond which there is a black shadow, the fearsome darkness which would not exist if our lanterns were not lighted. And yet, as long as our lantern is kept burning, we must believe in that shadow. When at the end the light is blown out, will the perpetual night receive us after the brief day of our illusion? Or won’t we remain at the disposal of Existence, which will merely have shattered our trivial modes of reasoning?”] (Tr 1: 484; Weaver, trans. 156).
man is liberated. Still conscious, however, he expresses animosity toward the physical body as he no longer thinks of it as his own; he views the physical body as a but a remnant of his former self that the living want to hold onto and preserve. He is roused most by the thought of his absence in the world—imagining the houses, the streets, and the sky from the perspective of death. He is dismayed by the thought of his life being reduced to the meaningless objects that will survive him. There is an echo of Schopenhauer’s theory of the world as will and representation as the dying man, surveying the objects strewn around his room, realizes that the meaning given to all objects is purely subjective. He recognizes this process as death though he is not yet fully aware of the positivity of the experience. The narration follows:

Ma dopo tutto, ora s’è liberato, e prova per quel suo corpo là, più antipatia, rancore.
Veramente non vide mai la ragione che gli altri dovessero riconoscere quell’immagine come la cosa più sua.
Non era vero. Non è vero.
Lui non era quel suo corpo; c’era anzi così poco; era nella vita lui; nelle cose che pensava, che gli s’agitavano dentro, in tutto ciò che vedeva fuori senza più vedere se stesso. Case strade cielo. Tutto il mondo.
Già, ma ora, senza più il corpo, è questa pena ora, e questo sgomento del suo disgregarsi e diffondersi in ogni cosa, a cui, per tenersi, torna a aderire ma, aderendovi, la paura di nuovo, non d’addormentarsi, ma del suo svanire nella cosa che resta là per sé, senza più lui: oggetto: orologio sul comodino, quadretto alla parete, lampada rosee sospesa in mezzo alla camera. Lui è ora quelle cose; non più com’erano, quando avevano ancora un senso per lui; quelle cose che per se stesse non hanno alcun senso e che ora dunque non sono più niente per lui.
E questo è morire. (TLN 3: 558)

But after everything, now he is liberated, and he feels for his body there, more dislike, resentment.
Really he never saw the reason that others should recognize that image as his own any more.
It was not true. It is not true.
He was not that body; there was on the contrary so little; he was him in life; in the things he was thinking, that agitated him inside, in all that he saw outside without seeing himself. Houses roads sky. The whole world.
Indeed, but now, without the body any longer, this is the sorrow now, and this dismay of his dissolution and dispersion in all things, to which, to maintain himself, he returns to adhere but, adhering there, the fear again, not of falling asleep, but of his vanishing in the thing that remains there for itself, without him any longer: object: clock on the bedside table, picture on the wall, rose-colored lamp suspended in the middle of the room. He is now those things, no longer as they were, when they still had a meaning for him, those things that for themselves have no meaning and so now are no longer anything for him.

And this is to die.

Similar to the end of the novella, “Soffio” (“A Breath”) (1931), the protagonist of “Di sera, un geranio” becomes a disembodied spirit: “The individual consciousness, on mirroring itself, has passed through reflection to complete dissolution” (Radcliff-Umstead 111). In order to successfully represent the dissolution of consciousness, Pirandello must overcome the boundaries of language and deconstruct traditional narrative form. Radcliff-Umstead describes Pirandello’s approach to this crisis of representing the nothingness of death:

Death as floating away into nothingness is the message of the novella “Di Sera, un geranio” (“At evening, a Geranium”) of 1934, which so transcends the conventional sense of narrative as to acquire an evanescence of style as the disembodied spirit wanders across a familiar realm that is rapidly becoming remote. A man who feared a dangerous operation has died. To die is exactly to lose contact with the material objects that go into the construction of life. The bewilderment of the spirit floating around the death chamber is shown in the adverbs of place like qua (here), giù (down), là (there) which establish a staccato rhythm for the forcible flight of the consciousness. As a sentient form it used to find identification in thought and in the outer world but never with the body, toward which it feels rancor in death. Living consists in the images that others project upon the individual. Dying is a dissolution into formlessness, the fading away of all constructs. The structures of life that the mind and the senses try to grasp—like a clock, a picture hanging on the wall, the rose color of a lamp—were all illusions that must vanish into death’s nothingness. (Radcliff-Umstead 113)

The man’s soul, separating further from the lifeless physical body in the bedroom, drifts outside to the garden. Pirandello then describes a basin whose water flow is obstructed by
leaves clogging the drain. The story closes with the following passage:

Sparire.
Sorpresa che si fa di mano in mano piú grande, infinita: l’illusione dei
sensi, giá sparsi, che a poco a poco si svuota di cose che pareva ci fossero
e che invece non c’erano; suoni, colori, non c’erano; tutto freddo, tutto
muto; era niente; e la morte, questo niente della vita com’era. Quel verde
… Ah come, all’alba, lungo una proda, volle esser erba lui, una volta,
guardando i cespugli e respirando la fragranza di tutto quel verde così
fresco e nuovo! Groviglio di bianche radici vive abbarbicate a succhiar
l’umore della terra nera. Ah come la vita è di terra, e non vuol cielo, se
non per dare respiro alla terra! Ma ora lui è come la fragranza di un’erba
che si va sciogliendo in questo respiro, vapore ancora sensibile che si
dirada e vanisce, ma senza finire, senz’aver piú nulla vicino; sì, forse un
dolore; ma se può far tanto ancora di pensararlo, è già lontano, senza piú
tempo, nella tristezza infinita d’una così vana eternità. Una cosa,
consistere ancora in una cosa, che sia pur quasi niente, una pietra. O anche
un fiore che duri poco: ecco, questo geranio…
– Oh guarda giú, nel giardino, quel geranio rosso. Come s’accende!
Perché? Di sera, qualche volta, nei giardini s’accende così,
improvvisamente, qualche fiore; e nessuno sa spiegarsene la ragione. (TLN
3: 559)

Disappearing.
A surprise that becomes little by little, greater, infinite: the illusion of the
senses, already scattered, which gradually empties itself of things that
seemed to be there and that instead were not; sounds, colors, weren’t
there; everything cold, everything silent; it was nothing; and death, this
nothing of life as it was. That green … Ah, how, at dawn, along a shore,
he wished to be the grass, once, looking at the bushes and breathing the
fragrance of the green grass so fresh and new! Tangle of white living roots
clinging to suck life out from the black earth. Oh how life is of the earth, it
does not want the sky except to give breath to the earth! But now he is like
the fragrance of a herb that is dispersing in this breath, vapor still sensible
that thins and vanishes, but without end, with nothing nearby any longer;
yes, perhaps a pain; but if he is still able to think of it, he is already far
away, with no more time, in the infinite sadness of such a vain eternity.
A thing, still consisting within a thing, that is also almost nothing, a stone.
Or even a flower that lasts a short while; here, this geranium …
– Oh look down, in the garden, that red geranium. How it is illuminated!
Why? In the evening, sometimes, in the gardens some flowers, suddenly,
light up this way; and no one can explain the reason for it.

As in the quotation from C.G. Jung cited at the beginning of this section: “What is
significant in psychic life always lies below the horizon, and when we speak of the
problem of modern man we are speaking of things that are barely visible—of the most intimate and fragile things, of flowers that open only in the night. In daylight everything is clear and tangible, but the night lasts as long as the day, and we live in the night-time also” (Jung 93). Pirandello demonstrates the frustrated final thoughts of a man realizing that his life revolved around illusions. However, he presents his death as the breath that extinguishes his lantern light of illusion, not the eternal darkness that provoked so much fear and attachment to material possessions when he was alive. Radcliff-Umstead concludes his discussion of this novella:

Just as in the story of the man with the flower in his mouth, in this novella a flower serves as the symbol of death but also as a blazing moment of eternity. For a second the spirit enters into the life of a geranium, which suddenly catches fire and flames brilliantly until the spirit has faded altogether away. The momentary flickering of mortality ends. Language and poetic image capture death’s phenomenology and psychology. (Radcliff-Umstead 113)

It is Pirandello’s aim to represent this truth: Man is trapped by his false belief that the light is reality; when man no longer clings to the light, he will recognize that the darkness is an illusion. The paradox here lies in that illumination, or enlightenment, takes place in the dark of night; however, only against the backdrop of the darkness can one see the true light of reality. In representing the passage into death as parallel to witnessing a flower that blossoms in the night, suddenly and without explanation, Pirandello successfully illustrates man’s need to embrace, and not fear, the darkness and to psychically pursue those things that are not readily visible in the daylight.
According to Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno e centomila* is the key to all of his work. From this we may infer that Pirandello’s most important texts ultimately comprise the themes of alienation, the absence of identity and renunciation. All these are explored to their extreme by Vitangelo Moscarda. It is not just that life is capricious and unpredictable, that attempts to establish order in the world are thwarted, and that judgements are unreliable. There is a deeper anxiety, at a level where even the centre of experience is called into question, where the self which one blithely takes for granted starts to unravel. Yet if we may take both the author and the narrator at their word, this process of “self-destruction” may in fact lead to the attainment of true knowledge and felicity. [Pirandello says: “E’ il romanzo della scomposizione della personalità … Spero che apparirà in esso, più chiaro di quel che non sia apparso finora, il lato positivo del mio pensiero.”] Many readers, however, have remained unconvinced, and feel that Moscarda ends in sadness and defeat. Conversely, this article, drawing largely on Buddhist doctrine, attempts to provide a systematic explanation and vindication of Moscarda and his “refusal to be.” In this light, I hope to demonstrate what existence means for Pirandello and his protagonist, why it is a bad bargain, and most importantly, how the latter successfully transcends it. (M. John Stella)\(^{175}\)

In this final section, I offer an analysis of the divergent spiritual and mental journeys of the protagonist, Mattia Pascal, of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, and Vitangelo Moscarda, protagonist of *Uno, nessuno e centomila*, in their quests for self-knowledge and unfettered consciousness in light of Pirandello’s application of Buddhist philosophy. Vitangelo Moscarda’s character is similar to Mattia Pascal’s in that they share congruent background stories of having a wealthy father, an idle work ethic and a bothersome wife, and both men experience identity crises of equal severity that cause them to reevaluate and radically change their lives. There is one vital difference, however: Moscarda overcomes his spiritual sickness or, *Tantalus syndrome*, as called by Antonio Illiano, and Mattia Pascal does not. Twenty years after the publication of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*,

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\(^{175}\) See M. John Stella “*Uno, nessuno e centomila*: E il vostro naso?”
Pirandello is able to offer Moscarda a lasting solution to his crisis of identity that was, perhaps, unavailable to Mattia Pascal because it was not yet available to Pirandello himself (as translations of the sacred Eastern texts were not readily available in translation, and such ideas were not common knowledge, especially in a predominantly Catholic country.)\textsuperscript{176} With this text, Pirandello overcomes the crisis of form, that is, the crisis of representing with language the ineffable nature of the mystical experience and the dissolution of consciousness. Pirandello achieves this success by emphasizing the negative aspects of nirvana, in terms of language signifying, “being without,” and by eradicating the traditional conclusion and transcending the structure of the convential narrative.

Mattia Pascal and Vitangelo Moscarda suffer parallel crises of identity and consciousness and their distressing self-analyses are constant throughout the novels.

Moscarda, however, becomes whole in spirit, completely present and connected with the

\textsuperscript{176} The Second Council of the Vatican explains the rejection of Hinduism and Buddhism by the Catholic Church: “From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense. Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men” (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions - Nostra Aetate, Vatican: the Holy See. 1965)
flux of life and nature, whereas Mattia Pascal remains fragmented and attached to the forms of his memory and personality, still concerned with the futile constructions that tormented him from the beginning of his conflict. While some critics have used the term pantheism to describe Pirandello’s portrayal of the constant flux of life and his characters’ immersed engagement with nature, I propose that Pirandello’s rendering of the mystical experience of such characters, in the moment in which they achieve freedom from their suffering, is most closely akin to the state of nirvana as described by Buddhist doctrine. Moscarda’s awareness of his nothingness, and his ability to remain as though viewing himself from outside of himself, enabled him to break his cycle of torment and attain nirvana, the freedom from suffering, and experience selflessness and self-satisfaction. Pascal, however, is unable to detach from his false “self” and remains imprisoned in the cyclical rotation of karma. Close analysis of the novels Il fu Mattia Pascal and Uno, nessuno e centomila, and the final words of Mattia Pascal and Vitangelo Moscarda, reveal that Pirandello offers a solution to modern man’s crisis of identity and consciousness. Pirandello concentrates on Pascal’s bondage of karma versus Moscarda’s attainment of nirvana and liberation, as illustrated by the conclusions of the novels.

Let us now examine how the spiritual journey of the protagonists Mattia Pascal and Vitangelo Moscarda, and a close analysis of their final words in the novels Il fu Mattia Pascal and Uno, nessuno e centomila, demonstrates that Pirandello found and represents the cure for man’s spiritual sickness, as Moscarda says, in the sickness itself. Early in the novel Moscarda says, “Cominciò da questo il mio male. Quel male che doveva ridurmi in breve in condizioni di spirito e di corpo così misere e disperate che certo ne sarei morto o impazzito, ove in esso medesimo non avessi trovato (come dirò) il rimedio che doveva
guarirmene [“This was the beginning of my sickness. The sickness that would quickly reduce me to conditions of spirit and body so wretched and desperate that I would surely have died of them or gone mad, if I had not found in the sickness itself (as I will tell) the remedy that was to cure me of it] (Tr 2: 195; Trans. Weaver 5). The process that Moscarda will describe of needing to see himself from the outside, akin to Paleari’s “lanternosophy,” can only begin after one confronts the illusion of his beliefs about his identity and reality. Thurman explains the process of finding the remedy in the awareness of the sickness itself:

Most teachers of enlightenment are just out there offering their healing and liberating therapies. It’s their profession, as it was the Buddha’s. He was the original Freud, the ultimate Jung . . . Buddhist psychology is a joyous science of the heart. It operates on the assumption that we can use our own sophisticated minds to realize our selfless and thus transformable nature. It teaches us how to take apart our absolutized self-sense in a useful way so that we are no longer in conflict with reality as we normally are, kicking and screaming and miserable but pretending that we’ve got it all together. It teaches us to free ourselves from our demons by understand our true place in reality: ultimately selfless while relatively present, aware, and interconnected with all other beings. It teaches us to embrace infinite life. And it teaches us compassion, caring for others rather than obsessing over ourselves. (Thurman 41)

Moscarda, the first-person narrator-protagonist, is a confidant 28-year old man who becomes psychologically tortured at the outset of the story when his wife points out to him that his nose is crooked. Upon hearing that his nose, the central facial feature that he had prior believed to be handsome, tilts to the right, Moscarda is immediately irritated by the sudden discovery of his physical defect; he worries that he does not know his own body. Realizing that his external appearance looks different to other people than to himself, Moscarda anxiously draws the conclusion that there is an elusive outsider living inside him that exists for other people but is unknowable to him. Distressed by not being
able to imagine how others may view his appearance and actions, Moscarda begins to feel like an artificial imitation of his true self and suffers a traumatic identity crisis. Disconnecting from the image of himself that he formerly identified with, the mirror becomes his enemy as it reflects an unrecognizable being, a dream-like “apparition” of himself (Trans. Weaver 19). Similar to the traces of Mattia Pascal that were vaguely familiar in Adriano Meis, Moscarda glimpses only fleeting impressions of the self he believed himself to be, confusing the man in the mirror with the outsider residing inside of him. Displaced from his identity and feeling an urgent need to be alone in a “new” way (without himself), Moscarda admits signs of madness in his behavior. Unable to find solitude and peace, reminiscent of Mattia Pascal’s distress, he plunges into reflection and self-examination, becoming obsessed with pursuing the outsider inseparable from himself. Moscarda cannot console himself with reflection and meditation, and his spiritual sickness leads him to acts of madness. When he makes an even more unsettling discovery about his identity, Moscarda says:

Credevo ancora che fosse uno solo questo estraneo: uno solo per tutti, come uno solo credevo d’esser io per me. Ma presto l’atroce mio dramma si complicò: con la scoperta dei centomila Moscarda ch’io ero non solo per gli altri ma anche per me, tutti con questo solo nome di Moscarda, brutto fino alla crudeltà, tutti dentro questo mio povero corpo ch’era uno anch’esso, uno e nessuno ahimè, se me lo mettevo davanti allo specchio e me lo guardavo fisso e immobile negli occhi, abolendo in esso ogni sentimento e ogni volontà. (Tr 2: 201)

I still believed this outsider was only one person: only one for everybody, as I thought I was only one for myself. But soon my horrible drama became more complicated: with the discovery of the hundred thousand Moscardas that I was, not only for the others, but also for myself, all with this one name of Moscarda, ugly to the point of cruelty, all inside this poor body of mine that was also one, one and, alas, no one, if I set myself before the mirror and looked, hard and motionless, into my eyes, abolishing in that person all feeling and all will. (Trans. Weaver 14)
Feeling doomed to carry this outsider with him forever, yet not willing nor able to renounce his “impresa disperata” [“desperate enterprise”], Moscarda continues his seemingly insane attempt to see himself with his own eyes as others see him (Tr 2: 202; Trans. Weaver 15).

Throughout the novel, Moscarda experiences moments of liberation that he misconstrues as madness. He ascends spiritually and mentally when he sees his father from the perspective of an outsider, and is able to detach from him in way he had never been able to before. Moscarda sets out to perform an experiment with the aim of imposing a new impression on those that perceived him as a cold usurer, like his father was. He risks his job and reputation, but he is determined to evict Marco di Dio and his wife from their house. Moscarda expresses a sense of liberation when he finds the file he needed for his experiment. His master plan, as the reader comes to find out, is to be publically recognized for donating a new house and a large sum of money to the couple after having evicted them. However, his hope for the transfiguration of his public identity is shattered when the crowd, as well as Marco di Dio, repeatedly calls him a madman.

Gradually Moscarda becomes more and more self-detached and alienated. His awareness of this frightens him and leads him to consider suicide, as he does not realize that he is in the process of spiritually evolving. He decides to withdraw the money from his father’s bank, rendering it liquidated, so that he could completely disassociate from his past as a usurer as well as being known as his father’s son. He grabs his wife’s wrists and shoves her when she laughs at his ridiculousness, and he finally makes clear to her that he is no longer her Gengè (his wife’s nickname for him). Back in his room alone, Moscarda says that he has become “one” and he feels he has connected to the self he wanted to be; he is
no longer usurer for the public, nor Gengè for his wife.

Toward the end of the novel, Moscarda begins to talk about Gengè in third-person, indicating to the reader that a shift of identity is taking place. Anna Rosa, a friend of his wife’s, discloses to Moscarda that his father-in-law, his wife and the men from his father’s bank are planning to have him declared incompetent. She encourages Moscarda to meet with the Monsignor at the church and dispose of his money in the respectable way of donating it to charity. In a turn of events, Anna Rosa shoots Moscarda, and he makes the decision to donate all of his possessions and earnings—an act of renunciation akin to Siddhartha Gautama’s before he became the Buddha—so that a home for the destitute could be established with an adjoining soup kitchen. He decides to take a room there and lives simply, like any other person seeking shelter and food. The first-person narration is interrupted with a phrase describing Moscarda, “Ecco: per sé, nessuno. Era questa, forse, la via che conduceva a diventare uno per tutti” [“You see? For himself he was no one. This, perhaps, was the path that led to becoming one for all”] (Tr 2: 308; Trans. Weaver 158). Using a holistic approach to assess his identity, Moscarda attains a liberated consciousness and inner peace, and unlike Pascal, is able to live the way he consciously chooses—albeit, cloistered on the fringe society—but only because that was his best option. What Moscarda and others may have perceived as his madness, was nothing other then a calling for self-exploration and understanding. As Thurman explains, “Those people who had problems with their inner lives, with fitting into the machine of the greater social purpose, were mainly cast off into a corner and forgotten. Maybe they played the role of the village idiot, or, if they were lucky, they wandered off and found a Christian monastery (Thurman 37).
Moscarda’s final words in the last chapter of the novel, paradoxically called “Non conclude,” (“No Conclusion”) indicate that he has found the path to nirvana, and is able to transcend his identity crisis by mentally freeing himself of from all forms of existence, passions, exertions and sensibilities. He no longer looks in the mirror, as he is not concerned with his appearance and he wears the simple clothes provided by the home yet he walks around smiling. In the practice of “not concluding” and detaching from all concepts in his memory, including his name, Vitangelo Moscarda finds the Middle Way and achieves what Mattia Pascal could not. Moscarda says:

No name. No memory today of yesterday’s name; of today’s name, tomorrow . . . I am alive and I do not conclude. Life does not conclude. And life knows nothing of names. This tree, tremulous pulse of new leaves. I am this tree . . . And the air is new. And everything, instant by instant, is as it is, preparing to appear. I turn my eyes away at once so as to see nothing further arrest its appearance and die. This is the only way I can live now. To be reborn moment by moment. To prevent thought from working again inside me, causing inside a reappearance of the void with its futile constructions . . . To think of death, to pray . . . I no longer have this need; because I die at every instant, and I am reborn, new and without memories: live and whole, no longer inside myself, but everything outside. (Trans. Weaver 160)

The exemption from all thought beyond the present moment allows Vitangelo Moscarda to overcome his fragmentation and evolve toward a totality. He achieves this through his conscious relinquishing of illusions, attainment of awareness of the present moment, and
the subsequent detachment from all consciousness that a void ever existed. Radcliff-Umstead recognizes Moscarda’s attainment of mystical consciousness. He writes:

The ultimately nameless central character of Uno, nessuno e centomila undergoes an all-encompassing death of the ego—the same self-annihilation that mystics have sought for centuries through ascetic discipline […]. It is a condition of dying and being reborn from second to second, a release from the torture of thought, a constantly renewing ecstasy of self-loss in the vastness of the universe, the sweet shipwreck of the soul in the ocean of infinity that tempted the nineteenth-century poet Leopardi. There occurs an interpenetration of all things with one another, to annihilate the isolation and discontinuity that are customary to human existence in conventional society. The nothingness that the protagonist of Pirandello’s final novel experiences is a positive “abyss of divine enjoyment” […] What the Pirandellian character enters is a realm of instantaneous vision, with no mutual exclusion of individual places in space that become harmoniously interrelated. The barriers between dream and reality vanish into the super-reality of that moment of absolute poetic expression. […] At last in a Pirandellian work a fugitive from life triumphs by escaping the temporal death of social form. Moscarda has transcended the “normal” adjusted state that comes from abdicating ecstasy. The protagonist had abandoned that false self and those false realities of life as Gengè. (Radcliff-Umstead 284).

Concentrating on the flux of nature and the eternal cycle of becoming, Moscarda transcends his ego-self—purifying his consciousness and realigning his soul with Being. Moscarda is liberated from wordly suffering and embodies selflessness and peace, thereby surpassing Mattia Pascal, who still clinging to form at the end of the novel, remains in a state of emotional and spiritual paralysis. Pirandello, in turn, transcends the boundary of form and language. Moscarda Vitangelo, dying and being reborn, detaches from the narration—which he before claimed and guided. The final words of the novel illustrate that Moscarda Vitangelo has vanished. Though the reader has a clear memory of the original narrator of the story, Vitangelo has transcended his everyday consciousness and the story has no choice but to continue as a representation of a series of present moments and descriptions of nature. In exacting a continuity of rejections that indicate
the protagonist’s full immersion into mystical nothingness and unity, Pirandello perfects the form and affects a truly modernist approach to literature.
CONCLUSION

So far, one thing is sure: that with Pirandello for the first time Italian literature discovers how the spirit, far from being the simple, two-dimensional entity it once believed, is a chasm unfathomable by the eye, an unexplored region sounding with strange voice, streaked by phantasmagorias, peopled with monsters, where truth and error, reality and make-believe, wakefulness and dream, good and evil struggle forever tangling in the shadow of mystery.  

-Adriano Tilgher

In keeping with his own theory of not concluding, Pirandello’s writing never officially concluded. Driven by the desire “to continue to work, always work,” as he wrote to his muse and confidant, Marta Abba, Pirandello continued to work up until the night before he died in December of 1936. Pirandello was always motivated by his persistent spirited imagination, so even while on his deathbed, he dictated his idea for the third act of I giganti della montagna (The Mountain Giants) to his son Stefano. Pirandello’s last gift to the world, though unrevised and unfinished, is the consummation of his life’s work; Pirandello himself called I giganti della montagna, “il mio capolavoro” [“my masterpiece”] and “il trionfo della fantasia” [“the triumph of the imagination”] (Illiano “Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author” 107). In his excitement, Pirandello wrote to Marta Abba of I giganti della montagna:

Credo veramente ch’io stia componendo, con un fervore e una trempidazione che non riesco a esprimerti, il mio capolavoro, con questi Giganti della montagna. Mi sento asceso in una sommità dove la mia voce trova altezze d’inaudite risonanze. La mia arte non è stata mai così piena,

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178 (Trans. Marta Abba, The Mountain Giants and Other Plays 15).

179 The first act of I giganti della montagna (The Mountain Giants), titled I fantasmi, was published in 1931 in “Nuova Antologia.” In Florence in 1937, I giganti della montagna was staged outdoors in the Boboli Gardens under the direction of Renato Simoni (See Albumn Pirandello 328).
It is unfortunate that Pirandello was unable to finish the work he deemed his masterpiece. Despite the author’s passion for this work, it is doubtful that his visionary coup would have been well received by the public. This final play, the last of Pirandello’s three “myths,” was performed posthumously in Florence in 1937 with little success. Though *I giganti della montagna* was successfully staged in 1958 by George Strehler, the critics’ enthusiasm was for Strehler’s direction rather than Pirandello’s content. Pirandello wrote to Marta Abba in 1930 after staying up all night writing, “Will my work ever recompense me for the pain this dawn has given me, drowning the bitterness of my own fate in the general bitterness of our useless mortal life?” (Marta Abba, trans. *The Mountain Giants and Other Plays* 15). The fate of his play would most likely not have surprised Pirandello as he said that while *I giganti della montagna* was a triumph of poetry, it was at the same time the, “tragedia della poesia in mezzo a questo brutale mondo moderno” [“The tragedy of poetry in the midst of this brutal modern world”] (Illiano “Pirandello’s Six Characters” 107). As Pirandello’s euphoric enthusiasm for *I giganti della montagna*...
implies (critical skepticism notwithstanding), this text represents the summa of his engagement with metaphysics and spirituality. Pirandello’s final mythical and mystical drama is important to this study as it is the culmination of decades of writing about, and meditating on, the boundaries of reality and the fictions of the spirit. It represents nothing short of the fullest, and final, as it turns out, elaboration of his aesthetics of the metaphysical.

Abounding with fantastic creations and supernatural elements, *I giganti della montagna* maintains the integrity of traditional myth.\(^\text{180}\) This genre of the mythical realm was the perfect forum for Pirandello to stage the conflict between the spiritual world and the materialistic world and to give life to his abstract theories of life versus form and illusion versus reality. The play, “al limite, fra favola e la realtà” [“at the boundary, between fable and reality”],\(^\text{181}\) is a labyrinthine representation of the creative spirit versus the world of form, reason and logic, the role and function of art, communication in the theater, and enlightenment versus disillusion.

*I giganti della montagna* is set in a surrealistic world where, “all notion of a naturalistic setting has disappeared” (Susan Bassnet-McGuire 155). The characters are comprised of three main groups: 1) Gli scalognati (The Scalognati), “a curious society of the dispersed, who live, in an ownerless villa, a life given over to dreams and illusions,” headed by the magician, Cotrone; 2) A nomadic theater troupe trying to find an audience

\(^{180}\) Myth is defined as: “A traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some superhuman being or some alleged person or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or natural explanation, esp. a traditional or legendary story that is concerned with deities or demigods and the creation of the world and its inhabitants” (*Webster’s* 946).

\(^{181}\) After the List of Characters, one reads: “Tempo e luogo, indeterminate: al limite, fra la favola e la realtà” [“Time and place, undetermined, at the boundary between fable and reality”] (*Maschere nude* 10: 391).
for the play, *Favola del figlio cambiato* (*The Fable of the Changling Son*), run by Il conte (the Count) and his wife, Ilse, “the guiding spirit of the theatrical company”; and 3) I giganti (the Giants), “with their dull, unthinking brutality,” and the servants of the Giants, “the poor fanatical servants of life” (Trans. Simon and Erica Young 154-163). Pirandello describes his layered “mito artistico,” (“artistic myth”), *I giganti della montagna*, in an interview in 1930:

>[È] semplicemente una tragedia d’uomini che non si intendono. Solo che il contrasto, cioè il motivo e la materia dell’incomprensione e quindi del dramma, è qui fornito dall’arte, mentre nel *Lazzaro* è la religione e nella *Nuova colonna* la legge. I Giganti della Montagna sono gli uomini refrattari all’arte, chiusi e conchiusi nella ragion practica del vivere. L’attrice, il conte suo marito, il poeta Cotrone, i suoi compagni scapigliati e i guitti della compagnia sono lo spirito che agisce e costruisce oltre la materia: e il dramma è l’incontro, anzi lo scontro di questi due mondi incomunicabili. (Ivan Pupo, ed. 448-449)

[It is] simply a tragedy of men who do not understand. Only that the contrast is, that is the reason and the subject of misunderstanding and therefore of the drama, is here provided by art, while in *Lazarus* it is religion and in the *New Colony* it is law. The Giants of the Mountain are men refractory to art, closed and concluded in the practical reason of living. The actress, the count her husband, the poet Cotrone, his disheveled mates and the wandering actors of the company are the spirit that acts and constructs beyond the material: and the drama is the encounter, or rather the clash of these two incommunicable worlds.

As explained by Pirandello in the quotation above, the drama of *I giganti della montagna* is the conflict between the actors, representative of art, and the Scalognati, the allegorical “primitive and natural forms of the spirit,” versus the Giants, who in their “destruction of the human spirit” and adherence to reason, represent the resistance to art and obstacle of form.

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182 The *Favola del figlio cambiato* (*The Fable of the Changling Son*) is intended to be Pirandello’s play, *Il figlio cambio* (*The Changeling*) (Bassnet-McGuire 155).
The Scalognati have renounced society to live naturally in the villa. Having resigned from everything, or “everyday consciousness,” their souls are purified and they are freed from self-consciousness—like the animals and the trees who do not have the “privilege” of watching themselves live, as Pirandello has described this curse many times before. They explain their happy existence, where everyday brings a new opportunity to delve into the depths of consciousness and “dissipate reality” into bright lights and clouds:

**Cotrone:** Tutte quelle verità che la coscienza rifiuta. Le faccio venire fuori dal segreto dei sensi, o a seconda, le più spaventose, dalle caverne dell’istinto. Ne inventai tante al paese, che me ne dovetti scappare, perseguitato dagli scandali. Mi provo ora qua a dissolverle in fantasmi, in evanescenze. Ombre che passano. Con questi miei amici m’ingegno di sfumare sotto diffusi chiarori chiariori anche la realtà di fuori, versando, come in fiocchi di nubi colorate, l’anima, dentro la notte che sogna.

**Cromo:** Come un fuoco d’artificio?

**Cotrone:** Ma senza spari. Incanti silenziosi. La gente sciocca n’ha paura e si tiene lontana; e così noi restiamo qua padroni. Padroni di niente e di tutto.

**Cromo:** E di che vivete?

**Cotrone:** Così. Di niente e di tutto.

**Doccia:** Non si può aver tutto, se non quando non si ha più niente.

**Cromo:** Ah, senti? Quest’è proprio il caso nostro! Dunque noi abbiamo tutto?

**Cotrone:** Eh, no, perché vorreste avere ancora qualche cosa. Quando davvero non vorrete più niente, allora si. […]

**Doccia:** E solo quando non hai più casa, tutto il mondo diventa tuo. Vai e vai, poi t’abbandonì tra l’erba al silenzio dei cieli; e sei tutto e sei niente… e sei niente e sei tutto.

**Cotrone:** Potevo essere anch’io, forse, un grand’uomo, Contessa. Mi sono dimesso. Dimesso da tutto: decoro, onore, dignità, virtù, cose tutte che le bestie, per grazia di Dio, ignorano nella loro beata innocenza. Liberata da tutti questi impacci, ecco che l’anima ci resta grande come l’aria, piena di sole o di nuvole, aperta a tutti i lampi, abbandonata a tutti i venti, superflua e misteriosa materia di prodigi che ci solleva e disperde in favolose lontananze. Guardiamo alla terra, che tristezza! C’è forse qualcuno laggiù che s’illude di star vivendo la nostra vita; ma non è vero. Nessuno di noi è nel corpo che l’altro ci vede; ma nell’anima che parla chi sa da dove; nessuno può saperlo: apparenza tra apparenza, con questo buffo nome di Cotrone…e lui, di Doccia…e lui, di Quaquèo…Un corpo è
la morte: tenebra e pietra. Guai a chi si vede nel suo corpo e nel suo nome. Facciamo i fantasmi. Tutti quelli che ci passano per la mente. […] Con la divina prerogativa dei fanciulli che prendono sul serio i loro giochi, la maraviglia ch’è in noi la rovesciamo sulle cose con cui giochiamo, e ce ne lasciamo incantare. Non è più un gioco, ma una realtà maravigliosa in cui viviamo, alienati da tutto, fino agli eccessi della demenza. (Maschere nude 10: 447-450)

**Cotrone:** All those truths which our consciousness refuses. I make them emerge from the secrecy of our senses, or if they are more frightening, from the deep recesses of our instinct. Back home, I invented so many of them that I had to run away, as I was pursued by scandals. Here I try to dissolve them into phantasms, into vanishing visions. Fleeting shadows. With these friends of mine, I attempt to dissipate even outer reality into expanded brightnesses, by shedding the soul, like so many puffs of colored clouds, into the dreaming nighttime. The foolish outsiders are afraid of them and stay away; so, we remain the masters here. The masters of nothing and of everything.

**Cromo:** And how do you live?

**Cotrone:** Like this. With nothing and with everything.

**Doccia:** One can only possess everything when one has nothing.

**Cromo:** Well, do you see? That’s just the case with us. Do we then possess everything?

**Cotrone:** No, not quite, because you would still like to possess something. When you will really no longer wish for anything, only then will you be set.

**Doccia:** And only when you don’t have a home does all the world become yours. No matter where you are, you will commit yourself on the grass to the silence of the heavens. You are all and you are nothing; . . . and you are nothing and you are all. […]

**Cotrone:** I too could have been a great man, perhaps, Countess. But I resigned. I resigned from everything: from formality, honor, dignity, virtue, which are things that all animals ignore, thank God, in their blissful innocence. Once the soul is freed from all these obstacles, it remains as great as the air, full of sunshine or clouds, open to all lightnings, abandoned to all the winds; it is a superfluous and mysterious substance for marvels, which elevates us and scatters us to fabulous distances. Just look at the earth—what a plight! There may be someone down there who is under the illusion of living our life; but it isn’t so. No one of us occupies the body that another person sees us in, but rather the soul which speaks … who knows from where: nobody can tell. It’s one appearance after another, with this comical name of Cotrone . . . he with Doccia . . . and he with Quaqueo . . . The body is death: it is shadow and stone. Woe unto him who sees himself in his own body and with his own name. Let’s be ghosts—all the ghosts which come to our minds. […] With the divine prerogative of children who take their games seriously, we transfer the
wonder which is inside us to the things we are playing with, and allow ourselves to be charmed by them. So it is no longer a game, but a marvelous reality that we live in; far away from everything, and even reaching excesses of madness. (Trans. Marta Abba 67-70)

This mythical fantasyland of possibility is true reality for the Scalognati. Cotrone explains to Ilse that here, on the border of life where reason is not necessary, he is able to turn dreams into reality: “Siamo qua come agli orli della vita, Contessa. Gli orli, a un comando, si distaccano; entra l'invisibile: vaporano l'fantasmi. E cosa naturale. Avviene, ciò che di solito nel sogno. Io lo faccio avvenire anche nella veglia. Ecco tutto. I sogni, la musica, la preghiera, l’amore... tutto l’infinito ch’è negli uomini, lei lo troverà dentro e intorno a questa villa” [“We are here as if on the very border of life, Countess. At a command, these borders become detached and the invisible enters; the ghosts evaporate. It’s natural. It happens frequently in our dreams. I make it happen even in our waking; that’s all. Dreams, music, prayer, love... all the infinite which is in man, you will find in and about this villa”] (Maschere nude 10: 436; Trans. Marta Abba 60). Here we see all of the major spiritual preoccupations of P’s mature opus at work: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Buddhism, occultic elements, parapsychology, and psychology.

*La Scalogna* represents true reality for Pirandello as well, as it is the place where the creative spirit is free to concoct and give life to even the most fantastic ideas of the imagination; it is a reality where one is free to realize, not just dream, ideas so outlandish and radical that the creator seems to have reached madness. However, there is no threat of scandal or mental institutions in this reality. Actualizing the Buddhist notion of “emptiness,” the Scalognati embody the paradox that to have everything, one must detach from all things. Cotrone explains to Cromo that, despite the fact that the actors live meagerly outside of society, they do not yet have everything and are not truly free
because they still possess the desire for an audience. Cotrone explains that people
experience “emptiness” differently as it evokes either a positive or negative connotation.
In Pirandellian terms, most people view living authentically with the flux of life—though
deviating from the norm—as living ‘without.’ Regarding the negative versus positive
representation of “emptiness” in modern literature:

The negative experience of ‘inner emptiness,’ boredom, loneliness and nausea is part and parcel of contemporary art and literature. Prototypes of these experiences in the clinical situation are becoming common, but the literary and even the current philosophical writings provide an encounter with what may be called an ‘emptiness’ which is merely negative.

In the context of Buddhism, there are two approaches to the experience of ‘emptiness.’ One is the negative encounter with the vacuity and boredom in one’s life, the other is the positive realization of this as an insight into the nature of reality, the lack of an inner essence and permanent self along with spiritual experience of the ‘void’ and the ‘signless.’ It is due to a kind of spiritual poverty that modern man is incapable of converting this negative encounter into a more positive insight into the nature of reality. […] It is by deep insight into the nature of reality, by understanding the doctrines of dukkha and anatta that we transcend a purely negative submergence by boredom and emptiness.
(Padmasiri De Silva 121)

De Silva writes of a “spiritual poverty,” based on the teachings in the Majjhima Nikaya. This “spiritual poverty,” equivalent to Pirandello’s “spiritual sickness,” can be overcome by detachment from self and experiencing the ‘void’ itself. The void for Pirandello is recognition that the shadow is created by the false light of illusion; therefore to “experience the void,” in Pirandellian terms, is to take off the blinders of ignorance (anatta), so as to gain inner vision of Being and achieve clarity of the nature of reality. Like Vitangelo Moscarda who has become so detached from his body and appearance
that he no longer recalls his own name, Cotrone explains that clinging to one’s body and name is like clinging to death—as these are just forms that enclose the soul and repress the spirit. As the Buddha declared: “It is by preoccupation with body, feelings, perceptions, mental constructions and consciousness that one acquires a name” (Trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi Samyuttanikāya III, iv). Renate Matthaei writes of the Scalognati, who “stripped of everything,” have returned back to nature:

It is the mind freed from all social and metaphysical ties that here toys with itself. Its creations are phantoms, fragmented dreams, ghosts that transform truth and all external reality into ephemeral fantasies and transient shadows. The shimmering kingdom of the Ravens of Misfortune, filled with a heavenly intoxication, is a world of the dead, which in their turn invent other shadows in the endless process of disillusion that cannot escape from illusion. Being without external restraints, it falls victim to imagination run wild. […] [Pirandello] lets dreams and imagination act independently, giving them a reality that transforms the stage into a phantasmagoria. (Simon and Erika Young, trans. 159)

Pirandello never abandoned the spectral elements of the occult nor the theories of artistic hallucination from his early days with Luigi Capuana. Act Three resonates with parapsychological phenomena, and Cotrone describes the Theosophical notion of the thought-form. Cotrone intertwines his description of the creations of imagination with a commentary on the function of the theater and the obligation of the actors:

Vi ho pur detto che la villa è abitata dagli spiriti, signori miei. Non ve l’ho mica detto per ischerzo. Noi qui non ci stupiamo più di nulla. L’orgoglio umano è veramente imbecille, scusate. Vivono di vita naturale sulla terra, signor Conte, altri esseri di cui nello stato normale noi uomini non possiamo aver percezione, ma solo per difetto nostro, dei cinque nostri limitatissimi sensi. Ecco che, a volte, in condizioni anormali, questi esseri ci si rivelano e ci riempiono di spavento. Sfido: non ne avevamo supposto l’esistenza! Abitanti della terra non umani, signori miei, spiriti della natura, di tutti i generi, che vivono in mezzo a noi, invisibili, nelle rocce, nei boschi, nell'aria, nell'acqua, nel fuoco: lo sapevano bene gli antichi: e il

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183 From Uno, nessuno e centomila: “Nessun nome. Nessun ricordo del nome di jeri; del nome d’oggi, domain” (“No name. No memory today of yesterday’s name; of today’s name, tomorrow”) (Tr 2: 309; Weaver, trans. 160). See Chapter Four of this dissertation for full quotation.
popolo l’ha sempre saputo; lo sappiamo bene noi qua, che siamo in gara
con loro e spesso li vinciamo, assoggettandoli a dare ai nostri prodigi, col
loro concorso, un senso che essi ignorano o di cui non si curano. Se lei
Contessa, vede ancora la vita dentro i limiti del naturale e del possibile,
l’avverto che lei qua non comprenderà mai nulla. Noi siamo fuori di questi
limiti, per grazia di Dio. A noi basta immaginare, e subito le immagini si
fanno vive da sé. Basta che una cosa sia in noi ben viva, e si rappresenta
da sé, per virtù spontanea della sua stessa vita. È il libero avvento d’ogni
nascita necessaria. Al più al più, noi agevoliamo con qualche mezzo la
nascita. Quei fantocci là, per esempio. Se lo spirito dei personaggi ch’essi
rappresentano s’incorpora in loro, lei vedrà quei fantocci muoversi e
parlare. E il miracolo vero non sarà mai la rappresentazione, creda, sarà
sempre la fantasia del poeta in cui quei personaggi son nati, vivi, così vivi
che lei può vederli anche senza che ci siano corporalmente. Tradurlì in
realità fittizia sulla scena è ciò che si fa comunemente nei teatri. Il vostro
ufficio. (Maschere nude 10: 475)

I have already told you that the villa is haunted, my friends. I was not
joking. Here, we are not surprised at anything any more. Human pride—
forgive me—is really very stupid. There are other things that live a natural
life on this earth, Count, that we cannot see in our natural state, but that we
can perceive only through a defect in our five most limited senses. That is
why, at times, when conditions are abnormal, these beings reveal
themselves to us and frighten us. Of course—we had never supposed they
existed! They are unhuman dwellers of the earth, my friends—phantasms
of nature, of any kind of nature, that live among us invisibly, in rocks, in
woods, in the water, in the air, in fire. The Ancients knew them well, and
the masses have always known them. We know it now, out here, we who
compete with them and frequently overcome them, inasmuch as we
compel them to give to our inventions a sense that is unknown to them or
that they don't care about. If you still view life within the limits of the
natural or of the possible, Countess, I warn you that you will never
understand a thing out here. We are now outside these limits, thank God.
All we have to do is imagine, and our imagination instantly takes on life,
by itself. Just so long as something is quite alive within us, it will be
represented spontaneously and unaided, by virtue of its very life. It's the
free appearance of every necessary birth. At the most, we help along the
birth somehow. Take those dolls there, for instance. If the soul of the
characters that they represent incorporates itself within them, you will see
those dolls move and talk. And mark you well that the real miracle will
never be the representation itself, but always the imagination of the poet in
whom those characters were born living, so alive that you can see them
even if they are not bodily there. This is what is ordinarily done in the
theatres—on the stage they are translated into a fictitious reality. That’s
your job. (Trans. Marta Abba 88-89)
*I giganti della montagna*, is in essence, Pirandello’s response to the question he posed forty-three years earlier in Arte e coscienza d’oggi” (“Art and Consciousness of Today”): “Quale sarà l’arte di domani?” [“What will be the art of tomorrow?”] (Spv 906). Susan Bassnet-McGuire writes:

The play may be seen as a statement of Pirandello’s disillusionment with the role of art in contemporary society, a position towards which he had been moving steadily for years. Pirandello had deeply involved himself in exploring the apparent dichotomy between art and life, between form and motion, and had come increasingly to investigate this duality in theater terms […] [The] Giants’ servants, symbols of materialism and tastelessness, do not want Ilse’s poetic play. They demand entertainment, a song and dance routine, with no pretensions to high art. Although Cromo, the character actor, tries to persuade the others to acquiesce to the audience’s demand, Ilse refuses. She attacks the audience for their ignorance and in their rage and intolerance she is torn to pieces behind the tattered curtain of her stage. (Bassnet-McGuire 154-155)

Disappointment and disenchantment with art is reflected in the action of the play within the play, but Pirandello’s own *myth* answers that challenging conventions, surmounting form, and representing the mysteries of life is far from tragic or impossible. As evidenced by the dramatic works from *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* to *I giganti della montagna*, Pirandello, (like Ilse whose devotion to the theater was her “sacred duty”), dedicated himself to the creation and execution of genuine art and refused to conform to the demands of the audience. Pirandello challenges his audience and offers a positive prescription for change; he is not necessarily issuing a condemnation or criticism of the current state of art. *I giganti della montagna* can be read, therefore, as consonant with his triumphant feelings of satisfaction about its success (clearly not, ultimately, critical but) as a spiritual exercise.
Pirandello illustrated throughout his canon that to survive in society, the human mind adapts to, and is confined by, what Carl Jung called the “collective unconscious,” which surrounds the ego-consciousness. Jung explains:

Individual consciousness is surrounded by the treacherous sea of the unconscious. This consciousness of ours has the appearance of being stable and reliable, but in reality it is a fragile thing and rests on very insecure foundation. Often no more than a strong emotion is needed to upset the sensitive balance of consciousness. [...] These disturbances do not show themselves only in acute form; often they are chronic and can bring about a lasting change of consciousness. As a result of some psychic upheaval whole tracts of our being can plunge back into the unconsciousness and vanish from the surface for years and decades. Permanent changes in character are not uncommon. (Carl Jung 138-139)

Pirandello recognized the imbalances of the consciousness and his work reflects the psychic disturbances that Western psychology was just beginning to explore. In demonstrating the spiritual sickness of his protagonists who suffer because of their ignorance of illusion and dependence on logic and reason, Pirandello represented the consequences for the consciousness, spirit and soul in adhering to an inauthentic way of living. The result, though man is physically alive, is a spiritual death and a suffering that tortures the soul until real death extinguishes the false light of illusion. Optimistically, however, Pirandello comes to demonstrate that though man suffers as the result of his attachment to ego-consciousness and artificial realities, freedom from the cycle of suffering is attainable if he is willing to explore beyond the imposed limits of the consciousness and embrace the interconnected nature of the universe. Pirandello, in his skepticism of traditional Western science, looked beyond the medical approach to healing the suffering of the mind and turned to various spiritual belief systems for a solution. As Robert Thurman explains, modern Western psychology, as opposed to ancient Buddhist psychology, provided temporary solutions:
Western psychology developed during the era of industrialization. Freud
and Jung lived in the wealthier societies of central Europe. Members of
the middle class finally had a little time and money to explore their
general state of being. When their interiors were maladjusted or abused or
neglected, they could find someone to work with them. So these early
psychologists began to ask themselves: How does the mind work? What
are the problems with the mind? How can these problems be fixed? But
their main purpose was only to re-adapt these misfits back into the
machinery of industrial society so that their patients could work, function
and “be normal” again. As Freud himself said, his therapy was designed to
help people get rid of neurotic suffering so they could get back to ordinary
suffering. There was never any mention of complete freedom from
suffering as the definition of health, or even a livable option. (Thurman
38)

Considered in this context, then, I would argue that this play, far from being a moment of
over-ripeness or an example of late style, is in fact the apex of Pirandello’s aesthetic
program. In his earlier works, Pirandello was intrigued by the contemporary revival of
Spiritualism and Theosophy, as well as the burgeoning fields of psychology and
parapsychology. In his later works, Pirandello’s typically anguished protagonists came to
embody a mystical consciousness which he represented using elements reminiscent of the
Buddha’s Four Noble Truths. Pirandello’s consideration of modern and ancient spiritual
approaches, Eastern as well as Western, as viable means to resolve the discordance
between the mind, soul and spirit was artistically original but also socially relevant and
laden with significant implications. Most insightful of Pirandello, in his rejection of
traditional Western science and attempt to overcome the prevailing “spiritual sickness”
plaguing man, was his application of the ancient Eastern Hindu and Buddhist systems,
whose views of the universe are now—4,000 years later—validated scientifically by
many renown physicists. Modern physics recognizes the strong parallel between the
concepts of relativity and quantum theory and the ancient philosophies of the Eastern
mystical systems of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism and corroborates the world-view of
the Eastern mystics—namely that all things in the universe are dynamic and interconnected. Fritjof Capra describes this congruence in his seminal work, *The Tao of Physics*:

> Eastern thought and, more generally, mystical thought provide a consistent and relevant philosophical background to the theories of contemporary science; a conception of the world in which man’s scientific discoveries can be in perfect harmony with his spiritual aims and religious beliefs. The two basic themes of this conception are the unity and interrelation of all phenomena and the intrinsically dynamic nature of the universe. The further we penetrate into the submicroscopic world, the more we shall realize how the modern physicist, like the Eastern mystic, has come to see the world as a system of inseparable, interacting and ever moving components with the observer being an integral part of this system. (Capra 25)

The discoveries of modern physics led to significant paradigmatic shifts in the fields of science, on the microcosmic level as well as the macrocosmic, affecting traditionally maintained Western cultural beliefs. The emergence of new evidence regarding the physical world, via the exploration of atomic and subatomic particles, revolutionized the dominating mechanistic Newtonian model of the universe and completely reconfigured the conception of space, time, matter, and cause and effect—radically altering the traditional and widely accepted convictions concerning physical reality. The synthesis of relativism, the personality, the soul and the spirit—concurrent with modern physics, psychology, parapsychology—and Spiritualism, Theosophy, Hinduism and Buddhism, to name a few of the elements found throughout Pirandello’s canon, though seemingly anachronistic, are perfectly indicative of the modern time and space in which Pirandello lived and captured so accurately in his art. Interesting, however, is the paradox inherent in Modernism in that the modern movement was motivated by a need to represent what are truly age-old realities of the fluidity of the consciousness, human intuition, and the
vitality of life. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane describe the achievements of
Modernist writers that were permitted because of the perspective of time and history:

And what such artists have achieved can be considered – has been considered – the ultimate achievement of artistic possibility in the twentieth century, part of the progress and evolution of the arts toward sophistication and completion. The art that makes life, the drama of the artist’s consciousness, the structure that lies beyond time, history, character or visible reality, the moral imperative of technique; are not these the basis of a great aesthetic revolution into literary possibilities greater than ever dreamt of? Hence Virginia Woolf, holding that the modern stylistic revolution came from the historic opportunity for change in human relationships and human character, and that modern art therefore had a social and epistemological cause, nonetheless believed in the aesthetic nature of the opportunity; it set the artist free to be more himself, let him move beyond the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of light. Now human consciousness especially artistic consciousness could be more intuitive, more poetic; art could now fulfill itself. It was free to catch at the manifold – the atoms as they fall – and create significant harmony not in the universe but within itself (like the painting which Lily Briscoe completes at the end of To the Lighthouse). The world, reality, is discontinuous till art comes along, which maybe a modern crisis for the world; but within art all becomes vital, discontinuous, yes, but with in an aesthetic system of positioning. (Bradbury and McFarlane 25).

Given the developments of modern physics, Pirandello’s works, typically classified as modern, must now be considered as fundamentally rooted in and connected to an ancient belief system that is capable of providing a framework for science and art that is timeless and universal.
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