

Complexities of the Mask, Enrico IV & J. Alfred Prufrock

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In the second issue of T.S. Eliot's literary journal, *The Criterion*, published in January of 1923, a short story by Luigi Pirandello appeared, entitled "The Shrine," (a translation of the 1904 "Il tabernacolo"). Less than a year before this appearance, Pirandello's great play *Enrico IV* (*Henry IV*) was first performed, and though we cannot know exactly why this particular story was selected for publication nineteen years after its initial appearance, it hardly seems like mere coincidence that its translation coincides with *Enrico IV*'s initial production. Though "The Shrine" is rarely considered a predecessor to *Enrico IV*, it presents a protagonist whose similarities with those of Enrico cannot be overlooked. The link behind this connection is Pirandello's essay from 1908, "L'umorismo."

I do not, however, aim to simply link these two texts in light of their author's theorization of humor but rather to look at Pirandello's theories from "L'umorismo" and how they manifest themselves within these examples from Pirandello's fiction in order to situate his work within the larger context of early Twentieth Century experimental literature. Much has been done linking Pirandello's characters to a new type of early twentieth-century anti-hero, the alienated man who has been called, "the twentieth-century man par excellence" (Biasin 365),¹ but no one has looked at the relationship of Pirandello's work to perhaps English Modernism's greatest example of ennui, J. Alfred Prufrock. T.S. Eliot relates to this discussion in more ways than just as Pirandello's publisher; for, Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," utilizes a characterization that falls very much within the parameters of Pirandellian "humorist" fiction. All three works confect a new type of twentieth century anti-hero based on the narratological mode of humor which Pirandello details in "L'umorismo," the type which utilizes the complexities of the formation of the mask in order to dramatize the complexities that lie behind the interaction of individual to individual, of individual to society, and of character to reader.

"The Shrine" represents an earlier, less complex form of the mask-making process within Pirandello's fiction, a process which will be complicated by the time the story of Enrico arrives on the stage. It is the story of Spatolino, a bricklayer in an unnamed rural Italian town who has fallen on bad luck. Since his decision to not join the local union, which he sees as godless, he has had difficulty finding work. When the local notary Ciancarella, a wealthy man and infamous unbeliever, shocks Spatolino by commissioning him to build a Christian shrine, Spatolino has no choice but to accept the job. Unfortunately, just as the shrine is completed Ciancarella has a stroke and dies. Spatolino takes the bill to the heirs, but they refuse to pay. Since Ciancarella had been a lifelong unbeliever, they claim that the shrine was never actually commissioned by their relative. Spatolino takes the case to court but fails to persuade the judge, and when the appeal loses as well, Spatolino has a breakdown.

Having lost faith in what he calls 'divine justice,' he sews himself a red tunic and sets himself up in the shrine in the pose of Christ, complete with a crown of thorns atop his head. Despite his wife's appeals and the jeers of the townspeople, he refuses to leave. Eventually, Spatolino becomes something akin to the local oracle. People bring him food and ask him to pick their lottery numbers. It seems Spatolino will be resigned to madness for the rest of his days. However, in the story's final paragraph Spatolino's prayers are interrupted by the sounds of a familiar noise, that of a cricket.

But not seldom it happens that while he is praying, another cricket, the old chirping cricket, awakens within him. Spatolino shakes off the crown of thorns from his forehead . . . and, scratching himself here and there where the thorns have left their prick, and with his eyes grown vague, he begins to whistle:

- Fifi . . . fifi . . . fifi . . .

This whistle is the same sound Spatolino makes in the opening of the story when he is lying in bed having trouble getting to sleep. It is the same whistle, which in the beginning of the story is

described as the one Spatolino makes, “when a doubt or a thought was gnawing at him inside.” With the whistle connecting the opening and the ending of the story, an ambiguity arises, because in both cases the whistle represents an interruption. This second instance, however, takes on greater significance, because while the first whistle interrupts Spatolino’s insomnia, the second seems to be interfering with something deeper. All this time in the shrine, not even the jeers of the locals affected him, but suddenly now something has obtruded on his state of mind. What then, “awakens within him”? There is no direct answer, but an obvious possibility is his sanity. Nothing written explicitly indicates that Spatolino will leave the shrine. Yet the story hints at this possibility; for, Spatolino’s whistle is linked to his earlier state of sanity, when “a thought was gnawing at him inside.” The idea of a man awakening from insanity, in much the same way he falls into insanity from the peak of normalcy, transforms the story from that of a simple tale of one man’s descent into madness. Spatolino’s story resembles in many ways the far more famous one of Enrico. Both deal with the descent of one character into madness and the possibility of an awakening from it. Both, for example, overcompensate for their troubles by assuming a larger-than-life pose, Spatolino as Christ and Enrico as the medieval emperor. As previously stated, the key to the parallels underlying these two narratives is Pirandello’s now famous essay from 1908, “L’umorismo.”

At the heart of Pirandello’s idea of what constitutes *umorismo* lies the now famous example of the old lady. One sees an old lady with dyed hair and too much make-up, clearly trying to achieve a youthful look. At first the spectacle causes one simply to laugh, and this is what Pirandello calls the comic, which he refers to as the “avvertimento del contrario” (“recognition of the opposite”)² (*Saggi* 127). On further examination, however, perhaps one learns that the reason for this overcompensation is a deep sadness of some kind; in her specific case she is trying to look young in order to retain the affections of a much younger husband. This reflection is what Pirandello terms “il sentimento del contrario” (“the feeling of the opposite”). It represents the realization of an inner sadness or type of hardship, which is causing the comical display, with the display merely a poor attempt at hiding one’s pain. The comic is the view of the mask or pose, and that which Pirandello calls *umorismo* is the knowledge that this mask is the form taken in order to compensate for a deep insecurity.

This idea concerning the underbelly of the comic is nothing especially new.³ Nietzsche’s terminology does not delineate between the comic and *umorismo*. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he defines it as, “the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity” (96). Nietzsche’s idea more closely resembles the Freudian idea of laughter as cathetic discharge than it does Pirandello’s, whose definition of *umorismo* does not recognize a positive form of purgation within the comic act. Pirandello’s own idea replaces the idea of “discharge” with the act of compensation, which applies equally well to the story of Spatolino as to Enrico IV. When Spatolino loses his appeal of the court’s first decision, the effect is narrated as earth shattering; for, it was not the loss of money which affected the bricklayer, but, “the crumbling of his faith in divine justice,” as a result. “There is no God anymore,” Spatolino says. It is this self-revelation, which directly causes the breakdown in which Spatolino props himself up in the pose of Christ and therefore makes himself look ridiculous. In his early moments in the shrine, he is simply comic, as Pirandello’s definitions conclude. He is spit on; rotten fruit is thrown. After Spatolino settles into his role as the town fool, the townspeople stop their taunts and assaults, and he settles into the role of the *umoristico*. *Il sentimento del contrario* has been absorbed by the town, and his story achieves its tragedy.

Spatolino’s personal tragedy is something much more than a deep sadness. In his case it stems from a newfound insecurity in divine justice, one that leads to profound uncertainty. It is this insecurity and uncertainty which underlie *umorismo*, but these causes are not examples of *umorismo*. Spatolino’s story does not become an example of Pirandello’s idea until he props himself up as Christ. It is the act of overcompensation as a result of his insecurity, which makes him an example of Pirandello’s theory. Since the act of overcompensation is willful, there is motive behind it. This is what I would like to term the consciousness of insecurity. Insecurity, however, is not meant in the sense in which it is most often used today. This is not merely a lack of courage or self-esteem, though both are part of it. Inherent in the realization of *umorismo* are aspects of alienation, incommunicability, loss of identity, and severe

discontent. Insecurity, for the purposes of this discussion, represents the realization of instability in one's place in this world. The mask, the great Pirandellian theme, is the outcome of this consciousness of insecurity.

Spatolino's mask is the living Christian effigy he becomes. His insecurity with God leads to the act of overcompensation Pirandello describes in the example of the old woman trying to look youthful. Enrico, like Spatolino, also falls into madness and awakens from it. He too is ridiculed, though never in the direct manner to which Spatolino is exposed. Enrico becomes an example of *umorismo* after he wakes up from his twelve years of delusion and chooses to continue on as the medieval emperor. Enrico's back story is never acted out onstage, so one must look to how Enrico's actions within the play itself reflect his own personal crisis.

Described meticulously as a man, "già grigio sul dietro del capo; invece, sulle tempie e sulla fronte, appare biondo, per via di una tintura quasi puerile, evidentissimo" (141), ("already grey at the back of his head; instead, at his temples and in front, apparently blonde, due to a quasi puerile dye-job, very evident"). Enrico enters onstage as a theatrical spectacle, and he is completely pathetic. It is evident that he dyes his hair, rendering his look puerile, notwithstanding the costume. He is also wearing, "un trucco rosso da bambola, anch'esso evidentissimo" (141) ("doll-like red make-up, this too very evident"). At first it seems as though Pirandello's emphasis on the fact that all this is evident is redundant. Of course it is evident; the man is dressed like a Medieval German king in a twentieth century Italian town. Yet what Pirandello stresses in these stage directions is not the obviousness of the disguise in the eyes of the audience and the other characters but Enrico's conscientious attempt at disguise. Most evident is not the attempt to disguise a modern man as a medieval one but the attempt to pass off a middle-aged man as a twenty-six-year-old.

What is on display in this scene is the process of the mask of overcompensation. He overcompensates for his age in much the same way the old woman from Pirandello's essay does. Before Enrico wakes from his madness, he is simply mad, and *umorismo* becomes irrelevant since there is no consciousness of insecurity. He is not trying to make up for any insecurity, because he truly believes he is Enrico IV.⁴ When he wakes though, and when he chooses to remain this character, he makes himself into the type of figure Pirandello was discussing in the figure of the old woman. Rampant insecurity takes over his mind. He becomes insecure over his own sanity and over what his insanity means to his reputation. He is no longer the young man he was the last time he had his wits about him, so now insecurity over his age develops as well.

The formation of the mask becomes the signpost to the recognition of *umorismo*, one half of the two great Pirandellian symbols of the mask and the mirror. The notion of the fractured self, Pirandello's idea of the multiplicity of selves inherent to almost all his works, is exemplified by the symbol of the mirror. However, the acknowledgement of the fractured self is merely one aspect of the humorist artist, which allows for the creation of an art of *umorismo*,⁵ but it is not *umorismo* in itself. *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, 1904 (*The Late Mattia Pascal*), the novel Pirandello wrote before "L'umorismo" has rightly been identified as Pirandello's first important expression of his idea but not always for the right reasons. This is because the mirror image, though the most important theme in much of Pirandello's work, is oftentimes overstressed in relation to the essay, in which instead it is the formation of the mask that is of primary importance. One such critic has made this claim:

This famous example (that of the old woman) . . . fails to capture the essence of *umorismo* as Pirandello practices it in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* and elsewhere. In fact, Pirandello's art seldom emphasizes a moralizing sympathy for the tribulations of others, and seldom turns on the ability of Pirandello's characters to identify profoundly with the Other. (Druker 67)

What this critic then sees as the essence of *umorismo* is the exemplification of the mirror symbol or the multiplicity of selves so vital to *Il fu Mattia Pascal*. This assumption, however, culls its idea of *umorismo* more from Pirandello's fiction than from the essay itself. Sympathy lies at the heart of the

confrontation of the selves in *Enrico IV*. The process of overcompensation, which finds its manifestation in such little gestures as the dyed hair, works initially on a comic level. When the audience is later informed of the truth behind his madness, the gesture attains its humoristic qualities and therefore initiates a type of sympathy. It is not a moralizing sympathy, and it does not require the audience to pity the plight of Enrico, but it does force the audience to connect the underlying insecurity of the character to the collision of the various selves on display in the play. *Umorismo* is not a meditation on the reality of the Other within consciousness, but the underlying tragedy behind the formation of a mask or type of Other which would otherwise have been merely comical.

Enrico fears being made ridiculous. In other words, he fears the sympathy of others, because this would imply that he was pitied. It is his fear of others' sympathy, though, which makes him sympathetic. This fear of being perceived as ridiculous while making oneself out to be ridiculous is one of the primary ironies of *umorismo*. The goal, after all, of creating a mask to overcompensate for insecurity is to conceal. Inherent therein lies this fear of being discovered, of having this insecurity exposed. As the jailor moves to carry Spatolino to prison, Spatolino fires back: "Leave me alone! Who is more Christ than I? . . . Don't you see how they mock me and revile me? Who is more Christ than I?" It is clear in these words that Spatolino does not actually believe he is Christ incarnate but rather chooses the role of the martyr as a defense against a newfound doubt. Enrico betrays a similar sentiment when he makes his unannounced confession to his dumbfounded councilors. "Parole! parole che ciascuno intende e ripete a suo modo," (171) ("Words! Words that each hears and repeats in his own way"), he blurts out, only to indict these unspecified words with a possibility that frightens him too much. "E guai a chi un bel giorno si trovi bollato da una di queste parole che tutti ripeton! Per esempio: <<pazzo!>>" (171) ("And woe to he who one fine day finds himself stamped with one of these words that everyone is repeating! For example: 'crazy!'""). Obviously he is discussing the moment he awoke from his delusion, having found himself suddenly middle-aged and labeled mad by all around him. His only tactic is to retreat back into his madness, anything to protect him from being seen as a fool. The irony once again, is that this retreat into madness is what truly makes him ridiculous. Eric Bentley has commented that Enrico's, "aim in life is nothing less than to attain to tragic seriousness" (67). The double irony of *umorismo* is that while it is the mask used to hide one's insecurity which makes one out to be ridiculous, it is the realization that this mask is being used to cover up one's insecurities which makes the situation tragic, rather than merely comical.

Any expression of Enrico's insecurity would of course run contrary to his goal of hiding it. The audience comes to learn of the secrets underlying his façade through slip-ups, hints, and the way the character physically looks, all subtle signposts aimed to heighten the humoristic effect. As a result, consciousness of his insecurity remains at the forefront of how the play proceeds, since there is a continual recognition of Enrico's unstable self-presentation on the part of the audience in the theatre and the audience within the drama.

Insecurity, in the Pirandellian sense, pervades every aspect of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as well. As a result, it becomes a drawn-out entrance, with commentary on the preparations being made filling up the void left by the delay. "There will be time," Prufrock says, "To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." This line alone would seem enough to label "Prufrock" a humoristic work in the Pirandellian sense.⁶ It is both Prufrock's discussion of the preparation of his mask as well as a questioning of the authenticity of everyone he has ever encountered. With Enrico, the preparations he has made, or the face he has painted up in order for him to face the world, is encountered as he faces the world. This is his entrance. With Prufrock, however, everything is happening backstage as he narrates his doubts and reasons for indecision:

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare? and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair –

[They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]

Prufrock presents his insecurity openly. It dominates the poem and takes over the speaker. His entrance is perpetually put on delay, as the consciousness of his insecurity takes over his thoughts.

"Don't you see how they mock me and revile me?" Spatolino asks the jailor in "The Shrine." The bricklayer uses the townspeople's taunts as justification for the mask of Christ he creates for himself. Prufrock, and Enrico as well, speculate on their townspeople's taunts and fear them as an ever-encroaching threat. It too becomes a form of justification. "Do I dare?" Prufrock asks, when all that awaits him is jeers about his thinning hair. It is of course Prufrock's insecurity, which projects these words into the mouths of those he fears. Prufrock claims, "They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!'" in much the same way Enrico reenacts the vocalization of the brutal word he claims to have heard in the mouths of those around him: "pazzo."

The most straightforward parallel between Prufrock and Enrico is the worry they spend over their aging hairline. Whereas Enrico's dyed hair works as the example of his conscientious mind overcompensating for his insecurity, Prufrock narrates for the reader his own insecurity, projecting those insecurities into the imagined words of imagined spectators. He can hear the refined chatter of sophisticated women who "come and go / Talking of Michelangelo." He creates a double projection. The first is the imagined value of women who are far too good for him, speaking of sophisticated subjects such as art. The second projection is the one previously mentioned, the imagined reactions by these women. They will laugh at his bald spot and tease him for his inferior physique. When he states at the end of the poem that he does not think the mermaids will sing to him, he is in effect combining these two projections into one final conclusion, whereby the superior female figures choose singing as communication, which is music of course, the most beautiful form of verbal expression. Prufrock, though, will never get to hear this music, because the mermaids will not choose to sing to him. The ideal makes its final rejection.

Enrico's separation from the woman he loves begins in his youth, but because of the apoplectic state in which he has lived the last twenty years, this separation renews itself. The failure of his youth, the loss of Matilde, finds the form in which it can persist, as a painting. It becomes the reminder of the distance, which separates Enrico from Matilde, a distance that only widens with each progressive year. Enrico's desperate attempt to conceal himself as a twenty-six-year-old is the attempt to arrest himself in a moment in time the way in which Matilde's painting has arrested her image in a moment in time. Once the audience encounters the present-day Matilde, her separation from who she was in the painting and who she has become has been sealed, as has her separation from Enrico. Frida's masquerade as the living portrait of her mother only acts to exacerbate the realization of just how far from his love Enrico remains. His mermaid will never sing to him, both because of his madness, and because his mermaid, his ideal, is merely an image of a youthful woman who has long outgrown her portrait.

Thus far one word which has not been mentioned nearly enough is fear, because it is fear which underlies *umorismo* and the process of mask-making. In the moment with the Doctor just before Enrico reveals his charade to his councilors, he leans in to whisper in confidence: "Io ho sempre tanta paura . . . Ho paura talvolta anche del mio sangue che pulsa nelle arterie come, nel silenzio della notte, un tonfo cupo di passi in stanze lontane" (170) ("I am always so afraid . . . I'm even afraid sometimes of the blood that pulsates in my arteries like, in the silence of the night, a deep crash of footsteps in far away rooms"). With Enrico, such words are tricky, because in the words Eliot uses to describe Hamlet, Enrico's is also something, "less than madness and more than feigned" ("Hamlet and His Problems" 142). Is the audience to believe that he literally fears the blood running through his arteries?

This 'confession' of Enrico's comes just moments before he lets slip his charade to his councilors. If the entrance scene of Enrico's is initially comic, since up to this point the audience still believes he is mad, then this scene of the confession of his fear is what now makes his situation and the past scenes with Enrico *umoristico* in hindsight. His confession actually begins with the statement of his fear to the doctor

just prior; for, it begins as an exercise in rhetoric. By confessing his fear to the Doctor, his once outlandish madness begins to settle into something more sympathetic to an audience, a genuine fear. Through this Enrico enlists the audience's pity. Matilde and the Doctor exit, leaving Enrico alone with his suppliants. His confession to them works off this element of sympathy he had set in motion just before. He condemns the visitors at the villa for the pretence they have manufactured of having come to the villa in the hopes of helping him: "E avevano l'aria di prestarsi per compassione, per non fare infuriare un poverino già fuori del mondo, fuori del tempo, fuori della vita!" (171) ("And they seemed to come to help out of compassion, in order not to infuriate a poor man already outside of this world, outside of time, outside of life!"). Enrico here once more asks for the audience's pity, referring to himself as "un poverino" while at the same time questioning the others' motives. He is "un poverino" because he is a man, "outside of the world, outside of time, outside of life," but this call for pity betrays his motives. Only a sane person would of course be conscious of the fact that he were outside of life.

It is here where Enrico lets slip his true fear in the words cited above: "E guai a chi un bel giorno si trovi bollato da una di queste parole che tutti ripetono! Per esempio: <<pazzo!>>" (171). The fear is genuine, for this speech is not actually rhetoric. Here it begins to spin out of his control, as though he had never meant to reveal so much. The fragile barrier between truth and fiction so common to Pirandello's work begins to crumble in the rest of the scene, in which Enrico vacillates between making statements which point to his sanity and forcing his councilors to kneel before their emperor. Pirandello's concept of *umorismo*, however, is why Enrico must be sane for this play to work. Later into the scene he continues to discuss the effect everyone's words had on him:

E quante cose mi parevano vere! E credevo a tutte quelle che mi dicevano gli altri, ed ero beato!
Perché guai, guai se non vi tenete più forte a ciò che vi par vero oggi, a ciò che vi parrà vero
domani, anche se sia l'opposto di ciò che vi pareva vero ieri! (175-6)

And how many things seemed real to me! And I believed everything they told me, and I was
pleased! Because woe, woe to you if you don't hold on tighter to what seems true to you today, to
what seems true to you tomorrow, even if it's the opposite of what seemed true to you yesterday.

Enrico fears much more than ridicule, because the words of his spectators directly affect the authenticity of his own beliefs. Enrico's insecurity, in these words, is revealed in its full profundity in that it has entangled Enrico's sense of truth and reality in a fundamental ambiguity, irrevocably unsettling his sense of placement in the world.

Prufrock's place in the world remains a possibility with which he only flirts. He represents one of the quintessential Modernist characters because of this unease with the outside world. He lacks solid ground. The question then becomes whether this is because of something shifting below his feet or because of an inherent weakness in his footing, that is, whether it is exterior or interior. At one point Prufrock asks, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" This is no declaration but a question framed in doubt. The poem is stuffed with hypothetical questions that go unanswered. "So how should I presume?" "And would it have been worth it, after all." The conditional use of the verb here corrupts Prufrock's statement with debilitating insecurity. Throughout the poem, though, the universe remains unaffected by Prufrock's presence. This is the great tragedy of his narrative, the fact that the women may move to and fro in the other room, the mermaids may sing, but he stands at a distance forever looking on, and the world never notices. At least Enrico's circle cannot be called ambivalent. For whatever ridicule he undergoes, the efforts undergone to play up his masquerade point to a level of interest in his situation which Prufrock does not admit to receiving from anyone.

At one point Prufrock states that there will be time yet, "for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions, / Before the taking of toast and tea." Possibility takes on an epic grandeur, vacillating between fulfillment and negation. The hundreds of "visions and revisions" possible become compressed into the quotidian, before, "the taking of toast and tea." The failure to achieve

anything within the constantly-renewed possibility of each new day is elevated above the level of the mundanely disappointing. Enrico's everyday life takes on this same level of grandeur as well, with a masquerade which can continue only through the efforts of many. He is no Emperor of course, only playing one in real life. His is the role of the fool surrounded by a court willing to play up the elaborate joke that he is really the king. Both Prufrock's and Enrico's stories gain their catharsis through the expression of self-doubt at the root of their consciousness, the recognition of *umorismo* which makes them tragic and not merely laughable.

Enrico's own unease with society is less straightforward than Prufrock's. He moves in normal (i.e. contemporary, respectable) society before his accident, though, afterwards of course, this society changes.⁷ It is manufactured around him in order to suit his new madness. When he wakes Enrico should logically move back into the society of the outside world. His choice to remain within the world of the villa becomes a conscientious retreat. It is the mask. It is the mask he renews after he stabs Belcredi. With Enrico, the mask is twice at the point of being willingly stripped. The first moment is when he makes his great speech of confession to the councilors, and the second is the final confrontation with Belcredi. Enrico, of course, in both moments, retreats back into the mask of the emperor. These exchanges represent both conscientious decisions and moments of cowardice. In these two confrontations Enrico sees the effect the discovery of his mask has on society around him, and the effect is devastating. He must turn back.

The murder of Belcredi undoes the innocuousness of Enrico's charade. Afterwards, there can be no facile resolution. The charade reaches its crisis, the turning point when he can either turn back towards the safety of the mask or push ahead. Prufrock's great difference with Enrico is that he never actually reaches this turning point. He asks, "Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, / Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?" There is no moment of passion, which leads to the necessity of escape, as Enrico's murder led to the necessity of returning into the mask. Prufrock's moment of crisis is the ultimate moment of cowardice, which undoes his plans to act. He reaches the doorway, but rather than turn back after having opened the door, as Enrico does, Prufrock simply turns back without having turned the handle.

"Human kind cannot bear very much reality," Thomas Becket says in Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral* (209). It is a sentiment common to both Eliot's work and Pirandello's, which in many ways elaborates upon Pirandello's notion of *umorismo*. The insecure figure creates a mask, because he or she cannot bear his or her reality. It is here where the consciousness of insecurity and the disconnect felt between the individual and society merge. *Umorismo* is the coping method utilized by those who cannot bear very much reality, but it is also the route, which further distances the individual from that reality. Spatolino mimics his god in order to cope with his loss of faith, but it only disconnects him further from what he has lost. Enrico's ruse cannot reconnect him to the society and the woman he loved; it only bears him further away.

The one question that has not been posed thus far is, "What is Prufrock's mask?" He takes up no new persona in order to face the world, because he never faces the world. His safety method is not concealment within a constructed identity but concealment within a mask of composure. At one point he asks himself, "Do I dare to eat a peach?" This simple act represents any act, which may initiate a multitude of repercussions, but this is only narrated in the poem. It is never acted out in society. The great difference between a figure of *umorismo* and any insecure person in the world is that with *umorismo* fear overtakes one's ability to put out the authentic, whether this manifests itself as one's retreat into a mask (such as Enrico) or as simple retreat (as in Prufrock's case). The character of Woody Allen, as represented in his films, represents the prototypical figure of insecurity in contemporary American society. He, however, inhabits a post-Freudian world in which psychology has become an established discipline and insecurity is as normal to us as piety was in Medieval Europe. With the prototype figure of insecurity *sans* mask, i.e., not *umoristico*, his authenticity is his insecurity. Even if one considers the mask as an authentic part of the self in a character like Prufrock and Enrico, one must nevertheless recognize

that both sides are never meant to be exhibited, as that would lead to exposure. While an audience or reader may see all sides of a humoristic character, that character nevertheless does not desire such an open display.

In both *Enrico IV* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the formation of the mask dramatizes the ambiguities that engulf the interaction of individual and Other. Though authenticity remains a preoccupation for these two characters, it is in fact irrelevant in terms of the relationship of text to reader / spectator. The complexities of this relationship render the whole notion of authenticity almost *passé* in fact, for more profound complications arise as a result. The only substantive comparison of Pirandello's work with Eliot's that this author could find concerns Eliot's later drama in relation to Pirandello's,⁸ but this relationship has less to do with any affinity between texts than it does with the simple fact that both were leading authors from their respective countries who knew of each other's work. "The Shrine" appeared in *The Criterion* the year after the publication of Eliot's "The Waste Land," the same year that *Enrico IV* was first performed and one year after the initial production of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*). A simple glance at these dates indicates that at around the same time both authors were concerned with the complex and fractured relationship between the individual and society, a relationship posited as particular to the times in which they wrote. The use of the mask became an authorial method for communicating this complexity, one based on the idea that connects the formation of the mask less with what Bakhtin calls the "joy of change and reincarnation," as he associated it with Medieval folk culture (39), and more with the necessity that one's use of the mask projects. No longer does it represent the liberty of breaking free from the fetters of societal decorum for a moment. In Pirandello and in Eliot as well, it signals the inherent tragedy associated with requiring such a freedom and of realizing that such a liberty can never truly be achieved.

NOTES

¹ Many critics have made this link. Notable examples include Renato Barilli's *La linea Svevo-Pirandello* which, as the title suggests, ties together Pirandello's work, with that of Italo Svevo. Gian Paolo Biasin, in the above-cited work, expands this comparison to include the poetic persona of Eugenio Montale, while Thomas Harrison ties Pirandello's protagonists to the anti-heroes from the works of Robert Musil and Joseph Conrad.

² All translations are the author's own.

³ Baudelaire also deals with the other side of laughter in his famous essay, "The Essence of Laughter." For an insightful discussion of the two see Manuela Gieri, "Of Thresholds and Boundaries."

⁴ Perhaps this comment seems to contradict the essay, since in it Pirandello writes that the inevitable conclusion to the crisis of contingent identity that lies at the heart of Pirandello's idea is either death or madness. However, though Enrico was mad before, he was so only as a result of his injury. Therefore the realization, which initiates modern man's crisis according to Pirandello, is absent.

⁵ Jonathan Druker discusses this when he says that, "Humorist art . . . acknowledges the split Self and the fundamentally irrational characteristic of the psyche . . ." (61).

⁶ Though a direct line of influence for Eliot here concerns Jules LaForgue, the relationship to Pirandello in this citation is obvious enough to justify the comparison. See John J. Soldo, "T.S. Eliot and Jules LaForgue."

⁷ Though even before his accident Enrico was something of an outsider. Matilde tells the doctor that, "he was not like the others." ("non era come gli altri!") (129), and then elaborates upon this statement: "Era così, dottore, Un po' strano, certo; ma perché ricco di vita: estroso!" ("He was like that doctor. A little strange, for sure; but because he was full of life: whimsical!") (130).

⁸See J.H. Whitfield, "Pirandello e T.S. Eliot: Identità e Contrasti."

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