

Pirandello's *Enrico IV*: Mussolini as Mask, History as Masquerade

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In Pirandello's *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, Anselmo Paleari tells Mattia that the difference between ancient and modern tragedy consists of defective stage props. The moment Aeschylus' Orestes saw a hole in the sky above his head, argues Mr. Paleari, he would become Hamlet. One may be tempted to expand the hyperbole by saying that the moment Hamlet tore open his "inky cloak" to show the actor behind it, he would become Pirandello's Enrico.

Hamlet is a name that occurs frequently in a discussion of Pirandello's *Enrico IV*. Walter Starkie writes that every speech uttered by Enrico "contains words of [such] profound wisdom [that many scholars] call him the Hamlet of the 20th century" (Poggioli 159). Renato Poggioli argues that "we are right in asserting that there is Hamletism in *Enrico IV*" (159). I think that the parallel between Hamlet and Enrico may be misleading unless it is properly qualified. It is true that Enrico and Hamlet share the obsessions of a severely anguished personality--obsessions which manifest themselves in the passionate rhetoric of their monologues and soliloquies--nonetheless it would be a historical aberration to attribute Enrico's tensely existential angst to Hamlet himself. Passionate rhetoric, the two characters' common denominator, branches into oratorical eloquence in Hamlet's soliloquies and into logical dialectic in Enrico's monologues, a divergence in discursive modes, this, which adumbrates further differences. Enrico is a man of "our own time," as Pirandello's stage directions prescribe (139). His preoccupations and anxieties are those of a

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modern man. In his most erratic lamentations he becomes, paradoxically, a rigorous logician attempting to reconstruct the network of forces at work within his personal tragedy. In his most solipsistic moments he distances himself from his immediate surroundings to plead, paradoxically again, the universality of his human condition.

In my opinion, *Enrico IV*'s genuine indebtedness to William Shakespeare in general and to *Hamlet* in particular consists not so much of the debatable affinity between the two plays' protagonists as of the motif of the "play within a play," which in *Enrico IV*, even more than in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, Pirandello pushed to its logical extreme. While watching a performance of *Enrico IV*, the audience is under the impression that a stage, which was to have housed the enactment of some strange play-within-the-play, has magically grown to the size of the actual stage, so that the actors are superimposing roles and mixing dialogues from a variety of scripts whose significance ramifies in multiple directions.

The tiniest marginal detail in *Enrico IV* comes alive when looked at from this perspective of multiple levels of fictionality. The roles chosen by the play's characters for the pageant on horseback which, twenty years before the events related in the play occur, signs the beginning of Enrico's insanity, can be easily decoded, for instance, as an autonomous subtext. Enrico dresses as Henry IV, the German Emperor, and Matilde, the woman who, in spite of his love, will marry Tito Belcredi, his mortal enemy, dresses as Matilda of Tuscany, ally of the Pope in his fight against the German Emperor. Baron Tito Belcredi, who will startle Enrico's horse, provoking the fall which imprisons Enrico's deranged mind in the identity of the German Emperor, dresses as Charles of Anjou, the King of Naples and Sicily. Tito's impersonation of Charles of Anjou, the tyrant against whom the revolt remembered as the Sicilian vespers broke out in Palermo in 1289, is bound to assume a strong subtextual relevance to any audience familiar with Sicilian history. The enthusiastic struggle which saw the Sicilian youth fighting side by side with Garibaldi's *Camicie Rosse* against the Bourbons in 1860 resulted in what the Sicilians felt was a new form of colonial domination (Jacobbi 408). Pirandello experienced the radical disillusionment with governmental policy which prevailed among his fellow Sicilians through some of his older relatives who took part in Garibaldi's insurrection, in particular one Rocco Ricci Gramitto who gave him room and board at the time of his college studies in Rome in 1887 (Giudice 96).

Twenty years after the pageant Matilde, her daughter Frida and Tito visit Enrico at his castle to cure his demented masquerade as Henry IV. Matilde dresses again as Matilda of Tuscany, while Tito dresses as a young Benedictine monk from Cluny. At first Tito's new disguise may seem dictated by mere circumstances. It is the doctor accompanying them to Enrico's castle who suggests at the last minute that Tito should conceal his true identity from Enrico. Yet at a closer inspection this situation too appears pregnant with historical significance. Pope Gregory VII himself spent the years of his

novitiate, from 1047 to 1049, at the Abbey of Cluny, in Burgundy, Central France (Wright 330). Enrico, wearing a penitent's habit, prostrates himself in front of the young novice at once, as if for a reenactment of the Canossa meeting between the German Emperor and his enemy the Pope. The Baron's symbolical execution at the end of Act Three reverberates, therefore, with both historical and biographical resonance; it amounts to a collective execution where Enrico gets his revenge over his rival in love, Tito Belcredi, Henry IV witnesses the death of the challenger of his imperial authority, Gregory VII, and Pirandello executes an enemy of the Sicilian people, Charles of Anjou.

Why, we may ask, did Pirandello pick out the historical personage of Henry IV, German King from 1054 and Holy Roman Emperor from 1084 to 1105, for his play? Such choice has been predominantly treated as accidental or whimsical by critics, producers and directors alike. One historical personage--they all seem to argue, or, to be more precise, do not even bother to argue for what in their view must be self-evident--would have been worth another in the economy of the play. It seems to me that this is not the case with Pirandello's *Enrico IV*. Far from being accidental or whimsical, the choice of Henry IV is one of the essential elements of the play.

The Rome of 1921 was, like Berlin for the last forty-five years, a divided city. For sixty years after the breach of Porta Pia by the Piedmontese army, there had been virtually no diplomatic communication between the Italian state, governed by the Savoia royal family, and the Vatican state, governed by the Pope. A metaphorical wall had been erected which split the city in two segments. On either side of the wall alike lived a distressed population which acknowledged the legitimacy of its own government, be it church or state, without being insensitive to the spiritual authority of the rulers on the opposite side. Pirandello, who made Rome his home town in 1891 (Giudice 140), was keenly aware of these fractured sentiments. The scars of the Piedmontese cannonades could still be seen on the walls of Porta Pia. The Romans will have to wait until 1929 to see Mussolini and Cardinal Gasparri sign the Lateran Pacts, a concordat which represents a turning point in the dispute between church and state and a formidable relief for the Romans' civic schizophrenia. To depict a reversal in the state of affairs between two powers within one city as dramatic as the Lateran Pacts, we can simply look at the recent fall of the Berlin Wall and the popular jubilation that accompanied it. To single out an historical antecedent to the forthcoming compromise between temporal and spiritual powers in Rome, ardently demanded by his fellow citizens, an *erudito* such as Pirandello would have had to go back to the meeting between Henry IV and Gregory VII at Canossa (January 1077). It was at Canossa, in Matilda of Tuscany's castle, that the Emperor renounced his right to invest a bishop-elect with the ring and staff of his office, marking with this decision an apogee of papal influence over the German empire.

But why, we may still ask, would Pirandello pick out a historical character at all? In postulating a functional relationship among the dispersion of

(hi)stories embedded in the play's plot line--from the pageant on horseback in historical costumes to the charade contrived, twenty years later, by Matilde and Tito to cure Enrico's displaced sense of time, from Enrico's identification of Tito as Pope Gregory VII to his decision to pretend madness long after he has recovered his awareness of the historical present--I am going against the grain of a traditional interpretation that reads in Enrico's existential angst a prefiguration of the existentialist philosophy that was going to spread in Europe in the thirties. Hayden White (37) has argued that the legacy of Existentialism to our time consists of a strategy of relinquishment of responsibility toward the past. André Malraux considered history "valuable only insofar as it destroyed, rather than established, responsibility toward the past" (White 37). If I were to interpret the psychodrama within Enrico's drama as a symptom of the existentialist legacy, I would have to qualify the parallel levels of fictionality in *Enrico IV* as an imposing architecture of random choices. The historical characters of Henry IV, Gregory VII, Matilda of Tuscany and Charles of Anjou would amount to interchangeable, glamorous costumes in a capricious carnival of the imagination.

Too many indications seem to work against the existentialist interpretation, though. Let us consider again the character of Baron Belcredi and its historical valence. I argued above that Baron Belcredi dies, at the end of the play, as the simultaneous personification of: i) Pope Gregory VII, the mortal enemy of Henry IV, ii) Charles of Anjou, the oppressor of the Sicilian people, and iii) Tito himself, Enrico's rival in love. But Belcredi first comes on stage as the impersonation of the corpse of still another historical personage, that of Adalbert, the bishop of Bremen and tutor of Henry IV. The play begins with the appearance at the castle of a "counsellor," the latest acquisition to the staff of servants dressed in historical costumes who are hired by Enrico's relatives to satisfy all his whims. It is not accidental that this young man's name, Fino, means "subtle" in Italian. He was hired to substitute for Enrico's recently deceased counsellor, Tito, who for years had impersonated Adalbert at Enrico's ridiculous court. The bishop of Bremen was driven away from the Emperor in 1066 by the nobility, which looked unfavorably on his great personal power. The dead counsellor and Enrico's rival, Baron Belcredi, share the same first name, Tito. This homonymy might be looked at as the result of a whim or a distraction of the part of the playwright, if it were not for the fictitious name attributed by Enrico to his new counsellor Fino.

"They've driven Adalberto away from me," complains Enrico (143), who, in his hallucinatory state, cannot conceive of his counsellor's actual dying. "Well then, I want Bertoldo! I want Bertoldo!"

"Who's got to be Bertoldo?" wonder the other counsellors, who are all experts in German history.

"But which Bertoldo? And why Bertoldo?" wonders Fino himself.

Pirandello handles his historical innuendos and premonitions with amazing virtuosity here. In 1080 Henry IV suddenly reversed his attitude of

compromise toward the papacy. He deposed Gregory VII and nominated an antipope, Clement III, whose original name was Guibert, archbishop of Ravenna. The name Guibert, translated in Italian as Gilberto, derives from the French Gisilbert, or Gislebert, a compound of *gisil* (arrow) and of *berht* (clear, illustrious) (Zingarelli 2227). That the names Gilberto and Bertoldo share the etymon *berht* is self-evident. The confrontational tone of the words by which Enrico nominates Bertoldo as Adalberto's successor is therefore justified by the etymological subtext, so to speak, from which we learn that Bertoldo represents in the play none less than Guibert, archbishop of Ravenna, future antipope, whose nomination was followed by Pope Gregory VII's death. Therefore, when Enrico appears in front of Tito Belcredi wearing a penitent's habit, like Henry IV in front of Gregory VII at Canossa, he can at one and the same time prostrate himself in front of the impersonation of the Pope and threaten him with imprisonment and death, since his puppet, the antipope Gilberto, is already in office.

"Tomorrow, at Bressanone," he predicts (170), "twenty-seven German and Lombard bishops will sign with me the act of deposition of Gregory VII! . . . a false monk!" And then he warns Matilde (171), "Do you feel inclined to laugh at me, seeing me [dressed like a penitent]? You would be foolish to do so. . . . Would you laugh to see the pope a prisoner?" Two dramatic historical events--Henry's penance and Henry's subsequent rebellion--are collapsed here to an instant in time. The Emperor's past and the Emperor's future are petrified in the nightmarish present from which Enrico, like his perpetually young picture hanging on the wall of the throne room, cannot free himself.

An analogous volte-face to Henry IV's rebuff of the treaty of Canossa followed the Lateran Pacts between the fascist state and the Vatican. Immediately after the signing of the concordat, Mussolini claimed in a public speech that now the Church was subordinate to the state. In the three months after the treaty Mussolini had more issues of Catholic newspapers confiscated than in the previous seven years. "At no time," argues Denis Mack Smith (162), [was] "the tension with the Vatican . . . so bitter as . . . after the concordat."

Renato Poggioli comes very close to extrapolating correctly Pirandello's original procedure of appropriation of the historical past when, in dealing with *Enrico IV*, he zeroes on "the negation of history that has become masquerade . . . real madness" (159). We must not forget, after all, that the play is written only a few months before Mussolini takes power in Italy. Mussolini is the actor, the histrionic "dissimulator" (Mack Smith 111) whom Pirandello himself defines "a true man of theatre" (Giudice 462) and in whose intuition of Italian theatricality Piero Gobetti sees the secret of political success (Gobetti 30-32). Under the demented direction of Benito Mussolini, Italian history is soon to become a masquerade in black shirts. The masquerade will gravitate about Mussolini's delirious, antihistorical strategy of reenactment of the glorious deeds of the Roman Caesars, a masquerade orchestrated by a dictator in

whose persona we can detect all the elements of political ambivalence and duplicity which Pirandello prophetically conflated in the character of Enrico. In typical Mussolinian fashion, Enrico holds out an open hand to his guests but turns it into a menacing fist before they have a chance to shake it. "I could . . . arrest the Pope and . . . elect an antipope," he declares to his guests. But, he adds, "I resist the temptation. . . . I feel the atmosphere of our times. . . . Woe to him who doesn't know how to wear his mask" (171). These words uttered by Enrico bear a striking resemblance to Mussolini's first speech in front of the Italian Parliament, on November 16, 1922. "I could change these rooms into a soldiers' camp, but I don't want to do it," he said, pretending for a moment strict adherence to the principles of the Constitution. Then he added, "Not for now . . ." And a few minutes later he threatened, "I don't want to govern against you, Gentlemen. As long as you'll make it possible, I won't" (Lussu 86).

And who but Mussolini could manipulate history as successfully as Pirandello's Enrico, by spectacularly expanding and contracting historical time, by collapsing the past and the future of Italian history into a metahistorical duplication of the frantically sought-for martial glories of the present? Mussolini went so far as experiencing, or pretending he did, a pageant on horseback as glamorous and as faditic as Enrico's: the march on Rome of the fascist legions on October 28, 1922. The legend wants him to have led the march on horseback like Caesar across the Rubicon, but the historians tell us that he did not participate in it, since as the black shirts paraded clumsily through the major Italian cities he was already in Rome, receiving his appointment as Prime Minister from Vittorio Emanuele II, King of Italy (Mack Smith 54).

However, I see the term "negation" as a rather problematic element in Poggioli's definition of Enrico's masquerade. Negation and forgery of history, in this case, are Mussolini's undertaking, not Pirandello's. I detect in *Enrico IV* a desperate and tragically self-defeating attempt at assumption of historical responsibility on the part of the playwright. Although it cannot be denied that Pirandello comes from a southern culture which, after the unification of Italy under the Savoia royal family, embraced an open attitude of civic disengagement, it would be a gross mistake to interpret this disillusioned attitude as an uncompromising dismissal of the possibility of social and political intervention. In the first two decades of the 20th century the two most influential representatives of the southern intelligentsia, Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, were working in fact toward a redefinition of the notions of history and social change inherited from the 19th century. Both Croce's elaborations on the abstract ideal of freedom, in whose name man finds an ethical justification to his sociality, and Gentile's prophetic depictions of an existence of pure interiority, through which man deludes himself into believing he has magical powers over reality (Jacobbi 411), seem to be reflected, the first as a positive aspiration, the second as a pathologic self-deception, in the character of

Enrico. And it must not be forgotten that his studies in Rome and in Bonn opened Pirandello to less circumscribed influences. When, for instance, Anselmo Paleari, in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (166), wonders in the presence of Mattia whether we ought to look at the men of the past for advice, whether we ought to look, he says, at *le lucernette* (the small lights) that the great dead left burning on their tombs, I am more than inclined to assume that Pirandello is referring to *I Sepolcri* (*The Sepulchers*), the work by Ugo Foscolo in which many Italian patriots of the *Risorgimento* saw a manifesto of national unity.

Jean-Paul Sartre has argued that history is at best a gamble on a specific future and at worst a retrospective rationalization of what we have in fact become (White 39). Poggioli's criterion of extrapolation of the sense of history embedded in *Enrico IV* seems to go in a parallel direction to Sartre's argumentation. On the contrary, I see in Enrico a man paralyzed in an unchanging stance of stony stupefaction, a captive of a historical configuration for whom the past has been forever "determined," forever "settled," and the future has been forever predicted. He is not gambling on a future which cannot be changed, nor is he rationalizing what he is becoming because his life has already happened and he is not evolving into anything. He vegetates within the frame of a painting which shows him at the age of 27, burdened with the memory of his past misfortunes, oppressed with the premonition of his future predicaments.

It is partly to a Benjaminian notion of historical configuration that I am inclined to relate my interpretation of the historicity in *Enrico IV*. The tragedy of Enrico is that of a man who cannot act on his future because he does not dare to reinterpret his past. Enrico is aware of his status of captive of history. He has sentenced himself to a perennial reenactment of his past failures which keeps him from grasping "the constellation which his [present] has formed with [his past]" (Benjamin 263). He wants to emancipate himself to "live freely and wholly [his] miserable life" (172). In Benjaminian terms, his task would consist of taking cognizance of alternative possibilities of apprehension of the past so that his praxis could blast his own existence out of its predetermined course.

But Enrico is kept prisoner of a fixed historical configuration by the magical powers of his enemies. "I can't free myself from this magic," Enrico complains with his guests (172). ". . . Ask the pope to do this thing he can so easily do: to take me away from that (*Pointing to his portrait almost in fear*)."

It is in the preternatural power endowed to the two life-size portraits mounted on a wooden stand in the throne room, which represent Enrico and Matilde dressed in their carnival costumes, that Pirandello's criteria of dramatic characterization depart from a properly Benjaminian perspective to articulate the governing metaphor in the play, the metaphor of history as masquerade. In its unfolding the metaphor crystallizes the dispersion of (hi)stories within the plot line into a metahistorical perpetuation of a specific historical formation, that of fascist Italy in Pirandello's time.

In the portraits Enrico is dressed as the Emperor Henry IV and Matilde as Matilda of Tuscany, the Countess who, after acting as an intermediary between Henry IV and Gregory VII in 1077 at Canossa, was intermittently at war with the Emperor until he died. From the alternation of resentment and compassion, pity and attraction, which brings Matilde to Enrico's mansion twenty years after the accident that caused his madness, to Enrico's desperate attempt, in the last scene of the play, to kidnap Matilde's young daughter, Frida, the living symbol of the life which has already run by him, the fate impending on both characters is encoded *a priori* in their choice of costumes. In the eyes of the audience, the two painted images turn imperceptibly into icons of identity and predestination. Having captured the essential precipitate out of Enrico's life experiences, which consists of his unrequited love for Matilde, a sentiment in need of perennial disguise, they obstruct any possible development. They are what they are, images forever fixed on canvas. Not even Tito's murder can change Enrico's condition as a captive of time past.

Also Enrico's enemy, Tito, is the victim of a fate which amounts to a mere duplication of the past. As we saw above, he appears on stage in the ambivalent role of a triumphant pope who is soon to become the corpse of a deposed pope. Pirandello's stage directions (149) describe Tito as a Janus-like figure: a lover for whom Matilde shows no benevolence or appreciation, whom she does not take seriously, but who has "plenty of reasons" to laugh at her mischievous pretenses. The versatility of his personifications is a prolongation of his duplicity vis à vis Enrico. However, in his participation in Matilde's attempt to restore to Enrico's mind "the sense of time, of the contrast between past and present" (Poggioli 159), he falls prey to the same repetitiousness which haunts Enrico's existence. He comes to the castle confident in his power to discriminate between past, present and future, full of contempt for Enrico's spiritual disorder, and in the end he finds himself sitting as a powerless defendant in front of the hypothetical tribunal of time past, the same tyrannical tribunal which sentenced Enrico, like so many other Pirandellian characters, to the fate of a "living corpse . . . a passive witness of life" (Poggioli 156).

The tragedy with Pirandellian time is that it is *not* pregnant with Benjaminian tensions. We can recognize in its spatial and temporal indicators the coordinates of that "suspension of happening" (Benjamin 263) to which social praxis is bound to give a salutary shock, yet the tension of these unstable indicators is imploded in a fraudulent world peopled with masked characters and painted icons. Enrico is desperate to assume a responsible stance vis à vis his own existence--"let me live my life!" he implores--however, his ambition to live a real life is frustrated by his own compulsion to revive his past hopes, to reenact his past failures. His irresolution burdens his own struggle against the forces of identity and predestination with all manners of obstructive behavior. He is a partisan of historical determinism when it comes to persuading his four counsellors of their enviable condition as fugitives from the anxieties of the

twentieth century, to whom fate afforded the privilege "of having to do nothing else but [living already in history, where] everything is determined, everything settled" (195). But he is quick to turn his faith in the permanence of the past into a merciless sophism of dialectical instability when it comes to torturing Matilde's nostalgia for "the fading image of [her] youth" (170). Matilde, a middle-aged woman, dyes her hair and wears heavy make-up in a pathetic effort to erase the signs of time from her face. ". . . You too, Madam, are in a masquerade, though it be in all seriousness" he accuses Matilde. "I am speaking . . . of the memory you wish to fix in yourself."

Obstructionism, Enrico's strategic mode of behavior toward himself as well as toward his friends and enemies, operates as a relay in the governing metaphor of the play. In the twenties, both the fascist government and the democratic opposition had recourse to legal obstructionism as one of their primary means of social intervention. The electoral reform imposed on the Parliament in 1923 by the fascist party, which secured to Mussolini's dictatorship a legal, somewhat technically and politically superfluous justification, was followed by the congregation of the democratic parties into a powerless and ineffective shadow-government in Rome, the so-called *Aventino*, which in the name of a formal adherence to the principles of the Constitution turned opposition into a sterile parody. Mussolini's legal duplicity in front of the circumstances surrounding Matteotti's assassination (1924) was paralleled by the ambivalent legalism which, in spite of the weakness of the fascist regime brought about by popular indignation after Matteotti's death, induced the members of the *Aventino* to reject all proposals of insurrection. The history of fascist Italy consists, on the one hand, of Mussolini's ruinous, delirious pretence that the time and glories of imperial Rome could be legitimately revived, and, on the other hand, of the opposition's extenuating tactics of legal stalemate.

The plot of *Enrico IV* impedes the sequential course of historical time. Everything in the life of Enrico is already written, from the ambivalent roles assigned to his unannounced visitors to the fate impending on them. All past, present and future events in Enrico's life converge in the claustrophobic space of a fictitious throne room, among a cluster of ambivalent personages whose duplicity and irresolution juxtapose on the story of a day in Enrico's life the predetermined pattern of historical events which took place eight centuries before. And nobody can change anything in this pattern because nobody can be held responsible for it in the first place. Both Tito, who twenty years earlier startled Enrico's horse, causing his madness, and Enrico, who at the end of the play kills Tito in front of eight witnesses, act as impersonal agents of destiny. They are not responsible, either from a historical or legal standpoint, of the consequences of their acts. Tito avoids prosecution because only Enrico, a madman, knows about his misdeed, and the testimony of a madman is not valid in a court of law. Enrico avoids incrimination for his murder by falling

back on a form of legal obstructionism complementary to that of Tito, that is, by retreating forever to the world of his pretended madness.

Having traced the operations of obstructionism in *Enrico IV* back to the pervasive role played by legal obstructionism in the Italian political life of the twenties adds an element of ambiguity, rather than subtracting it, to Pirandello's apprehension of the historical formation of fascist Italy. Obstructionism does not amount in the play, as one might expect, to an unequivocal sign of social decay and emotional impotence--a symbol, in other words, of the sentence of spiritual lethargy that Mussolini passed on the Italian people in the twenties. On the contrary, a web of superior wills and magical forces entraps the characters of *Enrico IV* in a fatalistic acceptance of obstructionism as a natural and uncontestable law determining the outcome of human endeavors. The magical arts of the pope are the force that imprisons Enrico in a spiral of repetitions. Enrico's condition is not conceived as one of abdication of responsibility but rather as one of remittance of responsibility, his obstructionism is not a choice but a fatality. In the Europe of the fascist dictatorships the ethical category of free will was being turned abruptly obsolete and substituted by the impersonal operations of forces independent from men's choices and desires. In *Enrico IV*, Pirandello seems to translate such occurrence into the sinister sort of relief, the perverse sort of pleasure, that Enrico finds in the stillness of time, in the predictability of the past.

Everything determined, everything settled. . . . And as sad as is my lot, hideous as some of the events are, bitter the struggles and troublous the time--still all history! All history that cannot change. . . . And you could have admired at your ease how every effect followed obediently its cause with perfect logic. . . . the pleasure, the pleasure of history, in fact, which is so great . . . (195)

Renato Poggioli was the first critic to identify the relationship between the treacherousness of legal institutions and the pervasive fatality of social forces as one of the leading themes in Pirandello's work (149-152). Pirandello, who before turning his attention to philology and literature was a law student in Rome, nurtured a suspicious attitude toward modern legal institutions. His conception of law as a blunted weapon in the hands of the individual was correctly pointed out by Benedetto Croce, who described the meaning of *Il fu Mattia Pascal* as the "victory of the legal state" (Poggioli 156).

In 1917, four years before *Enrico IV*, Pirandello wrote *La giara* (*The Jar*), the one-act play which best exemplifies the outcomes of legal obstructionism as the ultimate expression of the impersonal forces governing the logic of human endeavors. Renato Poggioli (149-152) provides a remarkable exegesis to the text of *La giara*. Don Lolò and Zi Dima are involved in a legal controversy. Zi Dima was hired to fix a crack in the jar that Don Lolò bought to hold the surplus oil expected from a bumper crop of his Sicilian olives. Zi

Dima entered the jar to fix it from within, but when the work was done he could not get out unless the jar was broken again, this time to pieces. Who is going to pay for the jar? Who is going to pay for Zí Dima's work? The two men cannot find an agreement. Don Lolò has recourse to the advice of a lawyer and embarks on an unscrupulous legal battle. But to Don Lolò's menaces Zí Dima responds by quietly crawling down into the jar, from where he declares he is in no hurry to get out. Eventually Don Lolò kicks the jar to pieces. Zí Dima comes out of it shouting, "I have won! I have won!" But has he actually won? And what has he won, precisely? Don Lolò has lost his precious jar but Zí Dima has lost the value of the labor he put into fixing the jar. The legal battle ends with no winner. To be more precise, one may argue that the real winner is the lawyer hired by Don Lolò, who makes a comfortable living out of such silly contenders as Don Lolò and Zí Dima. However, the eminent winner, metaphorically speaking, is legal obstructionism as the expression of the heuristic procedure by which Pirandello orders the universe of Don Lolò's farm around a fate of human and social inertness. Obstructionism appears in this case as the abstract personification of the historical forces of permanence that keep the quasi-feudal society depicted in the play in a state of lethargic stillness.

I maintained above that the plot of *Enrico IV* impedes the sequential course of historical time. Enrico, a literal reversal of Dorian Gray, spends his solitary life as a miserable extension of his own painted image, an icon of eternal youth. As he lies in passive wait of an improbable age of liberty for himself before the malevolent stare of his painted image, the passing of time designs a strained, doomed expression on his face. Enrico's guests have come to his castle as judges, and like judges they look on Enrico as "something integral and permanent" (Poggioli 167), a character from a Greek tragedy. But the stage props are "defective," and anybody can see the make-up on Enrico's face. Acting as his own lawyer, Enrico embarks on a defense which begins as a skillful performance in logical dialectic but reaches soon the level of confession, where "all sophism disappears in a yearning for purification" (Poggioli 165).

One day I opened my eyes; and I was terrified because I understood at once that not only had my hair gone gray, but . . . I was all grey inside. . . . Everything had fallen to pieces, . . . everything was finished; and I was going to arrive, hungry as a wolf, at a banquet which had already been cleared away . . . (203)

Enrico is anxious to "explain, to justify, [and] to modify the distorted image of himself" (Jacobbi 412) that his guests fabricate in their improvised tribunal, yet all his efforts are vain. Under the disintegrating force of his guests' convictions, the countless atoms which constitute his personality are revealed in a never-changing opaqueness, like an atmospheric dust deprived of

all spectral colors. He is, in the view they intend to impose on himself, the man they have known in his youth, an oversensitive type, an organizer of parties and *tableaux vivants*, an unsuccessful suitor, who has turned temporarily mad. Two complementary narratives of Enrico's life are simultaneously produced by his guests and by himself; however, as far as their finality is concerned, these complementary narratives come to the same thing because they both aim at collapsing the present into a rigid duplication of the past as it is understood and interpreted by their respective narrators. On the one hand, Enrico's orderly reinstallation in the circle of his bourgeois friends is the *sine qua non* condition that would reassure Matilde and Tito of the legitimacy of their past choices and present life style. On the other hand, Enrico's choice to live as a captive of the past is still, twenty years later, his vital protection against the betrayal perpetrated on him by Matilde and Tito.

His guests' tenacity leaves Enrico, a fake emperor counselled, obeyed and served by four professional actors, with no choice but that of falling back on obstructionism. He counters their tribunal with his own tribunal, their predetermined apprehension of his past and present with his own apprehension of past and present. To their insistence that he give up the costume of the German Emperor and plunge himself back in the life of the present, he opposes his obstinacy to search for the unreachable woman of the past. To Frida as the innocent go-between who should bring him back to mental stability (it is the doctor's idea to have Frida dressed as young Matilde, to provoke a counter-shock in Enrico), he opposes Frida as the personification of the woman Tito Belcredi took away from him; he tries to kidnap her, and with this final move he precipitates Tito's assassination and the confirmation of his life sentence as a madman.

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (253) Benjamin recalls the story of "a puppet in Turkish attire" which could play chess. A little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside the puppet and guided its hands by means of strings. The puppet could either defeat any adversary or be an easy match for anyone, according to the talent of the mind which guided its hands. Enrico's resigned despondency makes of him the puppet in the hands of an impersonal superior will which orchestrates human affairs against Enrico's choices and in spite of his actions. Obstructionism, Enrico's favorite weapon, does not keep things from happening, nor does it petrify time; it just hurls Enrico into a condition of spiritual lethargy that tragically prevents him from acting according to his own free will.

Enrico IV is the play of a protracted masquerade that promotes a strategy of systematic disguise and diffusion of that very social contradiction--the sentence of spiritual lethargy that Mussolini passed on the Italian people in the twenties--that is embedded in all of its multiple levels of fictionality. It comports a legal and political discourse with a significant affinity with Mussolini's grandiose vision of social cohesion in Italy as the result of a reenactment of the imperial glories of the past. And like Mussolini's delirious

strategy, which did not keep European history from evolving but kept the Italian people from positively affecting its evolution, Pirandello's legal fatalism does not keep Enrico from changing, on the contrary, it hurls him into a carousel of changes of which he is pathetically unaware. As such, Enrico's personal tragedy measures both the extent to which Pirandello succeeds in capturing the rhetoric of legal and political obstructionism dominant in Italy in the twenties, and the extent to which he fails in countering the social cohesion promoted by this particular rhetoric with an alternative ideology capable of helping resolve the social conflict.

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