
FROM *IL FU MATTIA PASCAL* TO *LIOLA*: AN ANALYSIS OF PIRANDELLO'S HUMOR

LINDA ARMAO

In 1908, Pirandello articulated his notion of humor in his critical essay entitled *L'Umorismo*.¹ It is important to note that at this early date Pirandello had already set forth his philosophical/psychological theories of the human personality which have come to be associated with *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921), and superficially dubbed, "typical Pirandellian themes." Moreover, there is an interesting temporal coincidence between this critical explanation of humor and Pirandello's departure from narrative prose, as he channeled his creative energies into drama. This timely shift in literary form reflects Pirandello's awareness that drama neatly lends itself to an investigation of the myriad roles one plays—off-stage—in any given lifetime. Certainly Pirandello sensed the organic relationship between his concept of the multi-faceted, mask-donning personality and the dramatic portrayal of a character on a theatrical stage. Pirandello used the masks and props of the theater to remind his spectator that life, itself, is replete with these theatrical accouterments. Whether theater imitates life, or life imitates theater, Pirandello found in the dramatic genre a fitting stage for the acting out of his special brand of humor.

The purpose of this analysis of *Liola* (1916) is thus two-fold: 1) To show the textual differences between this play and the fourth chapter of *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* (1904) which inspired it. While contrasting these texts and noting the changes which allow *Liola* to function dramatically, I will show that this drama works better than its narrative

predecessor to demonstrate Pirandello's concept of humor. 2) To present thematic evidence that this play does indeed transcend dialect or verist theater since it incorporates elements of "umorismo" which characterize the later "typical Pirandellian" plays.

By manipulating plot as well as characters, Pirandello brings to fruition a dramatic version of the fourth chapter of *Il Fu Mattia Pascal*. As he moves from narration to drama he realizes a successful transition by making the following adjustments: a) he embellishes or distills existing incidents; b) he invents new incidents while omitting others; c) he reorders the sequence of events to create dramatic dynamism from the more casual meandering of his prose narration; d) he strengthens or weakens key characters; e) he invents new characters to promote spectacle and/or convey rural ambience; and f) he eliminates peripheral characters which would only clog his dramatic machinery. The following list of characters and skeletal account of the fourth chapter of *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* provide a backdrop against which these technical revisions can be analyzed.

IL FU MATTIA PASCAL

LIOLÀ

Mattia Pascal	Liolà
Batta Malagna	Zio Simone (old uncle who wants heir)
Marianna Dondi	Zia Croce (Zio Simone's cousin)
Romilda	Tuzza (daughter of Zia Croce)
Oliva	Mita (young wife of Zio Simone)
Mattia's mother	Zia Ninfa (Liolà's mother)
Gerolamo II Pomino	Eliminated from play
Mattia's brother	Eliminated from play
Narration	Gesa (aunt and guardian of Mita)
Narration	La Moscardina
	Ciuzza, Luzza and Nela (3 young girls)
	Tinino, Calicchio and Pallino (Liolà's 3 boys)
	(these 6 characters generate spectacle and provide ambience of "campagna")

Il Fu Mattia Pascal

Gerolamo II Pomino is in love with Romilda Dondi. He is afraid that she is about to be trapped between her mother's cunning and her uncle's desperation. While Romilda's mother, Marianna, has her

eye on Batta Malagna's fortune, Malagna, Romilda's uncle, is utterly desperate for an heir. Gerolamo fears that the young Romilda could too conveniently serve mother and uncle alike with one and the same means.

After his first wife died, Malagna snatched up the young and robust country girl, Oliva, whom he deemed quite fit to solve his problem. Three years have elapsed and Oliva is still without a child. Impatient and angry, Malagna makes daily visits to Marianna, his cousin, to bemoan his childless fate. Marianna sympathetically listens with one eye on her own daughter.

Gerolamo invokes the aid of Mattia Pascal and the latter willingly begins to frequent Romilda's house to investigate the situation. Good intentions notwithstanding, Mattia and Romilda fall in love. While Marianna is at first very hostile to Mattia's presence, she comes to welcome his daily visits. With uncharacteristic cooperation she allows the lovers just enough privacy to consummate their passion. Romilda becomes pregnant and Marianna has no further need for Mattia Pascal. Romilda is forced to cancel her relationship with him and throw herself at the mercy of her uncle: surely Batta Malagna will have pity on her and save her reputation by claiming her child as his own. Soon thereafter Malagna announces that Romilda is carrying his child and Mattia Pascal silently harbors the truth which sears his heart. Marianna Dondi has carefully compassed her end, relying at all times on Malagna's vulnerability in the face of such a situation.

Mattia Pascal settles for nothing short of perfect revenge. He convinces Malagna's young wife, Oliva, that she must answer this outrage in kind: "Devi anzi dirgli di sì, che è vero, verissimo, ch'egli può aver figliuoli.... comprendi?"² Mattia impregnates Oliva, providing Malagna with a legal if not a biological heir. At this point, Malagna has no need for Romilda's child and admits he had fraudulently claimed it as his own. Mattia marries Romilda and Marianna Dondi is indeed undone, hoist by her own petard.

I. From Il Fu Mattia Pascal to Liolà

The drama of *Liolà* emerges from this fourth chapter of *Il Fu Mattia Pascal*. Let us take a closer look at the textual changes which effectuate a successful transition from one genre to another.

A) The embellishment of existing incidents (a):

From a brief narrative account, Pirandello creates a dramatic exchange between characters which advances the action while it provides background information to the reader/spectator. The situation common to both texts is the old man's mistreatment of his second wife because she has failed to bear him a child. In the novel one learns of Malagna's behavior: "Aspettò ancora un anno, il terzo: invano. Allora prese a rimbrottarla apertamente."³ Pirandello uses this short piece of narration as the dramatic fulcrum around which the first scene turns. As the play opens, all the women are working and singing, preparing Zio Simone's almond crop for the marketplace. Tired and thirsty, they remind Zio Simone that he has promised them some liquid refreshment. He hedges and the women begin to banter back and forth about his avaricious tendencies. This playful conversation reveals part of Simone's character. The chatter continues as the women wonder why he hoards his money; he can't take it with him when he dies and he has no children to whom he can bequeath it. With this, all laughter ceases as Zio Simone's anger betrays the crucial fact which plunges him into the action of the play: he sorely wants an heir. His reaction in the following dialogue reveals the frustration at work beneath his gruff exterior.

La Moscardina. « Avesse figli—Uh, m'è scappata! »

(Si tura subito la bocca. Le altre donne restano tutte come basite. Zio Simone le fulmina con gli occhi; poi, scorgendo la moglie, scarica l'ira su lei.)

Zio Simone. (a Mita) « Va' via, va' via, mangia-a-ufo! va' via! »

(E come Mita, avvilita, non si muove, andandole sopra, facendola sopra, facendola alzare e strappandola e scrollandola:)

« Lo vedi, lo vedi a che servi tu? solo a farmi beccare la faccia da tutti! Va' via! Subito a casa, via! »

(Mita va via dal fondo, mortificata, piangendo.)⁴

The action of this scene, that is, the old man's harsh treatment of his mortified wife, foments animated conversation among the women. Pirandello now has an excuse to continue their chatter, supplying more background information which will set the stage for the ensuing action. However, there is a deeper artistic import to this scene. As Zio

Simone rails at Mita who shrinks from the stage, Pirandello infuses the shadow allusion of the narration—"prese a rimbrottarla apertamente"—with flesh and blood reality. Furthermore, what begins in the play as a comic exposure of an old man's greed, ends with an insight into the serious motives behind the greed. Inherent in such embellishment is Pirandello's concept of humor.

For Pirandello, the capacity for humor begins with man's unique ability to see himself in the very act of living. Man, unlike the lower animals, can reflect upon his essence and juxtapose his view of himself with his surroundings. The comic writer and the humorist alike exploit this ability in order to provoke laughter by pointing to the many incongruities in this view man has of himself vis-à-vis his surroundings. While the comic writer stops at this level, his end met with this "perception of the opposite", the humorist is only beginning. The humorist must now reveal the hidden meaning—the psychological secrets—behind the incongruity. For Pirandello, this is the "feeling of the opposite" and it is this level of insight which separates the humorist from the comedian.⁵ The grumbling, the greed, the anger of Zio Simone are comic and provoke laughter until the more serious disturbances beneath them are made manifest. At this point, laughter yields to observation; this is Pirandello's humor at work. As Pirandello, himself, explains: "While the sociologist describes social life as it presents itself to external observation, the humorist, being a man of exceptional intuition, shows—nay, reveals—that appearances are one thing and the consciousness of the people concerned, in its inner essence, another."⁶

Of course, the *raison d'être* behind Pirandello's humor is to convey his ideas about the human personality by making them artistically active.⁷ The question which arises at this juncture is whether or not theater makes these ideas more artistically active than prose narration. I think that it does. Since Pirandello's humor depends on man's ability to see himself in the act of living, seeing other men characterized on a theatrical stage becomes a metaphor for reflective consciousness. The visual dimension of the theater is thus very important for Pirandello's humor; seeing other men in life-like scenarios compels man to reflect on his own reflection, perhaps to even see the incongruities of his own self-image.

- B) The distillation of existing incidents (a) and,
 The introduction of new characters to promote spectacle
 and convey rural ambience. (e)

A second scene from *Liola* demonstrates how Pirandello distills the essence from long passages of narration without losing vital information. In several pages of first person narrative prose⁸ Mattia Pascal juxtaposes the personality and social standing of Batta Malagna's first wife with those characteristics of his second wife. Mattia Pascal informs his reader that even though Malagna's first wife was of a weak physical constitution and never conceived his child, Malagna was too intimidated by her superior social standing to register his disappointment. Of course, no such intimidation checked Malagna's harassment of his second wife. Ironically, his second wife always believed in her own fertility but was too faithful to her marriage vows to prove it. In *Liola*, after Mita is sent crying from the stage, the women folk must remain to explain via their conversation this history of Zio Simone's marital woes. Without these women, the motivation behind the action would be lost to the spectator/reader. Pirandello extracts the essence of this information from the novel and injects it into the following animated dialogue:

Zia Croce. « Lo sapete anche voi che la prima moglie di Zio Simone fu una vera Signora. »

La Moscardina. « e la pianse, bisogna dire la verità, la pianse tanto, quando gli morì! »

Gesa. « Già! Per tutti i figli che seppe fargli! »

Zia Croce. « Che figli volete che gli facesse quella poverina! Era così (magra) e teneva l'anima coi denti!... Zio Simone prese vostra nipote soltanto per averne figlio, non per altro. »

Gesa. « Scusi, che intende dire con questo? Che manca forse per mia nipote?... Ringrazi Dio che mia nipote è onesta, e la prova perciò non si può fare! »⁹

However, Pirandello is not satisfied merely to substitute this conversation for previous narration. He introduces three new characters into this scene to make a dramatic spectacle and create rural ambience out of what would otherwise be a simple transition from one genre to another. Three young girls, Ciuzza, Luzza and Nela, hover around

the older women to try to make sense out of this talk of husbands, wives and “figli.” They are too young to understand, yet too old not to be curious. In stage directions which periodically interrupt the previous dialogue, Pirandello explains how these three girls must tiptoe back and forth, attempting to eavesdrop on the juicy conversation of the older women:

(Allora, prima l'una e poi l'altra, pian pianino s'accostano ad ascoltare ciò che dicono di là tra la zia Croce, comare Gesa e comare Carmena e poi lo vanno a riferire alle altre due che ne ridono, ammonendole con cenni di non farsi sentire.)¹⁰

One can imagine the life-like quality these giggling girls add to the scene—the kinetic energy they generate—while the women function to fill in the necessary information which advances the plot. Pirandello, however, is careful to integrate these two components of the same scene. As one of the girls, signaling her companions over a particular piece of gossip, bumps into Zia Croce, Pirandello achieves his desired integration:

(A questo punto, Luzza, accostandosi per ascoltare, nel voltarsi per far segno alle compagne, sbatte contro la zia Croce che si volta e la spinge sulle furie contro quelle che gridano e ridano.)

Zia Croce. «Càzzica, che ficchina! V'ho detto di tenervi discoste, pettegole che non siete altro!»¹¹

With great economy Pirandello has concocted a scene which fulfills the informative function of the narration while it promotes vivid theatricality. At the same time, his humor cannot resist the obvious incongruity in Zia Croce's scolding of the girls: “pettegole”, gossips, more aptly describes Zia Croce and friends than these innocent girls at play!

C) The invention of new incidents (b)

A delightful scene is invented in its entirety which functions dramatically in a variety of ways: it provides comic relief from the serious conversations about Mita's fruitless marriage to Zio Simone; it reveals the spiritual buoyancy of these country women who never take anyone's plight too seriously too long; and, it brilliantly heralds the first appearance of the hero, Liolà.

As the women continue their unsophisticated yet earnest analysis

of marriage and procreation, the mother of Liolà, Zia Ninfa, passes by on her way to mass. The three young girls are eager to join her because they realize it is late and that Zia Ninfa will arrive in time for the “messa delle signore.” However, Zia Ninfa explains that she must avoid this mass if she ever hopes to win God’s favor from going to church. Last week at the messa delle signore she did nothing but watch these rich women wave their fans to cool themselves. She fears it was the devil himself who prompted her to watch the fans and miss the mass! At this point, the three girls squeak and squeal and demand that Zia Ninfa demonstrate how these “vere signore” fan themselves. The entire group, women and girls alike, circle Zia Ninfa to watch the performance. With a perfect combination of gesture and words (the words actually imitate the sound the fans make as they cut through the air with their various motions). Zia Ninfa mimics first the signorine who are looking for husbands, then the married signore, and finally, the widowed signore:

Zia Ninfa. « Le signorine da marito, così:

(Fa il gesto di scuotere fitto fitto il ventaglio, e dice precipitosamente, accompagnando il gesto, impettita)

« L’avrò! l’avrò! l’avrò! l’avrò! »

Le signore maritate, così:

(Muove la mano con grave, placida soddisfazione)

« Io ce l’ho! io ce l’ho! io ce l’ho! io ce l’ho! »

Mentre le povere vedove:

(Muove la mano con sconsolato abbandono, dal petto al grembo)

« L’avevo e non l’ho più! l’avevo e non l’ho più!

l’avevo e non l’ho più! »

Everyone laughs and the young girls, pretending their hands are fans, mimic the signorine who are eagerly waiting for husbands:

Ciuzza, Luzza e Nela (a coro). Oh bella! Sì, L’avrò! l’avrò!

l’avrò! l’avrò! l’avrò!

(A questo punto, da lontano, si ode la voce di Liolà che ritorna col carretto dal paese, cantando)¹²

As the young girls chant, “I will have him, I will have him”, the singing of Liolà is heard in the distance. A scene which had all the

trappings of pure entertainment ends by announcing the arrival of Liolà. In retrospect, one sees that Pirandello uses Liolà's physical progenitor, Zia Ninfa, as his spiritual progenitor as well. With her animated performance, she creates the same joyous atmosphere which characterizes the ambience of Liolà's spirit.

D) The reordering of the sequence of events (c)

The most striking of Pirandello's revisions is his reordering of the sequence of events of the plot. In the novel, it is the end of the chapter, the classical denouement, which reveals the truth behind the ruse and the motives of the characters involved. The play, however, begins with such a revelation. In Act I one learns that it is Tuzza, not her mother, whose malice sets forth to destroy Mita's marriage and win Zio Simone's wealth. It is Tuzza who deliberately uses Liolà, who knows her uncle is vulnerable prey for "l'inganno." She proclaims to her mother:

Tuzza. Le voglio dire perchè mi son messa con Liolà....Perchè....Zio Simone, invece di prendersi me, si prese quella santarella di Mita.... Perchè il mio danno ora posso rovesciarlo addosso a chi me l'ha portato. Rovinata io, rovinata lei.

Zia Croce.e Zio Simone?

Tuzza. Mi butterò ai suoi piedi; gli confesserò tutto.... E poi darà lui a intendere agli altri, e prima di tutti alla moglie, che il figlio è suo. Gli basterà averlo così, pur di prendersi questa soddisfazione.¹³

By beginning the play with this exposure of Tuzza's outrage, Pirandello creates the necessary tension from which the rest of the action is generated. Both Acts II and III feed on the energy which is released with Tuzza's dramatic admission of guilt: will her trick bring to bear the end she seeks? Equally important, however, is the second function of this reordering of events. It is very much in keeping with Pirandello's humor that he begins with an "inganno" which offers the investigation and analysis of two possible solutions. One solution would rely on a conventional idea of justice: expose the treachery, find the truth of the matter, and if possible, punish the guilty party. A second solution would allow Pirandello to express his cynicism toward the efficacy of a system which champions truths at the expense

of fragmenting individuals and undermining relationships. As he explains in *L'Umorismo*:

La conciliazione delle tendenze stridenti, dei sentimenti ripugnanti, delle opinioni contrarie, sembra piú attuabile su le basi d'una comune menzogna, che non su la esplicita e dichiarata tolleranza del dissenso e del contrasto; sembra, in somma, che la menzogna debba ritenersi piú vantaggiosa della veracità, in quanto quella può unire, laddove questa divide.¹⁴

Just as in *Così è se vi pare*, Pirandello, opts for this latter solution in *Liolà*. Eric Bentley explains how this works: "In *Liolà*, to stick to the terms of the play itself, deception (inganno) leads to outrage (infamia), whereupon a remedy (rimedio) is found, not by exposure of the deception, but by another and larger deception."¹⁵ As Bentley maintains, it is not evil which fashions this larger deception, but the wisdom and humanity of *Liolà*.

II. *Does Liolà transcend dialect or verist theater?*

It is surprising, in light of all the textual evidence to the contrary, that so many critics have failed to see Pirandello's "umorismo" in *Liolà*, aligning it instead with Verga's verist theater. Leonardo Bragaglia writes:

Delle due « lettere » del teatro pirandelliano.... quella filosofica e quella fatta attraverso il livello verista, questa seconda è la più comunemente applicata dalla critica moderna per un attento esame delle prime opere « siciliane » di Pirandello. *Liolà*, per esempio, fu considerato un esemplare perfetto di rappresentazione verista di preta estrazione verghiana.¹⁶

Domenico Vittorini, as well, recognizes in *Liolà* "an echo of the life that Verga depicted in *Cavalleria Rusticana*.... the same country setting, the same primitive people and passions."¹⁷ Vittorini denies *Liolà* the complexity of character which a humoristic reading of *Liolà* reveals: "The naturalistic theme in the particular and well-defined characters that naturalism assumed especially with Verga, Pirandello's great master, appears also in *Liolà*."¹⁸

The character of *Liolà* is the logical point of departure from which

to discuss the relationship between this play and the later “typical Pirandellian” works. Liolà is a much stronger character than his predecessor, Mattia Pascal. The naivetè of the latter awakens to an active embracing of simplicity in Liolà. Unfortunately, however, this joyous zest for life has been interpreted by many critics as a uni-dimensional, hence un-Pirandellian, psychological profile. They claim that Liolà is the incarnation of happiness, Pirandello on holiday. While Liolà is indeed blessed with a healthy spirit, it is not because he is ingenuous. His intuition, if not his intellect, has kept him at arm’s length from interpersonal relationships which tend to define the indefinable nature of his soul. While he must protect himself from others, he is spared the pressures of the bourgeois society from which so many of Pirandello’s characters suffer. Perhaps this is why his particular means of adjusting to life, his retreat to nature, has been so successful:

Io, questa notte, ho dormito al sereno;
 solo le stelle m’han fatto riparo:
 il mio lettuccio, un palmo di terreno;
 il mio guanciaie, un cardoncello amaro.
 Angustie, fame, sete, crepacuore?
 non m’importa di nulla: so cantare!¹⁹

Liolà’s awareness here of “angustie”, “fame”, “sete”, and especially “crepacuore” betrays the human sensitivity at work beneath his joyful song. He is no less alert to the disappointments of interpersonal relationships, to the incommunicable distance between any two souls, than is Leone, the husband in *Il gioco delle parti*. The only difference is that Liolà, unlike Leone, has never entered the fray; he has avoided the wounds, the rehabilitation, the inevitable scarring. Liolà intuitively senses that there is something wrong with conventionality—even in the Sicilian countryside—and rejects it. He explains to Zia Croce: “Non sono uccello di gabbia, Zia Croce. Uccello di volo, sono.”²⁰ Nonetheless, when he realizes that Tuzza is carrying his child, he willingly accepts responsibility for his actions. He is ready to save her honor, even though he senses that in saving her, he loses himself. However, Liolà is spared this violation of his own nature when Zio Simone succumbs to Tuzza’s guile and agrees to claim her child as his own. Liolà knows at this point that his spirit has been saved. It is important to note here that, unlike Mattia Pascal, it is for no selfish motives that

Liolà later impregnates Mita; he is not seeking balm for his own wounded ego. He never loved Tuzza, as Mattia had loved Romilda; he knew not the agony of rejection which had prompted Mattia to seek revenge. Walter Starkie is mistaken when he imputes such motives to Liolà: "Meanwhile Liolà, the village gallant always ready for a new adventure, bethinks him that now is a superb chance of revenging himself on Tuzza, who had rejected him."²¹ In fact, it is this very lack of personal motive for revenge which places Liolà's humane solution to Mita's problem in a humoristic, and therefore, "typically Pirandellian," mode. This is Pirandello's recurring lie—his "inganno" which remedies a previous "inganno"—which is more efficacious than the divisive screaming of the truth.

At the end of the play, when Zio Simone tells Liolà that he must marry Tuzza, unlike the weaker Mattia Pascal, Liolà refuses: "Sapevo che, sposando lei, tutte le canzoni sarebbero morte nel cuore."²² He knew before that marrying Tuzza would silence all the music in his heart, but his sense of duty and honor lead him to offer her his support. Now that Tuzza herself has transgressed the bounds of conventional morality with her attempted outrage against Mita, Liolà has no need to worry about her. He offers to care for her child and goes off singing into the woods.

Even though Liolà escapes with his spirit intact, he does not enjoy the "spensieratezza"²³ with which many critics have characterized him. As he tells Zia Croce in the beginning of Act I: "Fingere è virtù; e chi non sa fingere non sa regnare."²⁴ It is amazing that anyone would deny *Liolà* its proper place in Pirandello's corpus in the face of such a statement; certainly this one sentence could serve as a summary for those very "Pirandellian" themes which *Liolà* purportedly lacks.

It is not necessary, however, to confine oneself to the character of Liolà in order to find evidence of Pirandello's humor in this play. Just as in *Così è se vi pare*, there is a hoard of gossips in Liolà which hover around the central core of characters. In *Liolà*, however, these gossips are not seeking the truth, but rather a version of reality, an appearance, which can appease their sense of social justice. They are not happy with Tuzza's attempted revenge on Mita. Even though Tuzza confessed the truth to Zio Simone, these gossips (the town conscience) cannot countenance the appearance that Tuzza's child belongs to

him. When Mita is concerned, however, it is different. Even though everyone realizes that Mita's child no more belongs to Zio Simone than Tuzza's child, they are willing to embrace this second deception; it restores the social harmony they demand. As Eric Bentley describes it, "it is a kind of social pact or legal fiction"²⁵ which returns order to the little Sicilian village.

There is an interesting change in plot from *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* to *Liolà* which reinforces the fact that in this play Pirandello actively seeks the artistic expression of his humor. Whereas in *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* Oliva confesses to her husband, Batta Malagna, that she is carrying Mattia's child, Mita makes no such mistake in *Liolà*. Instead, Mita takes Liolà's advice, she holds her tongue, and proves to Zio Simone that, yes, he can have children. The end which Mita seeks, that is, a peaceful reconciliation with her husband, would be compromised by her admittance of the truth. One recognizes in Mita's simulation here a form of adaptation or survival which Pirandello advocates in his essay, *L'Umorismo*. Eric Bentley unravels the convoluted levels of appearance and reality which are inherent in Mita's wise deception:

Tuzza excludes Uncle Simone from the pact by actually telling him what has happened and thus preventing him from pretending to himself that the child is his. Mita doesn't make this mistake. It matters nothing that others shout the news in his face. That is unofficial gossip. The understanding, the apparent appearance, is that he is the father of Mita's child. And it is this appearance of an appearance, this shadow of a shadow, that brings back into Mita's grasp the solid realities of Simone's wealth and power.²⁶

With so much evidence that *Liolà*, despite its joyous refrains, sits comfortably among Pirandello's other humoristic writing, why have so many critics denied this? Certainly the difficult nature of Pirandello's concept of humor lends itself to such confusion. When one fails to grasp the intricacies of Pirandello's humor, it becomes difficult to recognize its presence. Since the humorist's job is to go one step beyond the comedian to the "feeling of the opposite", it is no wonder that Pirandello's humor is more elusive than comedy. Furthermore, if it takes, as Pirandello espouses, a privileged form of reflection to yield the humorist his viewpoint, it may then take a keener critical eye to discern this viewpoint in art. Pirandello explains

the type of reflection the humorist enjoys in order to see beyond the incongruity—"the perception of the opposite"—to its psychological origins—"the feeling of the opposite.": "The reflection which I speak of is not in opposition to the conscious versus the spontaneous; it is a kind of projection of the very activity of the creating imagination."²⁷ The way in which Pirandello describes the humorist's special reflection indicates that it is not a part of man's "reflective consciousness" in the sense that it requires one's cognitive powers; it is part of the "creative consciousness" of the humorist. Let us say that it is an extra tool—a heightened sense—which enables the humorist to see through a person's exterior, to unmask him. The humorist enters the private sanctuary of the human soul where motives and private longings crouch in the darkness. Because *Liolà* is more joyful than Pirandello's later plays, and because its humor is couched in Sicilian lore, critics have tended to miss its more serious psychological insights which signal the presence of Pirandello's "feeling of the opposite." While Pirandello definitely thickens his use of humor as he experiments with its theatrical potential, it cannot be denied that *Liolà* is the legitimate offspring of a humorist's creative consciousness.

Notes

1. Pirandello, Luigi: *L'Umorismo*, in *Saggi, Poesie, Scritti vari*, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano, 1965.
2. Pirandello, Luigi: *Il Fu Mattia Pascal*, Arnoldo Mondadori, 1957; p. 290.
3. *Ibid.*: p. 282.
4. Pirandello, Luigi: *Liolà*; Arnoldo Mondadori, 1949; p. 644.
5. In Pirandello's essay on humor, he distinguishes two levels of artistic reflection: the "avvertimento del contrario" and the "sentimento del contrario". While the former consists in the recognition of a comical incongruity, the latter entails an insight into the reasons behind the incongruity.
6. Pirandello, Luigi: *Saggi*: (Milano: Mondadori; 1939), p. 163 (work cited by Eric Bentley, *In Search of Theater*, Vintage Books, 1953; p. 284).
7. Bentley, Eric: *In Search of Theater*, Vintage Books, 1953; p. 280.
8. Pirandello, Luigi: *Il Fu Mattia Pascal*, pp. 279–283.
9. Pirandello, Luigi: *Liolà*. p. 646.
10. *Ibid.*: p. 645.
11. *Ibid.*: p. 646.

12. Ibid.: pp. 649–650.
13. Ibid.: pp. 658–659.
14. Pirandello, Luigi: *L'Umorismo*, p. 147.
15. Bentley, Eric: *In Search of Theater*, p. 147.
16. Bragaglia, Leonardo: *Interpreti Pirandelliani*, Trevi Editore, Roma, 1969; p. 45.
17. Vittorini, Domenico: *The Drama of Luigi Pirandello*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1935; pp. 70–71.
18. Ibid.: p. 63.
19. Pirandello, Luigi: *Liolà*, p. 655.
20. Ibid.: p. 661.
21. Starkie, Walter: *Luigi Pirandello*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967; p. 85.
22. Pirandello, *Liolà*, p. 700.
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