

Social Conventions Versus Personality in Pirandello's First Novel *L'Esclusa* (*The Outcast*)

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Abstract

Marta Ajala, the protagonist of *L'Esclusa*, (*The outcast*), surprised by her husband in the awful act of reading a love letter sent by a man, is thrown out of the house even though she has done nothing wrong. But she will be accepted and taken in again, provided after she has actually committed the act which she was unjustly charged with in the first place. In this article I have focused on Pirandello's intention to demonstrate boldly the conflicts between the individual and social conventions which urge man to follow a determined social role. In order to avoid the assigned mask society imposes Pirandello's character shows various reactions. At first the individual shows her unacceptable and absurd rebellious attitude demonstrating her own will to resolve her personal and social problems. But society does not accept Marta's attempt to deny her social role. In Pirandello's ideology if the individual does not accept his/her assigned social role certainly will not achieve Society's forgiveness, and this will be a point of focus in this article.

Key Words: Luigi Pirandello, *Verismo* (Naturalism), Social Conventions, Modern Narrative, Modern Italian Novels, Crisis of Identity.

Introduction

Pirandello has written seven novels among which *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (The late *Mattia Pascal*) won the most important and valuable literary prize of the world in 1932: the Nobel Prize. The author has been acclaimed greatly in his home country and abroad. For this reason many critics have focused on his works producing a wide range of essays, articles or critical comments

Best known for his plays *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) and *Tonight We Improvise* (1930), Luigi Pirandello achieved fame because of his dramatic works. The majority of critical studies since his death have concentrated on his plays. In spite of the attention that the author has received for his plays, his novels have received much less attention yet he was at first a novelist and a popular short story writer. Glauco Cambon reasonably claims that Pirandello's name has been unjustly only identified with his plays. (Cambon, 337). In 1934 Pirandello was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature because of his brilliant renovation of the drama age. Typical for Pirandello is to show how art or illusion mixes with reality and how people see things in a very different way, words are unreliable and reality is at the same time true and false.

*L'ESCLUSA*¹ (1901) (*The Outcast*) is Pirandello's first full-length novel. Pirandello wrote it when he was very young. Many critics reasonably argue that this novel has been strictly influenced by the Italian *Verismo*² and could be connected with Nineteenth-century Italian literature. In the ironical story the protagonist

1- *The Outcast* was written in 1883 and first published with some changes in serial form in *La Tribuna* in 1901. The second edition was printed in a single volume by Treves (Milan, 1908). The third and definitive edition was published by Bemporad (Florence, 1927).

2- *Verismo* is an Italian narrative style that stems from the realism of two Italian novelists of the late 19th century: Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga. The Sicilian novelist Capuana became Pirandello's friend and advisor and this is why Pirandello in his first two novels turned his attention to naturalistic fiction. In this regard Fiora Bassanese finds *L'Esclusa* as a companion piece to the major works of the Sicilian naturalists: Verga's *I Malavoglia* (1881- *The house by the medlar tree*). Capuana's *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* (1901, *The marquis of Roccaverdina*). (Bassanese, P.25) 'Although the author's first novel is considered as the result of his naturalistic notions it contains the seeds that blossom in his later theoretical works.

suspects that his wife is unfaithful and takes her back after the adultery has actually occurred.

Discussion

Throughout the linear plot of *L'Esclusa* Pirandello shows that something imaginary is destined to become a fact as well as a perception that definitely becomes reality. The confined spaces of regional setting and the closed mentality of its inhabitant delineated by the author all are employed to testify the metempsychosis of an imagination into fact. Also this fact is somehow related to the contrast between the social integration and the integral self-image the individual has of her/himself. In order to be reintegrated in society and to be accepted by people who believe in social codes man is forced to shatter his self image. Pirandello emphatically focuses on the reversed and contrary relationship between the self-image and self-complacency of man and his social integration in society. This struggle usually ends in the supremacy of social reintegration on the image the individual fashions for himself. For this reason Marta Ajala- though personally guiltless- is publicly sinner due to the insistence she has in her own self-image; she becomes innocent and socially reintegrated exactly when her self-image becomes disintegrated. Although here Pirandello explicitly elucidates the cruelty of confining social structure of life he somehow affirms that man should accede the mask society imposes on him in order to be able to survive his life. Marta Ajala's return to Pentagora's house somehow shifts her back to her previous social status with the result that she should abandon her self-sufficiency. Glauco Cambon claims that the point of *L'Esclusa* is to show the predicament of Marta who rejects the insular condition of human beings. (Cambon, 338). Unlike the critic's idea about the heroine's role I believe that Marta accepts an insular that social code imposes on her. The protagonist's curiosity brings about a situation in which she has to suffer the constrictiveness of social codes. What she does is a "struggle" to carry on her life in a complicated and self-created environment. Any act of rejecting usually derives from power or at least from courage of which Marta is emphatically

deprived. The critic dismissed that the predicament of Marta firstly emanates from her attempt to satisfy her psychological desire and not from a definite rebellion against social code. Any subsequent quarrel with social conventions emerges as a result of the character's curiosity.

Because of her disregarding of arbitrary conventions of society Marta should face punishment. Society never forgets any eventual transgression of the individual. As long as the individual respects the accepted habits on which society is based he will be part of the community but as soon as he ignores social codes and the customary ways in which everyone should behave within a community, he will suffer definitely the strong reactions of society. In *The outcast* the act of respecting social mores can be defined as an advantage just as any attempt to ignore the arbitrary conventions results in disadvantage. According to the situation in which Marta Ajala is involved, her leaving school and getting married with Rocco Pentagora is an advantage but a simple attempt to exchange love letters with Alvignani and consequently the false accusation of adultery makes the heroine completely brittle. Marta's unstable condition derives from her ignoring the advantage faced her before¹. In a society such as Sicilian one, Marta Ajala's plan to have a career as a school teacher does not have any compatibility with the community's assumption of felicity. Marta's parent's decision to take her back from school and send her to Pentagora's house is a reasonable activity acceptable by community. Not only Marta Ajala but also her father, father-in-law, her admirer, and all those people who have an authority over her are victims of social conventions. The only difference lies in the fact that Marta psychologically replies to her innate desire and ignores by mistake social restrictions. Here I should refer to Justine Wintle's expression who mentions social restrictions as superficial and which unfortunately always has been valued by society. (Wintle, 410) Society not only values appearance but also affirms formality. This is the social pressure that urges the protagonist to become what she was thought to be. Throughout the novel also

1-This is the same advantage that Antonio Ravi of Pirandello's second novel *Il Turno* wants to give to her pretty daughter Stellina by forcing her to marry the reach oldster Diego Alcozér.

Pirandello challenges the social code of honor. This code is very respectful and if an individual disregards it, he will certainly face the cruel reactions of society. Pirandello's art of sentiment of contrary reveals the inadequacy between the innate desire of the individual and those restrictions social conventions impose. This is obviously a contrast between the immense inside world of human beings and social conventions which appear as obstacles. In this regard, Pirandello is heir of the previous Italian intellectuals like Petrarca (1304-1374) and Leopardi (1798-1837) who have been obsessed by the contrast between the capricious nature of man and those limitations in reality that determine the enclosure of man's activity¹. But Pirandello's dealing with man's struggle against social conventions is related to the circumstance of a new atmosphere with specific features of nineteenth century society. In this viewpoint what challenges the restrictions of society comes directly from mind of the individual. Before committing any attempt to shape a new identity for herself, Marta is looking for a way to satisfy her desire. In fact Marta's decision to be a school teacher is not essentially an anti social behavior. But if she achieves a career of her own as a teacher it will result in rejecting the responsibility of being wife and mother and this is what the community cannot accept. It means that if the accepted social code of honor comes to be ignored, the authority of social and moral conventions will be violated and offended. Pirandello emphatically focuses on the absurdity of social codes. Radcliff-Umstead states that Pirandello's aim is to expose the absurdity and cruelty of social code (Radcliff-Umstead, 133.) It should be added that the absurdity presented by Pirandello is a bizarre one. On the one hand the author exposes social codes as something unbearable with which man cannot put up with. On the other hand he presents the effortlessness of his characters as the result of their attempts to ignore the respectability of social conventions. The prejudice of a cruel society to which Marta Ajala does not pay attention has extreme importance for her father Francesco Ajala. The father Ajala acknowledges that his daughter's

1- Among Italian literary intellectuals Francesco Petrarca (1304 -1374) had been obsessed by this contrast which is reflected in his *Secretum (My secrets)*. The inadequacy between man's nature and the concrete limitations imposed by reality also pervades Leopardi's poems. (1798-1837).

scandalous commitment threatens his authority as a father and as a successful man of town. Thus what will remain for him is isolation. Marta's sin withdraws the respect people know in her father as man of authority. Pirandello emphasizes on the strict relationship between the individuals in society and shows them allied in their superstitions. By presenting Francesco Ajala as a character who refrains his own possession after the infidelity of his daughter, Pirandello focuses on the relationship between characters and objects they have in possession. The constancy of this relationship depends on the social position of the character. Francesco Ajala relinquishes any relationship with his objects because his relationship with society has been turned over. A proper relationship with society and its respectable conventions has superiority over any other communication. The relationship between characters and objects they have in possession is stronger than what Dombroski mentions as an interpersonal relationship. (Robert Dombroski, 91). The critic adds that creating interpersonal communication as a system imposed by society is impossible but it should be taken into consideration that what urges Pirandello's character to make rebellion is consciousness of this cruel reality.

Francesco Ajala's, Marta's and even Rocco Pentagora's isolation derives from the sense of losing what is honorably respected. Thus Marta's husband, Rocco, returns to his father's home. His anger and annoyance is very deep. His father tries to console him reminding him the family's curse in relation to women's infidelity. Rocco's annoyance has a subjective reason: being a wretched man whose life became the existing proof of the family's curse. Like his father-in-law Francesco, Rocco suffers a sense of losing his prestige in society. Generally in Pirandello's novels the characters' alienation is not related to the objects around them. Characters usually surrender themselves to the isolation they suffer and not to the unfortunate losing of objects. Marta's demonstration of freedom by exchanging love letters with Gregorio Alvignani results in her alienation but alienation of the other characters who are in strict relationship with the outcast appears as the natural result of their dependence on the heroine.

The regional setting of the novel is confined by superstitious practices.

Pirandello however rarely provides a depiction of customs but affords the prevailing belief system and prejudices. What Pirandello is going to criticize is the tyrannical prejudices of a closed provincial environment. These are the characteristics of a narrow-minded society that with its honor and male supremacy suffocates the individual. It would be relevant to see superstitions as an essential element of narrow-mindedness of a closed environment. This is superstition that makes Pentagora's family believe in their genetically predisposition for choosing infidel and betrayer wives. Although this genetic fate does not help Rocco Pentagora to discover his wife's betray but prompts him to accuse Marta immediately after he arrested her with Alvignani's love letter in hand. In fact because of this biological legacy Rocco cast his wife out.

In Pirandello's novels the family functions as a core in which characters patch up their personalities. On the other hand family is strictly linked with society and any flow or tide in society can easily change family's circumstance. Since all members of family are related to each other, the predicament of one member can affect life of other members. Not only Marta Ajala suffers a tragic life under the pressure of a narrow-minded society based on prejudices but her husband, father, mother and sister loose their peaceful lives. Marta falls down into a well and unwittingly trails with herself the other members of her family. Marta's curiosity which enabled her to go beyond social codes prepared this well. The heroine dismissed this fact that social codes require many respects and any attempt to dissect and deny them is not acceptable.

Marta's attempt to ignore social conventions can be considered as a striving to live that part of life which has been denied to her before. Not only her decision to exchange letter with her admirer Gregorio Alvignani but also her decision to become a teacher in order to save her life are related to the rejected part of her life.

In *L'Esclusa* the individual's circumstance appears utterly as the product of the provincial environment in which he experiences his life. Indeed what distracts the readers attention from the sorrowful life of the characters are social mores and people's environmental convictions. The absurd and insular condition of man urges

him to respect those mores and social codes that undermine their lives. If someone individually decides to abstain himself from the eccentricity of social conventions will certainly face solitude and punishment. In Pirandello's novels usually the focal theme grows over the pivot of those characters who refuse to accept the superiority of social codes. They try to escape from the absurdity of life in an environment undermined by institutionalized convictions. Marta Ajala exhibits the pathetic life of all those individuals who achieves this consciousness that society with its constructive conventions would never allow them have a free life far from social determinism.

Pirandello's stress on male supremacy has been embodied by Marta's exclusion from social participation. This is an important fact that instigates Marta to show her disloyalty to Rocco Pentagora. Pirandello is affirming that when man in his hypocritical society is not able to voice his outburst he will commit some actions that could be considered a sin and an offence.

In a narrow-minded society restriction does not appear always as a direct imposition inflicted upon the individual. It somehow can be embodied by a limitation in which the individual is bounded. Through this restriction society widely imposes its conventions on the community. Although the cultural and environmental limitation of a small community such as Girgenti provides facility for people to be in touch as fast as it is possible, this apparently positive fact reveals its opposite side when a shocking event shakes the whole community. The fast and easy possibility of being in touch as the specific feature of a small town spreads immediately over the community the scandal of marked Marta Ajala. In that closed environment where Marta and her family carry on their lives having knowledge of each other is so restricting that people do not need any proof to testify the identity of each other. This identity can be easily reversed in case of committing any mistake that challenges the authority and supremacy of social codes. Indeed society masters the individual and undermines his eventual non-respectful behavior. This limitation is more comprehensive when we draw comparison between Marta's life both in Girgenti and Palermo. Being cast out by her husband Rocco and shunned by her father Francesco

Ajala, Marta remains hopeless and helpless in Girgenti. Thus she is forced to take on herself the burden of being the bread-winner. But at first her striving in Girgenti where the story of his scandalous commitment circulates amidst the small town is doomed to failure. In Palermo there is not the possibility of being easily in touch and people have not precise knowledge of each other for Marta's sorrowful life in Girgenti changes into a peaceful one in the centre of Sicily. In Palermo Marta is still marked and accused of adultery and still not released from the undue accusation. What affords her the possibility of experiencing a tranquil and calm life despite of the accusation is exactly the opposition of what she confronts in Girgenti. Those limitations that have authority over the small community of Marta's hometown do not exist in Palermo. This is limitation that condenses all superstitions and assumptions. The smallness of Marta's hometown has a social means which has been embodied by both the restricted activity of the character and that way through which his bizarre circumstance comes to be circulated. In her community Marta should face two struggles. At first she should face the accusation of having transgressed social mores; on the other hand she must endure her new and marked identity in people's viewpoints. The latter one has been never removed from Marta's mother-in-law whom we encounter in a miserable condition at the end of the novel. Pirandello believes that society not only relies on its conventions but also on people's superstitions and assumptions. Marta's sinful behavior makes her husband Rocco reflect that his prestige has been degraded for people of Girgenti and consequently he will be marked as a cuckold man as just as his father was marked before. He has deep knowledge of the norms of his society. What he considers as the code of honor is nothing but a status of his own as a man who has a servant –woman at home. Rocco knows that the degradation of his status as a man of authority will be vastly circulated in the hometown. In order to patch up his crumbling prestige Rocco should show to community his extreme disdain for what his wife committed. He resorts to professor Luca Blandino seeking his help. Rocco's stress lies on some words that saliently indicate his decisive intention to restore his crumbling prestige by showing his disdain for Marta's shame. The conversation held between Rocco

and Blandino affords the reader the prospective of a man who is hopeless but still has a little courage to revenge his destiny. *paese* or community is the focal and pivotal principle of the conversation on which both Rocco and Blandino stress. After having explained the betrayal of his wife, Rocco insists that he will never achieve peace of mind if he does not get satisfaction before community (*Tutti i romanzi*, 21-22) And when Blandino with astonishment questions about the relation between his wife's shame and community Rocco explains that his honor has been negatively branded among community and he should defend it. (Ibid) Rocco's emphasis placed on *paese* or community affirms that he is not looking for a personal and psychological satisfaction at all. He acknowledges that in his small home town Marta's sinful commitment and his degraded position have been circulated home by home. In fact Rocco is seeking to testify the sanity of his deformed identity to that community that has been informed immediately of his wife's scandal. Thus his need to achieve satisfaction has a socio-psychological aspect. There is no accusation on Rocco but he is aware of this fact that there is a reciprocal infamy between him and his wife: Marta will be known as an adulteress and Rocco will be marked as zeal less. Accordingly what the reader encounters at the end of the novel as Rocco's forgiveness rises from this principal need. There is not any personal or psychological satisfaction that forces Rocco to forgive Marta. Seeing his mother in death chamber he realizes that the poor woman's infamy of being adulteress has not been annulled and his father's infamy of being cuckold has not been annihilated. Indeed Rocco decides to forgive Marta, now really adulteress, to save his honor before the close-minded community. And this can be considered as Rocco's act of self-defence. If the infamy of Rocco's family has been circulated through his society, it can be properly removed out by his forgiveness. Rocco's circumstance implies the dependence of the individual's honor on social code. This is a social code that easily deteriorates the individual's identity in case of man's violence and transgression. And Rocco's capability of avoiding a total annihilation -of which his father-in-law Francesco Ajala is completely deprived- helps him to restore his personal and social honor. Francesco Locks himself in a dark room in order not to

face the light of truth. His despair is so deep that does he not like to listen to his wife's _expression of any eventual hope in future.(Ibid, 29.) For Francesco not only his daughter Marta is a marked individual but also his home is a shameless one. He is aware that what will be the small community's reaction when the story of Marta circulates. Francesco's anxiety is not justifiable. The following day of the first night he deliberately avoided his family and then heard the old Scoma speaking: "*Anche mia, mia figlia! Anche mia figlia! Peggio di quella! quella non tradí, fu tradita; e ora la miseria...*" (Ibid) This is what Francesco Ajala predicted before. This kind of gossip that attacks Francesco's honor instigates him so that he likely wants to "*correre da Marta e afferrarla per i capelli, trascinarla per casa, percuoterla a sangue*" (Ibid). Francesco should not be considered as a rough, rude and dictator. According to situation of man in a provincial society where he is always under the pressure of social conventions, his effort to secure his honor emerges in a discourteous manner. In fact this is man's self-defence verified by his struggle against a total annihilation. The pressure of social code on Francesco is so intolerable that what agonizes him is his demolished and defamed honor. Social code is so important that he does not think about the injustice imposed upon his own daughter; he rather thinks that is not fair that a daughter tries to soil the name of his father. (Ibid, 28.) For this reason and unlike his son-in-law Rocco, Francesco Ajala capitulates himself to the steady and inflexible social codes. He cuts himself off not only from his shameless home (*casa svergognata*) but also from society. Francesco's avoiding his presence in society implies his lack of courage to encounter his mutilated prestige. By presenting Francesco's death, Pirandello underlines the cruelty of society that circulates the infamy of those characters who supposedly transgress social conventions and afterward justifies their state of being victims. The absurdity of life with which Pirandello is so fascinated has been exposed by Francesco's death. Instead of Marta who finally and really commits the sin of adultery, society sacrifices Marta's father and makes use of him as a seer crow to terrify those individuals who try to violate social mores.

The social honor on which the individual relies in a small hometown has such

significance that man tries to protect it at any cost. After Francesco Ajala's death his business and all his families fall in ruin. Marta decides to save her family by becoming a school teacher. But a woman's becoming the family bread winner seems to be a sort of transgressive action against social mores. It is an attempt to disobey moral codes that definitely results in the husband's dishonor. For this reason Rocco decides to prevent his wife from the idea of maintaining her family by becoming a schoolteacher. He proposes that he will economically support Marta and her family. But by supporting a socially outcast woman Rocco will be considered as supporting an individual who has violated social norms and this will offend his community. Here Pirandello's subtle humor depicts delicately the dilemma of man who finds himself in an ambiguous situation in which he must choose one of the two unsatisfactory alternatives. If Rocco does not support Marta, his wife proceeds to become schoolteacher which certainly degrades the honor of her husband. On the other hand if Rocco vividly maintains Marta and her family and saves them from falling, it will imply his being in favor of a sinful woman whom society has outcast. Indeed Rocco proposes to support Marta secretly in order to hide his actions from exposure. Pirandello emphasizes the tragic situation of a man who becomes accused of violating social conventions. In this case the man not only will be banished but also segregated and isolated far from any relationship even with his closest relatives. By sending Anna Veronica to convey his proposal Rocco in fact makes a tactic which aims at two goals: firstly he avoids any misgiving of being in relationship with and in favor of a sinful wife cast off by society; secondly he can save his social honor by preventing Marta from becoming a breadwinner (Ibid, 81). Rocco does not show any feeling of sympathy for the predicament of his wife and her family; his apprehension is about his own honor and prestige. Rocco thinks that Marta's attempt to maintain her family is a derogatory and contemptuous that brings about humility for him (Ibid). Even Marta's mother Signora Agata realises that her son-in-law is selfishly worried about his social position and not his wife's vulnerable life. Rocco's concern only with his own social interest seems so selfish that it provokes the rage of Marta's mother (Ibid).

The pressure of society on a hounded individual is so heavy that she feels herself urged to submit her life to a fatal consequences even though she is definitely not convinced about her imposed role. In fact a blamed individual should remove radically those things which motivate society's anxiety otherwise he/she should face society's punishment despite his/her innocence. From the conversation of Signora Agata with her husband Francesco Ajala one may deduce that she is not convinced about her daughter's offence. But she is paradoxically afraid of what she sees as Marta's obstinacy to prove her innocence. The confusion is that Marta's mother insists in Marta's being innocent but paradoxically accepts the reaction of society. Not only Marta's mother but also their family friend Anna Veronica has this paradoxical behaviour. She is convinced of Marta's being innocent but asks her to go to church as a penitent woman. Marta refuses Anna's advice; she acknowledges that her presence in the church as a penitent encourages people to confirm the accusation. Through this passage and that final one in which Rocco forgives Marta, though being informed of her adultery, Pirandello challenges the authenticity and absolutism of reality. Reality has just a relative appearance. Truth is that which only takes place in people's mind and they confer it to everything they encounter. For Marta this mind-produced reality has dicotyledonous function: she has been banished in her innocence and forgiven in her offence.

Pirandello focuses on a mechanism through which society uses its believers as instruments to impose its restrictions on the individual. In this way society controls the activity of those individuals who tend to transcend social codes. If an individual rebels against social codes at first he will face the atrocious and ferocious faces of the others who believe in social mores. This is a mechanism which society uses its believers to suppress the rebels. Pirandello's intrusive intervention makes him call these believers as enemies. When Pirandello graphs the separation of Marta and her family from Anna Veronica the author says that Anna is abandoned afresh among her enemies. (Ibid, 93.) Marta herself faces these enemies in the carnival day when people carry the platform of two saints San Cosimo e Damiano invoking them to protect them from illness. The carrying platform of the saints stops only in two

positions. At first it stops in front of church that consequently instigates the religious senses of crowds. In the second time when the carnival arrives in front of Marta's house where Marta, her family and Anna Veronica are watching the ritual performance, the carrying platform suddenly ceases to move. But in its second stop the ritual paradoxically stimulates people's rage (Ibid, 61-62.). In order to show those enemies who carry the task of putting in force social mores, Pirandello proceeds to use two prominently different styles. The description of the ritual and its motivation has been exposed by using a verist style while the carnival's pause before the window through which Marta and Anna watch the crowds of people has a symbolic and somehow surrealistic aspect. A surreptitious message is under the camouflage of the carnival. The carrying platform stops and the crowds of people gaze at the window menacing those blamed women who are watching them. It means that the pause of the carrying platform implies the presence of some sinners who do not deserve to watch the saints. The author is inclined to prove that in a small community superstition has a vital presence and comes to be used as an instrument to punish the sinner. Indeed a hounded individual not only should tolerate some objective grieves such as the death of the father and unborn child but also should put up with some subjective forces verified by the enemies. Caesar comments this fact as a social mechanism through which people control each other (Caesar, 69) What Caesar calls as the social mechanism of control is nothing more than an intrusive intervention of people in life of an individual that reduce people to a situation that they become their fellow-citizen's enemies. In Marta's case this mechanism appears more than a simple act of controlling. People of the heroine's society deny the authenticity of her social life by forcing her to leave her hometown. This is the first encounter of Marta with her enemies that reminds her of the hardships she should face in future. Here social convention is incorporated by opinion of the others which comes to be exercised over a blamed individual. Thus Marta's movement to Palermo cannot be considered only as an attempt to become a breadwinner, it also seems to be an opportunity for her to divest herself from the fanatical crowd of the community.

Nobody should detach from himself the social mask society imposes on him other wise he will face the cruel repression of society. Mask which society fixes on individual's face has an intermediary function. Not only society imposes its convention on the individual through the mask but also it appears as the unique connotation that people know each other. Any attempt to tear off this mask must be paid for with seclusion. Marta cannot come to term with the mask society has imposed on her. She tries to play a role far from that one assigned by society. Society as "the world of mask" (Budell, 52.) is based on conventions and fictions. In other words these common fictions create stagnant and motionless order. In this order a precise role has been determined for whoever wants to live in society. Any attempt of the individual to ignore this role and to undergo another one unidentified by society and community disturbs social orders and consequently brings about turmoil. In fact the individual's disorderly action stirs that lagoon that was lied on its bed for a long time. In order not to be smitten by the cruel punishment of society Marta, after being banished for a while, retakes her role and, though sinful, comes to be admitted by society and people.¹

Conclusion

In his first novel Pirandello probes the conflict between man and social conventions of his own society. By recreating the people, customs and regional landscapes of his native Sicily Pirandello shows that through his first novel he was

1- In order to avoid the assigned mask society imposes Pirandello's characters have various reactions. As has been shown Marta Ajala reaccepts her social role and achieves Society's forgiveness. Mattia Pascal of *The late Mattia Pascal* is the most helpless character of Pirandello. After he refuses his role he goes further and changes his identity; this is an absurd rebellious action that never achieves society's forgiveness. Society annihilates him by putting Mattia's name amidst dead persons and leaving her a grave with his name craved on it. Pirandello's last narrative character Vitangelo Moscarda strives to avoid both society's imposed mask and its cruel punishment. Like his fellow-creature Enrico IV, Vitangelo decides to evade the performance of any social role. But unlike Enrico who hides himself behind the mask of madness in order to avoid the responsibility of any social role, Vitangelo is not intent to take refuge in another mask. He definitely wants to shirk any social responsibility but not with resorting to another illusive world.

following the precepts of Émile Zola's Naturalism (*verismo* in Italian). Though in this novel the author's thought is not evolved beyond Italian *verismo*.

In the conflicts between social mores and the individual, Pirandello focuses partially on the psychology of the individual which is usually reflected in his reaction against what society imposes on him. Pirandello's understanding of psychology and its influence in individual behavior can be seen in the long essay *L'umorismo (On Humor, 1980)*, in which he examines the principles of his art. What Marta Ajala knows of herself, or thinks she knows, is the least part of what she is. Society and its' conventions are those that are privileged to determine her identity.

The author also has expressed his deep pessimism and his pity for the confusion and suffering of the human existence in a society where honors should be respected. The respectful honors create an absurd condition. Man should suffer a bizarre and ambiguous life not because he does not respect honors but because he does not have any determined signification of them. This is the grimy, painful and disturbing situation of Marta Ajala and the obscure that dominates in her life. On the other hand Pirandello tries to criticize severely the tyrannical prejudices of a closed and provincial environment. This kind of environment usually suffocates the individual by imposing its notions of propriety and honor.

By presenting Marta Ajala as the victim of the novel the author investigates the situation of gender. In a closed and provincial environment male supremacy seems to be a moral and deep seated belief which and Marta Ajala's attempt to ignore that is doomed to a failure in social morality.

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