

PLSJ

Persian Literary Studies Journal (PLSJ)

Vol. 8, No. 14, 2019

ISSN: 2322-2557, Online ISSN: 2717-2848

DOI: 10.22099/JPS.2022.38103.1118, pp. 45-71

Mask and Face in Bahram Beyzai and Luigi Pirandello's Theater

Hossein Sabouri *

Associate Professor

sabouri@tabrizu.ac.ir

English Language and Literature Department-Persian and Foreign Languages
Faculty- University of Tabriz

Shahab Salamat

M.A English Language and Literature

shahab.salamat@gmail.com

Abstract

This article provides a comparison between the conventional and modern theater of revolt. It also indicates that the modern theater's attitude of revolt is twofold, existential, and social. Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Brecht, Pirandello, O'Neill, and Beyzai, all from different parts of the world share one idea which separates them from their predecessors and links them to each other; it is their attitude of revolt toward what makes them modern playwrights. Luigi Pirandello and Bahram Beyzai's drama embrace the atmosphere of revolt in the modern era considered as the precursors of Existential drama of revolt. The modern theater starts with the sense of spiritual and social disintegration, fragmentation of man, and his estrangement of officialdom. Within the framework of comparative literature and the philosophy of Henri Bergson, this article analyzes the philosophical traces of the issues of life, time, and the human-made concepts and forms of life and applies them to the selected plays of Pirandello and Beyzai. Ultimately, this paper distinguishes two types of human revolt in theater and differentiates between Beyzai and Pirandello and concludes that whereas Pirandello's revolt is based on moving from one mask to another, Beyzai's revolt is on ripping off the masks and facing the ultimate nudity of the existential face of human being.

Keywords: Henri Bergson, Pirandello, Beyzai, Existential and social Revolt, comparative literature

* Corresponding Author

Received: 10/08/2020

Accepted: 23/05/2022

Introduction

Mask plays, Puppet plays and Marionettes are ancient types of drama existing for centuries in Asia and Roman Europe. It has changed itself from within throughout the years. Plato's famous parable of the cave, in his *Republic*, might be considered the most famous documented rendering of the puppet theater in western history. The famous image is a group of chained prisoners in a cave looking at the shadows projected on the wall in front of them. The prisoners think that they are seeing the real objects moving in front of them.

To identify the origins of some of the ancient Iranian dramatic forms is very difficult due to the fact that the geographic position of Iran was in contact with ancient Rome, Greece, and Byzantium; also the acceptance of Islam opened one other major gate to the Arab world. The constant and often harsh contact of cultural differences as well as similarities has certainly influenced Iranian traditional performances, rites, festivals, and dances. Additionally, the scattered documents of Iranian dramatic performances were considered of low importance by the high-class aristocracy and authorities since plays and performances were mostly in form of jokes, satire, and theater along with dances, mime and puppetry with music. To hide behind the farces, dances, jokes and puppets were in fact the secret solution for the survival of both the dramatic art and the rebel behind the mask.

In Iran, string puppets were more popular than the other type of puppet play known as shadow play. "A large proportion of Iran's population were nomads, and it is not farfetched to assume that they invented shadow plays while there were sitting around a fire near their tents." (Beyzai, *Iranian Theatre* 85). In Iran "These performances, usually done by the lower and working class of the society were labeled as low or informal and thus were rarely documented or written on the paper" (104).

The modern version of Puppets plays has its roots in the Italian "grotesque theater". The most accurate definition is given by Silvio D'Amico that tried to

give a coherent formula for the movement; “a theatre in which the characters were, in reality, marionettes and puppets animated using a complicated system of strings.” (qtd. in Calendoli & Applin 14). In this type of theater, the characters undergo a shrinking process, fall into the abyss of paralysis, and will be turned into deformed objects, marionettes, holding the illusion that they possess free will.

Modern theater starts with the sense of spiritual and social disintegration, fragmentation of man, and his “estrangement from officialdom” (Brustein 16). It deals with anarchic individuals and characters created by such author, seeking after the impossible, the sense of being in and out at the same time, and the paradoxical feelings poured over simultaneously or as Lessing writes in *Dramaturgy*, of the compromise “between the plastic arts and poetry” (Lessing 426). The Modern drama in short rests on the “...dark fury of Nietzsche whose philosophy is a harsh and radical rejection of God, church, Government, social rules...” and most importantly, morality. (Brustein 15-26) These are the elements of Existential crisis that leads to existential revolt.

In the Existential revolt, the dramatist examines the meaning of life and man's protests against it. Existence itself becomes the source of his rebellion. The drama of existential revolt is “the cry of anguish over the insufferable state of human beings” (Brustein 26). This form of revolt is identical to what Camus calls “metaphysical rebellion... the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole creation” (Camus 34). Such a definition could be applied with equal accuracy to the drama of Pirandello and Beyzai since their drama embodies the same kind of discontent with the basic structure of life. The other similarity is that in both Pirandello's and Beyzai's plays, the existential revolt is impotent, despairing, and doomed to failure. The existential dramatist, in this case, Pirandello and Beyzai make their characters subhuman, and interestingly this is the dominating impulse in the entire “theater of the absurd.” It is our purpose in this study to isolate the distinguishing characteristics of revolt drama in the works of two rebellion dramatists.

This article, as the title denotes is merely surrounding the idea of Mask and Face and the role it plays in the life of human beings. It delineates the Existential face in the works of Beyzai and Pirandello despite the different and at times opposing historical, geographical, political, contextual, and literary heritage they inherit.

The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive comparison of the modern theatre of revolt by Iranian playwright Bahram Beyzai and the Italian equivalent Luigi Pirandello. The comparison though takes place in the light of the philosophy of mask and face as thoroughly emphasized in Bergson's writings. While the subject has been dealt with more or less in the past, the scholarship lacks a devoted study such as this project endeavors to undertake.

The main reason behind choosing drama for this paper has arisen from the ancient question about the nature of drama. Why do we build theaters and stages? Why do we bother to create characters, disguise men and women and represent them in this practical way? Why do we prefer to put our story in this form of acting instead of writing it in papers and books, for families and gatherings, to read aloud on their couches and sofas? What makes the theater necessary? There, for sure, exist many ways to approach these questions, from different philosophical and psychological perspectives. But for the researchers, one thing and one discrepancy come to attention and that is the nature of duality in theater, the sense of being in and out at the same time, the paradoxical feelings poured over simultaneously or as Lessing writes in "*Dramaturgy*", of the compromise "between the plastic arts and poetry" (Lessing 426).

Robert Brustein's *Theater of Revolt* functions as the main reference for this research. It has been motivating and inspiring to us although it lacks political and social renderings of cultural and political masks. There is a voluminous literature on Pirandello, but here the authors have contented themselves to deal with the most related to the paper's discussion.

Thomas Bishop in his "Pirandello and the French theater" traces the Pirandellian theme of the "marrow of the contemporary ideas, of modern

anxieties and pessimism” in the French theater and claims that the French theater, Jean Gene, in particular, is impregnated with the Pirandellian thought. (Bishop 148) Bishop believes that Pirandellism consists of three major themes, “the multiplicity of personality, the relativity of truth, and the opposition of life, fluid and ever-changing to the rigid permanence of art” (27-28). The literature mentioned, mainly focuses on the philosophical and literary aspects of Pirandello’s drama and epistemology, the following instead, will focus on the analysis of the particular texts and works of this dramatist.

In their “A Study of the Lack of Identity in Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Henry IV*,” Jamal Nesari et al. tend to mingle with Pirandello’s philosophy of mask and face with the “archetypal” ideas of Jung. This research is a fine document concerning Pirandello’s engagement with psychological theories such as those of Jung and also Freud. Nesar states that “As the process of “individuation” and “archetypes” show every man can achieve his “self” and “identity” through these “archetypes” (Nesari et al 896). By this, he concludes that human being, identical to Pirandello’s characters can achieve their individuality through collective consciousness. This idea is a bit more optimistic than Pirandello’s himself. Pirandello sees human beings in the constant struggle of “creating and ripping off the masks” (Brustein 143) and that he is ultimately doomed to failure. When Nesari speaks of the Pirandellian Illusion he calls them heroic; “Pirandello shows that the illusion is not harmful; rather, it is a heroic assertion of individual identity, a means of rebelling against society. According to him, there is no universal, fixed reality; there is only every person’s perception of what is real” (Nesari et al, 897). The writers of this paper, in contrast, try to indicate that Pirandello’s illusions are inevitable and the very source of human terror and horror.

David Nolan’s “Theory in action, Pirandello’s *Sei Personaggi*” commits a textual analysis of the *Six Characters* and tries to portray each character’s drama through the discreet analysis of his/her dialogues and history. Nolan in

this paper asserts that each character in the play *Six Characters* has their own private and personal self. These selves or masks that each character is wearing are in constant conflict with others' masks. In his belief, social masks are not in a consolatory manner and that they are always at battle both with themselves and with other members of society. But again in this paper, there is no sign of any kind of resistance against the masks and no fight to revive their faces. There are merely characters of a play and in the hands of their author who has left them by now unfinished and wandering through the pages. No heroic action by any of the characters takes place and this is the most Pirandello's reading of his play. Because even if there is any action, it is absurd and doomed to failure. All of the research done on Pirandello are more or less concerning the idea of a mask and the face, but none has done a philosophical survey to dig out where all these ideas come from.

Bahram Beyzai's *A Study on Iranian Theatre* (1965) is precious research on the history of theatre in ancient Iran to the twentieth century and is one of the major references in the field; it has been called the "definitive work on the history of Persian theatre" (Ghanoonparvar). In his "An Analysis of Iranian Contemporary Theatre", Farhad Mohandespour declares some sharp attacks on the Iranian contemporary theater and claims that Iranian playwrights are under the eradicating influence of the western thought and traditions, a blind imitation that has led to the very "flawed form, reason and rhyme" in Iran's theater (2). Mohandespour counts several signs of Iranian theater's decay and ultimately concludes: "If there exists anything unfortunate in Iranian theatre, it is the fact that it is still not independent. Iranian theatre is under the control of the government" (6). This paper is an extension of Beyzai's remarks toward the end of the *Iranian Theatre*; Beyzai, like a puppeteer singing an epilogue to his play, anticipates the cultural decay of his motherland. The constant contact of western and eastern material is always in favor of the stronger; "the West took the cultural material from the rich orient, studied and personalized it and added it to its own culture and literature, the East, on the other hand, was content with

pure imitation which resulted in more imitations, restrictions and formal limitations" (Beyzai, *Iranian Theater* 207).

In "A Study on Power, Identity, and Knowledge in Bahram Beyzai's *Three Recitations*" a decisive definition of heroism in the works of Beyzai is inferred:

A hero is not necessarily one who has heroism in his blood or inherits it, but a hero from the depths of society can as well fulfill his humanistic responsibility, ward off the enemy and the monster of drought from the land, and remain in society's archetypal mind forever. (Tarnian, et al, 16)

While maintaining the epic and mythological themes, Beyzai shows his critical viewpoint on the components under study. Beyzai's hero is "an agent of emancipation who stands against the alien king" (Tarnian et al, 16). This definition is the closest to the Marionettes' hero, who resists the orders of the Puppeteer.

Bergsonian Playwrights

In *the Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson summarizes the philosophical framework which we have used in this paper,

Between the closed soul and the open soul, there is the soul in process of opening. Between the immobility of a man seated and the motion of the same man running, there is the act of getting up, the attitude he assumes when he rises. In short, between the static and the dynamic there is to be observed, in morality too, a transition stage. (55)

Bergson's philosophy is the philosophy of transformation, the transformation of concepts that human beings create for themselves. As Pierre Hadot briefly states, "For me, the essential of Bergsonism will always be the idea of philosophy as a transformation of perception" (125-26). Bergson

demands a “certain inner catastrophe in each of his readers” (James 266) which means total disorientation and disintegration in perception and then creating a whole new one. Likewise, Vladimir Jankélévitch’s point that Bergson’s philosophy “is not the rearrangement of already-known concepts, instead of a serious act and a complete conversion of the whole person, a conversion that implies an overturning of all our habits, all our associations, all our reflexes” (Jankélévitch 288).

Bergson’s philosophy is now considered to be too daring for readers since it goes beyond reading and thinking about the world and life, instead, his philosophy demands action and intervening in the life of ourselves. Bergson claims that this endeavor will lead to the disintegration of the self and a complete collapse but hopes that it does not end there. Alexandre Lefebvre in his *Human Rights as a Way of Life* asserts that this transformation is a human right and maybe the only human right.

Simply put, Bergson asserts that to maintain a society’s cohesion and to hold together a community, a human being tends to moral obligation. The simplest answer to this question, what ensures our society’s cohesion, would be “obligation”. All the members of a society share the need for social cohesion and obligations guarantee this maintenance for them. Obligations most of the time are not presented to us as obligations, but as habits and simply as part of the routine. The Obligation is not seen and felt most of the time but is not absent. On those occasions when we question the duty and resist the temptation of the habit, the obligation appears and commands. (Bergson, TSMR 995-25). Men cannot hear this command. It adroitly hides under the veil of reason and brings to us justifications to keep up with our duties. We are a part of an enclosed society with our shared duties. Each of the community members has their “role”.

This is not the whole story because human beings are also the home to the Instinct. If obligations are the manifestations of society and created by it, one can boldly say that man is made of instinct or at least a great deal of human

thoughts and actions are stimulated by instinct. Instinct is universal to all human beings and some of them are even shared with other living creatures. Therefore, the soul of the human being is the arena of an everlasting battle. The constant transformation debilitates man and creates a state of paralysis between these two powerful forces. Reason commands by the use of roles and obligations act in favor of the community, instinct, on the other hand, acts against the society and in favor of the individual. "Bergson insists that instinct rather than intelligence is fundamentally *the* vital mode of knowledge and for this reason serves as the precursor for his development of the method of "philosophical intuition" (Scott 61).

These assumptions identify Bergson's solution to the imprisonment of human beings within the very intricate web of obligations. By intuition, invention, and maintaining the state of constant becoming, man keeps up with the evolution, or better to say, life. "Can we go further and say that life, like conscious activity, is an invention, is unceasing creation?" (Bergson, CE, 23)

Mask and Face

The face represents man's real, authentic self. Mask, on the other hand, represents all social and external forms and norms. One pulls the suffering individual towards instinct, the other pole pulls the man towards what is socially acceptable such as conventions, traditions, social positions, respect, and rigid codes of law, religion, government, and morality. In Pirandello and Beyzai's plays, the character is torn apart and is incapable of choosing either of them. Pirandello writes: "Basically, I have constantly attempted to show that nothing offends life so much as reducing it to a hollow concept" (qtd. in Brustein 287).

The basic Pirandellian concept is borrowed from Henri Bergson:

Life (or reality or time) is fluid, mobile, evanescent, and indeterminate. It lies beyond the reach of reason, and is reflected only through spontaneous action, or instinct. Yet man, endowed with reason, cannot live

instinctually like beasts, nor can he accept an existence which constantly changes. In consequence, he uses reason to fix life through ordering definitions. Since life is indefinable, such concepts are illusions. Man is occasionally aware of the illusory nature of his concepts; but to be human is to desire form (286).

Concepts are the death of spontaneity. Being stuffed with concepts one has no defense against these social definitions that manifest themselves in new forms and still create a new mask and social position to rob him of his subjectivity and his *face*. To live as a part of society, man creates for himself patterns and roles. He plays family roles, he plays religious roles, social roles, and even literary roles. He becomes an actor. The better he plays his role, the further he is from his face. He plunges into disguise. The disguise would be his eternal state of living. Life becomes more illusory as he takes distance from his instinct. The Pirandellian hero is an actor and Beyzai's hero is a doll, both in disguise. But both dramatists broaden the implications even further, for both their characters—while being an actor and a puppet in the hands of a puppeteer—are also critical to their performances. “On the one hand, blind, dumb Life will keep darkly flowing in eternal restlessness through each moment's renewals. On the other hand, a world of crystallized Forms, a system of constructions, will strive to dam up and compress that everflowing turmoil” (Tilgher 21).

The two dramatists are in extreme opposition to all convictions and social forms of life. Their drama is described through reference to the mask and face. The mask of appearances is shaped both by the self and others, “others” who adhere to the fixed definitions and expect others to take part in a societal act. They create for themselves a society based on obligations and for the good of many. Society demands certainty and tries to limit man in its stationary concept. Man, like life, is unknowable and the human soul is in constant modulation in the timelessness of life. It echoes Bergson saying: “Can we go

further and say that life, like conscious activity, is an invention, is unceasing creation?" (Bergson, CE, 23). For Pirandello and Beyzai, personality remains a fictional construct, instead, they focus on the disintegration of this personality. Bergson poignantly proposes that humans are not men until they are set free, "by the force of ingenuity and invention something which in the animal remained imprisoned" (Bergson, ME 23). The Pirandellian men and the Beyzai's puppets have freedom, but this freedom is unbearable and ends in death and void.

In Pirandello, as well as in Beyzai, the characters sometimes unveil reality through spontaneous instinctual actions, but often prefer to return to their shelter and their beneficial illusion. "The crash is comical because it lays bare the intrinsic unreality of human constructions, but grievous too, because, however flimsy, the demolished structure did afford man a shelter from the mad storm of life" (Tilgher 22). Exiled as they are in the limbo of formlessness, their drama is an existential condition not dissimilar to that of the souls of Dante's limbo, who 'without hope live in desire' (Mariani 5-6).

Pirandello and Beyzai's Theater

Bergson's great impact on modern literature is beyond any question and many renowned literary figures such as T.S. Eliot, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, Henry Miller, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound and a great number of other prominent figures embraced Bergsonian aesthetics of language and intuition. In 1948 Eliot writes that the "real conversion, by the deliberate influence of any individual, was a temporary conversion to Bergsonism." (Eliot 5). Wyndham Lewis also confessed to his early allegiance to Bergson in a letter written: "Bergson was an excellent lecturer, dry and impersonal. I began by embracing his evolutionary system." (Lewis 488-9). Henry Miller courageously confessed that without reading Bergson, he would have gone mad:

If [*Creative Evolution*] had not fallen into my hands at the precise moment it did, perhaps I would have gone mad. It came at a moment

when another huge world was crumbling on my hands. If I had never understood a thing which was written in this book, if I have preserved only the memory of the word creative, it is quite sufficient. This word was my talisman. With it I was able to defy the whole world, and especially my friends . . . The discovery of this book was equivalent to the discovery of a weapon . . . It gave me the courage to stand alone, and it enabled me to appreciate loneliness. (Miller 219)

Beckett, the big absurdist also agrees on this point with him, in an obvious defense of the veil and the habit, Beckett says:

“Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit” (Beckett 515).

We shall not forget that obligation, reason, and habits are fundamental to our survival and very existence. “Habits” Beckett believes “is the agent of security” (517).

Examples and extractions are abundant in this stream. As mentioned above numerous writers, novelists, painters, sculptures, and poets share the core of Bergsonian thought on life; the life under the veil versus the life on the surface. But to go through each one of them is not the focus and intention of this thesis because it requires a wholly new study, time, and energy. Among this plethora of instances, only those, much closer to our focus is introduced and scrutinized. All in all, Bergson’s ideas on the artist are not so far from the already-renowned romantic views of the artist. Two renowned playwrights, Luigi Pirandello and Bahram Beyzai are amongst the bravest and most sophisticated of these writers. Pirandello and Beyzai embrace Bergson’s fundamental thoughts - without being lost in the technical philosophical terms and maze- personalize them with their

rich literacy and produce plays that are far from being imitated or repetitive in the world of literature.

Bahram Beyzai's mind is satiated with the images of cultural transition and suppression. These images marked, in particular, how global economic and power relations and meta ideologies of salvation and growth transform the face of the community and alienate their members from each other and also themselves and how the proponents of dominant discourses distort history and life to marginalize alternative narratives of belonging. Although he had no role in defining his position and status quo in the society, he believed that men, at the very advent of entering social interactions, become marginalized or "other". Thus the regular experience of being placed in the margins of belonging made him aware of how the center can be blind to the failures of the structures it creates. But Beyzai noticed problems that others neglected or justified and tried to find new ways to demonstrate how the dominant discourses suppressed some cultural practices to reinforce their narratives of placement and belonging and imposed them on marginalized and substructures of the society. Beyzai looking for his self and the self of the marginalized members of the society, goes back to history, hoping to find columns for his shaking legs of identity.

Beyzai's *Marionettes* (1963) is the main focus of our study regarding his manipulation of Bergson's ideas. *Marionettes*, also called, the Puppet Plays is considered one of the most important plays in the Persian Language. It has been staged numerous times in different parts of the world. The *Marionettes*, with two subsequent plays, *Evening in a Strange Land* (1962) and *The Story of the Hidden Moon* (1963) constitute Beyzai's puppet play trilogy.

In the *Marionettes*, the dramatist personae are mostly universal, myth-type characters. The characters are all made of plastics and are the puppets in the hands of the puppeteer. The world of this play is the world created by masks. The characters are made of plastics and are the very toys in the hands of their roles and above that, Puppeteer:

PUPPETEER. Our warmest greetings to you gentlemen, and ladies-welcome to our play. Kids love this play, I'm not sure about you. I make these toys move. They act by my command and obey my orders. I want them to make you laugh for today. (Beyzai 75, Translation of the quotations mine.)

They wish to resign their social and existential roles, they wish to become something and someone else, and they wish to fight against their fixed roles that have imprisoned them within a stationary definition.

HERO. I'm weary- no one has to wait to watch me fight anymore
 PUPPETEER. Our hero is a little sad today, Don't worry, he'll amuse you
 HERO. No Puppeteer! I don't want to fight, no more. I won't fight
 DEMON. I don't pretend myself, dumb and deaf! (77)

Hero resists his role and Puppeteer insists. The dialogue that takes place between them is the very essence of the Bergsonian hero who is tired of his roles and the masks he is wearing. He wants to take off the mask but society shall not let him do that. Hero says "I will fight- another fight" but this time, the battle is with himself, the battle against himself. Puppeteer warns him that "this fight is the most lethal of all the battles" (78). The existential revolt is dominant in this play but is not completed. The characters, ironically, are not human but have been given human roles. The characters cry throughout the stage, they defy their existence, they wish to die and they prefer not-being. They even shout at us, as the audience of the play, as readers of this drama. They reject their entity and their origin. They try to ruin the stage and stop the play. They do their best, Hero dies for his existential role, Blackman leaves Puppeteer, and Girl, the emblem of purity and love, broods over her dead beloved.

In 1933, Luigi Pirandello completed his autobiographical play, *When One Is Somebody*. The hero of the play is an old, renowned writer who finds himself imprisoned within a static role of a writer. He believes that his role is defined

by his society and the people who admire him so much. Tired of his fixed role, he puts on a mask of youth. Under the disguise of a young poet, he starts writing ballads and sonnets and for a while enjoying his freedom under his subterfuge. But the trick is finally discovered and the old man has to return to his unpleasant public duties. When one is somebody, one is immobile and dead. Only when one is nobody, does he exist in time and motion. This play consummates thoroughly Pirandello's view about the individual's relationship to his life. This play is the typical form of Pirandellian play, the drama of frustration and conflict between life and form, mask and face, time and timelessness. In Beyzai's *the Marionettes*, the characters are made of plastics, cotton, and paper, creating a doll instead of a human being. "All the characters of the new dramatic literature were painfully sincere and at the same time pretenders; they were both humans and puppets who were analyzed, judged..." (Brustein 14). Pirandello writes:

when a man lives, he lives and does not see himself. Well, put a mirror before him and make him see himself in the act of living. Either he is astonished by his own appearance, or else he turns away his eyes so as not to see himself, or else in disgust he spits at his image, or, again, clenches his fist to break it. In a word, there arises a crisis, and that crisis is my theater. (qtd. In Brustein 290)

Brustein acutely mentions that the "Pirandellian hero is an actor, a character in disguise", just like Beyzian Hero, "he is also a critic, who crucially judges his own performance." (Brustein 290) In traditional theater, the disguised characters are anxious not to reveal their true identity, in Pirandello and Beyzai's theater, the table is turned. Pirandellian characters helplessly seek a world of uncertainties to affirm their existence. The characters of many dramatists of the 'modern' tradition, suffer the same void and nudity and are desperate on assailing that absolute reality or the formless chaos. In these dramas, the play goes towards silence and surrender, but in Pirandellian theater,

even more conspicuously in Beyzai's *Marionettes*, although the characters know that they will never arrive at a satisfactory solution, they never stop searching for it, they never cease to fight for it and forget about it:

They will assert, in *Right You Are, if You Think You Are*, their awareness of the relativity of reality and maintain an uneasy family ménage. They will choose, in *Henry IV*, a reality fixed by the history of eight hundred years earlier. In *Six Characters*, they will seek definitive artistic form, or, failing to obtain it from their creator, seek at least momentary expressive form in the acting of a theatrical company. (Mariani 6)

The dramatic action in *It Is So* (1917) is the same Pirandellian dualism: the appearance versus reality, objective versus subjective, and the everlasting quest for achieving absolute truth. The “duality of truth is the root of the dissatisfaction and anxiety of those who seek *one* truth (as well as of the audience, who may sympathize with the victims but subconsciously shares the desire clearly obnoxious inquisitors for an absolute, objective truth)” (Mariani 33). Ann Hallamore summarizes the play as this: “By the beginning of the play every tragedy that could possibly happen to a family appears to have happened to them—death, insanity, illness, and the loss of all they possessed” (Caesar 31).

The play starts when Signora Flora claims that his son-in-law went mad when he lost her daughter, his wife, in an earthquake four years ago. Then remarried, but he assumes that his second wife is his old wife. Ponza, on the other hand, claims that his mother-in-law not being able to accept her daughter's death went mad and survives only by believing that the living wife is actually her daughter. In the course of the play, neither of them provides satisfactory answers and the ambiguity expands as the townspeople press harder to gain more data. Everyone including the Agazzi family and his allies is busy meddling in Ponza's life. Among them, Lamberto Laudisi disapproves of this interference;

LAUDISI. Oh, I grant you—if you could get a death certificate or a marriage certificate or something of the kind, you might be able to satisfy that stupid curiosity of yours. Unfortunately, you can't get it. And the result is that you are in the extraordinary fix of having before you, on the one hand, a world of fancy, and on the other, a world of reality, and you, for the life of you, are not able to distinguish one from the other. (Pirandello 98)

Finally, the only person who can reveal the reality is Mrs. Ponza herself.

They brought her to testify and to cast light on the shadowy state of the truth.

SIGNORA PONZA. [slowly, and with clear articulation]. Tell you what? The truth? Simply this: I am the daughter of Signora Frola . . . ALL. [with a happy intake of breath], Ah SIGNORA PONZA. . . and the second wife of Signor Ponza. ALL. [amazed and disenchanted, quietly] . . . What? SIGNORA PONZA. [continuing], . . . and, for myself, I am nobody! THE PERFECT. No, no, madam, for yourself you must be either one or the other. SIGNORA PONZ. No, I am she whom you believe me to be. [She looks at them all through her veil for a moment, then leaves. Silence.] (Pirandello 138)

The inquisitors in the *It Is So* are looking for objective reality, and the possibility to find absolute truth. Laudisi asserts that they are truths in the world but in the world of mathematics and science. “In the realm of human emotions, of personal opinions and beliefs, of the value of moral principles and behavior, the truth can never be absolute: it is subjective, personal, mutable [and] relative” (Mariani 28).

In Beyzai's second puppet play; *Evening in a Strange Land*, the initial setting is beautiful, the characters, although sad and contemplative, talk about love as the beauty and the salvation of their lives. They are looking for the love which is laid hundred years ago beside an old, impressive lake that is

surrendered by tall and majestic apple trees. Puppeteer, as promised an amusing story to the audience, endeavors to conspire against Hero. Puppeteer sends Hero to find and fight with Demon beside the lake. Hero, for the sake of his love, and his warm hut, embarks on his journey to kill Demon. Unpredictably, he finds that Demon is also a human, exiled from the community:

DEMON. my father said, human has created Demon for the sake of themselves. They overestimate our ugliness, to cover their own (Beyzai 133)

Demon begs Hero to kill him, but Hero resists. Puppeteer, once again asks:

PUPPETEER. you were not supposed to spare him!

HERO. but I did!

PUPPETEER. then what did I create the Demon for?

HERO. I ask you this, why?

PUPPETEER. for you to fight with. These men love to see you fighting!

HERO. ... I came across a Demon that was a Mirror!... the mirror of your oppression, injustice! (Beyzai 141)

Henry IV (1922), is the culmination of Pirandello's revolt against mask and face, life and form, time and timelessness, and the essence of the dramatist's philosophy. By laying the play in a historical structure, Pirandello brings the twelfth century to the present and takes the twentieth century back to the ancient costumes, castles, and traditions. Henry, an Italian nobleman, falls off his horse and hits his head on a rock while having a masquerade on a commemoration of the Roman emperor. He awakes to have the delusion that he is Henry IV. After his stumble, he becomes another person with a new identity and self. Donna Matilda, Henry's mistress, recalls: "I shall never forget that scene—all our masked faces hideous and terrified gazing at him, at that terrible

mask of his face, which was no longer a mask, but madness, madness personified” (Pirandello, Henry 159).

The actor has lost his role completely, the mask has eradicated the self and defined a new definition of the face. For the next twenty years, he becomes Henry and Charles Di Nolli, who hires men to act as Henry’s councilors and valets. By this substituted life, the valets and all the newly hired crew must act their roles. They also have to wear a new mask and resign from their previous roles. Landolph, one of the valets says:

It's a pity; because the way we're got up; we could do a fine historical reconstruction. There's any amount of material in the story of Henry IV. But, as a matter of fact, we do nothing. We have the form without the content. We're worse than the real secret counsellors of Henry IV; because certainly no one had given them a part to play—at any rate, they didn't feel they had a part to play. It was their life. They looked after their own interests at the expense of others, sold investitures and—what not! We stop here in this magnificent court—for what? —Just doing nothing. We're like so many puppets hung on the wall, waiting for someone to come and move us or make us talk. (144)

Between Time and Timelessness, Henry flees to the frozen, determined time of history. He chooses the deadly veil over the changing time and the constant state of becoming for he has seen no hope of salvation in it. The sane men are playing their roles of valets and courtiers. Brustein here believes that the current state of Henry is of “dance” and rapture, (298) but the writer of these lines would defy otherwise. According to Bergson, Beyzai, and Pirandello’s thought, the dance stems from duration, instinctual creativeness, defying and rejecting the fixed, defined, and predetermined roles which are already superimposed on us. Brustein writes: “Henry moves through life with the supreme confidence of one who knows what came before-and what comes after. Chance, accident, happenstance, the tricks of time, afflict him no more.”

(297-8) In this stone-like state of Henry, life ceased to exist. He becomes the puppet who is put in the so-called Beyzai's box by his own hands. In the box duration, creativity, instinct, movement, and becoming ends, and sterility, deadliness, and darkness reign. Fixity of history is a means of survival, a wise choice, but still a bitter, unavoidable compromise. The modern hero, like what we have already mentioned in Beyzai's *Marionettes*, is an agonized, alienated and vulnerable character that to a large extent resembles the more conventional view of an antihero. Henry has many chances to choose and to perform voluntarily choices that seem better to be called dreadful existential choices. Tilgher puts it this way:

one is forced to give oneself a Form that one can never be satisfied with, because always, sooner or later, Life pays for the Form it has given itself or has let others impose on it; and in this clash between Life and the Form into which the individual has channeled it or others have channeled it for him, we find the essence of the theatre of Pirandello. (qtd. In Mariani 57)

After twelve years of madness when he regains his sanity, he is faced with the ability to take off his mask and this is an existential choice with important consequences. He can peel off his mask and return to the world of everyday life, to the buffooneries of the human being, to the world of lies and chaos, to the restless chains of desires and whirls of events but the hero decides the other way. He chooses to hide behind this mask and stay away from the numerous concepts coming and going interchangeably. He chooses one concept and only one mask for the rest of his life. This, in fact, is a sad and heroic action. Henry voluntarily stays mad. He chooses the mask that others wear unawares. This alienation is the very core characteristic of the modern rebel or the twentieth-century hero.

Henry is Pirandello himself, as in *When One is Somebody*; the typical Pirandellian autobiographical character is a detached and secluded character who conceives the world from outside and prefers the "beings less real perhaps,

but truer!” (Pirandello, *Six Characters* 217). Beyzai and Pirandello try to “create an illusion that the outer action is improvised by actors, directors, spectators, while the inner action is an anecdote composed in advance” (Brustein 308). The conflict between the characters, directors; and even the author cannot be controlled by anyone. Even the author is negated. In *Marionettes*, Puppeteer loses his authority and the characters remonstrate and improvise actions. The play is not even completed as the author wants and is ended by the author killing and ripping off his characters.

The third and the last of the Marionettes trilogy, *The Story of the Hidden Moon*, takes place in a rather more poetical structure. The lines and the conversations are more literary. It seems from the very beginning that we are being drawn to a final resolution of the story and the third act of this trilogy. Puppeteer once more asks the audience to take part in his tale. In all three of Beyzai’s Puppet plays, it seems that the puppeteer tries to find an accomplice for his actions. Beyzai pulls the audience into the play several times and asks or better to say wishes for them to interfere and save the dolls. In the whole background of the third act, Hero and Demon are having a mortal battle. And the audience can hear the shouts and cries of them running behind the scene. Passenger, the newly-come member of the stage is a literate character who has read all the books and tales in his lonely life. He is an intellect in the Bergsonian terms. He wakes up and relays his dream: “I saw in my dream the sunny days. Outside of this town, is spring” (Beyzai 158):

PASSENGER. I came out from a dark and cold dungeon, and ran to find my lost *thing*. In the break back of the mountains, in the sandy dilemma, I asked myself: which way shall I go?

BLACKMAN. Drop into the cemetery. You may find that *thing* there. There abounds with ones who once looked for themselves. Ones who once called at a dilemma: which way? But there was only one way. (159)

The last thing is repeated by both characters, indicating they both know what they are talking about. The “thing”, like the characters, like Hero, and also the box from which they come, is universal in this play. The thing means identical for Passenger, Blackman, and more importantly, to all the dead dolls scattered on the ground of the stage. Blackman says: “left alone, like stones, we used to look at each other and everywhere was dark” (167) in that state of coma, before their existence, in the darkness they used to look at each other. When Puppeteer gives birth to them, they become alive but faceless and without a true identity, because Puppeteer has assigned roles, duties, and specific stories to each of them:

BLACKMAN. Once, a man approached me. I was- in that big, pale square- singing a jibber song for kids, I don't remember the faces!

PASSENGER. Faceless men! (168)

Traditional and more conventional plays usually end with the tragic death of the main character. In *Marionettes*, the victims are those who stay alive. The alive characters arouse pity if not anger in us and the reader leaves the stage in a state of hatred towards life. Fighting over death, rather than fighting for life is the final scene of *Marionettes*. In Beyzai's theater, the audience is the “subconscious” devotee of the ultimate truth. They seek to see the solo winner in the fight; they seek to be assured that the Hero of their soul triumph over their Demon and for achieving such relief and guarantee, the resurrection occurs. The world that Beyzai portrays follows the Bergsonian duality as well and that is the duality of society and the individual. In Beyzai's drama, the town civilian characters such as Mister, Businessman, and Poet, and also the audience, act as the symbol of the majority. Puppeteer's main purpose is to amuse them and make them laugh at his characters. He even promises them the very obedience of his stage characters.

The existential catastrophe occurs for the suffering individual. In the theater of Beyzai, anything can happen. Characters develop constantly and are

not supposed to obey their lines or their director's comments. Thus they draw the drama to an unexpected, terrifying, and unpredictable end, as in Pirandello's *Each in His Own Way*, in which the audience interrupts the play, attacks the stage, and brings down the actors and the director and the play remains uncompleted.

Six Characters in Search of an Author is unquestionably Pirandello's masterpiece. It is also the most famous play by this dramatist. It is the culmination of Pirandello's concepts of philosophy and also, besides *Henry IV*, by far the best-constructed play by the author. We are lucky that Pirandello decided to write a preface to his *Six Characters* and also that it is translated; because we can understand some of his views on literature and art first-hand. Pirandello informs us that he had sketched six members of a family for a "magnificent novel", but tired of telling a "straightforward history", he abandons the six unfinished.

He confesses that the characters' lives now are out of his hands because they have gained their own lives and the life that an author gives his character is not his anymore: "But one doesn't give life to a character for nothing. Creatures of my spirit, these six were already living a life which was their own and not mine anymore, a life which it was not in my power anymore to deny them" (365).

This is how *Six Characters* was created; Pirandello says:

"Why not," I said to myself, "present this highly strange fact of an author who refuses to let some of his characters live though they have been born in his fantasy, and the fact that these characters, having by now life in their veins, do not resign themselves to remaining excluded from the world of art? They are detached from me; live on their own; have acquired voice and movement; have by themselves—in this struggle for existence that they have had to wage with me—become dramatic characters, characters that can move and talk on their own initiative; already see themselves as such; have learned to defend themselves against

me; will even know how to defend themselves against others. And so let them go where dramatic characters do go to have life: on a stage. And let us see what will happen. (366)

Six Characters indicates Pirandello's conviction, "that theater is more real than life." (Brustein 314) The Characters are not locked and prisoned by their author and even the Manager. They live their own lives. They have a fixed and dead history, but their improvisations are real and even more real than life. Nobody can tell whether it was reality or a part of their play. "Instead of pretending that the stage is not the stage at all, but the familiar parlor, he pretends that the familiar parlor is not real, but a stage, containing many 'realities'" (Fergusson 37). The resemblance to Beyzai's theater is out of the debate. The similarity between the Manager and Puppeteer, their roles on the stage, and most importantly, their inability to control their Characters, or to put it more accurately, the suffered characters is conspicuous. The Manager and Puppeteer point out that only certain things can occur in the theater. They are not concerned with the lives of their characters and their so-called inner lives have no place on the stage. As the Director in the *Six Characters* asserts, the stage requires actors, not characters.

THE MANAGER. Nothing. For the moment you just watch and listen. Everybody will get his part written out afterwards. At present we're going to try the thing as best we can. They're going to act now.

THE FATHER. [as if fallen from the clouds into the confusion of the stage]. We? What do you mean, if you please, by a rehearsal?

THE MANAGER. A rehearsal for them. [Points to the Actors.]

THE FATHER. But since we are the characters . . .

THE MANAGER. All right: "characters" then, if you insist on calling yourselves such. But here, my dear sir, the characters don't act. Here the actors do the acting. The characters are there, in the

"book" [Pointing towards Prompter's box.]—when there is a "book."
(Pirandello, *Six Characters* 242)

In *Six Characters* the drama remains unfinished, as in *Evening in a Strange Land*. In both plays, the characters live their own selves, improvise and create. "The search for identity was a most promising subject for the new drama of existential emotions..." (Paolucci 56). This is the theater of existence and this is the theater of revolt.

Conclusion

Life has two levels of representation. On the one hand is the blind, restless, ever-flowing eternal seconds, on the other hand, a formed, fixed concept of the former. The everlasting fight occurs between the mask and the face; because the shadow of the existential self never ceases to project itself.

Pirandello's revolt, at times, is by voluntarily putting a mask on the characters' faces. They resist their existence by hiding behind their artificial masks. They choose to remain outside life and to stay away from the timelessness of the world. Pirandellian characters prefer the mask to reality, the history over fluidity, and the deadliness to spontaneity. He prefers book characters to life actors and fixity over fluidity. And this is his revolt against existence. Making it closer to a more social rather than existential cry.

Beyzai, on the other hand, acts differently. He concentrates on the existential dimension of the world and his revolt is against the masks and the fixity of our roles on stage, as in the world. His notion of life and form, mask and face, reality and appearance, and finally theater and life, can be said, are independent inferences directly drawn from Bergson's ideas, not of Pirandello. His characters take off their masks, and accept punishment and death for their bravery. Although they are safer behind their masks, they rip them off and come unarmed out of their fortresses. Beyzai's characters want to define their identity themselves and be free to create and to act instinctually. He concentrates on the disintegration of the personality as the true identity of a

rebel. The true self is revealed only when man breaks down all the codes and the obligations of a society. Beyzai's characters are not seeking new masks, not even to survive. This makes his theater a revolt against existence. Beyzai's hero stands alone against his society and his tradition. He does it so heroically and loud so that he might find some companion and supporters from the society. In fact, he becomes a martyr, a leader and an icon. Beyzai is searching for Iranian collective identity, not just as a personal endeavor, rather as a quest on behalf of his society, a commitment to the people with whom he shares his fate historically, linguistically, socially, culturally, and—inevitably—politically.

Works Cited

- Beckett, "Proust," in *Poems, Short Fiction, Criticism*. Grove Press, 2006.
- Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. The Modern Library, 1944.
- . *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays*. Translated by Herbert Wildon Carr. H. Holt & Co., 1920.
- Beyzai, Bahram. "Divane Namayesh [Plays Anthology]." Tehran: Roshangaran, 1384.
- Beyzai, Bahram. *A Study on Iranian Theater*. Tehran: Roshangaran, 1965, pp.
- Bishop, Thomas. *Pirandello and the French Theater*. New York University Press, 1960.
- Brustein, Robert. *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Drama*. The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1962.
- Caesar, Hallamore, Ann. "On the Social Impulse." *Luigi Pirandello*, edited by Harold Bloom Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003, pp. 31-35.
- Calendoli, Giovanni and Applin, Denis. "The Theater of Grotesque." *The Drama Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, March 1978, pp. 13-18.
- Camus, Albert. *The rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. Vintage, 2012.
- Elliot, T. S. *A Sermon Preached at Magdalene College Chapel*. Cambridge University Press, 1948.
- Fergusson, Francis. "Action as Theatrical: Six Characters in Search of an Author." *Pirandello, a Collection Critical Essays*, edited by Glauco Cambon. Yale University, 1967.
- Ghanoonparvar, M. R. *The Encyclopedia Iranica*. Nov 29. 2011. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/drama>
- Hadot, Pierre. *Spiritual Exercise*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1995
- Jankélévitch, Vladimir. *Henri Bergson*, Duke University Press Books, 2018.

- James, William. *A Pluralistic Universe*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.
- Lefebvre, Alexandre. *Human Rights as a Way of Life*. Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, "Dramatic Notes," in *Selected Prose Works of G. E. Lessing*, ed. Edward Bell. Trans. E. C. Beasley and H. Zimmern. London: George Bell, 1889.
- Lewis, Wyndham. *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. W. K. Rose. Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1963.
- Mariani, Umberto. *Living Masks: The Achievement of Pirandello*. University of Toronto, 2008.
- Miller, Henry. *Tropic of Capricorn*. New York: Grove Press, 1961.
- Mohandespour, Farhad. "An analysis of Contemporary Iranian Theatre." *Journal of International Theater Institution*, 2008, pp.164-171.
- Nesari, Ali Jamali, et al. "A Deconstructive Reading on Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 28, 2011.
- . "A Study of The Lack of Identity in Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Henry IV*." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 28, 2011.
- Nolan, David. "*Theory in Action: Pirandello's 'Sei Personaggi'*." *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1968. pp. 269-276.
- Paolucci, Anne. "Pirandello's Exploration of Theater as Medium." *Bloom's Major Dramatists, Luigi Pirandello*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003.
- Pirandello, Luigi. "Henry IV." *Naked Masks, Five Plays of Luigi Pirandello*. Ed. Eric Bentley. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1952.
- . "It is So. If You Think So." *Five Plays of Luigi Pirandello*. Ed. Eric Bentley. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1952.
- . Preface to *Six Characters, Naked Masks, Five Plays of Luigi Pirandello*. Ed. Eric Bentley. E. P. Dutton, 1952.
- . *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. In *Naked Masks, Five Plays of Luigi Pirandello*. Ed. Eric Bentley. E. P. Dutton, 1952.
- Paolucci, Anne. "Pirandello's Exploration of Theater as Medium." *Bloom's Major Dramatists, Luigi Pirandello*. Chelsea House Publishers, 2003.
- Scott, David. "Sub Specie Durationis, or the Free Necessity of Life's Creativeness in Bergson's Creative Evolution" *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism*, Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Siebers, Tobin. "Sincerely Yours". In Charles Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 195-203.
- Tarnian, R., Hossein Khosravi and Ahmad Abumahboub. "A Study on Power, Identity, and Knowledge in Bahram Beyzai's *Three Recitations*." *Literary Theory and Criticism*, vol. 2, no. 2. 2017. pp. 39-69.
- Tilgher, Adriano. "Life Versus Form." *Pirandello, a Collection of Critical Essays*. Yale University, 1967.