

A Remark on Silence and Listening

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Before Beginning

Why “remark”? Because I am still developing the theory, and also because this is a short presentation. Why “a” remark rather than “some” remarks? Because this is not a series of different lines of thought constellated around one leading theme (that is what we have in mind when we speak of “some remarks on. . .”); it is rather a single thread of thinking which weaves its way through different places, acquires various colors when coming under different lights, and yet remains (no matter how thin, no matter how often exposed to the danger of breaking) that same single thread.

A last prefatory word, this time on the small specific occasion within the larger occasion celebrated at Rockhurst Hall and in this volume. In April 1964 Father Ong gave, at Yale University, a series of conferences within the well-known program of the Terry Lectures, whose expanded text was later published (Ong 1967). More than twenty years after Father Ong delivered his impressive lectures at Yale, a person from the university who came across his lectures a long time after they were published submits his thinking to him, as a homage to the inspiration he received. And this is more than an academic homage, more even than a purely intellectual tribute. My coming to such a place as Rockhurst College, in the heart of America, is a way of coming back to my spiritual roots. That such roots happen to have struck first on European soil does not, given the nature of what is involved, make a great difference.

This brief autobiographical excursus is here presented only to explain what otherwise would have appeared a temerity: that is, my speaking of spiritual matters here, in front of an audience

where so many are masters in the arts of the spirit.

A remark on silence and listening

“Remember the day in which, without fear in your heart, you met your first silence”

(Maurice Maeterlinck)

Listening as a crucial spiritual category is not a novelty. It is an important element in many religious traditions—certainly in the Judaeo-Christian tradition (but such an experience is by no means alien to Buddhism, for instance). It is also present in some contemporary philosophical theories (e.g., see Heidegger 1962:207, *passim*). But it seems to me that Heidegger’s great subtlety in this case is that of constantly playing an ontology of saying up against an ontology of silence. As for cultural and literary criticism: certain signs of a renewal of attention for the category of listening (cf. Barthes and Havas 1977) mark only the beginning of the necessary development.

What I am sketching here, on the other hand, is a definite option for listening—which as such has to face all the attendant dangers, designated by terms that still for too many are words of opprobrium, like quietism. Listening is considered here not as a sort of dialogical taking turns (a mechanical, temporary alternative to speaking), but as the crowning of the activity of saying, when the latter is pushed to its limits. The only way to really implement the paradox of silence—if we want to go on doing rhetoric, writing, literary criticism, translation—is to take up the stance, not of the *silentarius* so much as of the listener.

The position I am delineating has something in common with that of the mystic, but it should not be simplistically identified with it. For its concern is discourse in general and within it that particular ethic/aesthetic combination that is the literary text. What takes place in this process is not a series of occasional borrowings; this rhetorical approach is a spiritual interchange, not a form of confessional or technical dependency.

Contemplation is a word that has come to be associated almost exclusively with vision; but its etymon (going back to Latin *templum*) points in the direction of a more general notion, having to do with space.

When, therefore, I speak of this listening as a contemplation, I do not mean a passive looking on, but the rearrangement of the space around a text. Thus listening to what a text has to say has little to do with the modernistic tradition of purely immanent criticism, which takes a kind of idolatrous pride in staying within the single text that it examines.

On the contrary, by creating a space of silence around a text this approach first of all does something to the text (it is not passive); in the second place, by surrounding the text with the silence of a contemplation, this critical listening liberates energies and connections in the text which lead outside of it, broadening the spiritual background of the whole enterprise. In this way the rhetorical analysis does not superimpose an alien metalanguage on the literary text, but comes closest to the position of the writer, because it brings to the fore the crucial element of contemplation that is implicit in every act of writing.

A concrete illustration will be helpful. One of the least known among the many short stories that Luigi Pirandello published in literary magazines around the turn of the century and started issuing in book-length collections from 1901 on is the one titled “Canta l’Epistola” [“He-who-intones-the-Epistle”], a phrase which is the nickname of the defrocked seminarian who is the hero of the little story (Cf. Pirandello 1985, I:482-90).

Tommasino, who because of his change of heart has become an object of scorn and ridicule for his father and for the other inhabitants of his village, leads a chaste and solitary life, a life for which the term “contemplation” could be used—with the specification, however, that Tommasino’s experience is not a systematically religious one (he has left organized faith), but an asystematic way of looking at, listening to, things.

In the course of his musings, Tommasino concentrates his attention on one single blade of grass, growing wild near a little abandoned church, in a hilly spot he regularly visits in his walks. It is not that he takes care of it in an active way (watering it, for instance): he simply follows its life, rejoicing in its growth and duration. But one day a young lady passes by, sits in that spot and, getting up to continue her walk, absent-mindedly rips off that blade of grass, putting it between her teeth.

“You idiot!” cries out Tommasino in exasperation. The young lady, astonished at this insult on the part of a person with whom she never exchanged a word, reports the episode to her

fiancé, an army lieutenant who happens to be a very good shot. He asks for an explanation that naturally the young man cannot offer: slapped by the officer, Tommasino accepts the challenge to a duel, and is mortally wounded by a pistol shot. To the priest who kneeling by his death-bed asks him the meaning of all this (“But why, my son? Why?”):

Tommasino, with half-shut eyes, with a weakened voice, in the midst of a sigh which turned into a very tender smile, simply answered: “Father, it happened because of a blade of grass. . . .” And everybody believed that he had remained delirious until his dying hour.¹

Such are the closing lines of what I do not claim to be one of Pirandello’s greatest achievements, although it is a remarkable story. The initial part of this short story is a little too didactic and expository in tone; given the brevity of the text, this weakens the concentration.² But I am not putting together an essay on Pirandello (and at any rate, the minor texts of an important writer are crucial for his or her critical assessment); my purpose is to implement a certain way of thinking about literature, and this intelligently sensitive story is a significant emblem. Let me then briefly sketch certain basic critical responses which are possible here.

A first possibility is what can be called a naive reading. Such a reading would not look behind or beyond the text: what it would see is a bizarre anecdote, wry and faintly moving—in short (according to the circular move characteristic of a certain handbook style) a “typically Pirandellian” text. As most naive readings, this one is essentially right. But, again, as most naive readings, it does not have enough force to restrain the questing or questioning reader as he or she is drawn to go deeper: with all the attendant risks (and challenges) of tortuosity, of endless erring through the maze of interpretation.

Indeed, the possibility of what might be called an astute reading quickly emerges here. Consider.

Contrary to the coarsely voiced suspicions about the reasons behind his leaving the seminary, Tommasino is (as noted) completely chaste: “. . . no woman could have claimed to have received as much as a passing glance from him” (20). A post-Freudian reader will immediately suspect repression at work here; and such suspicions would be rewarded, given the way the

growth of that blade of grass is described—the blade of grass which Tommasino

had followed almost with a motherly tenderness in its slow growing among the other and shorter ones which were around it; and he had seen it rise---shy at first, in its quivering slenderness---above the two encrusted rocks, as if it were fearful and at the same time curious, in its admiration of the sight that opened up beneath it—the green, boundless plain; and then he had seen it stand up taller and taller, bold and self-confident, with a small reddish tassel on its top, like the comb of a young rooster.

Indeed, the phallic symbol seems so blatant here that the reader could incline to regard this too explicit delineation as further proof of the relative immaturity of the author's narrative skills at this stage. Such an impression could be confirmed by the following images:

Tommasino's joy at finding it every time intact, with its defiant small tassel (*pennacchietto*) on top, was indescribable. He stroked it with the utmost delicacy, he smoothed it using only two fingers; it was as if he guarded it with his soul and breath. And in the evening, on leaving the stalk, he entrusted it to the early stars which began rising in the dusky sky, so that they and all their sisters would watch over it during the night. And really, with his mind's eye, from afar, he saw that blade of grass of his, between the two rocks, under the thickly crowded stars sparkling in the black sky, which kept watch over it.

Once again, it would seem that the symbolic infrastructure of the tale is (“and thereby hangs a tale”) almost embarrassingly clear.³ With this kind of preparation the culminating image in the story, which triggers Tommasino's insult, appears almost to quiver on the edge of pornography. The young lady

absent-mindedly stretching her hand, had pulled up precisely that blade of grass and had stuck it between her teeth, with the small tassel hanging out. Tommasino Unzio had felt his soul tear, and he had not been able to resist the impulse to cry out to her: “You idiot!” when she had passed in front of him, with that

stalk in her mouth.⁴

No further elaboration is necessary here: the whole development of a certain kind of critical reading is already unfolding before your eyes. Such a reading I would define as hypercritical. Now, the kind of listening criticism that I am proposing avoids both the *hypocriticism* (if I may use this new coinage) of the naive reading—which at any rate is certainly not hypocritical, in the current sense of the word—and the hypercriticism of the astute reading.

But such a characterization does not imply any condescending or polemical attitude toward the readings which have been sketched. Anxiously setting one interpretation against the other is typical of that *phônomaikhein* (“waging battles of words”) which has been already defused and refused by the ancient Greek Sceptics; and at any rate such an attitude would be clearly contrary to the listening approach advocated in this essay. Indeed, in order to be serious, such a listening must be understanding and comprehensive: it must listen not only to the texts but, with equal attention and respect, to all interpretations that have grown, or can grow, around them. The rhetorical ontology recovers the whole textual complex (including, I repeat, critical interpretations) as part of a common effort—to bring things to expression, to transform Being into forms of being. This enterprise is objectively shared by all the components of textual work, beyond all appearances of division, of competitive struggle.

Within such a restorative enterprise there is no neglect of differentiations (indeed they are developed and discussed, as we just saw); but there is no space for the sharp, absolutist polemics that removes and discards. So much is this true, that the reading of “Canta l’Epistola” that I am going to briefly delineate in the next few lines grows out of a careful listening to the possible readings sketched above, and is meant as an integration of them, not as a way of scoring points with respect to them (cf. Valesio 1981).

What does it mean, in this specific case, to listen? To say that one listens to the text is not specific enough; if we leave it at that, what we have is a slightly more intense way of repeating what (in a different parlance) literary criticism has been saying for a long time. What we actually have to do is *to listen to what Tommasino is listening to*: the voice of mute things.⁵

It could be objected that this is a counter-intuitive way of

describing the situation, for what Tommasino is doing is not listening to, but looking at; the whole text in fact is (as my quotes from it have shown) textured on images that have to do with sight. But precisely this is the epistemological turning point.

If we confine ourselves to looking at what Tommasino is looking at, then we are in the same position as all the other people around him: we do not see *anything* (because nobody, under normal conditions, really *sees* a blade of grass); therefore we conclude, quite reasonably, that Tommasino is crazy; and his reaction to Miss Olga (the lieutenant's fiancée)—who, as all of us normally do, handles the blade of grass without really seeing it—appears as totally arbitrary. But what really explains Tommasino's behavior is that he is listening to a message. Only if we accept this are we ready to grant a human value to his actions. So long as he is seen as merely looking at the stalk, his attitude appears as a perverse one, as a way of avoiding mature relationships between human beings, stooping down to a form of life which lies below such relationships; it would be, then, a one-way connection which, although definitely not brutal, looks brutish—a stunting and impoverishing attitude. And yet—"The religious sentiment arises from. . . a brute conation of human nature," as is noted in a series of philosophical reflections of those years (The Gifford Lectures at Glasgow, 1916-1918; see Alexander 1920, 2:406 and 407, "the brute sentiment for deity").

More specifically, if we accept the fact that in doing what he does Tommasino is listening to a voice, then this very act of listening confers human dignity on this relationship.⁶ "Human dignity," I said—but how can one speak of this, when the relationship at issue does not take place between two humans, two full persons? The answer is found in a religious notion which can also be considered as a paradox: the predominantly Judaeo-Christian concept of rooting human dignity in a relation with the transcendental. It turns out, then, that Tommasino's loss of faith is not a mere sociological fact in the background of the story; much less is it a kind of stage to be passed through on one's way to a more sophisticated view of the world. Tommasino is, to be sure, thinking/feeling in the wake of the abandonment of an institutionalized, confessional faith, but his thinking/feeling is still a response to that faith.

This situates our text in its appropriate context, which is a very broad spiritual landscape. In this sense, Pirandello's short

story comes to look like that stalk of grass, and the context necessary in order to really listen to what it is saying appears now as that great plain which spreads below; recall the passage about the blade of grass that grows “as if it were fearful and at the same time curious, in its admiration of the sight that opened up beneath it—the green, boundless plain.” Like every intense interrogation in the territory of Christianity, Tommasino’s experience is on the verge of heresy; that is, it holds commerce with one of the great rivals, and nourishing alternatives, of the Christian confession. In this case, the nourishing alternative is that of pantheism. Thus Tommasino’s listening to the voice of the stalk of grass is one more episode in a very long and complex story which crosses the history of philosophy, and of theology, *and* of poetry: the story of the several efforts to recover a sense of the sacred in the adherence to all the things in the world, from the largest to the tiniest. “Expression is the one fundamental sacrament,” A. N. Whitehead will say, a little after Pirandello’s story, in his Lowell Lectures.⁷

Let us get back, for some moments, from this broad context to the specific rhetorical strategy at hand: this story is also an effective reminder of how, in the actual implementation of sacred images and themes (what I have called elsewhere “*theorhetoric*”; cf. Valesio 1984), irony and even the grotesque can play a decisive role, without diminishing (on the contrary. . .) the spiritual tension of discourse. The image of the “blade of grass” as a symbol of the tiny but important things in the world is, by the time Pirandello writes, a philosophical topos.⁸ The interesting theorhetorical twist of this novelette consists in *literalizing* the metaphor: the “blade of grass” thus becomes a blade of grass—no longer a passing nod to the variety of the world, a hurried way of speaking, but the motor of the whole sequence of events. This makes for a mixture of serious and grotesque elements. There is also another stab here, aimed at the rhetoric of “rest and recuperation,” with its description of the weary man-immersed-in-the-world (intellectual, political, or simply mundane man or woman) who goes to the country in order to bathe in the spontaneous and innocent simplicity of nature.

This is a vital and persisting discourse, to be sure. (One still reads letters from friends and colleagues, many of them professional writers, who talk in these terms of their experience of retired living in the country.) Yet this discourse is questioned by a modern rhetoric which points up the element of illusion implicit in such a

move, and the many petty or sordid realities which are to be found in the places apparently most close to nature. In this sense, Pirandello's text has close antecedents in texts like a well-known narrative essay by Giovanni Verga, "Fantasticheria," in the short story collection *Vita dei campi* (1880; cf. Verga 1940, 15:145-52), or an acidly intelligent novel like the one by Joris-Karl Huysmans, *En Rade* (1887). The ironization of this kind of return of the native is not an isolated case in Pirandello's short stories. But this one is remarkable in its heightening of the colors—and I refer not only to the element of grotesque, but also to that of deadly violence. (For this latter dimension, I think of the brilliantly described slow crescendo of violence in the famous novel by Benito Pérez Galdós, *Doña Perfecta* [1876].)

A final point on the story—which turned out not to be such a minor text, after all. . . . If we do not simply listen to Tommasino listening, but (as I proposed) listen to what he is listening to, then we have a right (indeed, an obligation) to maintain a critical attitude. I refer to Tommasino's abrupt reaction against Miss Olga.

Let us dare ask a question that is often disdained, as if it were too naive, by literary criticism: what passed through Tommasino's mind between the moment in which he saw the blade of grass being ripped off and the moment of his exclamation? It is not absurd to surmise that Tommasino, who had studied in the seminary, may have thought along the lines of reflections like the following:

. . .nothing the world has to offer
—the sensual body,
the lustful eye,
pride in possessions—
could ever come from the Father
but only from the world
(1 John 2:16).

Indeed, Miss Olga with the stalk hanging from her mouth must have been an emblem of what the Vulgate (with a phrase that rings deeper than the "pride of possessions" of the Jerusalem Bible version) calls *superbia vitae*: "life-pride," or "pride of life."

But isn't Tommasino's reaction to that life-pride a bit too strident, too uneasy? (We thus recover what is fruitful, and cannot be ignored, in the astute reading.) Isn't this reaction

somewhat inconsistent with the terms of Tommasino's own experience, which is teaching him a fully sympathetic acceptance of all things and creatures in the world? This is certainly not said in order to score a point on Tommasino — but rather, in order to underscore the necessity for constant self-criticism (isn't this, actually, a weaker synonym for soul-searching?) in the pursuit of the experience of listening.

But we cannot stop here. A systematic listening continues to open up broader spaces, both inside and outside; every prolonged act of listening prolongs the discourse beyond the individual text. (To remain inside it would be like stopping one's ears in order not to listen.) We must then continue to contemplate a blade of grass, without being discouraged by Tommasino's fate.

Etymologists remind us that the sense of *blade* as in sword-blade is secondary with respect to the sense of blade as in *blade* of grass. The original theme is the same that appears in German *Blatt* "leaf, sheet of paper" — something that has interesting implications for a general (we might say, a Vichian) rhetoric. For it seems that the key figure of speech here is not one of *hyperbole* but one of *euphemization*: I mean, it is not the case that the thing in the meadow is rigidly and phallically hyperbolized on the model of the thing in the warrior's hand; rather it is the case that the warrior's weapon is felt as something so brutally disturbing that it must be exorcized by euphemism, and called with the same name of the supple thing bending on the meadow.⁹

This points to an innovative restatement of the ancient topos dwelling on the connection between Book and Life—from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to that delicate image that appears in the midst of a complicated perspective (a woman telling her lover, who is a writer, how she imagines his sister) in a beautiful modern novel of 1900:

Sometimes she would come into your room while you were working
and lay a blade of grass on the page you had commenced.¹⁰

One might speak of an overdetermination of the image, if this did not sound like a negative judgment, while on the contrary what is at work here enriches our perception of the world. This leaf of grass used as a bookmark between two leaves of paper on which writing has begun to be traced is a *figura etymologica* rooted in nature. It vividly brings before our eyes both the origin of any

book as a physical object out of the vegetal world, and the possible destiny of the book, as a complex of signs which goes back into the bosom of nature.

Indeed, if we look at this blade of grass as a representative of the green world, we soon discover that we are faced with a powerful archetypal image: that *viriditas* on which the alchemists focused many of their meditations—when they considered how blessed Nature makes all things new and green blossom out of the putrefaction of matter in darkness.¹¹

This cosmic *viriditas*, this germination of being, may however—important as it is—distract us from the experience of listening, by underscoring a mere looking at. What is crucial, in this turn-of-the-century period which is still the key to understanding our so-called modern literature, is a renewal of that impressive theme: the voice of mute things. For, contemporary with the writing of this and other short stories by Pirandello, a short masterpiece comes out in Northern Europe, as a unique literary document: Hugo von Hofmannstahl's *Letter of Lord Chandos*, where the hero of the Epistle expresses his dramatic nostalgia for a language “in which the mute things speak to me” (. . . *die stummen Dinge zu mir sprechen*). This voice does not have for him only a utopian existence. He can hear it, or rather I should say (exploiting the powerful Italian crasis, in the verb *sentire*, of both English “to hear” and English “to feel”), he can feel it in certain privileged moments:

The mute and sometimes even inanimate creatures rise toward me with such an abundance, such a presence of love, that my enchanted eye can find no dead place around me.¹²

This is not only a literary, but also a philosophical, perspective¹³—and one that, as such, must acknowledge and make explicit its link with a rich theological tradition.

Once again, one should not be led astray by merely visual and imaginative considerations. The voice of the blade of grass and of similar mute things is the voice hidden in all processes of miniaturization; for miniatures are not only images, but speaking images; suffice it to remember the acute treatment of the theme of miniature in Bachelard 1964 [1958].

Yet even his important analysis falls short of identifying a key emblem which, in linking together the dialectic of

inside/outside, of enlargement/narrowing, in miniaturization, reveals an ontology: an emblem of the growth of forms of being in their spiritual nature, beyond sensory divisions and sensual speculations and sensuous delimitations. For if every poet is an heir to the fairy-tale hero who can hear the grass grow (cf. the lines of poetry quoted in Bachelard 1964:177), something greater is at work here. The key image is that of the small mustard seed which grows into “the biggest shrub of them all” (Mark 4:31,32). This image is diffracted and refracted in the visionary poly-discourse of the synoptic Gospels, with differences to which we cannot be indifferent. In the quoted passage from Mark as in the analogous one in Matthew (13:31,32), the mustard seed is a parable of the growth of the Kingdom of God: an image which, for all its power, is still somewhat abstract and external. But, more challengingly, the mustard seed in another place in Matthew (17:20) is — with a significant process of interiorization — an emblem of individual faith. And finally in Luke 13:19 the interpretive potential of this parable is realized when this text is immediately followed by the parable of the yeast — homely in appearance, but in fact agitating and suggestive. For the leavening of the flour mixed with yeast takes place traditionally overnight (thus evoking, by the way, for the *Jack and the Beanstalk* type of fairy-tale, an intertext broader and deeper than the one mentioned in note 3).

Also, the growth of the leavened bread evokes an intercourse between man and nature more intimate than that described by the sowing of the mustard seed. This kneading is like an embrace: “lovely-dumb” (as G. M. Hopkins would put it); and yet (and, because of this) decisive.

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Notes

¹The ellipses belong to the original text. This and the following translations are mine.

²Some other details conspire towards this weakening. For instance, the family name of the hero — Unzio — is too transparent an allusion to religious *unction*.

³We could collate this image with a Freudian analysis of the giant beanstalk growing at night, and of the boy climbing on it, in the *Jack and the Beanstalk* type of fairy-tale, as images on one level are connected to a boy's

feelings about masturbation. Cf. Bettelheim 1971:171.

⁴Rhetorical analysis, which constantly follows those intricate genealogies of images that make poetry out of prose, can point out here the genealogical link between this carefree, mundane, and sexual image of the stalk hanging out of the mouth of a woman in the bloom of her youth, with the sickly growth about the mouth of another Pirandellian character, in whose case the floral presence is a metaphorical one. I refer to the one-act play “L'uomo dal fiore in bocca” (“The man with a flower in his mouth”) (cf. Pirandello 1950 [1926]:297-310), where reality of that silentiary zone—deadly sickness—takes the surrealist, Magritte-like drollery out of the metaphor and gives it, in its stead, a sinister resonance. This short play or “dialogo” (as the author calls it) is the rewriting of an earlier short story (a frequent procedure in Pirandello). But the short story was already in dialogic form, so that the dramatic version simply reproduces it in full, without adding or taking out anything, but only inserting stage directions. What is relevant to the present analysis is the only change made, the title, which in this short story is “La morte addosso” (“Death on one’s back”—cf. Pirandello 1923:61-72). This latter title is strongly (almost brutally) effective; whereas the rhetoric of the drama’s title, “L'uomo dal fiore in bocca,” is an indirect rhetoric of suggestiveness.

⁵“It is to the invisible that listening may attend” (Ihde 1976:14, emphasized in the original). In adhering to this thought, I at the same time must distantiate the present analysis from a certain pale punctiliousness in the phenomenological enterprise, which sharply separates theology from philosophy and promotes the latter as the only possible enterprise (*ibid.*:15). The present analysis, on the contrary, is built on the refusal of any neatly cut division between theology and philosophy.

⁶On the problem of listening versus seeing, consult Ong 1982.

⁷“Expression is the one fundamental sacrament. It is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. . . this primary expression mainly clothes itself in the media of action and of words, but also partly of art” (Whitehead 1971 [1926]:127, in the context of a discourse which structures elements of pantheism.)

⁸Consider the following passage (with a resounding Hegelian ring) that I noted from Benedetto Croce’s works (and whose original context I have still to recover): “Everything in the Universe is Mind, down to the blade of grass and the worn stone; and philosophy is the very consciousness of the Universe.” Such thoughts raise the problem of the links between absolute idealism, the traditional religious notions of theism and pantheism, and the more specific philosophical underpinnings of these latter. On this, see for instance the quoted Alexander 1920, 2:382-401 especially. To be sure, Tommasino’s pantheistic leanings could be described, as this same philosopher would say, as being of “the more popular and easy-going form” (389). But, in the comprehensive rhetorical approach that is developed here, there is nothing really easy-going about the philosophical perceptions of the common man.

⁹This euphemistic move is not limited to the Anglo-Saxon linguistic domain: in some old Italian texts which maintain a particularly close connection with their dialectal background, the blade of the sword is sometimes euphemistically referred to with words normally designating the pods of some Leguminosae. (Cf. also that established Italian metaphor: *Il filo*

della spada “The edge of the sword.”)

¹⁰ cite from the translation of *Il Fuoco* in D’Annunzio 1914 [1910]:226. The passage appears in the second and last part of the novel, called “The Empire of Silence.”

¹¹See, for instance, the eloquent passage quoted in Jung 1954:269 from the anonymous alchemical treatise *Rosarium Philosophorum* (for which Jung uses a German edition of the Latin text, in 1550).

¹²Cf. Hofmannstahl 1979:472 and 469 respectively; English version (here followed with some changes) in Hofmannstahl 1952:141 and 138. Composed in August 1902, this fictional letter appears in two installments (October 18 and 19, 1902) in the Berlin paper *Tag* (cf. Tarot 1970:360ff.). As for Pirandello’s story, it was first published in the *Corriere della Sera* of December 31, 1911.

¹³A modern philosophical essay in the style of Christian existentialism like Sciacca 1962, interesting as it is, is a weaker echo of images like the one in Pirandello’s short story, a text which in its turn is paler than the beautifully pulsating images in the quoted *Letter of Lord Chandos*. (But we have to do here with a general strategy of discourse and thought.)

¹⁴“The miniature of an entire cosmos that speaks softly (175). . . . We are taught the ontology of presentiment. . . this tense state of fore-hearing. . . the weaker the indication, the greater the significance, since it indicates an origin (176). . . . the play of the dream devices known to us as seeing and hearing, ultra-seeing and ultra-hearing, hearing oneself seeing. . . to hear oneself listen” (181). I was reminded of these pages by Brandy Alvarez, who is not responsible for the particular development here.

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