Eleven Short Stories = Undici Novelle Study Guide

Eleven Short Stories = Undici Novelle by Luigi Pirandello

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Little Hut: A Sicilian Sketch

Little Hut: A Sicilian Sketch Summary

Little Hut is a brief sketch of rural Sicilian life. It opens with a little girl stepping out from a small hut on a hillside. She walks quietly for a moment, apparently having just woken up, and sits to look out over the countryside. Suddenly she begins to call for "Jeli."

Jeli, a young man who lives below in the valley, responds. The girl calls for him to climb up, as he is wanted by his boss.

Jeli climbs up and follows the little girl to the hut of Papa Camillo, his boss. Also in the hut is Camillo's daughter, Malia. Jeli and Malia exchange meaningful glances as Jeli enters.

Camillo speaks harshly with Jeli, ordering him to prepare some fruit for an important visitor the next day. Jeli is surprised by Camillo's threatening manner. "You should know better than to say things like that," he says to Camillo, "And to me of all people!"

Camillo ignores his remark and leads him out of the hut. He tells Jeli, "Meanwhile, if you ever again take it into your head to...Enough! you understand me..." Camillo leaves him and walks down the valley.

Jeli quickly ducks back in the hut to speak with Malia, and the meaning of Camillo's warning become clear. Jeli has asked to marry Malia, and Camillo has refused, continuing to treat him like a servant rather than a son-in-law.

Malia is distraught at her father's refusal, but Jeli quickly proposes that if they cannot marry with Camillo's blessing, they should run away. He tells her to be ready that night at 7 o'clock. Before she can respond, he vanishes.

The scene shits to the evening as it begins to grow dark. Malia is sitting outside the hut, waiting. Jeli suddenly appears, early. Malia is hesitant, but Jeli encourages her to be brave. He whisks her into a waiting farm cart, and they kiss as the cart carries them away.

Two hours later, Camillo returns home and calls out for Jeli. The little girl tells him he has run away with Malia. Camillo is furious. He grabs a rifle and shoots it into the air. The little girl watches as the enraged Camillo sets fire to his hut and rushes of down the valley. As the fire consumes the little hut, the little girl sits and watches it in fascination.

Little Hut: A Sicilian Sketch Analysis

Little Hut is a short story with three scenes that take place in a single day, at sunrise, near sunset, and after dark. The action of the story is very simple. The young farm

worker Jeli is in love with Malia, the daughter of his boss. Her father, Camillo, refuses to assent to their marriage so they run away. Pirandello does not explain this relationship among the characters in a narrative aside to the reader, rather it is all revealed gradually through the action and dialogue of the story. This is a common feature of Pirandello's stories and will be evident in others in this collection.

The character of the little girl who is present at the beginning and end of the story is an interesting one. She seems to have no direct involvement with the main events of the story, but is central to moving the action along. She provides another point of view on the action as well.

Citrons From Sicily

Citrons From Sicily Summary

A man stands in the rain at the door of a house, speaking to a servant. He is roughly dressed and carries a sack and a suitcase. He asks for "Terasina," and is spoken to condescendingly by the servant, who tells him there is nobody there by that name.

The man insists he is looking for "Terasina, the singer," and the servant realizes that he is indeed talking about the lady of the house, who he knows as Madame Sina Marnis. The servant is amused to learn her real name is simply Terasina. He asks who the man is, continuing to speak down to him.

The man, dripping wet, impatiently asks him to tell Terasina that Micuccio is here. When he is told that she is at the theater, performing, he asks for "Aunt Marta." The servant, assuming he must be a relative, suddenly changes his demeanor and invites Micuccio inside. He politely inquires about his relationship with Madame Sina. Micuccio is slightly embarrassed at the question and replies he is not a relative. He has come from her hometown to see her.

Immediately the servant's demeanor changes again and he speaks down to Micuccio, seating him in a small room near the kitchen to wait.

Micuccio has been traveling for nearly two days and has not eaten. From his seat, he watches the kitchen staff busily prepare for what seems to be a large dinner party. In the next room he sees a large table being lavishly arranged. He thinks to himself that he should have told the servant he was Teresina's fiance, but for some reason did not. It is perhaps because the servant would then feel obligated to treat him as a superior.

Micuccio is astonished. In his mind, he goes back to when he knew her in Messina, their hometown, five years before. She was poor, living with her mother, and nearly starving. He had discovered her beautiful voice and encouraged her to develop her talent. Teresina and Micuccio had fallen in love, but his parents opposed their marriage. From his own small income as a flute player he had supported her, purchased sheet music and paid a teacher. He had introduced her to an orchestra leader who arranged for a concert. She was discovered and told she should go to Naples to study at the conservatory. Micuccio had defied his parents and using a small inheritance he had received paid to send Teresina to Naples.

She had left with a promise they would marry once she had finished. It had been five years, now, and he had not seen her since. He had received letters, written by her mother, informing him of Teresina's growing success as a singer. At one point they had sent a sum of money to him as a kind of repayment. He had kept the money, and had it with him to return to them. He had come to hold Teresina to her promise to marry him.

A bell rings and the house springs to action at the return of "the mistress." Micuccio stands to follow the servant, but is told to sit and wait until he has informed her he is there. From his seat, he sees bunches of flowers being brought in and a group of gentlemen in formal dress crowding in. Suddenly he sees Aunt Marta, who is astonished to see him there.

Aunt Marta is flustered by his presence. It is an important night for Teresina, and it is clear that Micuccio's presence has complicated matters suddenly. She tells him to wait and she rushes back to the room where the gentlemen are milling around. He hears Teresine excuse herself, but does not see her. He expects her to come see him, but she does not.

Instead, Aunt Marta returns. She offers to wait for him while Teresine entertains her guests. A table is quickly set for them and food is brought. The sounds of laughter and conversation can be heard from the other room. They converse about the news from Messina, but Micuccio senses that Aunt Marta wishes to avoid to subject of why he has come.

Suddenly Teresina rushes in. He is dumbstruck by her appearance in a revealing dress and sumptuous jewelry. She does not stop to talk, but casually promises she will be back before long, then rushes out again.

Micuccio can no longer eat. He is astounded at the transformation of Teresina. A feeling slowly overtakes him that she has changed too much, that there is no possibility she means to marry him. He is embarrassed for having been so foolish, for having come so far with such an expectation. He cannot bear to stay in the house and face the ridicule of her guests and servants. He is ashamed that anyone might think he felt entitled to her for having spent his money to help her career.

Micuccio remembers the money he has brought to return to her. He gives it to Aunt Marta and angrily says he is leaving. She encourages him to stay, to wait to speak to Terasina. Aunt Marta herself is ashamed. She assumes that Micuccio's sudden anger is because he has realized Teresina had become morally corrupted and unchaste. She makes a kind of apology to Micuccio, saying, "There's no way for me to stand guard over her son" (pg. 29.)

Micuccio had not made such an assumption until Aunt Marta brought it up, in fact. Aunt Marta begins to cry. Micuccio replies, "And so she is no longer worthy of me. Enough, enough, I'm leaving" (pg. 31.) He takes up his sack and suitcase and remembers he has brought some citrons with him as a gift to Teresina. He gives them to Aunt Marta, telling her they are for her alone. He goes to leave the house but realizes that he has nowhere to go. Sitting on the back steps, he begins to cry.

Meanwhile, Teresina rushes back into the kitchen and finds him gone and her mother crying. Her mother points to the citrons, telling her he had brought them for her. Teresina gathers them up, and despite her mother's appeal not to take them into her

guests, she shrugs and rushes back to her party, calling "Citrons from Sicily! Citrons from Sicily!" (pg. 33.)

Citrons From Sicily Analysis

Citrons from Sicily is an ironic and sad tale about a man who holds on to an unrealistic expectation and is severely disappointed when it does not come to pass. For Micuccio, several years of misapprehension comes to a bewildering end in one evening as he realizes the woman he thought loved him and would marry him had given him up long before, abandoning her humility and traditional morals.

Pirandello plays with social class in this story, beginning with the opening dialogue between Micuccio and the servant. As he mentions in the story, Italian has different forms of the word "you," one familiar and one formal. The servant goes back and forth between the two as he assesses and reassesses Micuccio's standing in relation to his mistress. Micuccio sits iand waits in a back room, knowing that with a word he could reverse the situation again by telling the servants he is their mistress' fiance.

Terasina's social position changes dramatically over the course of the story. At first, she is lower than Micuccio, so poor that his parents object to him marrying her. With his help, she climbs to a social class higher than his. Nevertheless, she is still "unworthy" of him because she has not stayed true to him and, the implication is, has slept with other men. Teresina's mother has also been catapulted into a life of luxury, but finds herself ashamed.

Terasina appears only briefly, as a self-centered and selfish young woman, apparently unaware or indifferent to the sacrifices her mother and Micuccio have made for her.

With Other Eyes

With Other Eyes Summary

A young woman named Anna is standing at a large window one morning, looking out on a pleasant and sunny garden. She is in the bedroom of her husband, Vittore, and she notices his bed has not been slept in. He is to leave on a trip that night and she has come to prepare his things for the trip.

Anna hears a sudden squeak as she opens her husband's wardrobe and is startled. She grabs a walking stick in the corner to open a drawer and is startled again to find that the stick comes apart to reveal a sword hidden inside. She drops the sword in surprise.

Anna begins to look through the drawers of her husband's wardrobe. In an old suit coat, she feels something in the lining of the coat that has fallen through a hole in one of the pockets. She works the papery object out of the lining and discovers it is a photograph of her husband's first wife, Almira.

Anna knows little about her husband's first wife aside from that she betrayed him for another man and that Vittore had forced her commit suicide as a result.

Anna first feels a welling up of hatred for the woman in the picture for having betrayed the man she herself is so devoted to. Curiosity takes over, and she begins to examine the woman's face. She is beautiful, Anna thinks, more beautiful than she herself. Anna senses a sadness in her eyes, a look that she recognizes in her own eyes when she thinks about her husband sometimes.

Vittore comes into the room suddenly and Anna thrusts the picture into a pocket. He is angry with her for moving things around his room and laughs at her condescendingly. Vittore treats her like a child, one who loves him unconditionally and whose love he can take for granted and acknowledge occasionally when he feels indulgent.

That evening, Vittore is rushing to leave for his trip. Although he has gone on several such trips before, even leaving at night, Anna is sad to be left alone on this occasion and begins to cry. This angers Vittore, and he chides her for being childish. He leaves without saying goodbye.

Anna goes to bed, but cannot stop from thinking about the portrait and the other woman. She runs over the events as she knows them. Almira had betrayed Vittore with a man named Arturo Valli. Vittore had challenged Valli to a duel, which Valli declined. Valli had remarried and left town. Anna had married Vittore three years earlier and in that time had been completely devoted to him.

In the span of that day, however, she had suspended her love to look at her life objectively. She remembers that he had not even said goodbye to her on his departure.

She reflects that she has not seen her family since the day she married Vittore. Gazing again at the portrait, she first senses reproach in the woman's eyes, but then it seems as if she is looking at Anna with sympathy and pity. It is as if she, too, knew what it was like to be unloved.

With Other Eyes Analysis

With Other Eyes is a short, powerful story of just two scenes in which a woman wakes up to a disturbing truth after three years of marriage.

Anna is depicted as a young woman who seems to be lost in unfamiliar surroundings. She hears noises that Pirandello leaves unexplained. She is startled to find things hidden in her husband's room, such as the sword stick and the portrait of his first wife. The one thing she seems to be able to cling to for direction is her devotion to her husband, Vittore.

Even before Vittore appears in the story, Pirandello hints at his sinister character. The sword stick suggests that he is a man with a dangerous side. He is frequently away from home overnight. Anna knows this, but seems to accept it without fully allowing herself to understand the implication that he is probably having an affair.

It is the portrait of Almira that shakes Anna from her self-induced ignorance. Her first reaction to seeing the photograph is the one she has ingrained herself to have. She hates and blames the woman for having betrayed Vittore. Her view changes over the course of the day, however, as she recognizes the pain and sorrow in Almira's expression and realizes it comes from the same source as her own pain and sorrow, which she has suppressed up to that point. She is able to look at herself sympathetically through Almira's eyes and realize the truth of her situation.

A Voice

A Voice Summary

The Marchesa Borghi has a son who has gone blind. She has had him examined by numerous experts and all of them have told her he has an incurable case of glaucoma. In her desperation to help her son, she finally calls on Dr. Giunio Falci, an eccentric and disagreeable man who is the head of an eye clinic.

Dr. Falci examines the young man and does not believe he has glaucoma. Instead, he believes he has developed cataracts, which is a condition that can be cured with an operation. Dr. Falci does not tell the Marchesa what he thinks, however, not wishing to give her any false hope in case he is wrong. Instead, he asks to come visit her son again after a few days.

Dr. Falci returns to the Marchesa's grand villa a few days later and finds a crowd of people outside. He learns that the Marchesa had died suddenly and unexpectedly during the night. He puzzles over whether he should leave or go on in. He questions his decision not to have told the Marchesa his diagnosis earlier. At least then she might not have died thinking her son was incurably blind. He decides that giving the news to the son instead might offer him some consolation.

He is met in the house by Lydia, a young, blonde woman dressed in black. He explains why he has come, and offers his opinion that the young man, who now has the title Marchese, might be cured of his blindness. Lydia seems to mistrust him. She tells him the Marchese cannot see anyone now, but that she will tell him about the doctor's visit and that he will certainly send for him later.

Three months pass, and the doctor has not been sent for. In that time, Lydia, who had been the Marchesa's housekeeper, had stayed on to manage the house for the Marchese and to help care for him. At first she pities the handsome young blind man, but her pity soon turns into love. He in turn is touchd by her kindness for him and falls in love with her. He asks her to marry him.

Lydia is reluctant, wondering if she is deceiving the Marches somehow because he has never seen her, only heard her voice. After several days, she agrees to marry him, and happily begins to arrange the house for them to live together.

Just a week before the wedding, Dr. Falci arrives again, unexpectedly. Lydia meets him and expresses her surprise to see him. Dr. Falci apologizes. He says he had forgotten about the Marchese's case until he heard the rumor that he was to be married. He imagines that Lydia had perhaps forgotten that she said she would tell the Marchese about his diagnosis.

Lydia is flustered. Although the doctor has politely provided her with a plausible excuse, instead she tells him she did not tell the Marchese about his diagnosis. Dr. Falci

responds with some politely-phrased by sharp questions that indicate he suggests that Lydia was reluctant for the Marchese to regain his sight because she is afraid she will lose his love if he sees her in person.

Lydia bristles at this suggestion. The doctor persists in his suspicion. Indignantly she stands to take the doctor to the Marchese. Dr. Falci stops her and offers to make no mention of his previous visit so that the Marchese would not know that she had tried to stop him from seeing him before. She defiantly says she will tell the Marchese herself what has happened. Dr. Falci shrugs and offers to come back after the wedding, even. Lydia, ashamed at the implications of his remarks, declines.

Dr. Falci is shown in to see the Marchese. Lydia introduces him and tells the Marchese about the previous visit. Dr. Falci again tries to provide her with an excuse by interrupting and explaining that Lydia had not wanted to give any false hope to the Marchese because she doubted his diagnosis. Lydia angrily contradicts him. She tells the Marchese that the doctor believes she wanted him to stay blind because that is the only way he would marry her. She leaves suddenly, leaving the Marchese confused and calling after her.

Lydia runs to her room in tears. In truth, she had not thought the doctor would be able to restore the Marchese's sight, but his reappearance and suspicious questions aroused the realization in her that his blindness was necessary for her love to him. She shrinks in repulsion from the suggestion of the doctor that he return after the wedding, feeling it would be an unforgivable deception.

She hears the door to the Marchese's room open and rushes into the corridor. She meets Dr. Falci, who tells her he has confirmed his diagnosis and that the Marchese will come the next day to his clinic for an operation that should restore his sight.

The doctor leaves and Lydia rushes to the Marchese. He is crying with joy that he will soon see her. He tells her he wants her to be the first thing he sees. He asks her to speak to him with her beautiful voice, to tell him how she was fixing up the house where they would live together. She holds back her tears of sorrow and speaks to him all day and into the night. He embraces her and she realizes she might give in and sleep with him, which would commit him to marry her no matter what. She is resolute, however, and pulls away from him. She will not entrap him because of her love for him.

Lydia accompanies the Marchese to the clinic and tells him she will spend the time while he is recuperating in finishing the preparations for their household. The operation is a success, and the Marchese sends for her to come to the clinic, but she does not go, responding that she does not want to excite him, that she will wait for him to come home.

The day before the Marchese is to return, Lydia packs up her belongings and leaves without anyone knowing. She wants to remain forever a voice to the Marchese, a voice that he will search for in other women but will never find.

A Voice Analysis

A Voice is a bittersweet love story about a young woman in love with a blind Italian nobleman. When an eccentric and disconcertingly frank doctor offers to cure the nobleman of his blindness, the young woman discovers herself trying to thwart him and keep her lover from regaining his sight.

The interplay between the young woman, Lydia, and the doctor who believes he can cure her lover, Dr. Falci, is a central part of the story. The doctor is exceedingly polite, but his polite words reveal a frank insightfulness to Lydia's situation. He is perhaps more insightful than Lydia is herself about her own feelings, but she takes offense at his assumption that she is trying to deceive the Marchese. When she finally admits to the Marchese that she had kept the doctor away from him, it is more out of defiance to the doctor than devotion to her lover.

Lydia's choice at the end of the story to leave the Marchese without allowing him to see her is a complicated gesture. She decides the only way to extend his love for her is to extend his blindness of her. Pirandello leaves her motivation unclear.

The Fly

The Fly Summary

Two brothers, Neli and Saro Tortorici, are rushing to the house of the doctor, Sidoro Lopiccolo. Their cousin, Giurlannu Zaru, has been stricken with a sudden illness and they are running to seek the doctor's help.

Sidoro, the doctor, lives with his bedridden wife in a disheveled house with seven children. He listens impatiently to the brothers as they describe their cousin, lying swollen and blackened in a stable at a farm some ten miles away. Sidoro yells that they will have to get a mule for him to ride. Saro runs to get a mule and Neli says he will go get a shave. He is engaged and it is Sunday, the day he spends with his young fiance. Neli knows his fiance will be upset that he will miss their date, but he must help his cousin, who is also engaged.

The three men had been hired to help harvest almonds the previous day. Halfway through the day, the farmer employing them told he no longer needed them to harvest, but would pay them to help the women who were shelling the almonds. The pay was at a lower rate than they made harvesting. Neli and Saro agreed to shell almonds, but Giurlannu declined, laying down in a stable to rest. The following morning the brothers went to get him and found him dying, feverish and all swollen in the face.

Neli quickly gets a shave and speaks hurriedly with his fiance, Luzza, and with Mita Lumia, Giurlannu's fiance, promising to bring him back as soon as possible. Saro, Neli and Sidoro set out for the farm where Giurlannu is lying ill.

It is a hard road. The brothers guide the mule carrying the doctor to the stable where they find Giurlannu, worse than before, having difficulty breathing. The brother's try to cheer him up, promising to carry him back home, while the doctor examines him.

The diagnosis is clear to the doctor. It is a case of anthrax. He asks Giurlannu if he had been bitten by an insect recently. He answers that he does not think he has. The doctor explains tht an animal may have died of anthrax and some insect that had fed on the carcass might have carried it to Giarlannu. As he is explaining, Giurlannu watches as a fly circles around the stable and lands on Neli's face. The fly moves to a fresh nick in Neli's chin that had received during his shave earlier. He sees the fly dig in to the cut.

Barely able to speak, Giarlannu asks the doctor if it could have been a fly that carried the disease. The doctor answers that it could have been. Giarlannu continues to watch the fly on Neli's face. He finds himself wishing that the fly was the same one that infected him. He suddenly becomes jealous of the healthy and strong Neli who was to be married the same day as Giurlannu.

Neli suddenly feels the bite of the fly and shoos it from his chin. He looks at Giurlannu and sees him smiling. "The fly," he says, and points to Neli's chin. Neli shows the cut to

the doctor, who leads him outside the stable to look at it more closely. Saro went out with them.

Giurlannu waits in the stable, listening to the voices outside. After a while Saro comes in and takes the mule, without looking at Giurlannu. It is silent. Giurlannu calls after Saro, but gets no response. His strength failing, he lies in his fever and wonders if he dreamt the entire episode. Then he looks over to see the fly on the wall, sitting and cleaning itself contentedly.

The Fly Analysis

The Fly is a brief and unusual tale of revenge. The dying Giurlannu finds a distorted type of vengeance in watching silently as his cousin is possibly infected with anthrax by the same fly that infected Giurlannu. Finally, he is left to die, the deadly fly his only companion.

Pirandello creates very rich character portraits within a small space in his stories. There is the once proud doctor, displaying his photographic portrait to his sickly children in his rundown house. The Tortorici brothers are a vital, youthful team, undaunted by the doctor's world-weary condemnation of their enthusiasm. Giurlannu Zaru is too proud to work with women, and has a deep jealous streak of his cousins.

The theme of marriage underlies the story. Sidoro's marriage has been ruined by his wife's illness. His house is full of garbage and his seven children unhealthy and unkempt. Neli and Giurlannu are young men engaged to be married, but illness has prevented the marriage of Giurlannu and possibly of Neli. Pirandello leaves open the question of which situation is preferable.

The Oil Jar

The Oil Jar Summary

Don Lollo Zirafa is a contentious olive farmer who frequently quarrels with people to the point of taking legal action. His habit of quickly growing angry and getting on his mule to ride off to see his lawyer has become a joke among his employees and neighbors.

The harvest is near and Zirafa has paid a large price for a brand new oil jar to store olive oil. The jar is enormous in anticipation of a good harvest, and is being stored in a shed. At the end of one work day, some of Zirafa's farmhands are putting away their ladders and tools and find that someone has broken a section out of the jar with an axe, ruining it. Zirafa is furious when he finds out.

After his anger subsides, one of the farmhands tells Zirafa the jar can be repaired. He recommends that Zirafa send for Dima Licasi, a tinkerer who has a secret kind of cement he claims can fix anything. Zirafa sends for him, but is skeptical. He ridicules Dima and demands that he also use rivets to repair the jar. Dima is indignant. He knows the strength of his formula. To get the work, however, he agrees to use rivets as well.

Dima sets to work on the jar with the help of a farmhand. He fits the pieces into place and drills holes in the jar for the rivets. He gets inside the large jar and cements the pieces in place. A farmhand helps him pull the rivets through the holes he has drilled. The repair is complete, but Dima, distracted by his frustration with Zirafa, has made the repair with himself inside the jar. He cannot get out through the narrow opening. To get out, the jar will have to be broken.

Zirafa is furious once more. He calls for his mule to go to his lawyer, but before leaving he hurriedly pays Dima three lire, throwing the coins into the jar, and offers him some lunch, to satisfy his part of the agreement over the repair. He then rides to his lawyer to determine how he can sue Dima.

Zirafa's lawyer is amused by the situation. He tells Zirafa that Dima may be liable for the damage because of his workmanship, but on the other hand, Zirafa is unlawfully detaining Dima inside the jar. He tells Zirafa to have Dima appraise the value of the repaired jar and hold him liable for it.

Zirafa rushes back and asks Dima to appraise the jar. Dima replies that if he had let him use only his cement, it would be worth the same as it was when new. Because of the rivets, however, it was only worth one third that. Zirafa immediately counters that Dima will have to pay him 17 lire, his appraised value of the jar, and he will break it and let him out.

Dima refuses, and Zirafa is furious again. He threatens to sue him for trespassing. Dima lights his pipe and blows the smoke out the neck of the jar.

Zirafa leaves the shed. It is the end of the work day and Dima sends a farmhand to town to use the three lire he received from Zirafa to buy some drink. The farmhands gather around the jar and drink and sing with Dima into the night.

The noise awakens Zirafa, who is furious to hear Dima enjoying himself. He rushes to the shed and begins shaking the jar, toppling it and sending it rolling down a hill into a large tree, where it smashes to pieces and frees Dima. The final sentence of the story is "And Uncle Dima won." (p. 111)

The Oil Jar Analysis

The Oil Jar is a familiar type of story where a figure of authority is outwitted by a person from a lower class. Zirafa is self-important and rude to his workers, quick to anger and quick to sue anyone at the slightest provocation. He is also suspicious of everyone and mistrustful of Dima when he claims his powerful secret cement will repair his jar as good as new.

Zirafa is finally undone by his own actions. The final sentence "And Uncle Dima won" probably refers to the lawsuit that the reader knows certainly took place following the breaking of the jar.

It's Not To Be Taken Seriously

It's Not To Be Taken Seriously Summary

Perazzetti is a well to do man with a very active imagination that often sends him into fits of duck-like laughter. This habit of his has led some to believe he is crazy, but it is only his imagination taking an absurd twist that conjures up images so hilarious to him he cannot help but laugh. For example, while sitting in a restaurant, he imagines people taking on the forms if their "inner beast," the type of animal they resemble in their behavior. He also has a common habit of imagining what people look like as they are using the bathroom.

Whenever Perazzetti is in love and engaged, however, his manners change completely. He suppresses his wild imagination and becomes a perfect gentleman. This lasts until his passion begins to fade and he realizes how he has been beaten down, and the wild laughter begins again, ruining the engagement. He has been engaged more than 20 times.

On one occasion he becomes engaged to a woman named Elly Lamanna who has a brother named Lino. As Perazzetti spends more time with Elly's family, he becomes great friends with Lino. One day the family is visiting the seashore, however, and he sees Lino in a bathing suit and notices that he looks very much like his sister, Elly. Perazzetti cannot shake the image and calls off the engagement, telling Elly marrying her would be like marrying Lino.

Lino challenges Perazzetti to a duel to defend his sister's honor and Perazzetti allows him to stab him with his sword in the duel. He recovers however and decides he must take measures to prevent such a thing from happening again.

Perazzettis solution is to get married. He marries a woman named Maddalena, a slightly crazy woman who walks around at night laughing, with a poodle, dressed in elaborate hats. He marries her, gives her an allowance, and sends her away to live in the country.

Perrazetti's friends rush to him on hearing the news he is married. They ask why he would tie himself down in such a way. He shows them his bed where he sleeps alone and asks them if he is really tied down. They respond that he will regret getting married one day.

Perazzetti replies that he knows he will regret it, but that when he does it will be because he has fallen in love again, and that is when his plan comes to fruition. He will be prevented from getting married because he already has a wife. When his friends roar that he has already gotten married, he replies, "That one? Go on now! That one's not to be taken seriously!" (pg. 125.)

It's Not To Be Taken Seriously Analysis

This story is an amusing character sketch of a likable but unusual character with a unique outlook on life. Perazzetti can see only the absurd side of people and can usually barely control his amusement. This behavior has gotten Perazzetti into trouble, particularly with th families of the young women he has fallen in love with.

Perazzetti's absurd resolution to his situation is to marry a woman who doesn't "count," the slightly mad Maddalena. Pirandello does not linger over a description of this Maddalena, but it is interesting that her behavior does not seem, on the outside, to be much different than Perazetti's. She walks around laughing for no apparent reason.

To take a wife to prevent oneself from getting married makes perfect sense in Perazzetti's unique view of the world. At the base of his decision is his desire to stay true to his own nature and not have to change himself in order to please anyone else.

Think It Over, Giacomino!

Think It Over, Giacomino! Summary

Professor Agostino Toti's wife Maddalena has been crying and miserable for three days. She is much younger than he, about twenty-six years old, and he himself is short, bald, fat and about seventy. He does not fool himself that she is truly in love with him. She was poor when he married her, but he had the prospect of a full pension from his teaching position to leave her. She also later inherited a large sum from a brother, which Toti has put away for her after his death. Professor Toti is "philosophical" about everything. He has made concessions for his wife and he feels entitled to have her in a good mood.

Professor Toti has not only decided to benefit his young wife, but also a young man, Giacomino Pugliese, a handsome former student of his. Toti gets him a good job at a bank.

There is a child, a boy of about two called Nini, and Toti is extremely devoted to him. The boy calls him "daddy," which seems to bring a smirk to anyone who overhears it, but Toti does not mind. The fact is he has grown to think of himself as more of a father to his young wife, who he married so that someone might benefit from his hard work. He feels more like a grandfather than a father to the little boy.

Maddalena continues to sit alone in her room and weep. She does not answer Toti's gentle requests to tell him what is wrong. Finally, he decides he must take action. He has the maid dress Nini in nice clothes and he takes him to the home of Giacomino.

Giacomino lives with a sister who helps take care of him. She answers the door and is astonished to see Professor Toti with the boy. She hates Toti, Pirandello writes, because he has led her brother into a "mortal sin."

She tells Toti that Giacomino is not in, but he is persistent. She says surely he understands how awkward and inappropriate it is for Toti to be there with the boy. Toti says he understands, but he feels the best way to deal with a situation where there are upset feelings is to get everything out in the open. He is referring to the upset feelings of his wife, which are somehow connected to Giacomino, it seems.

Reluctantly, Giacomino's sister lets Toti and Nini in the house and calls for Giacomino, who actually is at home. Giacomino comes in, looking distraught. Nini runs up to him with joy, but Giacomino only reluctantly shows him any attention, worrying Toti. Giacomino tells Toti he should not have come, that it is torture for him. He does not deserve Toti's kindnesses, he cries. He asks him to leave and forget he even exists.

Toti is astonished. He asks why Giacomino would send him away. He replies that he is engaged. Toti is devastated. This is the reason for his wife's misery.

Toti becomes outraged. It now becomes clear that his young wife is in love with Giacomino and is upset that he has become engaged to another. But this is not what upsets Toti. He knows about their affair, in fact he had encouraged it. Nini is not his child, but Giacomino's. The professor knows all of this because he has planned it himself. He planned to leave a happy family behind to raise Nini and live comfortably. Now it has all been ruined because Giacomino has become engaged to someone else.

Professor Toti is outraged. He tells Giacomino that he might show up with Nini at the door of his fiance and tell her the truth. He reminds him that he can have his job at the bank taken away. Giacomino is indignant, but Toti storms out of his house, crying, "Think it over Giacomino! Think it over!" (pg. 143.)

Think It Over, Giacomino! Analysis

Like the previous tale, this one present a somewhat absurd version of marriage. In a more typical romance, a husband might confront the man his wife is having an affair with and threaten him to leave her alone. This tale has the identical action to such a tale, but the husband is threatening the lover in order to make him take his wife, not leave her.

Pirandello reveals the true nature of the relationship among the character gradually over the course of the story. The reader is first given a hint that perhaps Nini is not really the professor's son when Pirandello mentions that people smirk when Nini calls Toti "Daddy." The interchange between Toti and Giacomino's sister reveals that she blames Toti for something very serious - a mortal sin - hinting that perhaps Toti was not only aware who Nini's real father is, but had a hand in arranging the affair. That this is actually the case is all revealed in the final scene between Toti and Giacomino in which it is revealed that Toti had engineered the entore situation out of a desire to leave a legacy after his death.

A Character's Tragedy

A Character's Tragedy Summary

The story opens with the author addressing the reader directly, saying, "I persist in my old habit of giving audience every Sunday morning to the characters of my future short stories...I almost always find myself in bad company." (pg. 145.)

The author goes on to describe the scene of these meetings, as if the characters in his head are actual people who come to visit. They are an unruly group, with some pushing ahead of others for his attention. While some push ahead, however, some wait quietly, like the old man, a conductor, who lets others go first and then comes to the author timidly asking to be put into a story. The author grants his request, and has him die in a tale called "Old Music."

One Sunday the author goes into his Sunday meeting a little late because he has been up the night before reading a novel given to him by a friend. In the novel was a minor character named Dr. Fileno who had developed a unique outlook on life. He pretended that everything that happened had happened long in the past. This allowed him to immediately cope with any tragedy or setback. It was as if he had created a telescope through which he viewed the present through the wrong end, to make it appear like the distant past. The character had written a book about his philosophy called The Philosophy of Distance.

The author is intrigued by this character and his philosophy of life and is frustrated that the author of the novel did not make better use of him, choosing instead to rework a common old plot and leaving this interesting character to one side. When the author comes into his meeting with his characters that next morning, he finds Dr. Fileno there. The other characters are trying to forcefully hold him back.

The author calls them off and tells Dr. Fileno he will have to leave. The doctor appeals to the author to give him a proper story. He speaks about his interesting characteristics and the importance his philosophy might have if treated properly by a good author. The author concedes all this, but responds that Dr. Fileno is not his character, and so there is nothing he can do.

Dr. Fileno is persistent. It is perfectly alright to take him over as a character, to rename him, and to use him in a story. The author firmly declines, saying he does not do such things, even if they are allowed. Finally he dismisses the character and his philosophy, telling him to resign himself, and to let the author's own characters speak.

A Character's Tragedy Analysis

This imaginary tale provides some insight into how Pirandello develops his rich characters. His imagination seems to be populated with all kinds of figures, each

competing for his attention. He has struck upon a formal way to develop these characters and uses the metaphor of a Sunday visit to describe it.

When the author reads other writers, he runs the danger, it seems, of allowing the characters of others into the crowd in his head. At the root of this seems to be a belief that he can make more of a character than the original author did. Pirandello seems to hold onto a principle that this is not a proper thing to do.

The irony of the story is that Pirandello does indeed adopt the character of Dr. Fileno after all. Even though the story is about how he has rejected him, it is still a story in which the character appears.

A Prancing Horse

A Prancing Horse Summary

Blackie and Fofo are horses in the same stable. Blackie has recently arrived, and is put out by Fofo's constant talking. Blackie is a well-mannered horse who has come from the fine stables of a prince and princess. The prince was an enthusiast of the noisy kinds of carriages that spew smoke and move on their own and when the princess who loved the horses became ill and could no longer leave her chair, the prince had gotten rid of Blackie and the other horses in the stable, despite the entreaties of the head groom, Giuseppe.

Now Blackie was in this new stable, with the irritating Fofo. The stable is nice, but not as nice as the prince's. He is not sure exactly where he is, but there are 20 other horses there, all black like him. Fofo begins to fill him in.

They are in a kind of shipping agency, Fofo tells Blackie. It is easy work. They haul boxes. He has figured this out by talking to other horses who also work for shipping agencies. The boxes they haul are long, narrow and quite heavy, Fofo guesses, because they only ship one at a time. The merchandise must be very valuable, he assumes, because as they pass through the streets people stop and watch and show their respect. They carry the box to a large, majestic building, which Fofo tells Blackie he thinks is a kind of customs office. After that, Fofo does not know what happens to the merchandise they carry, and he believes that the humans don't know either. He has come to the conclusion that humans do many things without knowing why they do them.

The grooms are getting ready for a "first-class" job, Fofo deduces, preparing special harness with tassels and plumes. Four horses are hitched to the large carriage, including Fofo and Blackie, next to one another. As they leave the stable, Fofo tells Blackie more about what to expect. Four horses in all their finery means they must be pulling some very valuable merchandise, and that there will be a lot of speeches given. Fofo warns Blackie not to snort or act up or the driver will pull hard on his reins.

As they approach the manor house where they are to pick up the box, Blackie does begin to act up. He kicks and snorts and prances, and the driver cannot control him. Only when they reach the house and a servant comes out to the carriage does Blackie calm down. It is Giuseppe, the groom. He recognizes Blackie and begins to cry. He calms Blackie down and tells him he will drive the carriage himself. It is the princess inside the box, he tells Blackie. They will carry her together.

Fofo overhears this and realizes what it is they carry in their special carriage. He understands why their work is so easy. "It's only when humans cry that we can be cheerful and relaxed," he says, "And he too felt the temptation to prance" (pg. 171.)

A Prancing Horse Analysis

Pirandello again slowly reveals what is happening over the course of the story. This fantastic tale is told from the point of view of two funeral horses, the regal Blackie who has just arrived in the funeral stable, and the talkative Fofo, who has been there some time already. As Fofo informs Blackie of the nature of their work the reader gradually realizes that his guess that they are involved in some kind of "shipping" is wrong and that they are actually pulling funeral carriages. Fofo's misunderstanding is still insightful, however, made from an innocent and objective viewpoint. Pirandello is making an amusing observation that there is little difference between a coffin and a crate of merchandise from the viewpoint of a horse, and hints that perhaps this is the proper viewpoint for humans to take as well.

The story ends sadly as Blackie, too, realizes the nature of their work and that they are being led to the house of his former beloved mistress who he deduces must have died. Here again, Fofo's observations are profound in their ignorance.

Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law

Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law Summary

Either Mrs. Frola or her son-in-law, Mr. Ponza, is insane, and everyone else may goe insane trying to decide which one it is.

Mr. Ponza had come to the town of Valdana with his wife and her mother, but rather than have his mother-in-law live with him and his wife, Mr. Ponza has set her up in her own apartment. That is enough to get the people of the town talking, but the situation is even stranger. Mr. Ponza does not let his wife leave their house or visit her mother.

Mrs. Frola is a pleasant old woman, and frequently visits the other ladies in Valdana. The other ladies are shocked at her son-in-law's cruel behavior and ask her how she puts up with it. She responds by defending her son-in-law. He is not cruel at all, she tells them. Rather, he loves her daughter so much that he wants all of her love to pass through him, even the love she has for her mother. He sees that Mrs. Frola is well taken care of, and she tells the ladies that a few times a day she does actually see her daughter. She goes to the house and calls up to a high window, where her daughter appears and lowers a basket to her with notes about what she has been doing that day. Despite Mrs. Frola's excuses, the ladies of the town are not convinced of Mr. Ponza's generosity.

Matters are confused even further when Mr. Ponza himself shows up where his mother-in-law has recently visited and asks if she has been telling people that he refuses to let her see her daughter. Mr. Ponza's version of affairs is different. He was indeed once married to Mrs. Frola's daughter, but she had died four years ago. Mrs. Frola had gone mad from grief and since that time she has refused to believe her daughter was dead, but that she lived and her son-in-law simply did not allow her to see her. It is his second wife who writes her notes and helps him maintain the illusion for the benefit of Mrs. Frola, and it is out of generosity that he continues to support her.

However then Mrs. Frola makes the rounds again after her son-in-law and responds that in fact it is Mr. Ponza who is deluded. He believes his wife died four years ago when in fact she had not. He believes he remarried, but this was all staged for his benefit, she tells people, because he thought his wife was a different woman entirely. He seems to have returned to normal, Mrs. Frola believes, but still fears that he may lose his wife and so keeps her locked away.

Some townspeople believe one person, some the other. One thing is certain, whichever is the crazy one, each is acting out of a sense of duty and generosity to the other. People study and analyze their stories, but nobody can determine the reality from the illusion.

Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law Analysis

In this story Pirandello examines the futility of trying to understand human behavior. Neither of the main characters in the tale believe themselves to be crazy and each is acting completely rational based on their own version of affairs. One is completely deluded, however, and the other has gone to great lengths to indulge this delusion. Which person is playing which role is really unimportant to the happiness of either, but it is extremely frustrating to those who wish to know the truth of the matter.

The truth of the matter does not matter, Pirandello would seem to suggest. These two people treat each other with kindness and respect and each does so out of a genuine concern for the other. This is what is important, no matter how crazy it might appear to the outside world.

Characters

Maliaappears in Little Hut

This is the attractive daughter of Papa Camillo. Malia is in love with the farm worker Jeli, but is forbidden by her father to marry him. She elopes with Jeli.

Jeliappears in Little Hut

This is a worker for Papa Camillo. Jeli is a young man who always smokes a pipe. He is bold with Camillo and wishes to marry his daughter, Malia. When Camillo refuses to agree to the marriage, Jeli makes arrangements to run away with her.

Papa Camilloappears in Little Hut

Papa Camillo is a stout, belligerent farmer, the father of Malia, and the employer of Jeli. He lives with his daughter in a small hut on a hillside. Camillo is furious when his daughter runs away with Jeli and sets fire to the hut in his rage.

Micuccioappears in Citrons From Sicily

This is a flute player in a small orchestra in Messina, a town in Sicily. Micuccio falls in love with Teresina, a woman from Messina, and devotes himself to her development as a singer. He becomes engaged to Teresina, but they put off their marriage to allow her to go to Naples to study voice.

Madame Sina Marnisappears in Citrons From Sicily

This character is also called Teresina. She is a popular singer who started off a poor Sicilian girl. She was encouraged by Micuccio to pursue a career in singing and left him with the promise to marry him after five years. She is self-centered and selfish, however, and abandons all thought of marrying Micuccio after she finds success and popularity.

Aunt Martaappears in Citrons From Sicily

This is Teresina's mother who is also called Aunt Marta by Micuccio. She has accompanied her young daughter in her rise as a singer, but is embarrassed and ashamed by the luxurious and loose lifestyle her daughter has adopted.

Annaappears in With Other Eyes

This is the main character in With Other Eyes. She is a young woman married to Vittore Brivio, to whom she is devoted. Over the course of the story, she comes to understand she is not loved in return.

Vittore Brivioappears in With Other Eyes

This is the somewhat sinister husband of Anna. Vittore treats Anna condescendingly and is frequently away from home on trips that are not explained and which she does not inquire about. He somehow forced his first wife to kill herself after he discovered she betrayed him.

Almiraappears in With Other Eyes

This is the first wife of Vittore and the woman in the portrait discovered by Anna. Almira had an affair while married to Vittore and subsequently killed herself.

Dr. Giunio Falciappears in A Voice

This is an eccentric eye doctor and the leader of an eye clinic. Dr. Falci has an unkempt appearance and a frank manner of speaking that makes him highly unpopular. He is called as the last resort by the Marchesa in an attempt to cure her blind son.

Lydia Venturiappears in A Voice

This is the housekeeper of the Marchesa Borghi who stays on to care for the Marchesa's blind son after her death. Lydia falls in love with the Marchese Borghi and they become engaged. She leaves him after his sight has been retored, but before he has seen her.

Marchesa Borghiappears in A Voice

This is the mother of the Marchese Borghi and the employer of Lydia Venturi. The Marchesa spares no expense in trying to find a doctor who might cure her blind son, but dies suddenly after the visit by Dr. Falci, never knowing that he was able to cure him.

Marchese Silvio Borghiappears in A Voice

This is a handsome young nobleman who lost his sight a few years before the death of his mother. The Marchese falls in love with his housekeeper, Lydia, but she leaves him before he can see her following his successful eye surgery.

Sidoro Lopiccoloappears in The Fly

This is a doctor who has hit on hard times after his wife becomes ill. He lives in a rundown house where he cares for his wife and seven children.

Neli and Saro Tortoriciappears in The Fly

These characters are two young brothers who try to help their cousin, Giurlannu, when they discover him sick and dying. Neli is engaged and is to be married on the same day as his cousin.

Giurlannu Zaruappears in The Fly

This is a young man who dies of anthrax. He is proud and refuses to do what he thinks is women's work.

Don Lollo Zirafaappears in The Oil Jar

This is the blustery olive farmer in The Oil Jar. Zirafa has a short temper and is fond of suing anyone he has business dealings with. He meets his match in Dima.

Dima Licasiappears in The Oil Jar

This is a person who has invented a powerful cement that he claims can fix anything. He becomes trapped in Zirafa's oil jar while repairing it, creating the absurd situation central to the story.

Celestino Perazzettiappears in It's Not to Be Taken Seriously!

This is the odd character at the center of the story who many think is crazy because of his habit of bursting into uncontrolled laughter. He is a well-to-do man and much liked. He is quick to fall in love and has been engaged over 20 times.

Elly Lamannaappears in It's Not to Be Taken Seriously!

This is an attractive young woman who becomes engaged to Perazzetti. He confides in her the reason for his apparently odd behavior, and she is accepting of him. Perazzetti calls off their engagement when he cannot stop imagining how much Elly looks like her brother, Lino

Lino Lamannaappears in It's Not to Be Taken Seriously!

This is a onetime friend of Perazzetti and the brother of Elly Lamanna. Lino must end their friendship and challenge Perazzetti to a duel when he breaks off his engagement.

Professor Agostino Totiappears in Think It Over, Giacomino!

This is an elderly teacher who has taken a young wife. Professor Toti is "philosophical" about his marriage, believing it is something he is doing out of kindness for his wife, even to the point of encouraging her to have an affair with a man closer to her own age so she will have someone to look after her when he dies.

Maddalenaappears in Think It Over, Giacomino!

This is the young wife of Professor Toti, who is in love with Giacomino. Although a poor woman when she marries the Professor, she receives a large inheritance from a brother after she marries. She is miserable when Giacomino becomes engaged to another woman.

Giacomino Puglieseappears in Think It Over, Giacomino!

This is the young man Professor Toti chooses to help by getting him a job at a bank and encouraging him to have an affair with his wife so that the two might be married after the death of the Professor. Giacomino resents Toti's kindness and threatens to ruin his plans by marrying someone else.

Niniappears in Think It Over, Giacomino!

This is the young son of Maddalena. He is actually the son of Giacomino, which Toti knows, but who he is bringing up as his own.

The Writerappears in A Character's Tragedy

This is the narrator of "A Character's Tragedy" and a stand in for Pirandello himself. He is a man with a vivid imagination who holds imaginary conversations with the characters in his stories.

Dr. Filenoappears in A Character's Tragedy

This is a fugitive character from another novel that intrudes upon the imagination of the writer in "A Character's Tragedy." Dr. Fileno has developed a philosophy of life that copes with hardships by distancing himself from events. He appeals to the writer to give him a story to appear in, but is dismissed by the writer.

Blackieappears in A Prancing Horse

This is the black horse formerly belonging to a noble family who finds himself sold to a undertaker to pull funeral carriages. He becomes disturbed when called on to pull the hearse of his beloved former owner.

Fofoappears in A Prancing Horse

This is the talkative stablemate of Blackie and the character that provides the main point of view in "A Prancing Horse." Fofo eventually realizes the true nature of his easy work over the course of the story.

The Princessappears in A Prancing Horse

This is the former owner of Blackie who becomes ill and is confined to a chair. She eventually dies from her illness, and Blackie, her former horse, is coincidentally called on to pull her hearse.

Mrs. Frolaappears in Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law

This is the elderly mother-in-law of Mr. Ponza. Mrs. Frola believes that Mr. Ponza is married to her daughter but that he believes he is married to an entirely different woman. She may be deluded, but the reader is not told whether this is the case. She is devoted to her son-in-law, despite the fact that he will not let her see her daughter.

Mr. Ponzaappears in Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law

The son-in-law of Mrs. Frola. Mr. Ponza claims his first wife, the daughter of Mrs. Frola, died and that he has remarried, but that Mrs. Frola refuses to believe that her daughter is actually dead. He says his second wife and he pretend she is Mrs. Frola's daughter to humor her in her delusion. He himself may be deluded, however, and the question is left open.

Objects/Places

Italyappears in All stories

This is the Mediterranean country where all of the stories in this collection take place.

Sicilyappears in Several stories

This is an island region of Italy where several of the stories take place, particularly the ones that occur in small towns and agricultural settings.

Citronappears in Citrons From Sicily

This is a small citrus fruit similar to a lemon.

Cataractsappears in A Voice

This is an eye condition that can cause blindness.

Anthraxappears in The Fly

This is an infectious and deadly disease that can be contracted by contact with animals that have died of the disease, or by being bitten by an infected insect.

Oil Jarappears in The Oil Jar

This is a large ceramic jar meant to hold olive oil. It is large enough for a man to fit inside.

Dima's Cementappears in The Oil Jar

This is the somewhat mystical invention of Uncle Dima, who claims his cement can fix anything.

Almira's Portraitappears in With Other Eyes

This is the photograph of her husband's first wife that Anna discovers inside an old suit of his. Seeing this photograph, Anna reflects on her own situation.

Undertaker's Stableappears in A Prancing Horse

This is a stable of all black horses used to pull funeral carriages.

The Customs Houseappears in A Prancing Horse

This is Pirandello's humorous reference to a church, where the "deliveries" pulled by the funeral horses are stamped and approved by the customs official who is actually a priest.

Themes

Death

Pirandello treats the subject of death in several of this stories. The theme is central to some of the stories and secondary in others, but a common thread seems to emerge of death being treated as an inevitable and perhaps even absurd part of life.

Death is a central part of the action of "The Fly," where a young farmhand slowly dies alone in a stable from anthrax, possibly contracted from the bite of fly. The young man accepts his fate, but his last thoughts are jealous ones for his cousin, who is to be married. As he lies dying, he silently watches as a fly bites his cousin on the chin, possibly infecting him as well, and giving him a small bit of comfort. Pirandello does not present death as a rapturous or even tragic event. The character of the young man is subject to his human weaknesses right up to his last moment alive.

"The Prancing Horse" addresses the absurdity of the human institutions surrounding death. From the non-human standpoint of a horse, a funeral wagon appears no different than a delivery wagon and we are all simply being shipped to nowhere. The slow ceremony apparently so full of sadness for humans means a light day's work for a horse. Pirandello invites his reader to share this viewpoint.

Death is an absurd secondary element in "Mrs, Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law." the main question of which character is crazy depends on the truth about the death of Mr. Ponza's wife. Either she is dead, and Mrs. Frola is insane for believing she is alive, or she is alive and it is Mr. Ponza who thinks she is dead. This is a puzzle to the townspeople, but the answer does not matter, Pirandello suggests. Death is not so serious a matter that it should change how we treat each other.

Marriage

The theme of marriage runs through most of Pirandello's stories in this collection, and rarely is it treated as a happy institution.

The young farmhands in "The Fly" are engaged to be married and full of enthusiasm. Pirandello confronts one of them with the character of Dr. Lopiccolo, who has seven children and an ill wife who cannot care for them. Dr. Lopiccolo is temporarily enraged at the young man's naive vision of marriage, but his angry advice means nothing to the young man, who goes away thinking he will have even more children and support them simply through his hard work.

Marriage is a lopsided affair in stories like "With Other Eyes" and "Citrons From Sicily." In one story, a young woman slowly comes to realize her love for her husband is not returned. In the other, a young man has held on to his love and the promise of marriage to a woman who has dismissed the idea from her own mind long before.

Marriage actually seems to be an obstacle to true love in "A Voice," where a woman believes it would be a trap to her blind fiance to hold him to a promise he made when he could not see her.

In "Think It Over, Giacomino!" Professor Toti treats marriage like a business arrangement. He makes plans to hand his wife and son over to the younger Giacomino upon his death and is furious when Giacomino fails to meet his part of the bargain.

In "It's Not to Be Taken Seriously," the thing referred to in the title is the marriage of the main character, who takes a wife not out of love but simply to prevent himself from taking a wife. Marriage is an absurdity at this point, just a technicality.

Truth and Belief

Life is uncertain but nevertheless we all hold on to certain beliefs that we feel are true, Pirandello suggests in several of his stories in this collection. When our beliefs turn out to be false, the results can be devastating, but often we never learn whether our beliefs are true or not. This hardly matters in most cases, however, Pirandello would seem to believe, because we act on what we believe is true and not what we actually know to be true.

This question is addressed most directly in Pirandello's story "Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law." There is a truth behind the beliefs of the two main characters. Either the first Mrs. Ponza is dead or alive. The characters have opposing views on the matter, and each is aware of the other's belief, yet one of them is distorting the facts of the matter to fit their belief. In this case, this self-delusion is of little consequence as the characters accept this uncertainty and do not let it affect their happiness.

Clinging to a false belief has quite a different outcome in the story "With Other Eyes." the young wife who finds the picture of her husband's first wife at first interprets the portrait through her closely-held belief that the woman had betrayed her husband. She hates her. As she reflects on the portrait, however, she recognizes an expression similar to her own when she is thinking about her husband, a look of vague sadness. As she considers her situation even further, she realizes that what she thought all along about the woman was false. Furthermore, her beliefs about her relationship with her husband are also false. He does not love her, and he did not love his first wife. The story ends abruptly as the woman realizes she has allowed her mistaken beliefs to trap her in an unhappy marriage.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in most of Pirandello's stories in this collection is of an omniscient narrator who can describe the thoughts and motivations of all the characters. In several stories, Pirandello focuses on one character and presents most of the action from that character's point of view, such as in "Think It Over, Giacomino!" where the story is told through the eyes of Professor Toti, and "Citrons From Sicily" which is told mainly from the point of view of Micuccio.

In "Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law," however, the narrator does not have insight into the minds of the characters and this is crucial to the theme of the story. One of the characters is apparently deluded and possibly insane, but nobody knows which one. Pirandello withholds his authorial omniscience and leaves the question open by taking an external point of view.

One story, "A Character's Tragedy," is told in the first person. It is a story of the author undergoing his own creative process where he sits and converses with the characters in his head before letting in their own stories.

Pirandello introduces a unique point of view in "A Prancing Horse," told through the characters of two horses who can communicate with one another. Fofo, the horse that does all the talking in the story, is ignorant of the true nature of his work for an undertaker but is observant and has made some conclusions based on them. Although Fofo's naive point of view creates some humorous interpretations of the human funerary traditions, Pirandello at the same time is inviting his reader to look at the ritual through objective eyes and perhaps smile at its absurdity.

Setting

Pirandello's stories are mostly set in Italy. Some take place in a rural setting while some are in larger towns and cities.

"Little Hut: A Sicilian Sketch," "The Fly," and "The Oil Jar" take place in an agricultural setting in the region of Sicily, Pirandello's home region. The characters are farmers and farm workers and the action is centered around the activities of agriculture . Sicily is also the setting for part of "Citrons From Sicily," as the home region of the main characters, although the main action of the story takes place in a grand house in a large Italian city, possibly Naples. In this story, the contrast between the two settings is an important element of the story.

"With Other Eyes," "A Voice," "It's Not To Be Taken Seriously," "Think It Over, Giacomino!" and "Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law" all take place in Italian towns among mannered middle and upper class characters. The action in these stories

centers largely on the interpersonal relationships within polite society, especially concerning marriage.

"A Character's Tragedy" outwardly takes place in the study of the author, but its actual setting is in his imagination.

"A Prancing Horse" takes place in the stables of an undertaker in an Italian town. The main characters are horses and the story is told from their point of view.

Language and Meaning

Pirandello originally wrote in Italian and this collection presents his stories in their original language along with translations into English. As with any translated text, differences in languages can result in meaning being changed slightly in translation as sayings and idiomatic phrases are interpreted by the translator. This collection includes occasional notes by the translator indicating where certain phrases are difficult to express accurately in translation.

Pirandello uses dialogue frequently to move the plots of his stories along. He describes the actions of his characters, but often the reasons for their actions is not explained until the characters begin to speak. His characters speak in natural conversations where sentences sometimes are unfinished and people interrupt one another. As in natural conversation, much is inferred and implied between the people speaking and is left unsaid. Pirandello leaves these gaps unfilled, letting the reader fill them in, as if eavesdropping on a conversation.

Pirandello's stories are short and his language is compact and energetic. He quickly lets the scene of the story unfold, providing sometimes just a sketch of the situation and surroundings, sometimes starting immediately with dialogue that gradually reveals the characters and settings. Despite their short length, the stories are rich in detail and the characters reach full proportions.

Structure

This collection contains eleven early stories by Pirandello presented in both the original Italian and in English translation. The stories include footnotes by the translator to indicate where idiomatic phrases have been interpreted and later revisions made by Pirandello himself. The collection includes a brief introduction by Stanley Appelbaum, the translator.

The stories are presented in chronological order based on when they were written by Pirandello, beginning with his earliest known story, "Little Hut," written in 1884, through "Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In Law" written in 1917. They are a small sample of the hundreds of stories that Pirandello produced in his career, as well as poems, novels and plays, some of which were based on the stories in this collection.

The stories are short, usually containing only a few scenes taking place over a short period of time. They contain very little introductory matter, often only a brief introduction of the characters. Some stories begin with the main action of the tale already underway. Pirandello often leaves the action partly unfinished at the end of his stories, leaving the reader to wonder about the final fate of the characters or to fill in the probable ending themselves in their own imagination.

Quotes

"The little hut, blackened, was pouring out smoke, pouring smoke and crackling, as if with its slow snapping and popping it wanted to greet the little girl, who, pale, horrified, was watching it with a fixed gaze" (Little Hut, pg. 9.)

"With face flushed, eyes bulging and mouth open, he stopped to gaze at her, dumbfounded. How could she ever...Like that! Her bosom bare, her shoulders bare, her arms bare...all ablaze with jewels and rich fabrics...He didn't see her, he no longer saw her as a living, real person in front of him...What was she saying to him?...Not her voice, nor her eyes, nor her laugh: nothing, nothing of hers did he recognize any more in that dream apparition" (Citrons From Sicily, pg. 25.)

"As she stepped away from the window, sighing, Anna noticed that her husband that morning had forgotten to rumple his bed, as he used to do each time, so that the servants couldn't tell that he hadn't slept in his room" (With Other Eyes, pg. 35.)

"And then it seemed to her that those kindly eyes, intense with passion and heartbreak, were pitying her in their turn, were condoling with her over that abandonment, that unrequited sacrifice, that love which remained locked up in her breast like a treasure in a casket to which he had the keys but would never use them, like a miser" (With Other Eyes, pg. 49.)

"She gathered up her possessions, and the day before he left the clinic, she departed without anyone knowing, in order to remain, at least in his memory, a voice, which perhaps, now that he had emerged from his darkness, he would seek on many lips, in vain" (A Voice, pg. 73.)

"While the doctor was speaking, Zaru had turned his face to the wall. No one knew it, but all the same death was still there; so small that it could hardly have been descried if anyone had intentionally looked for it. It was a fly, there on the wall, seemingly immobile; but, if you looked closely, now it was projecting its little mouth-tube and pumping, now it was rapidly cleaning its two thin front feet, rubbing them together, as if in contentment" (The Fly, pg. 87.)

"With his homely white hat, in his shirt sleeves, his chest bare, his face all red, dripping all over with sweat, he kept running back and forth, rolling his wolflike eyes and furiously rubbing his shaven cheeks, on which the heavy beard grew back again almost at the very moment it was shaved off" (The Oil Jar, pg. 95.)

"It's true then, all of a sudden, for no apparent reason ... exactly like a duck: he would burst out into certain fits of laughter that were like the quacking of a duck; and he would wallow around in that laughter just like a duck. Many, many people found in that very laughter the best proof that Perezetti was crazy" (It's Not To Be Taken Seriously, pg. 113.)

"Marrying with this single purpose, to benefit a poor young woman, he has loved his wife solely with a quasi-paternal affection. And he started loving her more paternally than ever from the time their child was born, the child by whom he would almost prefer to be called grandfather rather than daddy" (Think It Over, Giacomino!, pg. 129.)

"I persist in my old habit of giving audience every Sunday morning to the characters of my future short stories. Three hours, from seven to ten. I almost always find myself in bad company" (A Character's Tragedy, pg. 145.)

"You know where we are? We are in a shipping agency. There are all kinds. This one is called the funeral type" (A Prancing Horse, pg. 163.)

"But after all, can you imagine? Everybody may really go mad becuase they can't decide which of the two is the crazy one, that Mrs. Frola or that Mr. Ponza, her son-in-law. Things like this only happen in Valdana, an unlucky town that attracts every kind of eccentric outsider!" (Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, Her Son-In-Law, pg. 173.)

Topics for Discussion

Discuss how Pirandello depicts the institution of marriage in his short stories.

Compare the characters of Anna in "With Other Eyes" and Lydia in "A Voice." How are their situations similar? How are they different?

How is the subject of death presented in Pirandello's stories?

What role do women play in the stories in this collection? Are they sympathetic characters?

Discuss Pirandello's use of dialogue in his stories. What role does it play in advancing the plot?

In "A Character's Tragedy" Pirandello addresses the creative process. What does this story tell the reader about Pirandello as a writer?

How does Pirandello contrast the rural and urban settings and characters in his stories?

Pirandello deliberately leaves some information out of his stories. What effect does this have on the reader?