Six Characters in Search of an Author Study Guide

Six Characters in Search of an Author by Luigi Pirandello

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Introduction

Six Characters in Search of an Author created Luigi Pirandello's international reputation in the 1920s and is still the play by which he is most widely identified.

With originality that was startling to his contemporaries, Pirandello introduced a striking and compelling dramatic situation that initially baffled but eventually dazzled audiences and critics alike. In what begins as a realistic play he introduces six figures who make the extraordinary claim that they are the incomplete but independent products of an artist's imagination—"characters" the artist abandoned when he couldn't complete their story. These "characters" have arrived on the stage to find an author themselves, someone who will give them the fullness of literary life that their original author has denied them. Furthermore, these "characters" claim that they are more "real" than the actors who eventually want to portray them.

This concept was so startling it helped to incite a riot in the audience when the original production of the play was staged in Rome on May 10, 1921. Later that year, however, audiences and critics had assimilated the extraordinary idea and were enchanted by a remounted production in Milan. The play would then see successful productions in London and New York in February and October of 1922, in Paris in 1923, and in Berlin and Vienna in 1924. Pirandello's own theatre company, founded in 1925, then performed the play in Italian through out the major cities of Europe and North and South America. As a result of this assault on the theatre world, Pirandello became one of the most respected and influential dramatists in the world by the end of the 1920s, and today *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is considered one of the most influential plays in the history of world literature.

Author Biography

Luigi Pirandello was born in Sicily (the large island near the "toe" of Italy) on June 28, 1867, to a wealthy father who owned sulphur mines. Though his father wanted him to pursue a business career, Pirandello preferred academics and by 1891 had earned a Ph D. in linguistics, eventually spending many years of his life as a professor of Italian literature and language at a school for women in Rome.

In 1894 Pirandello's father arranged for his son to marry the daughter of his business partner, and Pirandello's resulting financial independence enabled him to live in Rome and pursue a writing career. Although he initially focused on poetry and short stones, Pirandello first achieved success as a writer in 1904 with the novel *The Late Mattia Pascal.* However, in 1903 floods in his father's sulphur mines had brought financial ruin to the Pirandellos and altered the playwright's life irrevocably. Pirandello's wife reacted to the catastrophe with an emotional breakdown from which she never recovered, spending the rest of her life in a condition of mental instability. His wife's condition made Pirandello's life miserable but also supplied him with the themes that would sustain the rest of his artistic career. Until he finally agreed to commit her to a mental institution in 1918, Pirandello was living with an insane wife who accused him of infidelity whenever he was out of her sight. This constant challenge to his sense of reality led Pirandello to investigate in his writings the question of personal identity and the relationship between madness and sanity and appearance and reality.

Pirandello became widely known in Italy as a poet, novelist, and short story writer, but around 1916, at the age of 49, he began writing more plays and when his famous themes appeared in his two dramatic masterpieces, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) and *Henry W* (1922), Pirandello immediately became an international success, enabling him to create a theatrical troupe that performed his plays around the world. By the end of his life in 1936 Pirandello had written eight volumes of poems, seven novels, 250 short stories, and 44 plays. But it was mainly because of his internationally famous plays that Pirandello was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1934, two years before his death from pneumonia in Rome on December 10, 1936. Pirandello has had a profound effect on twentieth-century drama and especially on what would be called the Theatre of the Absurd. Having given eloquent testimony to the issues of the relativity of truth, the instability of personal identity, and the nature of stage illusion, Pirandello remains one of the most influential dramatists of the twentieth century.

Plot Summary

Act I

When Six *Characters in Search of an Author* begins, the stage is being prepared for the daytime rehearsal of a play and several actors and actresses are milling about as the Producer enters and gets the rehearsal started. Suddenly the guard at the stage door enters and informs the Producer that six people have entered the theatre asking to see the person in charge. These six "characters" are a Father, a Mother, a 22-year-old Son, a Stepdaughter, an adolescent Boy, and young female Child. These "characters" claim that they are the incomplete creations of an author who couldn't finish the work for which they were conceived. They have come looking for someone who will take up their story and embody it in some way, helping them to complete their sense of themselves

The Producer and his fellow company members are initially incredulous, convinced that these "people" have escaped from a mental institution. But the Father, speaking for the other characters, argues that they are just as "real" as the people getting ready to rehearse their play. Fictional characters, he maintains, are more "alive" because they cannot die as long as the works they live in are experienced by others. The Father explains that he and the other "characters" want to achieve their full life by completing the story that now only exists in fragments in the author's brain.

The Stepdaughter and Father begin to tell their "story." The Father was married to the Mother but left her many years ago when she became attracted to a young assistant or secretary in his employ. Though the Father was angered by his wife's feelings and sent his young assistant away, he grew impatient with his wife's melancholy and sent their son away, to be raised and educated in the country. He eventually turned his wife out and she sought her lover, bearing three more children by him before the man died two months before the piay begins. These three children and the son from her marriage with the Father stand before the Producer and his theatrical troupe.

The Father's version of these events is variously contested both by the Mother and the Stepdaughter. The Father ciaims that he turned his wife out because of his concern for her and his natural son and that later he was genuinely concerned for his wife's new family. However, the Mother claims the Father forced her into the arms of the assistant because he was simply bored with her, and the Stepdaughter claims that the father stalked her sexually as she was growing up. They all agree that eventually the Father lost track of his stepchildren because the wife's lover took different jobs and moved repeatedly. When the lover died, the family fell into extreme financial need and the father happened upon his Stepdaughter in Madame Pace's brothel where the Stepdaughter was attempting to raise money to support the family.

Both the Father and Stepdaughter are anxious to play the scene in the brothel because both think the portrayal will demonstrate their version of that meeting. The daughter asserts that the father knew who she was and desired her incestuously while the father

claims he did not know her and immediately refused the sexual union when he reeogruzed her— even before the Mother discovered them in the room. After the incident, the Father took his wife and stepchildren home, where his natural son resented their implicit demands on his father.

The Producer and actors become intrigued by this story and are anxious to play it, putting aside their original skepticism about whether or not these "people" are "real." The Producer requests the "characters" to come to his office to work out a scenario.

Act II

The Producer's plan is for the "characters" to act out their story, starting with the scene in Madame Pace's brothel, while the prompter takes down their dialogue in shorthand for the actors of the company to study and imitate. The "characters" suggest that they can act out the story more authentically, but the Producer insists on artistic autonomy and overrules their objections. It is soon discovered that Madame Pace is not available for the scene, but the Father entices her into being by recreating the hat rack in her brothel and she appears—much to the consternation of the acting company, who immediately consider it some kind of trick.

When they begin the scene in the brothel, the Producer is initially dissatisfied with Madame Pace's performance and the Mother disrupts the scene with her consternation over what's being acted out, but finally the Producer is pleased with what he sees and asks the actors to take over for the Father and Stepdaughter. However, the Stepdaughter cannot help but laugh when she sees how the actors represent their scene in such a different manner from the way she sees it herself. But when the Father and Stepdaughter resume the acting themselves, the Producer censors the scene by not permitting the Stepdaughter to use a line about disrobing. He explains that such suggesliveness would create a riot in the audience. The Stepdaughter accuses the Producer of collaborating with the Father to present the scene in a way that flatters him and misrepresents the truth of what the Father had done. The Stepdaughter asserts that to present the drama accurately the suffering Mother must be excused. But as the Mother is explaining her torment, the final confrontation of the scene is actually played out, with the Mother entering the brothel to discover the Stepdaughter in the Father's arms. The Producer is pleased with the dramatic moment and declares that this will be the perfect time for the curtain to fall. A member of the stage crew, hearing this comment, mistakes it for an order and actually drops the curtain.

Act III

When the curtain rises again, the scene to be acted out is in the Father's house after the discovery at the brothel. The Producer is impatient with the suggestions given him by the "characters" about how to play the scene while the "characters" don't like references to stage "illusion," believing as they do that their lives are real. The Father points out to the Producer that the confidence the Producer has about the reality of his own personal

identity is an illusion as well, that the key elements of his personality and identity change constantly while those of the "characters" stay constant. The Producer decides that regardless of what the "characters" want to propose, the next action will be played with everyone in the garden.

After considerable squabbling between the "characters" as to how the scene should be portrayed and after the revelation that the Little Boy has a revolver in his pocket, the Son reluctantly begins telling the story of what he saw when he rushed out of his room and went out to the garden. Behind the tree he saw the Little Boy "standing there with a mad look in his eyes... looking into the fountain at his little sister, floating there, drowned." Suddenly, a shot rings out on stage and the Mother runs over toward the Boy and several actors join her, discover the Boy's body, and carry him off. It appears to some actors that this "character" is actually dead, but other actors cry that it's only make-believe. The exasperated Producer exclaims that he has lost an entire day of rehearsal and the play ends with a tableaux of the "characters," first in shadow with the Little Girl and Little Boy missing, and then in a trio of Father, Mother, and Son with the Stepdaughter laughing maniacally and exiting the theatre

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

This play by an Italian playwright, Luigi Pirandello, was written in 1921 and is set within that period. All the action occurs on the stage of a playhouse. There are no acts or scenes in this play. The two breaks that occur in the play are integrated into the play. The first break occurs when the Director and the chief Actor leave the stage. The second break occurs when the Technician mistakenly lets the curtain down.

There are two sets of actors in this play: the Actors who are rehearsing a play and the Six Characters who invade the rehearsal of the play and insist that they are characters that the Director must use in a play because of their compelling story.

The Actors in the Company are: The Director, Leading Lady, Leading Man, Second Actress, Ingenue, Juvenile Lead, Other actors and actresses, Stage Manager, Prompter, Property Man, Technician, Director's Secretary, Stage Door Man, Stage Crew.

The six characters without a script and who are searching for an author are: The Father, The Mother, The Son – age 22, The Stepdaughter – age 18, The Boy – age 14, The Little Girl – age 4. A seventh character, Madame Pace is also temporarily invoked.

The play opens with the Stage Manager booting a Technician off the stage so that the rehearsal for the second act of the play "The Game of Role Playing" can start. The director gives instructions to the Prompter and the Stage Manger and complains that the Leading Lady is late again. The Leading Lady shows up immediately afterwards and the rehearsal continues. The Leading Actor complains that he does not want to wear a Chef's hat. The rehearsal continues in this vein with the Actors bickering and complaining and the Director managing them along with coordinating the work of the Stage Manager and the Prompter.

In the middle of the rehearsal, The Stage Door Man announces the arrival of the Six Characters who are following him. The Characters appear to be very lost and look perplexed. Despite the Director's protest against this unwanted intrusion, The Characters aggressively interrupt the rehearsal and manage to tell their own story to the Director and to everyone else present in the playhouse.

The story of the six characters begins with the setup that The Father character and The Mother characters do not have a strong emotional connection. The Father hires a Secretary with whom the mother develops an intimate friendship that incites jealousy and frustration in the Father. Despite his feelings, the Father wants his wife to be happy and sends her away to be with the Secretary. The Father pays for the upkeep of the family but The Secretary is uncomfortable about The Father being nearby in the same city and moves the family away. The wife misunderstands The Father's motive and

thinks that he has sent her away with The Secretary to get rid of her. Their young son stays with the Father.

The Secretary and The Mother have three children, The Stepdaughter, The Boy and the Little Girl. The Father visits The Stepdaughter at her school but she does not know his identity. The Secretary dies and The Mother has to work as a seamstress to support her family. By a twist of fate, the woman who provides the sewing work, Madame Pace, hires The Mother because she wants to use The Stepdaughter as a prostitute. Madame Pace finds faults with The Mother's sewing work and obliges the daughter to pay for the supposedly bad workmanship by working as a prostitute.

Unaware of each other's identities, The Stepdaughter ends up in the arms of The Father, who is one of Madame Pace's clients. The Father, however, recognizes The Stepdaughter before anything happens between them. The Stepdaughter uses this new knowledge to extort money and favors from the Father. The Mother, The Stepdaughter and the rest of the family start to visit The Father. The Son, who has been raised by The Father and lives with him, resents this new family and he does not like then way that they behave. He deals with his feelings by avoiding any relationship with the family and thus avoiding any potential confrontations.

The Director is fascinated by the Six Characters' story, decides to put aside the play currently in rehearsal and wants to rehearse and write down the Six Characters' story by using the set of Actors currently on stage. He asks the Prompter to write down the dialogue as the Actors say them so they can later be used by him and the Actors to rehearse this new play.

The Father does not think it makes sense for the Actors to play the Characters because not only do the Actors do not resemble the characters, he does not see how any other person can represent the characters but the characters themselves. The Director and the Actors find it preposterous that The Father thinks that the characters should perform on stage as themselves as if they could act.

The Father and The Stepdaughter both protest when The Director assigns their roles to Actors. The characters do not think that the actors fit the personality of the characters. The Directors ignores them and continues with his attempt to recreate the characters' story so that it can be written down and rehearsed for a show. The Stepdaughter laughs hysterically at all attempts by the Lead Actress to play her role. The Father argues that the Lead Actor does not do justice to his character. Nonetheless, the rehearsal continues despite the Characters' protests.

The first scene that The Director wants to recreate is the scene where The Father and The Stepdaughter first met in the brothel. Upon The Father's insistence, the scene is created to look as authentic as possible. Drawn by the spirit of the scene, Madame Pace suddenly appears on the stage and shocks everyone. The Director and the Actors think that it is some type of 'hocus-pocus.' Madame Pace's voice is so low, however, that nobody can hear her. Finally, after lots of prompting from The Director, Madame Pace starts talking louder so that she can be heard. She talks in a unique language,

which is a hybrid of English and Spanish. The Mother character is upset by the presence of Madame Pace and wants her to go away. Madame Pace also does not want to perform in the presence of The Mother. When her protests are ignored, Madame Pace puts on her wig and leaves.

The Actors start to inhabit their roles and rehearse the first scene. The Prompter writes down the dialogue so that a script could be developed for the Actors' use. The Father and The Stepdaughter interrupt the Actors several times to make a correction in the Actor's portrayal of the character, in both the mannerisms and the dialogue. The characters make so many corrections that somewhere along the line the Actors are replaced by the Characters as they continue to tell their story, but this time they tell the story by acting it out rather than just telling. At one point, The Stepdaughter asks that The Mother leave the scene, as this would be too painful for both of them to watch. At this moment, The Mother expresses here constant torment in regards to her daughter's trade and in the daughter's eventual fate where she ends up in her father's arms. The Stepdaughter passionately continues with the recreation of the scene and The Father agrees with the authenticity of recreation. The Mother hollers in disgust.

The Director calls out "Curtain!" meaning that this where the act should end. The Technician, however, misunderstands The Director and literally lets down the curtain. When the curtain rises, the scene has been set for act two of the play. The previous set has been replaced by a small garden fountain. The Actors and The Characters are all on stage.

The Stepdaughter continues with her fervent retelling of the story and The Director has to cut her off so that the second act can be rehearsed. The Stepdaughter says that the garden scene is not sufficient since The Son needs to be shown as being locked up in the house. The Director patiently tells her that since this is a live stage, the illusion of the boy's presence will be created instead of having a literal set consisting of the house.

The Father is disturbed by the use of the word 'illusion' and he and The Director engage in a philosophical dialogue of reality and illusion. The Fathers says that whereas the play is only a 'game,' an illusory recreation of reality, for the Director and the Actors, the story is completely real for the characters. The conversation changes to a discussion of how a current reality can become an illusion in the future when a real person is able to understand that their past reality was simply an illusion in terms of what they understood to be true and the actual facts. For characters, however, their reality stays consistent.

The Father says that an author should allow characters to be themselves instead of trying to control them. The Director agrees with sentiment but tries to convince The Father of the need to mold reality into something that can be presented on stage because of the physical limitations of the stage.

The Stepdaughter interjects into the conversation between The Father and The Director and talks about her motivation as her character and The Father's motivation. The Director manages to route the conversation back to the rehearsal. The stage is set for the outdoor garden scene. The Boy is asked to hide behind the trees (this is a slight

alteration from him hiding inside the house). The Stepdaughter says that The Boy probably will not speak while The Son is nearby. Hearing this, the Son volunteers to leave but he is rooted to the scene, held there by some invisible force. He refuses, however, to take part in the scene and is willing to create a fictionalized dialogue between him and The Mother because, in reality, he leaves the room when The Mother approaches him.

As the scene continues, the Little Girl follows The Son out into the garden but drowns in the water fountain. As The Son attempts to save her, a gunshot is heard. The Boy has shot himself with a gun. He is dead. It is not a rehearsal but a fact. The character of the Little Boy is dead.

The Director, The Actors and all the others employed by the Acting Company leave. The characters are still on stage but The Stepdaughter runs down the stage laughing hysterically and disappears.

Analysis

Luigi Pirandello studied German philosophy and has been called a philosophical writer. This label seems very appropriate in the context of this play because throughout the play the concepts of reality and illusion are invoked and discussed. The play itself is structured as an intersection of reality - that of the rehearsing actors, with illusions - characters that form the basis of the actors' role.

The characters tell their story and the actors try to assume the role of the characters for retelling the story to a studio audience. This becomes problematic because the characters argue that the actors are misrepresenting the characters: the father disagrees with every interpretation attempted by the actor to play his role; the daughter laughs hysterically whenever her role is presented by one of the actors.

Pirandello, the playwright's voice, resonates in the dialogue of The Father. For example, there are philosophical points of consideration in The Father's dialogue when he says:

"I put the sense and value of things as they are inside me, whereas the man who hears them inevitably receives them in the sense and with the value they have for him, the sense and value of the world inside him? We think we understand each other but we never do."

The main theme that emerges is that whenever an actor takes on the task of playing the character, the characters no longer appear to be authentic because the actors imposes their own interpretation onto the character and this interpretation forces the original characters to be lost. Several subthemes emerge. One of the subthemes is that everyday reality is nothing more than an illusion because a person's reality is inconsistent and can change over time but the reality of a character is fixed in time. Another subtheme is: characters have a life of their own, and they cannot be controlled by the author once they are created. They have an identity that belongs to them rather than to the creator.

The ending of the play illustrates the philosophical themes that were discussed. The Boy is dead in reality since he was not an actor playing a character but the character himself. The story of his life is not a stage illusion but a reality. His actions are not controlled by The Director but by his own Character and by the demons of his own psyche rather than by a staged plot.

Albeit unintentional, this play appears to argue in favor of modern ubiquitous reality shows where real people are allowed to become characters in a pre-determined context. There are no authors involved in the telling of the story, at least not in defining the characters and the actions of the characters. The only defined elements are a loosely structured plot and manipulation of the events that might occur or not occur in the "characters'" manufactured life.

Characters

Amalia

See The Mother

The Director

See The Producer

The Father

The Father is the leading spokesperson for the six "characters " He is the biological father of the 22 year-old son he had with the Mother, and he is the stepfather of the three children the Mother had during her relationship with the Father's secretary. In his "Preface" to *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* Pirandello describes the Father as "a man of about fifty, in black coat, light trousers, his eyebrows drawn into a painful frown, and in his eyes an expression mortified yet obstinate." The Father is mortified by his stepdaughter's charge that he has felt incestuous feelings for her since she was a child, stalking her when she was a schoolgirl, and attempting to buy her in Madame Pace's brothel. The Father insists that his concern for his family has always been genuine and that he was surprised to discover his stepdaughter at Madame Pace's establishment. The Father is determined to have their story told. According to Pirandello, the Father and Stepdaughter are the "most eager to live," the "most fully conscious of being characters," and the "most intensely alive" as the two of them "naturally come forward and direct and drag along the almost dead weight of the others."

The Little Boy

The Little Boy is 14 years old and the eldest son of the Mother from her relationship with the Father's secretary. The Little Boy is dressed in mourning black, like his mother and two sisters, in memory of the death of his natural father. He is timid, frightened, and despondent because in his short stay in the Father's house following the incident in Madame Pace's brothel he was intimidated by the Father's natural son. His elder sister, the Stepdaughter, also disdains the Little Boy because of his action at the end of their story. The Little Boy does not speak because he is a relatively undeveloped character from the author's mind, and in the "Preface" Pirandello lumps the Little Boy with his younger sister as "no more than onlookers taking part by their presence merely." At the end of the story, the Little Boy will shoot himself with a revolver when he sees his little sister drowned in the fountain behind his stepfather's house.

The Little Girl

About four years old, the youngest daughter of the Mother from her relationship with the Father's secretary, the Little Girl is dressed in white, with a black sash around her waist. For the same reason as with her brother, the Little Girl does not speak, and she will drown at the end of the story presented by the "characters."

The Mother

The wife of the Father and the mother of all four children (the eldest son by the Father and the other three by the lover who has just died). She is dressed in black with a widow's crepe veil, under which is a waxlike face and sad eyes that she generally keeps downcast Her main goal is to reconcile with her 22-year-old "legitimate" son, to convince him that she did not leave km of her own volition. The Mother is deeply ashamed of the Father's experience with her eldest daughter in Madame Pace's brothel. According to Pirandello in the "Preface," the Mother, "entirely passive," stands out from all the others because "she is not aware of being a character... not even for a single moment, detached from her 'part.'" She "lives in a stream of feeling that never ceases, so that she cannot become conscious of her own life, that is to say, of her being a character."

Other actors, actresses, and company members

The other members of the Producer's company are proud of their craft and initially contemptuous of the six "characters" but then become quite intrigued by their story and are anxious to portray it.

Madame Pace

The owner of the dress shop that doubles as a brothel, Madame Pace is old and fat and is dressed garishly and ludicrously in silk, wearing an outlandish wig and too much makeup. She speaks with a thick Spanish accent and is mysteriously summoned by the Father when she appears to be missing from the brothel scene between the Father and Stepdaughter. She is, essentially, the "seventh" of the "characters." In the "Preface" Pirandello points out that as a creation of the moment Madame Pace is an example of Pirandello's "imagination in the act of creating."

The Producer

The Producer (or Director or Stage Manager, depending on the text and translation that is used) is the main voice for the theatrical company that is attempting an afternoon rehearsal for their current production when the six "characters" enter and request their own play to be done instead. The Producer initially attempts to dismiss these "people"

as lunatics, intent on getting his own work done. Gradually, however, he becomes intrigued by the content of their story and comes to accept their "reality" without further questioning because he sees in their story the potential for a commercial success. An efficient and even violently gruff man, the Producer is also patient, flexible, and courageous, willing to go forward without a great deal of conventional understanding of where things are taking him. He is, however, comically inflexible in that he insists on modifying what the "characters" give him to fit the stage conventions to which he is accustomed.

Rosetta

See The Little Girl

The Son

The only biological child of both the Mother and Father, this tall 22- year-old man was separated from his mother at the age of two and was raised and educated in the country. When he finally returned to his father, the Son was distant and is now contemptuous of his father and hostile toward his adopted family. Pirandello describes him as one "who stood apart from the others, seemingly locked within himself, as though holding the rest in utter scorn."

The Stage Manager

See The Producer

The Stepdaughter

The Stepdaughter is 18 years old and the eldest child from the Mother's relationship with the Father's secretary. After her natural father died, the Stepdaughter was forced into Madame Pace's brothel in order to help the family survive, and it was at the brothel that she encountered her stepfather. Pirandello describes her as "pert" and "bold" and as one who "moved about in a constant flutter of disdainful biting merriment at the expense of the older man [the Father]." Desiring vengeance on the Father, the Stepdaughter is elegant, vibrant, beautiful, but also angry. She, too, is dressed in mourning black for her natural father, but shortly after she is introduced to the Producer and his company, she dances and sings a lively and suggestive song. The Stepdaughter dislikes the 22-year-old son because of his condescending attitude toward her and her "illegitimate" siblings, and she is also contemptuous of her 14 year-old brother because he permitted the Little Girl to drown and then "stupidly" shot himself. She is, however, tender toward her four-year-old sister. The Stepdaughter and the Father are the author's two most developed characters and thus dominate the play.

Themes

Reality and Illusion

In the stage directions at the beginning of Act I of *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* Pirandello directs that as the audience enters the theatre the curtain should be up and the stage bare and in darkness, as it would be in the middle of the day, "so that from the beginning the audience will have the feeling of being present, not at a performance of a properly rehearsed play, but at a performance of a play that happens spontaneously." The set, then, is designed to blur the distinction between stage illusion and real life, making the play seem more realistic, but Pirandello has no intention of writing a realistic play. In fact, he ultimately wants to call attention as much as possible to the arbitrariness of this theatrical illusion and to challenge the audience's comfortable faith in their ability to discern reality both in and outside the theatre. Pirandello is concerned from the outset with the relationship between what people take for reality and what turns out to be illusion.

The audience has entered the theatre prepared to see an illusion of real life and to "willingly suspend their disbelief' in order to enjoy and profit from the fiction. In this way, human beings have long accustomed themselves to the illusion of reality on a stage, but in becoming so accustomed they have taken stage illusion for granted and in life they often take illusion for reality without realizing it Furthermore, in life, as on stage, the arbitrariness of what is taken for reality is so pervasive as to bring into question one's very ability to distinguish at all between what is real and what is not.

When the action of the play officially begins, the audience knows they are watching actors pretending to be actors pretending to be characters in a rehearsal, but nothing can prepare an audience for the suspension of disbelief they are asked to make when the six "characters" arrive and claim that they are "real." The audience "knows" these are simply more actors, but the claim these "characters" make is so strange as to be compelling. Even before there are words on a page (not to mention rehearsals, actors, or a performance) these "characters" claim to have sprung to life merely because their author was thinking about them; they claim to have wrested themselves from his control and are seeking out these thespians to find a fuller expression of who they are. These claims understandably strain the credulity of the Producer and the members of his company, who perhaps speak for the audience when they say, "is this some kind of joke?" and "it's no use, I don't understand any more."

The "characters" insist to the end that they are "real" even though the audience "knows" they are actors, and this conflict between what is known and what is passed off as real is intensified by the actors' responses to crucial moments in the play In Act I, for example, the Stepdaughter is summarizing the "story" of these "characters" when the Mother faints with shame and the actors exclaim, "is it real? Has she really fainted?" It is a question the audience would like to dismiss easily—"knowing" that everyone on stage is an actor—but this question is raised again even more dramatically at the end of the

play when a real-sounding shot is fired and the Mother runs in the direction of her child with a genuine cry of terror. The actors crowd around "in general confusion," and the Producer moves to the middle of the group, asking the question that the audience, in spite of its certainty, is tempted to ask, "is he really wounded? Really wounded?" An actress says, "he's dead! The poor boy! He's dead! What a terrible thing!" and an actor responds, "What do you mean, dead! It's all make-believe. It's a sham! He's not dead. Don't you believe it" A chorus of actor voices expresses the duality that Pirandello refuses to resolve: "Make-believe? It's real! Real! He's dead!" says one, and "No, he isn't. He's pretending! It's all make-believe" says another. The Father, of course, assures everyone that "it's reality!" and the Producer expresses a simple refusal to decide: "Make believe?! Reality" Oh, go to hell the lot of you! Lights! Lights! Lights!"

Permanence and the Concept of Self

Pirandello was convinced that in real life much is taken for real which should not be. He had only to think of his insane wife's decades of groundless accusations to realize that what the mind takes to be true is often outrageously false. But if illusions are repeated often enough, believed long enough, and enough people take them to be real, illusions develop a compelling reality in the culture at large. Such, for example, is the commonly held belief in the permanence of a personal identity.

Most people believe that they exist as a relatively stable personality, that they are basically the same people throughout their lives. But Pirandello and the Father directly challenge this belief when the Father asks the Producer in Act III "do you really know who you are?" The Producer blubbers, "what? Who I am? I am me!" But the Father undermines this serf-assurance by pointing out that on any particular day the Producer does not see himself in the same way he saw himself at another time in the past. All people can remember ideas that they don't have any more, illusions they once fervently believed in, or simply things that look different now from the way they once appeared to be. The Father leads the Producer to admit that "all these realities of today are going to seem tomorrow as if they had been an illusion," that "perhaps you ought to distrust your own sense of reality." Trapped by these observations, the Producer cries, "but everybody knows that [his reality] can change, don't they? It's always changing! Just like everybody else's!"

This question of a permanent personal identify is crucial to the Father because the Stepdaughter is trying to characterize him as a lecherous and even incestuous man. The Father knows that "we all, you see, think of ourselves as one single person: but it's not true: each of us is several different people, and all these people live inside us. With one person we seem like this and with another we seem very different But we always have the illusion of being the same person for everybody and of always being the same person in everything we do. But it's not true! It's not true!" The psychological and physiological needs that led the Father to the brothel were a part of him he does not value; but other people, like his stepdaughter and former wife, choose to define him by this weak moment "We realise then, [he says] that every part of us was not involved in what we'd been doing and that it would be a dreadful injustice of other people to judge

us only by this one action as we dangle there, hanging in chains, fixed for all eternity, as if the whole of one's personality were summed up in that single, interrupted action." The Father regrets the incident at Madame Pace's brothel but asserts that a human being cannot be defined as a consistent personal identity. The reality is that a human being (from the real world at least) changes so drastically from day to day that he cannot be said to be the same person at any time in his life. A human being is perhaps different hour by hour and may end up being 100,000 essentially different people before his life has ended.

Style

The Play Within the Play

The most obvious device that Pirandello uses to convey his themes is to portray the action as a play within a play. The initial play within a play is relatively easy for the audience to handle—Pirandello's own *Rules of'the Game* is being performed in rehearsal by a troupe of actors. Then the "characters" enter and they seem to embody a completely different play within the play. Furthermore, they insist on acting out the story that have brought to the rehearsal, which is done twice, once by themselves and again by the actors. And once the audience has more or less assimilated all of this, a seventh character, Madame Pace, is created on the spot, as if out of thm air. The effect is similar to that presented with nesting boxes, one inside another and another inside that until the audience gets so far away from their easy faith in their ability to distinguish between reality and illusion that they might throw up their hands like the Producer and simply say, "Make believe?! Reality?' Oh, go to hell the lot of you! Lights! Lights! Lights!"

Throughout the production of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* the audience in fact experiences the difficulty of distinguishing between reality and illusion that constitutes Pirandello's main theme. And the Producer's company of actors in many ways speaks for the audience throughout— from the initial, derisive incredulity at the entrance of the "characters" to the ambivalent response at the end of the play. And a crucial moment in this process comes early in Act I, after the derisive laughter of the actors has died down somewhat, and the Father explains that "we want to live, sir ... only for a few moments —in you." In response, a young actor says, pointing to the Stepdaughter, "I don't mind... so long as I get her." This comically libidinous response is ignored by everyone on stage, but it represents an important turning point in the minds of the actors in the company and in the minds of the audience as well. It embodies a playful, tentative acceptance of the illusion, a making do with what's available, an abandonment to the situation as it presents itself. In short, it represents the response to the mystery of life to which human beings obsessed with absolute certainty are ultimately reduced. One must simply get on with life and make the best of it, accepting the hopelessness of trying to draw fine distinctions between what is real and what is not.

Comedy

A less obvious device in the play is Pirandello's use of laughter to lighten the audience's confrontation with this frustrating collision of reality and illusion. The play is not easily seen as humorous on the page, but in production the humor can be rich and is certainly essential in order to reassure the audience that their inability to easily distinguish between reality and illusion is an inevitable but ultimately comic part of human existence.

The humor is most obvious in the frustrations of the acting troupe. Serious but self-important, they are comical in their inability to deal with anything they are too inflexible to understand. The Producer is admirable in the way he finally bends to the unusual situation and vaguely sees the emotional intensity that the "characters" have brought to him. But he is ultimately comical because he is hopelessly obsessed with stage conventions. He insists on trying to. "fit" this phenomenon within the boundaries of what he's most familiar with and his efforts are comically doomed In the Edward Storer translation of Pirandello's original text, the play ends with the Producer throwing up his hands and saying "never in my life has such a thing happened to me." What often makes comedy rich is witnessing human beings forced into being resilient under the common, existential circumstance of confronting the ultimate mystery of the universe.

But the play also displays a grim kind of humor in the desperation of the "characters," who stumble across this rehearsal looking for an "author" and end up settling for a director with decidedly commercial tastes. The Producer is not an author who can complete their story but someone who depends on a script that's finished. The best that he can do is to exemplify the incompleteness the "characters" have brought him; the worst he can do is to create more barriers to their sense of an accurate portrayal of then story, which he what he most comically does. The Father and Stepdaughter laugh when the actors portray them so differently from the way they see themselves, but the joke is ultimately on them.

At the very beginning of the play, the Producer is complaining of the obscurity of Pirandello's *Rules of the Game.* He is satirically instructing his leading actor that he must "be symbolic of the shells of the eggs you are beating." It is a very funny moment, given the actors' and Producer's frustration, as well as Pirandello's playful self-denigration. But it is also a moment filled with rich comic ambiguity because the Producer's dismissive explanation is quite seriously what Pirandello's play is all about: "[the eggs] are symbolic of the empty form of reason, without its content, blind instinct! You are reason and your wife is instinct: you are playing a game where you have been given parts and in which you are not just yourself but the puppet of yourself. Do you see? ... Neither do I! Come on, let's get going; you wait till you see the end! You haven't seen anything yet!"

Historical Context

Surrealism

Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was a watershed in the history of drama because its form and content were so revolutionary. And to some extent Pirandello's play relates to a more systematic artistic revolution in the 1920s—Surrealism. As C.W.E. Bigsby has said, Surrealism "is essentially concerned with liberating the imagination and with expanding the definition of reality."

The Surrealists insisted that by freeing the mind from the limiting controls of rationality, logic, consciousness, or aesthetic conventions, an artist could reach a higher reality that would include the fantastic and the marvelous—qualities that had generally been considered antithetical to realism. Coined by French poet Guillaume Apollinaire and championed by French poet Andre Breton, the term was described in Breton's famous 1924 *Manifesto on Surrealism* as a resolution of two states of mind— dream and reality. Joined together, these two states of mind made a sort of absolute or snr-reality. When the movement made inroads in England, an attempt was made to substitute the phrase "superreality" but the alternate terminology never caught on.

Earlier movements like Cubism and Dada had prepared the way for the liberating spirit of Surrealism, and the general result of this liberation was a challenge to the dominance of the realistic movement, which had its roots in the 19th century and which still survives today as a very powerful standard in the popular arts. But the "avant-garde," of which Pirandello is now taken to be an important part, has always distrusted excessively powerful traditions and has continually sought to enlarge the scope of artistic possibilities.

In his book *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature,* art historian Wylie Sypher observed what he called a "cubist drama" in *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* claiming that "Pirandello 'destroys' drama much as the cubists destroyed conventional things. He will not accept as authentic 'real' people or the cliche of the theatre any more than the cubist accepts as authentic the 'real' object [or] the cliche of deep perspective." A more thorough discussion of Pirandello's affinity with the Surrealist movement comes from Anna Balakian, who recognized that "an affinity has often been seen between the theatre of Pirandello and the surrealist mode because both adhere to such notions as the 'absurd,' the unconventional, the iconoclastic, and the shocking to stir the receivers of the created work." But in examining closely the elements of the surrealist manifestos and Pirandello's plays, Balakian concluded that "Pirandello and the surrealists shared a moment in the history of the arts but followed parallel rather than converging paths in their spectacular irreverence for the traditional."

Italian Fascism

In 1921, as *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was creating an international celebrity of Pirandello, the Italian statesman Benito Mussolini was consolidating his power and rising toward the position he would hold through World War II as the fascist leader of Italy. An Italian nationalist, revolutionary, and socialist from his early years, Mussolini founded his own fascist party in 1919. Italy was suffering social upheaval as a result of World War I and Mussolini capitalized on the situation to raise support for armed fascist squads that attacked Mussolini's political opponents and killed hundreds of people. On May 15, 1921, five days after *Six Characters in Search of an Author* premiered in Rome, Mussolini and 35 other Fascists were elected to the Italian parliament and began their struggle for power from within the governmental structure. Already known to his followers as *il duce* (the leader),

Mussolini organized squads of armed men at a Fascists' convention in Naples in October of 1922 and began his famous "march on Rome." Taking over the Italian government from his position as Prime Minister, Mussolini gradually consolidated his power and became virtual dictator by January of 1925.

Pirandello's connection with Mussolim and Italian Fascism is a complex and controversial part of Pirandello's life that is still being debated today. The connection with his art is roundabout but equally complex and controversial. In October of 1922, as Mussolini and his Blackshirts were marching on Rome, Pirandello's second masterpiece, *Henry IV,* was consolidating his rise to international recognition. Then, on June 10, 1924, Mussolini's men murdered a leading Socialist member of the Italian parliament named Giacomo Matteotti, arousing considerable public uneasiness and controversy. In September of 1924, Pirandello, now an international celebrity and an Italian literary hero, demonstrated his support of Mussolini by giving the fascist newspaper, *L'Impero,* a copy of a letter to Mussolini asking to join the Fascist party. Scholars still debate Pirandello's motives and the sincerity of his political commitment to Fascism, but the most significant ramification for the history of drama is that in the same year Pirandello and a group of his colleagues founded the Italian Arts Theatre company and Mussolini's political power helped Pirandello gain financial support for a theatre based in Rome. The company's first production was in May in Milan. As the company flourished Pirandello met actress Marta Abba, for whom most of his later plays were written, and his troupe began touring extensively throughout Italy, Europe, and North and South America. Thus, it was indirectly through Pirandello's involvement with Italian Fascism that his plays became so thoroughly disseminated around the world. Pirandello's theatre company collapsed in 1928 because of financial problems, but by that time his international reputation and dramatic impact were well-established.

Critical Overview

The first production of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* at the Teatro Valle in Rome on May 10, 1921, astonished its unsuspecting audience. As Gaspare Giudice reported in his biography of Pirandello, "things started to go badly from the first, when the spectators came into the theatre and realized that the curtain was raised and that there was no scenery." Some spectators considered this "gratuitous exhibitionism," especially as it was yoked with stagehands and actors milling about as if they were not really in a play. The arrival of the "characters" was even more "extraordinary" and "all this was enough to infuriate anyone who had gone to the theatre to spend a pleasant evening. The first catcalls were followed by shouts of disapproval, and, when the opponents of the play realized that they were in the majority, they started to shout in chorus, 'ma-ni-co-mio' ('madhouse') or 'bu-ffo-ne' ('buffoon')." The production had its supporters, but their defense of Pirandello's play created even more confusion, and the audience members, actors, and critics ended up exchanging blows that even spread out into the street and into a general riot after the play had ended.

Cooler heads ultimately prevailed, led perhaps by the review the next day by Adriano Tilgher, who would later become one of the most important and influential critics of Pirandello's work. Tilgher pronounced that the production was "a success imposed by a minority on a bewildered, confused public who were basically trying hard to understand. " Tilgher concluded that "from today, we can say-that Pirandello is most certainly among the leading creators of a new spiritual environment, one of the most deserving precursors of tomorrow's genius if tomorrow ever comes."

A few months later the production was remounted in Milan and because of the intervening publication of the text, audience and critics were prepared for the play's radical innovations of style and theme. Over the next three years, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was produced successfully all over the world.

An especially important production of the play directed by Georges Pitoeff was mounted in Paris on April 10,1923. The production had, according to Thomas Bishop, "the effect of an earthquake." Most famous for Pitoeff s ingenious device of bringing the characters down onto the stage in an elevator, the production created "characters" who were deemed "supra-terrestrial," and Germane Bree followed the famous French dramatist Jean Anouilh in saying that because of the influence that Pirandello had on generations of French dramatists "the first performance of Pirandello in Paris still stands out as one of the most significant dates in the annals of the contemporary French stage."

Another very important production of the play occurred in Berlin in December, 1924. Directed by the legendary Max Reinhardt, the characters were on stage from the beginning of the play but hidden from the audience until, as Olga Ragusa described it, "a violet light made them appear out of the darkness like 'apparitions' or ghosts." The production was said in a review by Rudolph Pechel to have fully realized "the magnitude and the possibilities of [Pirandello's] theme." According to Pechel, "it was Max Reinhardt rather than Pirandello who was the poet of this performance" because "Reinhardt felt

the potential of this piece and offered a master production of his art in which the audience became fully aware of all the horror of this gloomy world." According to Pechel, the "characters" were "like departed souls in Hades yearning for life-giving blood."

In 1925 Pirandello's own theatre company took the play to London as part of its world tour and the play was performed in Italian because the British censors had objected to the play's references to incest. A reviewer for the London *Times* maintained that in Italian "the tragic personages are more tragic, the squalid personages more squalid, and the comic remnant more emphatically and volubly comic" He called it "a new theatrical amusement For it is certainly amusing to see characters disintegrated, as it were, on the stage before you, wondering how much of them is illusion and how much reality, and setting you pondering over these perplexing problems while enjoying at the same time the orthodox dramatic thrill." A reviewer for the *Manchester Guardian* simply proclaimed the production "a dramatized version of a first-year course upon appearance and reality" in which "the author's strength lies not in any philosophical brilliance but in the practical cunning whereby he as made metaphysics actable."

Between 1922 and 1927 productions of the play appeared throughout Europe, the United States, and even in Argentina and Japan, testing directors, audiences, and critics around the world. As a result of the many rich responses to his work, Pirandello fashioned a significantly revised version of his play in 1925 in which he suggested the use of masks for the "characters" and appended his famous "Preface" that reveals the genesis of the work and Pirandello's concept of its thematic elements. Today, the "Preface" remains an almost integral part of the play itself.

Important productions around the world continued throughout the decades following Pirandello's death, including a New York production in October, 1955, adapted and directed by Tyrone Guthrie and a three-act opera version that appeared in New York in 1959 with a libretto by Dems Johnston and a score by Hugo Weisgall As Antonio Ilhano reported, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author '* 'was like a bombshell that blew out the last and weary residues of the old realistic drama" and today it is widely considered one of the most important and influential plays in the history of twentieth-century drama.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Nienhuis is a Ph.D. specializing in modern and contemporary drama. In this essay he discusses the role that uncertainty plays in Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author.

Pirandellian themes like the relativity of truth, the constantly changing nature of personal identity, or the difficulty of distinguishing between reality and illusion or between sanity and madness all have a common thread—they all point to uncertainty as a significant part of human experience. As John Gassner has observed, Pirandello was consistently "expressing a conviction that nothing in life is certain except its uncertainty."

In *Six Characters in Search of an Author* uncertainty begins with the introduction of the "characters." The claim they make about their reality is obviously counter to fact (they are, of course, actors), but Pirandello makes their case so convincing that it is ultimately difficult for the audience to feel certain about what they know to be true. It is interesting to see how Pirandello does this.

First of all, Pirandello has encouraged the audience to adopt their customary willingness to suspend disbelief and accept the stage illusion as reality. As one-dimensional as the members of the theatrical troupe ultimately appear to be, the play seems to begin in a spirit of ultra-realism—with a stage hand nailing boards together (how mundane is the sound of a hammer meeting a nail), with a set that appears unprepared for a formal "show," and with actors improvising their lines so as to sound as authentic as possible. Therefore, if the audience has taken these initial characters for real, what must they do with a group that claims they are even more real than the actors in the Producer's troupe? And the "characters" persist in their claim with such a vehemence that their claim becomes compelling.

Contemporary jurisprudence demonstrates a similar phenomenon. No matter how certain a defendant's guilty conduct seems to be, if the person charged with a crime persists in claiming innocence an air of uncertainty eventually envelops the proceedings and significant numbers believe the defendant innocent.

In this way, the Mother is especially difficult for the audience to dismiss as "merely an actress" because she is so simple and direct in her assumption of "'reality." As Pirandello says in his "Preface," the Mother "never doubts for a moment that she is already alive, nor does it ever occur to her to inquire in what respect and why she is alive. ... she lives in a stream of feeling that never ceases." And perhaps her most powerful moment comes near the end of Act II when the Producer verbalizes a very common sense approach to her suffering. The Producer is willing to grant the Mother some kind of reality but points out that if her story has happened already she should not be surprised and distraught by its reoccurrence. But the Mother says, "No! It's happening now, as well: it's happening all the time. I'm not acting my suffering! Can't you understand that? I'm alive and here now but I can never forget that terrible moment of agony, that repeats itself endlessly and vividly in my mind." In spite of the collision

with common sense that this assertion entails, intensity like this makes the fiction so compelling that the audience is forced to question its own certainty, if only subconsciously and only in a flashing moment. The genius of Pirandello is that he calls attention to the illusion and at the same time helps to perpetuate it, thereby demonstrating the awesome power that illusion has over the human mind and the inevitable state of uncertainty that must result.

An even more obvious contribution to the audience's sense of uncertainty is that Pirandello allows different versions of events to be presented but never suggests which might be more near the 'truth." Under what circumstances, for instance, did the Mother leave with the Father's secretary? Did she leave of her own accord? Or was she forced to leave? What were the Father's feelings for his stepdaughter while the young girl was growing up? What actually happened in the brothel? The Father, Mother, and Stepdaughter all answer these questions differently but there is no adjudication. In fact, the resolution of the different versions is simply ignored and becomes moot as the play ends in the melodramatic drowning and suicide. And Pirandello makes clear that the resolution would be impossible anyway because uncertainty is at the heart of language itself. In Act I the Father says, "we all have a world of things inside ourselves and each one of us has his own private world. How can we understand each other if the words I use have the sense and the value that I expect them to have, but whoever is listening to me inevitably thinks that those same words have a different sense and value, because of the private world he has inside himself too. We think we understand each other; but we never do. Look! All my pity, all my compassion for xthis woman *{Pointing to the Mother)* she sees as ferocious cruelty."

After one examines how Pirandello puts his audience into this condition of uncertainty, the next question is why does he choose to do this? In part, he creates uncertainty in his audience because he believes uncertainty is the natural condition that human beings must learn to live with. In his famous essay, "On Humor" (1908), Pirandello summed up this attitude toward human existence, asserting that "all phenomena either are illusory or their reason escapes us inexplicably. Our knowledge of the world and of ourselves refuses to be given the objective value which we usually attempt to attribute to it. Reality is a continuously illusory construction." Consequently, the "humorist," or artist, sees that "the feeling of incongruity, of not knowing any more which side to take," is the feeling he or she must create in the audience. Illusions are the human attempt to create certainty where it doesn't really exist, and all fall prey to the temptation. Pirandello's art simply puts many of mankind's most common illusions on center stage to demonstrate their flimsy inadequacy and encourages the audience to recognize these illusions for what they are. Pirandello describes life as "a continuous flow," with logic, reason, abstractions, ideals, and concepts acting as illusory constructs that attempt to fix this flux into a reality that can be stabilized and more certainly known. But Pirandello concludes that "man doesn't have any absolute idea or knowledge of life, but only a variable feeling changing with the times, conditions, and luck."

Umberto Mariani has asserted that the typical character in a Pirandellian work of art "has lost the feeling of comforting stability" and chafes under the "tragic knowledge that he cannot achieve what he seeks and needs; a universe of certainties, an absolute that

would allow him to affirm himself." Robert Brustein observed that "[For Pirandello] objective reality has become virtually inaccessible, and all one can be sure of is the illusion-making faculty of the subjective mind." Brustein noted that "man is occasionally aware of the illusionary nature of his concepts; but to be human is to desire form; anything formless fills man with dread and uncertainty." Aureliu Weiss has summarized all of this most abruptly, asserting that Pirandello simply "derided human certainty and denounced the fragility of the truth." But Weiss has also brought this discussion of content back around to its ultimate focus on form. When everything seems uncertain, "such a concept cannot be expressed through the traditional forms. It needs its own style.... What was needed to succeed in such an enterprise... was to strike an initial blow strong enough to shatter our certainty ... to create an atmosphere where reality would become less concrete and where illusion could play freely and gently worm its way into the audience's consciousness. No longer sure of anything, the spectator would accept as normal the oscillation between reality and illusion."

But Pirandello's obsession with uncertainty can also be accounted for by a basic understanding of the intellectual history of the Western world— which has witnessed a gradual erosion of certitude, from a relatively high degree of certainty in the Medieval world to the relatively high degree of uncertainty in the 20th century. Propelled, ironically, by the discoveries of science, this process has been developing for hundreds of years and has simply culminated in the implications of Darwin, Freud, and Einstein, among others. Anthony Caputi, in his *Pirandello and the Crisis of Modern Consciousness,* asserted that "Pirandello began where Matthew Arnold began, with the conviction that the world was in disarray, that the system of beliefs that had provided coherence and continuity for centuries had broken down, and that the new sciences could yield little more than organized barbarism." What Caputi called "the crisis of modern consciousness" is "that stage in which not just traditional ways of deriving coherence and value were lost but the capacity for deriving alternative coherences by way of the reason has been undermined as the reason itself has been subverted as an authority. As the idea gained ground that every mind is a relative instrument, subject not to the grand program for coherence provided by Christianity or, for that matter, by any other traditional orthodoxy, but subject to its own conditions, a new variability and a new insecurity were born. Not only did men and women not look to external sources for guides to value, they no longer looked to reason."

As Renato Poggioli put it, "logic, or reason, according to the classics of philosophy, had always had a universal value, equally valid for each *individual of the human race."* But "Pirandello does not believe in reason as an absolute and transcendent value." Reason for Pirandello is simply "a practical activity," a tool the mind uses as it needs to create and defend its illusions. Pirandello was the dramatist of consciousness, examining how the human mind apprehended the world, and he decided that humans could be certain of nothing that was produced from such a variety of mental platforms. The old standards of "reason" and "logic," thought to be constant guides implanted by God in the minds of all human beings, were dead, to be replaced by the disconcerting phenomenon of relativism. In a process of questioning that began most vigorously in the Renaissance, all that had been taken as certain for centuries was gradually re-examined until finally the process of consciousness itself fell under scrutiny and humans discovered that the

workings of the mind delivered more tricks than dependable conclusions. As Caputi finally put it, Pirandello and "most of the artists and writers of the [twentieth] century" saw the human mind as "a frail, uncertain faculty capable of little more than self-deception."

John Gassner concluded that Pirandello's "work remains a monument to the questioning and self-tormenting human intellect which is at war... with its own limitations. Once the intellect has conquered problem after problem without solving the greatest question of all—namely, whether it is real itself rather than illusory—it reaches an impasse. Pirandello is the poet of that impasse. He is also the culmination of centuries of intellectual progress which have failed to make life basically more reasonable or satisfactory. He ends with a question mark." And Robert Brustein concluded by saying that "after Pirandello, no dramatist has been able to write with quite the same certainty as before."

Source: Teny R.Nienhuis, for *Dmmafor Students,* Gale, 1998

Critical Essay #2

In this excerpt, Bassnet provides an overview of the play.

This is the play that established Pirandello's international reputation as a playwright. Already well-known in Italy as a prose writer, critic, and poet, he had begun to write for the theatre shortly before World War I, increasing his output rapidly after 1918. *Six Characters* caused a scandal when it first appeared, and the first night ended with a riot, due to the taboo subject-matter of the play: incestuous desire.

Six Characters is the first of three plays known as the "theatre-in-the-theatre" biology, because the action involves the attempted staging of a play within another play. A rehearsal of a Pirandello play is supposedly taking place in an Italian theatre, but is interrupted by the arrival of six people, who claim to be characters looking for a playwright to tell their story. That story then gradually unfolds, told principally by the Father and the Stepdaughter. At some point in the past, the Father and the Mother have separated, and the Mother has gone to live with another man by whom she has had children. She is accompanied on stage by the Son and by two smaller children, the Boy and the Little Girl. Relations between the characters are strained: the Stepdaughter detests the Son and the Boy, the Son has a grudge against the Mother, and the Father is an outsider altogether. The Father claims to have always loved the Mother and her children, but the Stepdaughter depicts him as a debauched elderly man who used to spy on her when she was a child.

In the second act, the Characters summon up a seventh person, Madame Pace, the owner of a seedy milliner's shop that serves as a brothel, where the Stepdaughter was working and where the Father met her when he came looking for a girl. The incestuous encounter between the Father and the Stepdaughter is interrupted by the Mother's cry. In the last act, the Mother tries to win over her sullen, resentful Son, but while her attention is distracted, the Little Girl drowns in a fountain and the Boy shoots himself The Stepdaughter runs away and the Father, Mother, and Son are left, prisoners of their own despair. The boundary between fiction and reality has completely broken down, the Director and the other Actors are left bewildered by what has happened, and the play ends.

Pirandello uses ingenious devices to mark the passage from one act to another, and manages to preserve the shape of the well-made play while simultaneously deconstructing it as a form. The text of the play was modified considerably after the famous Pitoeff production in 1923, when the appearance of the Six Characters, one of the great moments of theatre magic, was heightened by having them arrive on stage in a huge elevator. In the preface that he added to the second version of the play, Pirandello explains the function of the Characters in relation to his own creative process. He was constantly concerned with the problem of the vital, moving process that constitutes life, in contrast to the rigid fixity of art, and *Six Characters* explores that duality. The Characters are fixed in their tragic story, unmovably, for as Pirandello says, they are created out of "unvarying fantasy." Ironically, although the Characters are

fictitious, Pirandello argues that they appear more real than the Actors with their "changeable naturalness." Art, for Pirandello, can seem more real than life, and this is the paradox he seeks to expose.

What Pirandello does in *Six Characters* is to strip the play down to its bones, offering the audience the basic tools—the Actors, the Characters, a story—but leaving the final interpretation open. The play thus becomes an investigation of the processes of artistic creation; it is a play about playing that uses the device of play-making as its central, structural principle.

After the initial shock at the subject-matter of the play, *Six Characters* became a huge success, both in Italy and around the world. It has since come to be regarded as a classic experimental play that prefigured many later developments in the theatre. The work of Brecht and Piscator in exposing the theatricality of theatre finds its parallel in it, while the relativity of truth that means there is no single, straightforward solution to the story of the Six Characters, foreshadows the "Theatre of the Absurd."

Six Characters has remained one of Pirandello's most popular and best-known plays. It continues to be performed throughout the world and has been televised, filmed, and, (in 1959) turned into an opera. Although the subject-matter no longer causes feelings of outrage, the ingenious structure of the play continues to raise important questions about the nature of stage illusion and its relationship to life.

Source: Susan Bassnet, review of *Six Characters in Search of an Author va. International Dictionary of Theatre 1; Plays,* edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St James Press, 1992, pp 747-^8

Critical Essay #3

Hoyle reviews a revival production of Pirandello 'splay. While he avers the classic status of the work, the critic has less-than-favorable impressions of the production.

If you think the critic's function is parasitic, wait till you hear Pirandello on actors. The writer's famed distinction between reality and illusion makes it plain, in *Six Characters* at least, that actors are as removed from the blood and smew of real feeling as the recording angels of the centre stalls.

The mummer's endemic shallowness is underlined by Michael Rudman's new production at the Olivier. In the original, the theatre company that we meet in the throes of rehearsing another Pirandello play, *The Rules of the Game,* is not obtrusively characterized. Personalities are fleetingly illuminated by the odd detail But the irrelevant waffle of Nicholas Wright's new version plunges, heaven help us, into a backstage comedy, as stereotype thespians swap banalities and Leslie Sands's old stager confuses Polonius with the Gravedigger. (Though still rooted in Twenties Italy, the company is preparing *Hamlet.)* It might be Rattigan's *Harlequinade.* On the lethargic second Press night this embarrassing attempt to individualise the boys and girls were hampered by the listless snail's pace and, from the smaller roles, a delivery of lines ('Shh—look! "What's going on?') that was little better than amateur—Paul Hastings' sympathetic and lively vignette as Horatio always excepted.

In an attempt, presumably, to anglicise and modernise the frame of emotional reference, if not the setting, Wright and Rudman flatly contradict the original at some points. The mysterious family, frozen forever in some ghastly tragedy, who interrupt the proceedings and beg to be dramatised, should enter normally but be noticeably 'different' (Pirandello suggested half-masks). Here they suddenly appear in a black-out to a clap of thunder, but are thereafter 'normal' to the point of triviality. Pirandello ends his play with the 'producer stumbling terrified through the darkened theatre at the final vision of those figures fixed in an eternity of anguish—like the still-living acquaintance whom Dante sighted in the Inferno: he lives and breathes and goes about his business but he is already in hell—and, to the mocking laughter of the Stepdaughter who breaks the confines of stage, auditorium and building, we remember Petrushka's showman, appalled at the doll's ghost, at the spectacle of something created assuming an independent existence At the Olivier the imperturbable Director (Robin Bailey, whose drily undercutting smoothness provides the evening's mam pleasure) utters the character's last line, asking for more light, and settles down at his desk. And that's that

Throughout, the supernatural is hinted at (though Italians, the Sicilian awe of the evil eye apart, are robustly disinclined to *feerie)* while formality is rendered dully prosaic. The result is J. B. Priestley crossed with Tom Stoppard: as it were, *The Real Inspector Hound Calls.*

Everything is emphatic, pedantic; and this affects the playing. Lesley Sharp, a powerful actress as we know from the Royal Court, makes a liberated, hectoring Stepdaughter.

She suggests little horror at being pushed across the narrow divide between respectable poverty and the shame of prostitution. She, or the director, confuses intensity with earnestness. And she is lumbered with that modern semi-literate Americanism that someone at the NT should have blue-pencilled at rehearsal stage when announcing that she is 'nauseous'. No, Miss Sharp; your lines may be nauseous. You are nauseated.

Richard Pasco goes along with the prevalent mood by playing the lustful Stepfather as a verbose, almost professorial, droll. Barbara Jefford, as we were reminded by the Fellini film, *And the Ship Sails On,* has a potentially riveting star presence. By no means is she the cowed, illiterate little wife, perpetually bowed in shame (I wish I'd seen *her* Stepdaughter in the 1963 production). Ralph Fiennes carries off the almost unspeaking part of the cold Son with dignity and perceptible style; but Di Langford's dressmaker-procuress is colourless— why disregard Pirandello's detailed description of the bedizened, bewigged old madam?

I suspect Mr Rudman has been misled by the 'reality/illusion' duality of much of Pirandello's work, and has overlooked the fact that *Six Characters* is for the most part about different sorts of illusion. In an effort to draw distinctions in the wrong places, the production merely turns what, according to conventional wisdom, is a modern classic into a stilted museum-piece.

Source: Martin Hoyle, review of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in *Plays and Players,* Number 404, May, 1987, pp. 16-17.

Adaptations

Six Characters in Search of an Author was presented in a full-length film version in 1992 by BBC Scotland, starring John Hurt as the Father, Brian Cox as the Producer, Tara Fitzgerald as the Stepdaughter, and Susan Fleetwood as the Mother. Adapted by Michael Hastings and produced by Simon Curtis, the film, was directed by Bill Bryden. In 1996, the 110 minute film was released on videocassette with a teacher's guide.

In 1987, sections of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* were represented in an episode on Pirandello for the BBC Channel 4 South Bank Show series called *The Modern World: Ten Great Writers.* This documentary recreated a day in the life of Pirandello's acting troupe as they brought *Six Characters in Search of an Author to* London in 1925. The show was written and adapted by Nigel Wattis and Gillian Greenwood and produced and directed by Nigel Wattis. Hosted by series editor Melvyn Bragg, the episode featured Jim Norton as Pirandello, Douglas Hodge as the Producer, Reginald Stewart as the Father, Sylvestra LeTouzel as the Stepdaughter, and Patricia Thorns as the Mother.

A 59-minute videocassette version of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was presented in 1978 as part of an educational television series called *Drama: Play, Performance, Perception,* hosted by Jose Ferrer. A co-production of Mi-ami-Dade Community College, the BBC, and the British Open University, the episode was directed by John Selwyn Gilbert and included actors Charles Gray, Nigel Stock, and Mary Wimbush. The film was also distributed in 1978 by Insight Media and Films Inc. with actor Ossie Davis as guest commentator and additional direction by Andrew Martin. This version was re-released in 1992 as a 60 minute videocassette.

A 48-minute audiovisual cassette version of the play was presented by the British Broadcasting Corporation in cooperation with the British Open University in 1976.

A 58-minute VHS videocassette version of the play was produced in 1976 by Films for the Humanities (Princeton, New Jersey) in their History of Drama series as an example of Theatre of the Absurd. It was produced by Harold Mantell, directed by Ken Frankel, translated by David Calicchio, and narrated by Joseph Heller, with music by William Penn. The actors included Nikki Flacks, Ben Kapen, Gwendolyn Brown, Dimo Comdos, Bob Picardo, and Kathy Manning. In the same year this version was also released on two reels of 16 mm film with accompanying textbook, teacher's guides, and two film-strips. The film was re-released in 1982 in Beta and VHS, in 1988 in VHS, and in 1988 in a 52-minute version.

A commentary on the play by Alfred Brooks called "Pirandello's Illusion Game" was released on audiocassette in 1971 from the Center for Cassette Studies.

A 38-minute commentary on the play on audiocassette by Paul D'Andrea was released in 1971 by Everett and Edwards out of Deland, Florida, in the Modern Drama Cassette

Curriculum series. Another commentary by Robert James Nelson was released in 1973 as part of their World Literature Cassette Curriculum series.

A production of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* appeared on BBC television on April 20, 1954 in a translation by Frederick May.

Topics for Further Study

Read a biography of Pirandello to learn about the relationship Pirandello had with his mentally unstable wife. Then research the relationship between American author F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, who had numerous emotional breakdowns after 1930 and was institutionalized several times, eventually dying in a fire in a mental hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1948. Compare the two unstable marriages and their effects on the literary careers of the two authors.

Read Pirandello's "Preface" to *Six Characters in Search of an Author* for his description of the genesis of his play. Then read interviews in such books as *In Their Own Words* (1988) and *The Playwright's Art* (1995) to see how contemporary playwrights respond to questions about how they initially discover their characters and stories. "What conclusions can you make about the process of artistic creation?

Research what psychologists say about the human concept of self and compare their generalizations with the observations that Pirandello presents in *Six Characters in Search of an Author.* Where does the concept of personal identity come from and why is it so important to the human psyche?

Research the stage history of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* to see how various audiences and critics in different countries and times have responded to the play. How can expectations of the conventional and/or of the unconventional color an audience member's response to an artistic experience?

Research the concepts of Relativity and the Uncertainty Principle in Physics, with especial attention to Albert Einstein and Werner Karl Heisenberg, and compare the scientific treatment of these issues with Pirandello's artistic treatment.

Compare and Contrast

1921: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States from 1933 to 1945, contracts the poliomyelitis that will cripple him for life and confine him to a wheelchair or require him to wear heavy braces to walk. Since the appearance of robust vitality was necessary for the presidential image, the reality of Roosevelt's paralysis was downplayed by the media and went largely ignored or undiscovered by the American public. Roosevelt became the only U.S. President to be re-elected three times.

Today: Starting with the presidencies of Lyndon Baines Johnson and (especially) Richard Nixon, the media have become increasingly dedicated to examining the appearance of presidents and other political figures. However, Roosevelt's disability still remains a largely ignored part of his presidency. In 1997, a memorial statue of Roosevelt in Washington, D.C., created some controversy when—rather than obviously placing him in a wheelchair—the statue portrayed him as seated in an office chair with casters and with a large cloak draped over his legs that essentially obscured his disability.

1921: Eight baseball players from the 1919 Chicago White Sox major league baseball team go to trial in June on charges of accepting bribes from gamblers to purposely lose the World Series against Cincinnati in 1919. Indicted in 1920, their trial in June and July of 1921 ended in an acquittal, but the presiding judge fpr the grand jury, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, had become the first Commissioner of major league baseball in 1921 and banned the players from baseball for life in spite of the court's verdict.

Today: These eight members of the "Black Sox," including the great Shoeless Joe Jackson, are still considered ineligible for induction into baseball's Hall of Fame, the truth of their criminality having been decided by Judge Landis rather than by the process of the legal system. In what is perhaps a similarly contested process of judgment, the 7th Commissioner of major league baseball, A. Bartlett Giamatti, banned Cincinnati's Pete Rose from a place in the Hall of Fame in 1989, despite Rose's all-time major league record 4,256 hits, because Rose was accused of illegally betting on baseball games.

1921: The futuristic drama of social satire, *R. U.R.,* (Rossum's Universal Robots), by Czechoslova-kian playwright Karel Capek, opens in Prague. The robots are manufactured men and women who work without complaining. They are so difficult to distinguish from real people that one character decided the robots were capable of developing a soul. When robots around the world revolt against their masters, humanity is almost destroyed. The robots had finally begun to act precisely like human beings.

Today: Though *R. U.R.* is not widely produced today, the term and concept it essentially created—"robot"—has now become an established part of our vocabulary and thought. The word "robot" was a translation from the Czech word for "forced labor" and while Rossum's robots were manufactured from artificial flesh and blood, Fritz Lang's popular 1926 film, *Metropolis,* used the term to describe a creature made of metal and that more

mechanical concept of robot is what survives today. Today's widespread industrial use of robotics and the controversies over genetic engineering have perhaps given a new immediacy to Capek's drama.

What Do I Read Next?

Pirandello's second "masterpiece," *Henry IV* (1922), is another examination of human role-playing and the subtle differences between art and rife, madness and sanity. An accident leaves a man thinking for years that he is the German Emperor Henry IV. One day in private the man regains his sanity but decides to continue playing the role of Emperor and is finally trapped in his assumed identity.

Pirandello's *Right You Are (If You Think So)* (1917) has been called by many, including Eric Bentley, the "quintessential Pirandello." The situation in the story is told in three conflicting versions and the audience can never know which one to accept as true.

Many of Pirandello's novels elaborate on themes developed in the major plays. In *The Late Mattia Pascal* (1904) the hero permits himself to be thought dead and assumes a false identity to escape his past but discovers that he cannot start a new life without his old self. In *One, None, and a Hundred Thousand* (1926) a man who realizes he cannot be known by the multiplicity of his many selves renounces life and becomes the inmate of a poorhouse.

R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots; 1922), by Czechoslovakian playwright Karel Capek, presents a slightly different kind of confrontation between human and non-human figures who closely resemble human beings

No Exit (1948), by French playwright Jean-Paul Sartre, takes place in Hell and focuses on the Pirandellian idea that we are the roles we play and that our personal identity is constructed by how others see us rather than by our own concept of ourselves.

The Rehearsal (1950), by French playwright Jean Anouilh, presents a Pirandellian situation involving romance, role playing, and a play-within-a-play. A group of aristocrats meets in a villa and works out its romantic entanglements through their amateur production of a play.

Old Times (1971), by British playwright Harold Pinter, frustrates the audience's desire for certainty when the memories of the three characters are quite contradictory and the audience cannot know whose version of the past is most accurate.

The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985), a film by Woody Allen, is a modern, cinematic treatment of the Pirandellian idea that fictional characters can have a certain kind of reality that rivals the reality of human beings A number of other Woody Allen films deal with similar Pirandellian situations, such as *Deconstructing Harry* (1997).

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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