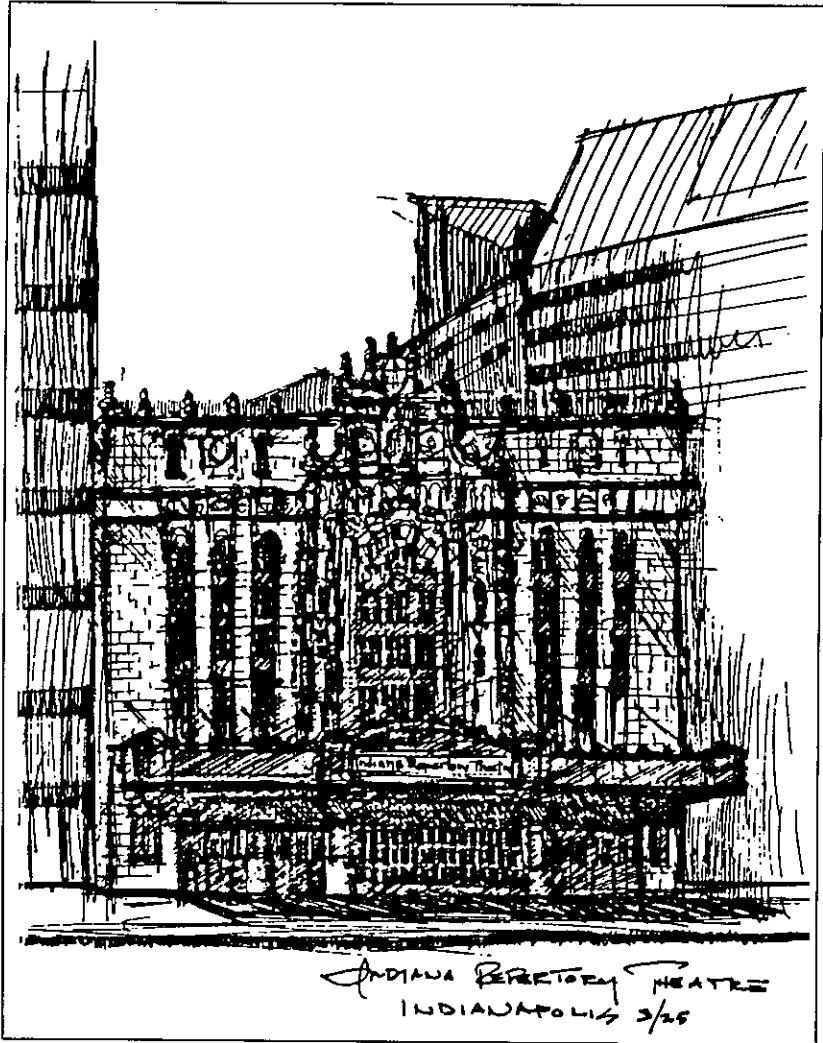


Study Guide



Indiana Repertory Theatre

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presents

Six Characters In Search of an Author

by Luigi Pirandello

translated by Paul Avila Mayer

March 8-April 2 1989

Directed by Tom Haas

Scenic Design: Ann Sheffield
Costume Design: Gail Brassard
Lighting Design: Rachel Budin

Sound Design: Michael Bosworth
Stage Manager: Augie K. Mericola
Production Stage Manager: Joel Grynheim

Cover Art created by G.W. Mercier

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Excerpts from Pirandello's Introduction to
Six Characters in Search of an Author

For a great many years now, though it seems no time at all, I have been assisted in my artistic labours by a sprightly young helpmate, whose work remains as fresh today as when she first entered my service.

Her name is Imagination.

Her delight is to search out the world's unhappiest people and bring them home to me to turn into stories and novels and plays; men, women and children who have got themselves into every conceivable kind of fix, whose plans have miscarried and whose hopes have been betrayed; people in fact, who are often very disturbing to deal with.

Well, some years ago, this assistant, this Imagination of mine, had the regrettable inspiration, or it could have been the ill-fated whim, to bring to my door an entire family: a man of about fifty, with a look of irritability and humiliation in his eyes, a poor woman in widow's weeds holding two children by the hand; next came a rather loud and immodest young woman, a-quiver with a brittle, biting anger, and a youth of about twenty who stood detached from the others, apparently contemptuous of the whole party. So here they were, the Six Characters, just as they appear on the stage at the beginning of the play.

I can only say that, having in no way searched them out, I found myself confronted with six living, palpable, audibly breathing human beings. They stood before me waiting, each one nursing his own particular torment, bound together by the mode of their birth and the intertwining of their fortunes, waiting for me to usher them into the world of art and make their persons, their passions and their adventures a novel or drama, or at least a short story.

They had been born alive and they were asking to live.

I kept thinking: I have given my readers enough trouble with all my hundreds of stories; why heap more trouble upon them with the sad story of this unhappy lot?

And so thinking I put them out of my mind. Or rather, I made every effort to do so.

But one does not give birth to a character for nothing. Creatures of my mind, those six were already living a life which was their own and mine no longer, a life I was no longer in a position to refuse them.

Why not write a play, I thought, based on the unprecedented case of an author who refuses to allow a certain set of characters to live, and the plight of these characters who, being fully alive in his imagination, cannot reconcile themselves to being excluded from the world of art? They have already detached themselves from me; they have their own life; they have acquired speech and movement; by their own efforts, by struggling against me for their lives, they have emerged as fully-fledged dramatic characters, autonomous and articulate. They already see themselves as

the rules of the theatre are too rigid to capture passion as it is lived.

The Director now attempts to prepare for the climactic scene in the Characters' story; the garden encounter between the Mother, the Son and the two young children. He arranges the Characters in the garden scene and again they step into their story, the tragedy of which they have already revealed. The Father again suffers the agony of the Mother's discovering him with the Stepdaughter, and the Stepdaughter arrogantly loathes him and the sneering Son. The latter is resentful and angry; he goes to the garden reluctantly, followed by his unhappy, rejected Mother. The Director badgers the Son, explaining that the play requires a confrontational scene between Mother and Son; the Son maintains that nothing happened between them but eventually the Director prevails, forcing the Son to relive the tragic scene in the garden. There he sees the Boy, hiding with a gun. When his little sister falls in the fountain and drowns, the Boy shoots himself. The Mother runs to him, crying in terror, and some of the Actors help to carry the Boy out. Is he really dead? The Actors believe it to be pretense. "Reality, sir, reality!" exclaims the Father, as he follows the rest of the family off. The confused Actors and Director are left to resume their interrupted rehearsal, caught in the irreconcilable clash between day-to-day reality and the reality of art encapsuled in the Characters and their story.

About the Playwright

Italy's most acclaimed modern writer, Luigi Pirandello is known in the United States primarily for three or four of his forty-four plays, written between 1917 and 1924. Of these plays, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* has earned for Pirandello a reputation as a major figure in the development of modern drama.

Pirandello was born in Agrigento, Sicily in 1867, the son of a wealthy owner of sulphur mines. He was educated at the universities of Palermo, Rome and Bonn. In 1891 he completed a dissertation on his native Sicilian dialect, receiving the doctorate of philology degree from Bonn. In 1894, Pirandello entered into an arranged marriage with the daughter of one of his father's business associates. They had three children. In 1898, Pirandello accepted a position as a professor of Italian at a women's teaching college in Rome, eventually rising to the position of chair of the institution's Italian language department. He was to keep this job until 1910, when the financial rewards of his writing finally freed him from the tyranny of teaching.

In 1903, tragedy befell the family when his father's mines were flooded and Pirandello's assets were lost, causing his wife to suffer a nervous breakdown which eventually necessitated her confinement in a nursing home (where she remained for forty years). Until 1919, however, when he consented to the transfer, Pirandello cared for his wife at home, an experience that undoubtedly stimulated the writer's preoccupation with the distinctions between sanity and madness.

Pirandello published his first poems as early as 1883; he wrote his first play in 1886; his first novel in 1901; and he published his first collection of short stories in 1894. Until the early 1920's, Pirandello's work was known primarily in Italy; he gained international recognition, however, with performances of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in Rome, London, New York, Paris, Vienna and Berlin between 1921 and 1924. His most prolific period occurred between 1916 and 1925 when he wrote many of his plays, including *Right You Are If You Think You Are* (1917), *The Rules of the Game* (1919), and *Enrico IV* (1922), to be followed by another burst of dramatic activity between the years 1930 and 1932 in which he wrote *As You Desire Me* (1931) and *Tonight We Improvise* (1932).

Pirandello's later life was clouded by his association with Fascism: in 1924 Mussolini presented him with a state-supported theatre, the Teatro d'arte di Roma, with which Pirandello toured Europe, North America and South America to great critical acclaim between 1924 and 1928. Pirandello remained loyal to Mussolini by supporting the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia which sparked World War II. Within his lifetime, Pirandello's fame had spread throughout the world: his works were translated into many languages and became the subject of numerous critical studies. Two years before his death in 1936, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

such; they have learnt to defend themselves against me; they are capable of defending themselves against anyone. Well then, why not let them go where dramatic characters usually go to live: put them on a stage. And see what happens.

And that is what I did. And what came out of it was an inevitable hodgepodge of tragedy, comedy, fantasy and realism in a completely original, and extraordinarily complex humoristic situation: that of a drama willing itself to be staged, determined at all costs to find a means of expression in the autonomous, living, speaking characters who embody it and suffer it in their inmost selves, and of the comedy resulting from the abortive effort at improvised theatrical realisation. The surprise, first of all, on the part of the wretched company of actors, engaged in a day-time rehearsal of a play, surprise and blank incredulity on being faced by the six who introduce themselves as characters in search of an author followed by this instinctive quickening of interest when they get a glimpse of the drama encompassed by the members of this extraordinary family--a dark, ambiguous drama which comes crashing unannounced onto an empty stage in no way prepared to receive it and then the gradual intensification of their interest as the conflicting passions explode.

Unintentionally, inadvertently, each of them, defending himself in a state of considerable mental agitation against the recriminations of the others, shows himself to be tormented by the same fierce sources of suffering that have racked my own spirit for years; the delusion of reciprocal understanding hopelessly based on the hollow abstraction of words; the multiple nature of every human personality, given all the possible ways of being inherent in each one of us; and finally the tragic built-in conflict between ever-moving, ever-changing life, and the immutability of form which fixes it.

I wanted to show six characters who are looking for an author. The play cannot be performed because the author they are looking for is missing; so instead we have the comedy of their abortive search, with all the tragic overtones which stem from the fact of their having been rejected.

Just at the point when all have finally understood that life cannot be created through artifice, and that the six characters' drama cannot be played without an author to quicken it with spirit, the Director, full of vulgar curiosity about how the story ends, gets the Son to give a blow-by-blow account of the sequence of events; the catastrophe explodes brutally and uselessly—it makes no sense and needs no human words—with the detonation of a firearm on the stage, cutting into and dissolving the sterile experiment of characters and actors, apparently with the aid of a poet.

The poet, meanwhile, without their knowledge, has been biding his time, looking on as if from a distance throughout their tentative struggles, and waiting to make of these the very substance of a work of his own.