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PIRANDELLO'S SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR, DEPARTURES FROM REALISM

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A first reading of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* impresses the reader as the outcry of the author against the realistic theatre and its conventions. Not only does Pirandello make explicit within the text of the play the shortcomings of the realistic method of representation, but also in the technique he uses he breaks away from the pretensions of this method. His thesis, as will later be illustrated with specific references to the play, is the relativity of truth. Demonstrating that there is no such thing as absolute truth, he disputes the claims of theatre to present reality on the stage. Furthermore, he shows how even if there were one irrefutable and undeniable reality, it would not be possible to present it on the stage. The flow of life, by the very fact that it has to be arrested in order to be presented in a unified whole, immediately loses its essence on being put into dramatic form by the playwright. Nor is the transformation this flow undergoes only at the hands of the dramatist. In Eric Bentley's words, «In drama life wears a double mask: the mask imposed by the dramatist and that imposed by the stage production.» For the script is subjected to the sensibilities of the interpreting director and actors who inevitably make out a different thing from the picture of life the dramatist had in mind. Moreover, even a further plane of reality emerges with the audience reaction to the production, subjective in its turn. Pirandello makes the reader quite aware of these different planes of reality by showing repeatedly the intensely suffering characters living over their lives in all their pain and the gross misinterpretation of these scenes when commented on or re-enacted by the actors of the company. Even the characters among themselves are incapable of objective truth; the daughter, for instance, can only see the father in terms of one incident supreme in her mind, or the son passes judgement on the mother on one ground, that of her illegitimate relationship.

Seeing the impossibility of telling the objective truth, the relativity of personality, ever-changing never complete and crystallized until death, and finally the illusion of real life itself, Pirandello does not even attempt to provide us with «real» conventional characters, personalities the authenticity of whom he expects us to believe in. He presents a set of «characters» who have come to life in an attempt to relieve their written out parts and justify themselves, and a set of actors, supposedly the «real» human beings. Yet even from the outset there is a hinted question as to the reality of the actors by the fact that they carry no names and are only abstractly called «Leading Lady» or «L'ingénue» or «Juvenile Lead».

As the play progresses, we get more and more of the irony of the unquestioned reality and completeness of these in relationship to the apparently obvious unreality of the characters, until in Act III, in a magnificent juxtaposition, Pirandello points out through the words of the Father that the characters are much more complete and defined and, in that sense, more real than the ever changing, ever illusionary set of human beings. We are not surprised at this juxtaposition: it has been working on us throughout the play, as the enactment of the characters' story, unrealistic but brutally realistic, has been presented side by side with the human beings' reactions to and interpretations of it, realistic but grossly unrealistic.

Another departure from realism comes in the frank use of the stage as the stage instead of the conventional peeping - through - the - fourth - wall technique. The audience comes in to find the curtains drawn and the bare stage of the theatre displayed as a stage. There is none of the ritualistic separateness and magic of illusion of realistic drama here. By reducing the difference between real life and the theatre, Pirandello helps to further impose his view that both real life and theatre are illusions; therefore objectivity and truth are not achievable on the stage.

We must, however, watch out against an oversimplification of **Six Characters** as merely a departure from realism. The opening sentence of this paper specifically states that it is the first impression the play gives that it is a thorough protest against realism. It is true that throughout the play Pirandello presents the misinterpretations, the easy classifications and unjust criticisms that lookers-on too readily label the painful experiences of the suffering characters with. But he does this tearing down of drama as an «imitation of real life» within a realistic context, precisely as such an imitation. The exposition, the dialogue, the unfolding of the plot are treated in purely realistic terms. With the exception of the appearance of the six characters out of a book and the later even more unreal entrance of Madame Pace, both to be taken as givens, all action follows logically and with natural motivation from previous action. Even the intermissions hold their own *raison d'être* (characters retiring to talk the matter over, or the accidental closing of the curtain) without a contrived curtain situation or curtain line,

More important than this is the gradual coming to life of the most theatrical element, the play within the play and its gaining truthful intensification from the most theatrical to the most real. The situation presented in the play within the play is one almost naturalistic in its sordidness and faithfulness to detail. (The daughter even remembers and insists on the furniture and the colours of the environment.) In fact, in its tableaux of heightened reality and its violent delvings into the unconscious, it takes on expressionistic dimensions, a paradoxical break with realism.

Though Pirandello lets the play develop realistically, bit by bit, he is fully aware of the danger of realistic action in making the audience intellectually unresponsive by thoroughly involving it emotionally. Therefore while letting us see the play within the play as if it were the real play, he does not allow us to forget that it is taking place on a stage by constantly bringing it down from its plane of reality to ours by either an interruption on the part of the actors for more sound or a reaction of indignation to one of the lines. And yet because of each interruption, the reality of the play within the play assumes stronger dimensions than the reality on the actors' level. The interruption of the scene between Mme. Pace and the Daughter, for instance, is done on the claim that the actors cannot hear them and demand more volume, while, of course, in the tension of the situation they are speaking in naturalistically low voices. The

re-enacting of the scene between the Father and the Daughter by the actors takes on a grotesqueness not present in the characters' own living of it.

Within the framework of over-all realism, while each character lives his life over in all its pain and suffering, he or she is nevertheless not unable, as is the case in realistic drama, to disentangle himself from his own emotional involvement to step back and comment on the significance of the scene. The set-up of the stage within the stage is a helpful device in enabling the characters to step out of their roles and see the meaning and implications of the situation. Thus, the Father is able to reason in terms of his suffering or the Daughter is able to hurl «cerebral» accusations to the Father.

In addition to the constant interruptions of the play within the play, what detracts from its realism is Pirandello's use of theatrical tricks, the main one of which has already been referred to as the emergence of the six characters. Here Pirandello makes use of stage lighting to make clear the distinction between the characters and the rest of the cast. They appear in «a tenuous light... almost as if irradiated by them - the faint breath of their fantastic reality.» This device, purely theatrical, would be unacceptable within the confines of realistic drama where at least a believable source of the light would have to be shown. Another theatrical trick he uses is interrupting the highly tense scene of the Father and the Daughter at its most dramatic moment and stopping the utterance of the most important sentence, the sentence the whole scene has led up to.

A closer look at the script will help justify the above generalizations about the play.

Even before the entrance of the six characters the inability of the theatre to come close to truth is demonstrated by the Manager's brusque decision to use «the old red room» for Leo Gala's «curious room serving as dining room and study» called for in the play being rehearsed, and his quick, gross summations of the stage directions.

After the entrance of the characters the discrepancy between theatre and real life is rapidly illustrated by a series of sentences such as «Life is full of infinite absurdities which, strangely enough, do not need to appear plausible because they are true» or the claim that the characters are «living beings more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes beings less real perhaps, but truer.»

The relativity of truth and personality begins to emerge as the characters start to tell their story. The Father who is called «The Demon of Experiments» by the Son presently begins to defend himself on moral grounds, on having acted out of pity for his wife; the Son defends his attitude of scorn in terms of his equivocal position in his own home and so on. Each character voices his own defence until we agree thoroughly with the Father, «We think we understand each other but we never really do... vaingloriously we try to substitute ourselves for this faith, creating thus for the rest of the world a reality which we believe after a fashion, while actually it doesn't exist.»

The second act is a brilliant demonstration of Pirandello's claim of the rift between the stage and real life. The characters cannot see the actors playing their parts; the Daughter even goes into convulsions of laughter at the idea of being represented by the Leading Lady. None of the details of the actual setting are able to be produced on the stage. The Father starts to hear his own words ring false, to be answered by the Manager, «It will be our job to find the right tones,» and, «Your soul... takes shape

here.»... «On the stage you as yourself cannot exist. The actor here acts you and that is an end to it.» The conventions of the theatre have to be observed no matter how poignant and real the feelings of the characters are. The tragic implications of the drama of the characters' lives completely espases the Manager and the actors who see in its reality only «vulgar tricks» and crudity or, in its ugly overtones, only comedy. (Mme. Pace's shameless proposition strikes the Manager as a piece of dialect comedy.)

The eventual acting out of the scene by the Leading Lady and Leading Man is, as might be expected, a complete failure, to be defended again by the director however. «Acting is our business here. Truth to a certain point but no further.»

At the end of the second act the mother makes clear that these events are happening all the time, that in contrast to the strict confines of theatre, there is no clear-cut distinction between the past and the present.

In Act III, in the argument between the Father and Manager, the final and expected juxtaposition comes about of the intenser reality of the characters, crystallized in its totality despite its being an illusion and the unreality of the human beings, actors, as yet undefined and changing from moment to moment. So that when the death of the two children occurs and the final issue of whether it is pretence or reality is raised, the audience sees the futility and the impossibility of attaching an easy definition on it.

This is exactly what Pirandello wants, the realization that realism is a nonsensical word in theatre. And paradoxically enough, it is only through realistic means and on the call to the audience to accept the play within the play as real (while all the time, of course, it is being acted by **actors** playing the parts of the six characters) that he has been able to convey his claim.

ALTI KİŞİ YAZARINI ARIYOR : GERÇEKÇİLİKTE AYRILMALAR

ÖZET

Pirandello ondokuzuncu yüzyılın sonunda belirli bir akım halinde gelişip sahnelerde yıllarca hüküm süren gerçekçiliğe (realizm) karşı en güçlü çıkışı yapmış olan oyun yazarlarından. **Altı Kişi Yazarını Arıyor** isimli yapıtında bu karşı çıkışı soyut ve somut olarak belirler. Katı bir gerçeğin varlığına inanmadığı için realizmin de sahnede gerçeği yansıtırma yeteneğini kuşku ile karşılar Pirandello. Çok yönlü ve göreliliği olan gerçeğin sahnede realizm akımı tarafından dondurulduğunu, bozulduğunu öne süren yazar, ayrıca yazılan eserin de yönetmen ve aktörler tarafından tekrar aslından uzaklaştırıldığını gösterir bu oyununda. Hatta kişisel tepkiler gösteren seyirci önünde de bu uzaklaştırma ayrı ayrı yorumlarla devam etmektedir.

Altı Kişi Yazarını Arıyor oyunuyla Pirandello bu nedenleri ortaya koyarak tiyatrodaki realizmin katı kurallarının yetersizliğini belirtmek istiyor.

Ancak yazarın içine düştüğü çelişki de bu oyunla realizme karşı çıkarken realizmin yöntemlerinden yararlanmasıdır.