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Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author": Home

This guide has been created as an information supplement to the Visions & Voices Event (16 April 2016): "Six Characters in Search of an Author", by Luigi Pirandello.

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Visions & Voices Event, April 2016

Six Characters in Search of an Author

A Visions and Voices Experience L.A. Event

Saturday, April 16, 2016

Depart USC at 1 p.m.; return at 5:45 p.m.

A Noise Within, Pasadena

ADMISSION

Open to USC students only. Reservations required. RSVP beginning Thursday, March 24, at 9 a.m. See description for details.*

About this guide

This guide provides information about Luigi Pirandello's play, "Six Characters in Search of an Author."

A companion guide, on Italian Studies, is the following:

Italian Studies Research Guide

For further assistance on Italy, its literature, arts, history, and culture, do touch base with me:

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Luigi Pirandello - A Short biography



Luigi Pirandello - Nobel Prize in Literature, 1934:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1934/

Nobel Prize: "for his bold and ingenious revival of dramatic and scenic art."

See: Award Ceremony Speech:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1934/press.html, and Video (5.42 mins.)

This autobiography/biography (below) was written at the time of the award and first published in the book series *Les Prix Nobel*. It was later edited and republished in *Nobel Lectures*.

Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) was born in Girgenti, Sicily. He studied philology at Rome and at Bonn and wrote a dissertation on the dialect of his native town (1891). From 1897 to 1922 he was professor of aesthetics and stylistics at the *Real Istituto di Magistere Femminile* at Rome. Pirandello's work is impressive by its sheer volume. He wrote a great number of novellas which were collected under the title *Novelle per un anno* (15 vols., 1922-37). Of his six novels the best known are *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904) [*The Late Mattia Pascal*], *I vecchi e i giovani* (1913) [*The Old and the Young*], *Si gira* (1916) | [*Shoot!*], and *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (1926) [*One, None, and a Hundred thousand*].

But Pirandello's greatest achievement is in his plays. He wrote a large number of dramas which were published, between 1918 and 1935, under the collective title of *Maschere nude* [*Naked Masks*]. The title is programmatic. Pirandello is always preoccupied with the problem of identity. The self exists to him only in relation to others; it consists of changing facets that hide an inscrutable abyss. In a play like *Cosí é (se vi pare)* (1918) [*Right You Are (If You Think You Are)*], two people hold contradictory notions about the identity of a third person. The protagonist in *Vestire gli ignudi* (1923) [*To Clothe the Naked*] tries to establish her individuality by assuming various identities, which are successively stripped from her; she gradually realizes her true position in the social order and in the end dies «naked», without a social mask, in both her own and her friends' eyes. Similarly in *Enrico IV* (1922) [*Henry IV*] a man supposedly mad imagines that he is a medieval emperor, and his imagination and reality are strangely confused. The conflict between illusion and reality is central in *La vita che ti diedi* (1924) [*The Life I Gave You*] in which Anna's long-lost son returns home and contradicts her mental conception of him. However, his death resolves Anna's conflict; she clings to illusion rather than to reality. The analysis and dissolution of a unified self are carried to an extreme in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921) [*Six Characters in Search of An Author*] where the stage itself, the symbol of appearance versus reality, becomes the setting of the play.

The attitudes expressed in *L'Umorismo* [*Humour*], an early essay (1908), are fundamental to all of Pirandello's plays. His characters attempt to fulfil their self-seeking roles and are defeated by life itself which, always changing, enables them to see their perversity. This is Pirandello's humour, an irony which arises from the contradictions inherent in life.

Source of this biography: From *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967*, Editor Horst Frenz, Elsevier Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1969



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Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author": Six Characters in Search of an Author - Resources

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Summary of the Play

Six Characters in Search of an Author was first performed at the Teatro Valle (a theatre and former opera house in Rome, Italy) in 1921. The action takes place in the daytime on a theater stage. The only props are several tables and chairs and the prompter's box.

This comedy, written in Italian (*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*), helped lay the foundation for the Theater of the Absurd, a literary genre popular in the second half of the twentieth century. Absurdist drama presents life as meaningless, nonsensical, and comic.

Pirandello presents six characters who walk off the pages of an unfinished play script and onto the stage of a theater. There, in front of a company of actors and their director, these characters maintain that they are every bit as real as the actors rehearsing the play, thus suggesting that they may actually be more real than the actors. Pirandello seems to advance the idea that those who declare that theatrical characters are not real but simply an illusion or a trick need to consider that objective reality is not the only reality,

Image Source:

<https://hallerstudentblog.wordpress.com/2013/05/17/six-characters-in-search-of-an-author-uwa-theatre-students-play/>



Online Resources

Pirandello Web <http://www.pirandelloweb.com/>

Pirandello Confesses (<http://www.vqronline.org/essay/pirandello-confesses>) why and how he wrote six characters in search of an author (VQR, Spring 1925).

Video of the Play (YouTube) 1 hr 43 mins.: **Published on Mar 10, 2014** - University of Auckland Drama204 Class Presents: "Six Characters In Search Of An Author" by Luigi Pirandello & translated by Stephen Mulrine.

About Pirandello's Theater

Plays by Pirandello (A very small selection):

Three Plays, Oxford University Press, 2014. (Leavey, PQ4835.I7 A2 2014).

Pirandello's theatre of living masks : new translations of six major plays, University of Toronto Press, c2011. (Doheny, PQ4835.I7 A277 2011). Plays included in this book are: *Liola, It Is So If You Think So, Six Characters in Search of an Author, Henry IV, Each in His Own Way, and The Mountain Giants*.

Six characters in search of an author [videorecording], Broadway Theatre Archive, 2002. (LVYDVD 2300).

About Luigi Pirandello's works:

Paolucci, Anne (c2009). The plays and fiction of Luigi Pirandello : selected essays. Middle Village, NY. : Griffon House Pub., (Doheny, PQ4835.I7 Z7232 2009)

Mariani, Umberto (c2008). Living masks : the achievement of Pirandello. University of Toronto Press . (Doheny, PQ4835.I7 Z73 2008).

Bloom, Harold (2003). Luigi Pirandello. Chelsea House. (Doheny, PQ4835.I7 Z66487 2003)

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