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Six Characters In Search Of An Author And Other Plays (Twentieth Century Classics)



Synopsis

Pirandello is the founding architect of twentieth-century drama, brilliantly innovative in his forms and themes, and in the combined energy, imagination and visual colours of his theatre. This volume of plays, translated from the Italian by Mark Musa, opens with *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello's most popular and controversial work in which six characters invade the stage and demand to be included in the play. The tragedy *Henry IV* dramatizes the lucid madness of a man who may be King. In *So It Is (If You Think So)* the townspeople exercise a morbid curiosity attempting to discover 'the truth' about the Ponza family. Each of these plays can lay claim to being Pirandello's masterpiece, and in exploring the nature of human personality each one stretches the resources of drama to their limits. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

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Luigi Pirandello was born of rich, middle-class parents in Girgenti (Agrigento), Sicily, on 28 June 1867. As a young man he studied at the Universities of Palermo, Rome, and Bonn, where he gained his doctorate in 1891. His first published work, *Mal giocondo* (1889), was a collection of poems. It was followed by other volumes of poems, critical essays, novels, short stories, and over forty plays. In 1894 he married Antoinetta Portulano, the daughter of his father's business associate. Financial disaster and a severe illness brought on by the birth of their third child drove his wife to a hysterical form of insanity. Only in 1918, when her presence in the family constituted a real threat to their daughter's safety did Pirandello agree to have his wife committed to an asylum. The enormous emotional strain he felt at this time is reflected in the intense pessimism found in his work.

Pirandello's first real success in the theatre came about in 1921 when *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was performed. *Henry IV* followed the next year and confirmed his position as a playwright. In the following years Pirandello travelled abroad extensively. He embarked on a career as a producer and in 1925 founded his Art Theatre in Rome. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934 and died in Rome on 10 December 1936. Mark Musa is a professor at the Center for Italian Studies at Indiana University. A former Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellow, Musa is the author of a highly acclaimed translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

A thoughtful sojourn into the depth of a character's existence. Although precocious and an intellectual marvel for its time, in modernity other authors have addressed the subject with greater acuity, and the quality of writing and excessive amount of expository speech from its characters bog the play down.

Luigi Pirandello's 1921 play "Six Characters in Search of an Author" ("Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore") has the deserved reputation of being the first existentialist drama and having a profound effect on later playwrights, especially those practitioners of the Theater of the Absurd such as Samuel Beckett ("Waiting for Godot"), Eugene Ionesco ("Rhinoceros"), and Jean Genet ("The Maids"). Pirandello's writing often focuses on elements of madness, illusion and isolation, all of which are inspired by the tragic aspects of his personal life in which his wife went insane and his daughter tried to commit suicide. In 1921 during a five week period Pirandello wrote his two acknowledged masterpieces, "Six Characters in Search of an Author" and "Henry IV." While "Six Characters" was successful when it opened in Rome it was also considered scandalous. However, it soon being performed in Milan, London, New York, and Germany. The setting for "Six Characters in Search of an Author" is a rehearsal for a play (By Pirandello) that is interrupted by the arrival of

six characters. Their leader, the father, tells the manager that they are looking for an author. It seems that the author who created them never finished their story and they are unrealized characters who have not yet been fully brought to life. The father insists that they are not real people but characters, and the manager and his cast can only laugh at the idea. But then they become intrigued by the bits and pieces of the story the six characters have to tell. The manager agrees to produce their story and become the author for whom they have been searching. He tries to stage the scene where the father meets the step-daughter in the dress shop but both characters insist that what the actors are doing is not realistic. The manager allows them to finish out the scene instead. This sets up the basic juxtaposition of "drama" and "reality" for the rest of the play, with the key scenes in the lives of these characters providing more questions than they answer about what happened and what it means. At the point when the manager can no longer tell the difference between acting and reality he becomes fed up with the entire thing and ends the rehearsal, providing an audience that has already been challenged by these changing notions of reality with an abrupt ending to the drama. There may or may not be a real story here, but the ultimate point of this play is that the tradition of reality in the theater no longer holds true. The radical idea here is that there is an immutability of reality for these six characters. Because they are forms, forced into performing the actions for which they were imagined, there is an inherent conflict with life. This is why the son wants to escape but cannot leave the studio and must play his role, as must the Mother and the rest of the characters. This is just as true of all the other characters besides the six, although the others are less inclined to see the truth, or at least the reality, of their own situation until the end, when the final scene of the drama seeks to dissolve the "stage" reality completely. Where Pirandello succeeds in the end is in having it both ways, for we can interpret what we have seen as being reality or as being acting. Either way, you are left to the same conclusion.

"Henry IV" ("Enrico IV"), is a 1922 tragedy in three acts about a man who goes insane after being knocked off of a horse during a masquerade where he was dressed as the Holy Roman emperor Henry IV of Germany. For twenty years the man believes that he is the 11th century monarch and the play begins with Berthold, a new valet being taught everything he needs to know about the "king." Others arrive who want to cure Henry IV of his madness, but when he "recognizes" one of them, they become more desparate in their attempts to bring him back to sanity. Pirandello's twist is that Henry returned to sanity after a dozen years, at which point he realized he was more comfortable playing Henry than with dealing with a world that has changed. So for eight years he has pretended to be Henry IV and he will do anything to maintain the pretense. Piradnello's point is that madness is not wearing a mask, because everyone does, but rather it would be wearing a mask and not being

aware of it."It Is So! (If You Think So!)" ("Cos'è, se vi pare!") is a 1917 three act play that also contrasts art and life to demonstrate that "truth" is a subjective and relative concept. Since no one has ever seen Signor Ponza's wife and her mother, Signora Frola, together. This curioity becomes a pressing concern for Ponza's employer, Councillor Agazzi who wants to discover the truth. Ponza claims that his wife is really his second wife. His first wife died in an earthquake that destroyed all of the records that would prove this to be the case. He also claims that his wife pretends to be Signora Frola's daughter to humor the old lady, whom he claims is insane. Pirandello makes his point in the final scene, which refuses to resolve the matter and make the truth clear to the audience.Usually "Six Characters" is the extent to which a student of drama and/or existentialism is introduced to Pirandello. But including these other two plays certainly develops his existentialist views in interesting ways, particular with regards to his dramatization of the problem of reality and unreality. Because of his great influence on modern theater, Pirandello was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature in 1934. Two years later, while in negotiations to appear in a film version of "Six Characters," he died.

Pirandello had writer's block. Luisa felt sorry for him. "Just write whatever's in your head", she said, "That's what you're always telling me. Everyone who's ever written a play-- I suppose that leaves out the critics and the university professors--knows that YOU don't write the play, you let the CHARACTERS write the play. Here", she said, "have a glass of wine. It'll help relax you." Two days later, when he was done, Luigi took the manuscript over to Alphonse, the literature teacher. Alphonse declared, after scanning it, "You've written a masterpiece!" "Really?" said Pirandello, "I mean, of course!" Alphonse stood up and gestured grandly with his arms, saying "Ah, the metaphysical ramifications! Reality and the imagination! You've started Postmodernism!" So Luigi did a little dance and headed home to bed.

He must be around here somewhere. Let me see, hello? Mr. Reviewer? Ms. Reviewer? How I am I supposed to start this? I guess I am a review for the Luigi Pirandello play, "Six Characters in Search of an Author." What am I supposed to say about it? I guess I could say that it is a wonderful piece about the search for truth. A reflection of the human experience. Dazzled and question ridden, on a journey to nowhere. But I haven't even read the thing! Mr. Reviewer? Ms. Reviewer? Tell me what it's about so I could have some idea to tell the readers out there. What? I can't hear you. Pirndello's best play? A post modern triumph? An easily stageable highway? Substitute for butter? What? I give up, you wicked person. Find someone else to be your slave, I am going to sleep now

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