

DELUSIONAL THOUGHT IN LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S SEI PERSONAGGI IN  
CERCA D'AUTORE

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## ABSTRACT

Scott Nelson: Delusional Thought in Luigi Pirandello's Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore  
“(Under the direction of Dr. Federico Luisetti, Dr. Dino Cervigni, and Dr. Ennio Rao)”

In this thesis, I will attempt to make a connection between the extensive research that has been done on delusional thought and the actions that the Six Characters take throughout the play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. Delusional thoughts come from not being able to understand or explain one's own situation and it is in fact a lack of understanding that causes the Six Characters to rationalize that they are living beings. In *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* the Six Characters make up a dysfunctional family consisting of the Father, the Mother, the Stepdaughter, the Son, the Young Boy and the Little Girl. After a long separation, they are brought together by a series of unfortunate events. Through my examination of the family as a whole, and also as individuals, the reader will see how the tragedy unfolds and the part that each member of the family plays.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. CONTEXTUALIZING THE WORK OF LUIGI PIRANDELLO AND EXPLORING <u>SEI PERSONAGGI</u> .....	4
III. DEFINING THE REALITY OF THE SIX CHARACTERS.....	18
IV. DELUSIONAL BELIEFS AND RATIONAL BEHAVIOR.....	35
WORK CITED.....	50

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, the Six Characters make up a dysfunctional family consisting of the Father, the Mother, the Stepdaughter, the Son, the Young Boy and the Little Girl. After a long separation, they are brought together by a series of unfortunate events. In this thesis I will examine the family as a single entity, and I will also examine each family member individually. Through this examination, the reader will see how the family's tragedy unfolds and the part that each member of the family plays.

In her article "The Genesis of Delusions," Loren Chapman writes that delusional thoughts come from not being able to understand or explain one's own situation and it is in fact a lack of understanding that causes the Six Characters to rationalize that they are living beings (175). In this thesis, I will attempt to make a connection between the extensive research that has been done on delusional thought and the actions that the Six Characters take throughout the play.

The play focuses on the struggle of the Six Characters to see their story performed. As the title of the play suggests, they are searching for an author, but what they find is something completely different and much more important: their own reality. The reality for the Six Characters is that they were born as literary characters that have been abandoned by their author. In his article "The Logics of Delusion,"

Remo Bodei writes that deluded individuals must shape for themselves a personality and a reality (204). The Six Characters have tried, unsuccessfully, to convince the author to complete their work and allow them the right to live forever through literature. Because of this rejection, the family members are forced to fend for themselves and go in search of another author who can help get their story performed.

In chapter one of this thesis, I will contextualize the work of Luigi Pirandello, allowing the reader to see how Pirandello arrived at theater and what led up to the writing of the play. I will also take into consideration contemporary events and outside influences that affected Pirandello's writing.

After gaining an understanding of the context of Luigi Pirandello's work, I will provide a brief summary of what actually happens in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, as well as a short description of the Six Characters themselves. This will allow the reader of this thesis to follow its ideas without having read the primary text.

In chapter two I will discuss the role that each member of the family plays in *Sei personaggi*. I will detail their struggle with the author and - more importantly - with each other. As the play unfolds, I will follow the quest of the Six Characters to find an author and to see their story performed. Through the family's continued struggle, we will see how the Six Characters find their reality through a process of delusional thought.

In the final chapter, I will examine delusional beliefs and rational behavior and show how the two concepts relate to *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. After defining what the term delusional means, I will discuss the problems that arise when attempting to label a behavior as delusional. Lastly, I will question what it means to

be delusional and then show how although the Six Characters appear to be behaving rationally, they are actually delusional.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTEXTUALIZING THE WORK OF LUIGI PIRANDELLO AND EXPLORING *SEI PERSONAGGI*

Luigi Pirandello is arguably one of the greatest writers in the history of Italian literature. During his lifetime, he used several different genres such as prose, poetry and theater, with his first published piece being a collection of poems and his second a novel, *L'Esclusa*, in 1893. During the first stage of Pirandello's life, writing was simply a means of relaxation and self-expression. After the collapse of the family sulphur mine, Pirandello was forced to make his writing a money-making endeavor. Coincidentally, *Il fu Mattia Pascal* was published that same year, 1904, and brought with it not only financial gain, but also international fame.

Before *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, Pirandello was considered by many critics as “a naturalist in the mold of Sicilian verismo, a writer who specialized in slice-of-life tales with a strong regional component” (Bassanese 22). It was not until after *Il fu Mattia Pascal* was published that the critics realized that Pirandello's work went much deeper than a “slice-of-life tale” and that he was a master at dealing with themes such as identity, self-consciousness and illusion.

In 1916, feeling that he had well established himself as a prose writer, Pirandello decided to return to theater, a genre that had not been friendly to him in his youth. The second time around was much more successful than the first, and in that



same year Pirandello saw the production of his two Sicilian dialect plays, *Pensaci Giacomino!* and *Liolà*. These Sicilian plays focused on the individual's relationship with his community, public and private identity and the interplay between reality and illusion (Bassanese 150).

Pirandello followed up this initial success with two more plays that came out the following year: *Così è (se vi pare)* and *Il piacere dell'onestà*. This was just the beginning of his theatrical success, and over the next decade, Pirandello would devote himself almost entirely to the theater; writing nearly forty plays including *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* in 1921 and *Enrico IV* in 1922 (Mulrine viii). Two years before his death on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1936, Pirandello was recognized for his incredible body of work with the Nobel Prize for literature.

It can be argued that the great fame of Luigi Pirandello comes mostly from his work in theater and that his most famous play is *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. A recurring theme in the works of Pirandello had always been the search for identity. This is clearly seen in his 1904 work, *Il fu Mattia Pascal* and in *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* which he started writing in 1909. In the case of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, it is not necessarily identity that the characters are looking for, but instead a story, or a literary work in which they can eternally live. In this play the character development has been substantial, but for the characters themselves, it is not sufficient.<sup>1</sup> Pirandello describes where he stands in a letter to his son:

Presi in un dramma terribile, che mi vengono appresso, per esser composti in un romanzo, un'ossessione, e io che non voglio saperne, e io che dico loro che è inutile e che non m'importa di loro e che non m'importa più di nulla, e loro che mi mostrano tutte le loro piaghe e io

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<sup>1</sup> The Six Characters have not been fully developed as literary characters. They have been created by an author who refuses to complete their story.

che li caccio via ... e così alla fine il romanzo da fare verrà fuori fatto (qtd in Boschiglia 77).

*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* was so innovative and revolutionary that it could not initially be accepted by the public. The play's premiere in Rome, May of 1921, was a disaster and according to Stephan Mulrine in his introduction to the play, "[it] infuriated the Roman audience to such an extent that it was almost booed off the stage, with cries of 'Manicomio!', and Pirandello barely escaped the theater without injury" (xviii). Felicity Firth also describes the reaction of the Roman audience in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*: "The play's formlessness, its lack of a sequential plot, its complete break with the patterns and structures of a traditional theatre, caused fighting in the streets of Rome on its first night" (487). Although this was not the result that Pirandello was hoping for on opening night, this reaction shows how powerful and ground-breaking this play was. Nothing of its kind had been seen before.

The play was later performed in Milan, after it had been published, and was a complete success. *Sei personaggi* went on to repeat this success wherever it was performed; including New York, Berlin and Paris. Now that the spectators knew what to expect, they could fully appreciate this work of art. So what makes this play so unique? To answer that question we must explore what happens in the play.

*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* begins with a disgruntled acting troupe trying to rehearse for a play, Pirandello's *Il giuoco delle parti*.<sup>2</sup> The group is forced to wait because of the late arrival of the Leading Lady. With her arrival, the rehearsal begins and the Director's lack of control is immediately evident. The Leading Lady

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<sup>2</sup> *Il giuoco delle parti* is a three act comedy that was written by Pirandello in 1918.

ignores his direction and the Leading Man starts an argument over the script and whether or not it should be followed.

At this point of confusion, the Six Characters wander onto the stage after having followed the Doorman into the auditorium. A strange aura surrounds them, intensifying the confusion on stage. Pirandello introduces the Six Characters as a family which consists of the Father, the Mother, the Stepdaughter, the Son, the Young Boy and the Little Girl. It is important to keep in mind that the Six Characters are neither actors nor real people off of the street. They are literary characters created by an author who has left them to fend for themselves. Their desperate search for an author has led the Six Characters to the stage.

As Pirandello describes them in the play, the Father is around fifty with thinning reddish hair and is the central figure in the encounter with the actors and the family's eventual tragedy. The Mother appears always to be worried and frightened, overcome by her burden of shame and humiliation. She is only a mother; she is not a woman in the sense that she has no femininity and is dressed as a simple widow with her eyes constantly downcast. The Stepdaughter is eighteen years old, arrogant and aggressive. She is extremely beautiful, and knows it, and makes her opinions known. The Son is twenty-two years old, tall, wears an overcoat, and a scarf around his neck. His resentment towards everyone and towards his involvement in the action is made clear throughout the play. The Young Boy is fourteen years old but appears to have the same mental capacity as the Little Girl. Neither the young boy nor the little girl speaks and in fact little is actually known about them. Pirandello describes the Young

Boy as simply a presence that watches the representation. The Little Girl, on the other hand, is not aware of anything going on around her.<sup>3</sup>

As these Six Characters wait on the side of the stage, the Doorman tells the Director that there are some people here to see him.<sup>4</sup> The characters come in, and the astounded Director tries numerous times to get rid of them; but eventually the strange story of the family wins him over and peaks the interest of the actors as well.

The Father begins the discussion by telling the Director that they are looking for an author. The Director's comment of: "Ma qui non c'è nessun autore, perché non abbiamo in prova nessuna commedia nuova," plays right into the hands of the Stepdaughter who responds: "Tanto meglio, tanto meglio, allora, signore! Potremmo esser noi la loro commedia nuova" (96).<sup>5</sup>

Because of the Father's intriguing arguments and the Stepdaughter's seductive nature and sex appeal, the group agrees to hear the family's tragedy. While the Stepdaughter reassures the acting troupe that the family members are truly six of the most fascinating characters around, the Father begins his narration of their story from the beginning and explains why the family needs an author: "Sì, sperduti, va bene! Nel senso, veda, che l'autore che ci credò, vivi, non volle poi, o non potè materialmente, metterci al mondo dell'arte" (98). Lost, without a finished work or an author to create it, the family is stuck in a sort of literary limbo frantically seeking the immortality that only a finished work of art can provide.

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<sup>3</sup> The Young Boy and the Little Girl epitomize the underdeveloped character. The Young Boy has the mental capacity of someone half his age while the Little Girl is not mentally developed at all.

<sup>4</sup> The Six Characters, who have followed the Doorman onto the stage, stand a little behind him looking lost and confused. This is meant to make a clear distinction between the Six Characters and the Actors.

<sup>5</sup> All quotes from *Sei personaggi* come from the 2007 edition by Annamaria Cascetta.

From the rants of the Father and the Stepdaughter, and occasionally the Mother and the Son, the story of these Six Characters slowly emerges. The Father, who married this poor simple woman, “per la tua umiltà ti sposai” (106), begins to realize that he cannot communicate with her. He is slowly separating himself from his family, having already sent his son to live in the country.<sup>6</sup> The Mother sees this as a cruel act but the Father says it was so the boy could grow up strong and healthy: an excuse that allows the Father to rid himself of what he considers to be another burden. This is just one of many contradictions throughout the play, usually caused by the Father’s unwillingness to take responsibility for his actions and to accept the fact that they have caused great harm to the family. One thing the Father continues to bring up is his desire for “una solida sanità morale,” something he appears not to possess but to demand of others.

Eventually the Father determines his relationship with the Mother to be eternally broken and, after realizing how much better off the Mother would be with his like-minded secretary, he persuades the two of them to start a new life together. Although the Father admits that this was the outcome that he wanted, he maintains that he did it keeping in mind the best interests of the Mother. Even though the Father has the Mother sent away, he continues to have an interest in her life and the life of her new family. As this new family starts to grow, the Father takes an interest in the Stepdaughter, and eventually begins stalking her; waiting outside of the school gate to see her as she emerges from school each day. One day, the Father takes it too far and instead of just watching, approaches the Stepdaughter with a gift. The Father’s

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<sup>6</sup> The original family consisted of the Father, the Mother, and the Son. The Father eventually grows tired of the Mother and having already sent the Son away, only has to push the Mother off on his secretary in order to be free of them all.

actions cause the new family to move away and the result, as they had hoped, is that the Father loses contact with them.

It is with the unfortunate death of the Secretary that the Mother and her three children are forced to move back to the city. Now, living in poverty, the Mother finds work as a seamstress in a “dress shop” run by a certain Madame Pace. It turns out that said “dress shop” is merely a front for a brothel where the Stepdaughter is forced to work. By now a young woman, the Stepdaughter must work as a prostitute to ensure the family’s survival.

One of the regulars of Madame Pace’s place of business is the Father who on one fateful day happens to end up in the back room with the Stepdaughter. Had it not been for the arrival of the Mother, the act of quasi-incest would have taken place.

After this encounter, the Father takes the whole family back to his house, where they attempt to live together. By now, the Stepdaughter has taken control of the situation, much to the displeasure of the Son, who completely rejects their presence and considers himself to be the only legitimate member of this dysfunctional family.<sup>7</sup>

The Director becomes more and more intrigued as the story of the Six Characters unfolds. After listening to the family, the Director feels that he can create a good play from all of the material that the Six Characters are providing him, but he is not yet convinced. The Director still wants to find an outside author to write the play, but with some more convincing from the Father, he agrees to proceed with a rehearsal, with the Six Characters providing an outline of the story.

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<sup>7</sup> The original family consisted of the Father, the Mother and the Son. After the encounter between the Father and the Stepdaughter at Madame Pace’s brothel, the Mother, Stepdaughter, Young Boy and Little girl move in with the Father and the Son. The Son feels that he is the only legitimate child because he was the only product of the marriage between the Father and the Mother. He rejects the Mother’s presence because, in his mind, she abandoned him.

The Director takes the Six Characters into his office to put the story together and leaves the actors on stage discussing the strange situation in which they find themselves. Shortly after, the Director returns ready for rehearsal, giving out orders and talking about the play with all of the participants. The Prompter prepares to write out a script in short hand as the Father and the Stepdaughter start to recreate the scene in the back room of Madame Pace's shop. Problems immediately arise because of the objections of the Father and Stepdaughter about the accuracy of the representation of their story. As they begin the rehearsal, the Director realizes that it cannot continue without the presence of Madame Pace, but at the request of the Father to recreate the scene, Madame Pace slowly walks out onto the stage.<sup>8</sup>

Now the re-enactment can get underway and begins with the Stepdaughter and Madame Pace whispering to one another. The Stepdaughter responds to the complaints of the actors that they cannot hear by saying that certain things cannot be said in a loud voice and that they must whisper so the Father, who is waiting in the next room, will not hear them. After the commotion dies down and Madame Pace leaves the stage, the Father can now enter and the scene can officially be recreated with the Mother, the Son and everyone else attentively watching, waiting to see what will happen. In the middle of the scene the Director tells them to stop and instructs the actors to relive the scene that they just witnessed. The Father and the Stepdaughter immediately object to the inaccuracies in the recreation and insist that it be recreated exactly as it happened. Even that is not enough because as the Father aptly puts it: "ma, certamente... ecco, non sono noi..." (135).

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<sup>8</sup> Madame Pace appears on the stage like a ghost and the hideous appearance causes the Actors and the Director to back away in horror. The Stepdaughter, however, immediately goes to Madam Pace's side reflecting the power of employer over employee.

After arguing about the accuracy of the story and the completion of the scene, the Father and the Stepdaughter decide to relive the scene in its entirety, ending with their embrace and the scream from the Mother who walks in on them. The Director loves this scene and suggests that they move on to the next act. The next act, the Stepdaughter tells him, is the one in which the Mother, the Stepdaughter, the Young Boy and the Little Girl moved in with the Father and the Son.

Once again the conversation turns to the authenticity of the recreation and the Father and the Director begin a philosophical argument over who is more real, the character or the actor portraying the character. After listening to their arguments, the Director agrees to get on with the play and the scene changes to the house where we see the arrival of the Young Boy and the Little Girl. Now it is up to the Son who, despite his futile attempts at leaving, the Father says must re-enact the terrible scene with his mother. The Stepdaughter explains that she is the one who eventually runs away, not the Son, and he is therefore bound to stay despite all of his efforts to flee. While the Son is pleading not to participate, the Stepdaughter is dutifully organizing the tragic scene that is about to take place in the garden. She puts the Little Girl over by the pond, giving her one last hug and instructing her on the part to play. The Stepdaughter then readies the Young Boy, first scolding him for killing himself, and not the Father and the Son, and then putting the loaded gun in his pocket.

The Son, despite all of the pressure from the others, continues to resist and, as if without realizing what he is doing, re-enacts the scene with the Mother. Meanwhile, the Little Girl drowns in the pond and the Young Boy shoots himself. As the shot rings out, it is unclear as to exactly what is happening and the actors show this



confusion by arguing over what just happened. Did the Young Boy actually shoot himself? Is he dead?

Amongst all of the confusion, the Director angrily calls for an end to the whole performance and dismisses the actors. In the backdrop, a green spotlight shines down on the remaining four characters, revealing only their silhouette. The Son emerges first, followed by the Mother and the Father, reforming the original family. Lastly, the Stepdaughter comes briefly onto the stage laughing as she runs away forever. With that, the play comes to an end and the reader is left to decide for himself what exactly happened.

In her book, *A Theory for Reading Dramatic Texts*, Catherine Parilla writes that “*Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* shook the foundations of realistic drama ... that it shattered the expectation of its contemporaries, who had become accustomed to a drama that recreated life in a seemingly glass-encased world” (31). Progress is often hindered by tradition and this play was no exception. The play was so different from anything people had seen before, that at first it could not be accepted. The success of *Sei personaggi* came later subsequently, after its public had had a chance to read the play and let its ideas sink in.

The Six Characters’ life on stage is seen through Pirandello’s use of the play-within-a-play. *Sei personaggi* opens with an acting troupe rehearsing for another play, Pirandello’s *Il gioco delle parti*. In his commentary on *Sei personaggi*, Joseph Farrell refers to the encounter between the Six Characters and the acting troupe as the “outer play” and the tragic story that the Six Characters carry within them as the “inner play” (lvii). This initial confusion sets the scene for the theme that drives the play: the

combining of life and art. As soon as the Six Characters become part of the action on stage, the situation changes significantly. The Prompter no longer has to read the script to the actors, instead, he simply records the lines that the Six Characters provide (Santeramo 43).

This *romanzo da fare* was a perfect combination of life and art. Pirandello looked at life as theater and this is seen by the convergence of the characters and the actors on stage. As the Six Characters awkwardly enter the stage, it is clear that they represent *art*, while the actors represent *life*. This distinction between life and art becomes blurred as the play continues and by the end, the Six Characters seem more real than the actors. In his article “Ambiguity in Six Characters,” Gaspare Giudice discusses the contradiction of the Six Characters’ stance in the play. The family members consider themselves to be living beings, but in order truly to live they must become part of a literary work. As Giudice says: “The character lives, is born alive, cannot die, and yet begs to be brought to life” (172). If we follow the ideas of Giudice, it becomes apparent that the Six Characters represent both life and art. If this is the case, then the question that must be asked is: Why do the Six Characters want to live (*vivere*) when they have already been born alive (*nati vivi*)?<sup>9</sup> In his book *Quasi niente, una pietra*, Enrico Cerasi comes up with an interesting conclusion regarding the lives of the Six Characters. He says that one possibility is to give two different meanings to the terms *vita* and *vivere*. Cerasi says that the Six Characters were “*nati vivi nella testa dell’autore, volevano vivere nella realtà*” (128). More importantly,

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<sup>9</sup> In the foreword to his play, Pirandello confirms this idea about the Six Characters being born alive yet wanting to live, and writes: “*Nati vivi, volevano vivere*” (76).

Cerasi writes, is that the Six Characters want a life on the stage and, therefore, eternal life in a literary work (129).

Although *Sei personaggi* is one of Pirandello's established masterpieces, the author was not without critics. Stephan Mulrine discusses this point and writes: "The term *pirandellismo*, applied pejoratively, carried overtones of willful obscurity, a perverse delight in baffling audiences with theoretical challenges to their objective reality" (xviii). But what made this play so successful, was not just the fact that it was innovative and that it challenged the ideas of reality. What most audiences and critics saw was what lay behind the façade: the underlying themes and messages, some of which came from Pirandello's imagination, while others came from the direct influence of the outside world.

Several events during Pirandello's life undoubtedly affected his writings. World War I, which was waged from 1914-1918, saw the capture of Pirandello's son Stefano by the Austrians and, despite several attempts by Pirandello to have him released, Stefano remained a prisoner of war until the conflict ended in 1918. Only a year after Stefano's return, in 1919, Pirandello was forced to put his wife Antonietta in an asylum. Antonietta had had a nervous breakdown after the collapse of the family's sulphur mining business and eventually the family was forced to commit her to a mental institution. This traumatic event may have subconsciously influenced Pirandello when writing *Sei personaggi*. The characters, like his mentally unstable wife, have an identity but do not recognize their story.<sup>10</sup> Mulrine makes a similar observation when he points out that the Father represents Pirandello in many respects

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<sup>10</sup> The Six Characters have been created by an author who has refused to complete their story. Because the family members do not exist in a literary work, they wander around lost, looking for a way out of their literary limbo.

and that both men, real and fictional, marry women of high moral regard but end up feeling detached and unable to communicate with their wives (xxvi). Pirandello is later accused by his mentally unstable wife of having committed incest with their daughter, while for the Father in *Sei personaggi*, incest, or the almost consummated act of quasi-incest, is what drives the play and the relationship between the Father and Stepdaughter.

When it came to theater, Pirandello rejected the current practices in Italy where leading actors, not the director controlled production. Instead Pirandello demanded a well trained and cohesive group of actors who were willing to accept the fact that the play, not the players, was the most important factor. Pirandello even went so far as to eliminate the prompter, whose presence only tended to allow the actors to be lazy in their preparation (Bassanese 20). Much of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* is driven by Pirandello's critique of theater as he saw it in Italy. This critique is seen through the struggle between the Director and the Leading Lady over control of the group. Much to the chagrin of the Director, the Leading Lady arrives late and chooses simply to ignore his direction. Later the Director gets into an argument with the Leading Man about his wearing of a chef's hat in the scene about to be performed. For the Director, it is a constant struggle to maintain control of the lazy acting troupe that continually challenges his authority and questions his tactics:

IL PRIMO ATTORE (al Capocomico). Ma scusi, mi devo mettere proprio il berretto da cuoco in capo?  
IL CAPOCOMICO (urtato dall'osservazione). Mi pare! Se sta scritto lì! (Indicherà il copione).  
IL PRIMO ATTORE. Ma è ridicolo, scusi!  
IL CAPOCOMICO (balzando in piedi sulle furie). Ridicolo! Ridicolo!  
(93)

What Pirandello wanted in his theater was the transformation of the actor into the character he was portraying. As Pirandello puts it, the actor wears a costume or, in Pirandellian terms, a mask, showing what the character represents. In her book *Understanding Luigi Pirandello*, Fiora Bassanese explains it this way: “Pirandello did not conceive of acting as a metamorphosis – his ideal actors are not ‘possessed’ by their roles offstage but consciously and knowingly inhabit them on the boards. For the character, not the actor had to dominate the role, a perception that would be realized artistically in his own theater plays” (20). When one considers the structure of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, this is undoubtedly the case, but what is interesting is that it is the characters who demand perfection from the actors, not the director.

## CHAPTER III

### DEFINING THE REALITY OF THE SIX CHARACTERS

In *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* the structure of the play is organized on the necessity of the characters to see their story performed. Who are these characters who enter the stage in search of an author? And what is their reality? These questions are not easily answered. The protagonists know that they are characters created by an author but their story is real. Boschiglia writes: "Essi sono l'incarnazione di una verità concettuale, non nata dalla natura, ma dalla fantasia, cioè dalla seconda verità che è la vera realtà e coincide con la vita" (78). What I will argue in this chapter is that the reality of these characters can be found through a process of delusional thought.

The characters repeatedly use the word *nascere*. According to them, they were born, not created by an author and in order truly to live, they must see their story represented. The end goal of the Six Characters' search for an author is the desire to become part of a literary work. The only way this can be accomplished, is by the completion and performance of the Six Characters' story. Early in the meeting between the Director and the Six Characters, the Father tries to explain to the Director that the Six Characters were born as literary characters:

IL PADRE. Niente, signore. Dimostrarle che si nasce alla vita in tanti modi, in tante forme: albero o sasso, acqua o farfalla ... o donna. E che si nasce anche personaggi!

IL CAPOCOMICO (con finto ironico stupore). E lei, con codesti signori attorno, è nato personaggio?  
IL PADRE. Appunto, signore. E vivi, come ci vede. (97)

In the foreward to the play, Pirandello says, “il dramma è la ragion d’essere del personaggio; è la sua funzione vitale: necessaria per esistere” (80). The Father explains the family’s *situation* and its desire to find an author to the Director of the theater company by saying, “perché chi ha la ventura di nascere personaggio vivo ... Vogliamo vivere, signore!” (98-9). It’s not only the desire to live, but to have a literary story, which the Father explains means to have an eternal life. This idea is not so strange if we follow the philosophy of Remo Bodei.<sup>11</sup> When Bodei talks about this concept in his book, *Le logiche del delirio*, he is referring to a way of life, or “articolare percezioni, immagini, pensieri, credenze, affetti o umori secondo principi propri, che non seguono cioè i criteri dell’argomentare e dell’esprimersi condivisi da una determinata società” (vii). Without the help of the author, the Six Characters are left on their own to develop ideas and desires that will define their way of life. By the time the characters come out on stage, many of these ideas are already formed. The Father and Stepdaughter, who are by far the most developed of the Six Characters, dominate the conversation with the Director and make all of the decisions for the family. The Mother and the Son add a few comments, but nothing of great importance, while the Young Boy and Little Girl remain silent throughout the entire play.

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<sup>11</sup> In his article “Logics of Delusion,” Bodei talks about his approach to the concept of delusion and the reason for choosing the title of his article. On this, Bodei writes: “The question that I tacitly pose – approaching the issue against the grain from the opposite direction to that generally taken – is not so much why delusion occurs, as why for the most part we continue to reason normally” (200). In this thesis, I take a similar approach in my analysis of the Six Characters. It is important to see how the family members continue to reason normally, not just to look at them as delusional.

In his article “The Delusion of Mutual Understanding: Structure, Language, and Meaning in *Six Characters*,” Umberto Mariani writes about the coming together of art and life and says that “the theme of the nature of artistic creation, of the relationship between art and everyday reality ... is explored here [in *Sei personaggi*] for the first time. The staging of the play, and even the process of its creation, is put on stage” (193). The Six Characters are a perfect combination of life and art because in order to truly live, they must become part of a work of art. In fact, these interconnected ideas are what drive the play.<sup>12</sup> One cannot be realized without the other and the Father and the Stepdaughter fight hard to make their goal of becoming part of a literary work, a reality.

Before these characters could be developed, they had first to be created. In the process of creation used by Pirandello, he appeared to become a character himself, caught between art and life just as the Six Characters. In the book *Novelle per un anno*, specifically the chapter titled *La tragedia d' un personaggio*, Pirandello explains the process by which his characters evolve and come to life:

È mia vecchia abitudine dare udienza, ogni domenica mattina, ai personaggi delle mie future novelle. Cinque ore, dalle otto alle tredici. M'accade quasi sempre di trovarmi in cattiva compagnia. Non so perché, di solito accorre a queste mie udienze la gente più scontenta del mondo, o afflitta da strani mali, o ingarbugliata in speciosissimi casi, con la quale è veramente una pena trattare. Io ascolto tutti con sopportazione; li interrogo con buona grazia; prendo nota de' nomi e delle condizioni di ciascuno; tengo conto de' loro sentimenti e delle loro aspirazioni. Ma bisogna anche aggiungere che per mia disgrazia non sono di facile contentatura. Sopportazione, buona grazia, sì; ma esser gabbato non mi piace. E voglio penetrare in fondo al loro animo con lunga e sottile indagine. (682)

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<sup>12</sup> The Six Characters, abandoned by their author, have created their own life. At this point they want what all dramatic characters want: to be part of a literary work.



It is hard to say whether the characters come to visit Pirandello or if he goes to visit them, but the result of these encounters is a home in a literary work for the lucky character that Pirandello deems worthy. The Six Characters have been through this process: born of the author's imagination, they have been given a kind of independent life but, unfortunately for the characters, they have been denied an artistic form (Mariani 194). They have been partially developed and then left to fend for themselves. Not lucky enough to be chosen, the Six Characters are forced to create their own lives.

In *La tragedia d'un personaggio*, Pirandello the author discusses the life of the character with (his character) Dr. Fileno, and on the subject the doctor says almost the exact same thing we hear from the Father, echoing the sentiments of the family, in *Sei personaggi*: "Nessuno può sapere meglio di lei, che noi siamo esseri vivi, più vivi di quelli che respirano e vestono panni; forse meno reali, ma più veri! Si nasce alla vita in tanti modi, caro signore" (686). The argument that one can be born in many ways is the same argument we hear from the Father when he is trying to convince the Director that the Six Characters are living beings.

In *La tragedia d'un personaggio* Pirandello takes the opposite approach and instead makes himself a literary character, much like Dante the Pilgrim in the *Divina commedia*, the Petrarch persona in the *Canzoniere*, and Boccaccio the narrator in the *Decameron*. What is interesting to note about the exchange between Pirandello the author and his character Dr. Fileno, is that it shows the reader that the idea of mixing art and life had been on Pirandello's mind for some time. *La tragedia d'un personaggio* could be considered a prequel to *Sei personaggi*, the latter written some

ten years later.

In *La tragedia d'un personaggio*, Pirandello has become a character and Pirandello the author and Dr. Fileno discuss many of the same problems that the family in *Sei personaggi* experiences. In fact, one could argue that Pirandello as a character shows the same madness, or logical form of delusion, that his characters express in *Sei personaggi*, especially the Father who, it has been argued, is somewhat based on Pirandello.

The culmination of the concept of art and life comes to a head at the end of *Sei personaggi* when the Little Girl drowns and the Young Boy shoots himself. As the actors rush to see what happened, it is unclear whether the suicide was real or not, and the rehearsal comes to an abrupt end with the Director complaining about the time that has been wasted.

LA PRIMA ATTRICE. È morto! Povero ragazzo! È morto! Oh che cosa!

IL PRIMO ATTORE. Ma che morto! Finzione! Finzione! Non ci credo!

ALTRI ATTORI (da destra). Finzione? Realtà! Realtà! È morto!

ALTRI ATTORI (da sinistra). No! Finzione! Finzione!

IL PADRE. Ma che finzione! Realtà, realtà, signore! Realtà! (155)

For the characters, what happened was real and now that two of the family members are dead, and a third, the Stepdaughter, has run away, the play concludes with the reformation of the original family: the Father, the Mother, and the Son.

In the words of Pirandello, one who is born a literary character has nothing to fear from death. At this point, one has to consider the possibility that the family is not just a figment of the author's imagination. According to Pirandello, the characters have already separated themselves from their author and are living on their own. The

author tried to let them die, but on their own they have acquired voice and movement. They fought for their lives and as a result of this fight, they have become dramatic characters who can move and speak on their own terms. They have learned to defend themselves from everyone, even the author. It is resistance that produces philosophy, according to Antonio Negri, and it is this resistance against the author who refuses to put these characters in a literary work that allows them to form a philosophy of fighting for what they want, which is to be a part of a literary work (1).

The family knows who the original author is and, after having tried, without success, to convince him to finish their story, they remain like abandoned children: born into the world and then left to fend for themselves. The Stepddaughter clearly expresses the confusion and frustration that the family feels in their desperate attempts to convince the author to finish their story.<sup>13</sup> “In delusion,” as Bodei explains, “one is caught in the middle of a tangle of logics that have each structured the experience open to them at different times and that cannot now account for the con-fusion of all the material before them” (Logics of Delusion 202). Bodei continues with this idea by writing: “Caught in this viselike grip, deluded individuals must shape for themselves a personality and a reality that is synchronized intermittently with the shifting equilibrium reached in the struggle between these logics” (Logics of Delusion 202). This is the situation in which the Six Characters find themselves. They are creations of an author who has decided not to develop their story and these Six

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<sup>13</sup> The Stepddaughter relates her painful experience to the Director: “È vero, anch’io, anch’io, signore, per tentarlo tante volte, nella malinconia di quel suo scrittojo, all’ora del crepuscolo, quand’egli, abbandonato su una poltrona, non sapeva risolversi a girar la chiavetta della luce e lasciava che l’ombra gl’invadesse la stanza e quell’ombra brulicasse di noi, che andavamo a tentarlo. – e poi io sola, io sola...- in quell’ombra ah, la mia vita! Che scene, che scene andavamo a proporgli! – Io, io lo tentavo più di tutti” (145).

Characters are trapped in a type of limbo, unable to be a part of a complete literary work and unable to reach, therefore, their Paradise. They are forced to develop themselves, or deal with their lack of development, and to create their own reality in a world where they do not belong. The Father attempts to explain to the Director the trouble he is going through while trying to discover who he is and seeks to justify his horrible actions:

IL PADRE. Il dramma per me è tutto qui, signore: nella coscienza che ho, che ciascuno di noi-veda-si crede 'uno' ma non è vero: è 'tanti', signore, 'tanti', secondo tutte le possibilità d'essere che sono in noi: 'uno' con questo, 'uno' con quello-diversissimi! E con l'illusione, intanto, d'esser sempre 'uno per tutti', e sempre 'quest'uno' che ci crediamo, in ogni nostro atto. Non è vero! non è vero! ...e che dunque un'atroce ingiustizia sarebbe giudicarci da quello solo, tenerci agganciati e sospesi, alla gogna, per una intera esistenza, come se questa fosse assommata tutta in quell'atto! (112)

It is interesting to note the observation of M. M. Bakhtin in his book *Art and Answerability*, when he talks about the formation of a character and explains how even the author rarely finds, from the beginning, a complete vision of the hero that does not change from beginning to end.<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin writes: “In order to see the true and integral countenance of someone close to us, someone we apparently know very well – think how many masking layers must first be removed from his face, layers that were sedimented upon his face by our own fortuitous reactions and attitudes and by fortuitous life situations” (6). Bakhtin says it is a fight with oneself, when the artist or author fights to establish the character. For Pirandello, it is the opposite: he has

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<sup>14</sup> Although Bakhtin does not specifically talk about theater, his theories in *Art and Answerability* are relevant to literary characters of any genre. In the chapter “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” Bakhtin discusses the relationship between the author and the character or “hero” that the author is attempting to create. Much like the Six Characters, Bakhtin says that when the author discusses his hero, he is talking about him as a living and determinate person who has become independent of the author (7). As independent characters, this is the situation in which the Six Characters now find themselves.

developed the Six Characters to a certain point, but for the characters themselves, it is not enough. They must grow up and create their lives on their own. In the words of Bodei: “Nel corso dell’esistenza ciascuno sperimenta quindi differenti versioni di se stesso, che includono brani non tradotti nel linguaggio degli strati successivi. Ogni individuo risulta così ‘dividuo’, attraversato da faglie e fessure” (*Le logiche del delirio* 7).<sup>15</sup> The Six Characters go through this process of trying to figure out who they are. We see throughout the play that all of the developed characters want something different. The Father and the Stepdaughter both want to find an author to create their story but for different reasons. The Father’s reason is arrogant and selfish. He thinks that having their story performed will make him part of a literary work and therefore give him eternal life. The Stepdaughter is motivated by hatred directed towards the Father and wants to show that he is a monster and the cause for all of the family’s problems. The Mother, fueled by guilt, wants the opportunity to reconcile with the Son who felt abandoned and wants to rid himself of the family and go off on his own. For all of these reasons, the family is searching for an author, because the original author refused to grant their wishes.

The fact that the only members of the family to have a name is the Mother reinforces the idea that the author does not want to make the characters live. What is strange for the characters, now that they live on their own, is that they did not choose names for themselves. The Stepdaughter is the only character that gives a name to another character. When she calls the Little Girl “rosetta” or “amorino,” it shows the

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<sup>15</sup> The ideas expressed by Remo Bodei in *Le logiche del delirio* are not intended for any specific group. What he focuses on instead is the concept of delusion itself and how it possesses its own set of logics. Bodei’s ideas can easily be applied to *Sei personaggi* because the Six Characters suffer from a form of delusion that is ruled by its own set of logics.

love that she has for her. Having a name means having an identity but these characters are not looking for an identity, they are looking for a story. According to Ann Caesar, the fact that these characters do not have names suggests that they are tied to their roles within the family (62). Another possibility is that they are used to their titles and, for example, the Father feels that his name is in fact “Father;” in other words, in his reality he is “Father.” Accepting their titles as names could be another example, on the part of the characters, to form and develop their own reality.

The Six Characters are so obsessed with finding an author to represent their story that they lose the possibility to have a present or a future. They only have a past, and that past is what keeps the family together. As Bodei says, “The past and the present are therefore inseparable because the past refuses to give way to a present on which it continues to bear (in the sense both that it ‘presses’ and that it is of ‘concern’)” (Logics of Delusion 202). Only in the end, when the story is finished, can the Little Girl and the Young Boy die and the Stepdaughter is allowed to leave and fulfill her predestined fate. This idea is represented in the first act when the Stepdaughter tells the Director: “Quando quest’amorino qua, Dio la toglierà d’improvviso a quella povera madre: e quest’imbecillino qua farà la più grossa delle corbellerie, proprio da quello stupido che è – allora vedrà che io prenderò il volo! Il volo! E non mi par l’ora, creda, non mi par l’ora” (33). Only after the Six Characters have re-enacted their past are they able to have a present and also the possibility of a future.

The Six Characters are members of a strange family: the Father, cause of much of the pain and suffering of the family; the Mother, loving and pained woman;

the Stepdaughter, full of hate for the Father and the Son; the Son, quiet and reclusive; and the two children, who have no voice. Elio Gioanola explains their relationship not as a hateful one, but as one that is lacking love: “Non c’è odio edipico tra i personaggi, dettato da rivalità, ma odio psicologicamente più arcaico, dettato dalla divisione e dagli sdoppiamenti, per cui i personaggi sono reciprocamente persecutori l’uno dell’altro per radicale mancanza d’amore (e si pensi solo al bambino che lascia annegare la sorellina nella vasca e poi si spara)” (596). It is only the Stepdaughter that shows any type of love; love towards the Little Girl. All of the other characters simply seem to exist with one another. Even the Mother, whom Pirandello describes in the play as only possessing the quality of motherly love, never actually shows any love towards the other characters. The only emotion we see from the Mother is guilt about abandoning the Son and shame about the sexual encounter that nearly took place between the Father and the Stepdaughter. The Mother is so consumed with guilt and the need for reconciliation with the Son that she leaves the only two characters who were not developed, and therefore cannot take care of themselves, to fend for themselves. As a result, the Little Girl and the Young Boy will die and the original family will reform.

To understand why all of these events take place, we must understand the role of each family member. The Father is the central figure in the encounter with the actors and the main cause of the family’s eventual tragedy. He represents the *mind*. He plays the part of the narrator for the author and describes, from his point of view, the development of the story and the sense of the drama. He acts as the messenger between the actors and the characters. His awareness of being an underdeveloped

character causes him great pain, and it is he and the Stepdaughter who lead the search for an author. It is the Father who wants to convince the Director to act as the author of their story. The Father portrays the Pirandellian conflict between mask and face (Farrell lix).<sup>16</sup> He claims to show the face of high morality but the Stepdaughter unmasks him and exposes his shame from trying to have sex with her; an act, according to the Father, “outside of his character.” He tries to show that his principal characteristic is one of remorse; but the Stepdaughter, the victim of his sexual desires, assures that the Father will continue to wear the mask of shame. She remembers the Father as a man who would come to watch her on a daily basis, long before the shameful encounter at Madame Pace’s place of business:

LA FIGLIASTRA. Eh, altro! Piccina, piccina, sa? Con le treccine sulle spalle e le mutandine più lunghe della gonna – piccina così – me lo vedevo davanti al portone della scuola, quando ne uscivo. Veniva a vedermi come crescevo.

IL PADRE. Questo è perfido! Infame! (109)

It is as Pirandello says, “per l’uno significa castigo e per l’altra vendetta” (11). It is this relationship of *castigo/vendetta* that the Father and the Stepdaughter use to attack one another and cause what Bodei calls “trappole relazionali,” unilateral blackmail whose end result leaves both parties trapped with no exit. Bodei explains: “Il ricatto nei confronti del più debole prende allora la forma di un gioco di potere, in cui chi si sottomette è come se dicesse ‘Io divento come tu mi vuoi a patto che tu ti prenda cura di me’” (Le logiche del delirio 62). After the encounter between the Father and the Stepdaughter at Madam Pace’s place of business, the Stepdaughter has a strong ascendancy over the Father and therefore. the family moves into the house of

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<sup>16</sup> The mask is meant to show the characteristics that the character claims to possess, while the face is the truth behind the mask. The characteristics portrayed by the mask and the face are often in conflict, especially in the case of the Father.



the Father, where the atmosphere is one of strong tension because of the Son who sees their presence as one of intrusion.<sup>17</sup>

The Mother, according to Pirandello, is only a mother; she is not a woman, in the sense that she has no femininity. She only possesses the emotion of motherly love. She is passive, asexual, and has resigned herself to her life, or her *part*, without a voice. In the words of Pirandello, she represents “nature” in the sense that she simply exists. He says that she is “una natura fissata in una figura di madre” (15). She is not intelligent and she does not contribute anything. The Father says that the attraction of the Mother is in her humility. Her mask is one of *mater dolorosa*, like the Madonna at the crucifixion of her son Jesus, and the negative feelings of the Son are what cause the suffering of the Mother (Farrell lxi). The Mother cannot show, or even have, her own desires or needs. Her job is to maintain the house and take care of the children, and the problems between her and the Son are what cause all of her suffering. This is explained by Pirandello when he says: “Forse perchè anch’ella (la Madre) spera di aver vita da costui? No: perchè spera che il Capocomico le faccia rappresentare una scena col Figlio, nella quale metterebbe tanta della sua propria vita; ma è una scena che non esiste, che non ha mai potuto, né potrebbe, aver luogo” (14). What the Mother wants is re-create the scene with the Son so that she can make up for her shortcomings as a Mother. She is obsessed with setting things right with him and because of this shame she cannot move on with her life or be a Mother to the other children. The Mother can have no future because she cannot accept the past. Bodei

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<sup>17</sup> The Father, struggling between pride and shame, is forced to face his sins because of the presence of the other family members. IL PADRE (gridando). No, a tempo, a tempo! Perché, per fortuna, la riconosco a tempo! E me li riporto tutti a casa, signore! Lei s'immagini, ora, la situazione mia e la sua, una di fronte all'altro: ella, così come la vede; e io che non posso più alzarle gli occhi in faccia! (112)

writes: “Il blocco del futuro, in quanto condanna a ripetere il passato, è reale nei casi in cui la declinazione al futuro dell’individuo sia, appunto, sbarrata” (Le logiche del delirio 12). The Mother is continually attempting to deal with her past failures and consequently she cannot move on. Delusion is therefore the result of the mother’s inability to deal with her reality.

While the Mother represents the *mater dolorosa*, the Stepdaughter represents the whore. As is usually the case, this was not her choice, but instead she was forced, by Madame Pace, to accept this role in order to help the family. The Stepdaughter describes their painful situation and the sacrifices she was forced to make:

LA FIGLIASTRA. Povera mamma! Sa, signore, che cosa faceva quella lì, appena le riportavo il lavoro fatto da lei? Mi faceva notare la roba che aveva sciupata, dandola a cucire a mia madre; e diffalcava, diffalcava. Cosicché, lei capisce, pagavo io, mentre quella poverina credeva di sacrificarsi per me e per quei due, cucendo anche di notte la roba di Madama Pace! (112)

The Stepdaughter wants to take revenge on the Father because of what happened at Madam Pace’s place and for the problems that he caused for the family. She will not allow the Father to maintain his air of innocence and morality. The Stepdaughter is an excellent representation of the love and hate that exists within the family. She hates the Father and the Son but she loves the Little Girl. In the words of Pirandello, she has “una vivace tenerezza per la sorellina” (27). The relationship that she has with the Mother is a little more complicated. She loves her mother, but hates her inability to control her feelings for the Son, who denies the Mother his love.

The Son has a sense of superiority that comes from his “legitimacy” and his feelings that he is not involved in the drama. As he puts it, “Non c’entro, e non voglio entrarci, perchè sai bene che non son fatto per figurare qua in mezzo a voi!” (113).

This is why the Son is constantly trying to leave. He does not care if their story ever gets represented and even tries, without success, to leave the stage. He is denied this possibility of leaving because of some strange force that restrains him. The Son can not escape because his life, or, better put, his part, has been predetermined by the simple fact that he is a character in the story. The Son attempts to talk his way out of the action, but the selfishness of the Father, and the fact that he has a part to play in the story, forces him to go through with it:

IL FIGLIO. Non ho proprio nulla, io, da far qui! Me ne lasci andare, la prego! Me ne lasci andare!

IL CAPOCOMICO. Come non ha nulla da fare?

LA FIGLIASTRA (placidamente, con ironia). Ma non lo trattenga!  
Non se ne va!

IL PADRE. Deve rappresentare la terribile scena del giardino con sua madre! (149)

The Son's attempted withdrawal from the family is what forces the Mother to go and find him, leaving the children alone and defenseless, resulting in their death, with the Little Girl drowning in the fountain and the Young Boy shooting himself.

Neither the Young Boy nor the Little Girl speaks and in fact little is actually known about them. According to Pirandello, the Young Boy is only "una presenza" that watches the representation, while the Little Girl is not aware of anything going on around her. These two characters are not well developed and as soon as their story is represented, they die, thus ending any future possible development. They are the innocent victims of the tragedy, first losing their Father, and then, in the end, losing their lives. In the preface, Pirandello writes that the Young Boy is fourteen years old but appears to have the same mental capacity as the Little Girl. He watches the Little Girl with indifference while she is drowning, without even trying to help her. In the

end, their existence, or the fact that they ever existed, becomes irrelevant when the original family consisting of the Father, the Mother and the Son is reformed.

Once the characters finish their story, they can fade off into the sunset because their place in literature is now secure. Their truth has been told and in a sense that they have a truth, makes the characters more real than the actors. The actors are constantly performing different stories in a theater while the characters are actually living out their lives and creating their own story.<sup>18</sup>

When the Six Characters first enter the stage Pirandello describes how they should look: “I ‘Personaggi’ non dovranno infatti apparire come ‘fantasmi’, ma come ‘realtà create’, costruzioni della fantasia immutabili: e dunque più reali e consistenti della volubile naturalità degli Attori” (94). At one point during the re-enactment of the family’s story, the Father and the Director begin a philosophical argument over who is more real, the character or the actor portraying the character:

IL PADRE. Mi sa dire chi è lei? (E rimarrà con l'indice appuntato su lui).

IL CAPOCOMICO (turbato, con un mezzo sorriso). Come, chi sono? - Sono io!

IL PADRE. E se le dicessi che non è vero, perché lei è me?

IL CAPOCOMICO. Le risponderei che lei è un pazzo! (143)

According to Bianca Fergola, the characters and the actors are divided into two worlds. The world of fiction, in which the characters find reality in fiction, and the real world, in which the actors give a reality to fictional characters (39). *Sei personaggi* blurs the line between these two worlds, and in the end, the characters appear more real than the actors. The Father solidifies his argument by showing the differences between a man and a literary character:

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<sup>18</sup> The Director attempts to rebuke the Father’s argument about truth by saying: Ma che verità, mi faccia il piacere! Qua siamo a teatro! La verità, fino a un certo punto! (136)

IL PADRE. Un personaggio, signore, può sempre domandare a un uomo chi è. Perché un personaggio ha veramente una vita sua, segnata di caratteri suoi, per cui è sempre. Mentre un uomo – non dico lei, adesso – un uomo così in genere, può non esser...tutta la sua realtà d'oggi così com'è, è destinata a parerle illusione domani.  
(143-44)

Another reality for the characters is the way in which the family's story is performed. For the family, the story is not real unless the actors perform it exactly as it happened. The characters are so real that every detail must be perfect. Here is where we see the different realities of the characters and the actors. The reality for the characters is how they remember it, whereas the actors are willing to bend reality in order to suit their purpose. For the actors, what matters is the end result and it is of no concern to them if the facts get blended with fiction. The particular details are not important for the actors, but for the characters they are fundamental.<sup>19</sup> This importance to detail is seen in the Father's reluctance to allow the actors to take over. He fears they will not be able accurately to represent the family:

IL PADRE. Ecco, penso che, per quanto il signore s'adoperi con tutta la sua volontà e tutta la sua arte ad accogliermi in sè ...  
IL PRIMO ATTORE. Concluda, concluda.  
IL PADRE. Eh, dico, la rappresentazione che farà – anche forzandosi col trucco a somigliarmi... - dico, con quella statura...difficilmente potrà essere una rappresentazione di me, com'io realmente sono.  
(122)

The reality for the family is that the Father, deciding that the Mother would be better off with the Secretary, persuades the two of them to start a new life together. Some years later, in search of "facile amore," the father attempts to purchase the stepdaughter's sexual services, only to be interrupted by the arrival of the Mother, who prevents this horrible act from being consummated. In the end, the Young Boy

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<sup>19</sup> The representation must be exact in order for the Six Characters to recognize it as their own.

kills himself, the Little Girl drowns in the fountain and the Stepdaughter runs away. It is not a perfect story by any means, but it is the only story that they have.

*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* was a groundbreaking a play, the likes of which had never before been seen. In the “romanzo che è diventato teatro” Pirandello breaks out of the mold with his representation of “teatro nel teatro” and his uses of different realities. In the foreword he writes: “la rappresentazione del dramma in cui sono involti i sei personaggi appare tumultuosa e non procede mai ordinata: non c’è sviluppo logico, non c’è concatenazione negli avvenimenti” (85). In the end, the reader discovers that the story of the family is a tragedy, but it is over; and through a process of delusional thought, the Six Characters have found their reality. In the words of Pirandello:

Bisogna innanzi tutto non presumere che gli altri, fuori del nostro io, non siano se non come noi li vediamo. Se così presumiamo, vuol dire che abbiamo una coscienza unilaterale; che non abbiamo coscienza degli altri; che non realizziamo gli altri in noi, per usare un’espressione di Josiah Royce, con una rappresentazione vivente per gli altri e per noi (Illustratori, attori e traduttori 224).

## CHAPTER IV

### DELUSIONAL BELIEFS AND RATIONAL BEHAVIOR

In the previous chapter, we saw how the Six Characters found their reality through a process of delusional thought. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will analyze what it means to be delusional and how one can arrive at the conclusion that a person is in fact delusional. Delusional beliefs often mix with rational behavior and thus they are frequently confused. Delusion, or madness, is an idea that is present in some of Pirandello's work such as *Sei personaggi, Enrico IV* and *Uno, nessuno, centomila*. In her introduction to *Pirandello: Three Plays*, Felicity Firth writes: "In Pirandello's thought the pretence of assumed madness is not essentially different from the pretence of assumed rationality" (xxvii). The terms themselves are very clear but the actions that follow can be difficult to label. So the question is: How can two opposite terms be so similar? First we must determine what it means to be delusional and then how what seems to be a delusional thought can instead be considered rational behavior. What I will do in this chapter is question what it means to be delusional, then show how, although the Six Characters appear to be behaving rationally, they are actually delusional.

Delusion as a term can be hard to define, and, in fact, may have many different definitions. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders defines delusion as a false personal belief based upon incorrect inference about

external reality and firmly sustained in spite of what almost everyone else believes and in spite of what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary (Maher 15).

The idea that a literary character could be a living being is absurd; yet the family, particularly the Father, holds firmly to it and is obsessed with finding an author to tell their story. The fact that there could be other theories about the existence of the family is not a possibility that they are willing to explore. It is as if that part of the script has been written and therefore must be considered undisputable truth. Truth is a term that the Six Characters claim to have on their side and, as Donato Santeramo says in his article “Pirandello’s Quest for Truth,” the Father insistently attempts to become the author of what he believes to be the *true* play (45). In fact, it is almost taken for granted by the family that they are indeed living beings and thus the focus of their search is on finding an author to tell their story. Led by the Father, his personal ideals and desires control the content and progress of the play.

In her article “The Genesis of Delusions” Loren Chapman says that the presence or absence of a delusion is determined by the individual’s interpretation of an anomalous experience (175). In the case of the Six Characters, the anomalous experience is that they find themselves in a strange place searching desperately for an author to turn their story into a performance. Their interpretation is that they are living beings who have been born as characters. This is an idea that cannot be accepted in today’s society. On the idea that the Six Characters could be living beings, Farrell writes that the characters must be distinguished from human beings and are as much creatures of fantasy as “Peter Pan and the children of Never-Never-



Land” (xxix). The question that must be answered is: Is the fact that the Six Characters consider themselves living beings grounds for classifying them as delusional?<sup>20</sup>

In his article, “Anomalous Experience and Delusional Thinking: The Logic of Explanation,” Brendan Maher writes that in most discussions on the definition of delusion, one must be careful when looking at other cultures or societies. He says that a belief that might otherwise be regarded as delusional cannot be classified in this manner if it is shared by a certain culture (16). Every culture and cultural sub-group has its own set of beliefs that outsiders would consider delusional, but because that belief is shared by enough people it is simply considered eccentric or superstitious and its people are labeled ignorant or backward. What makes the belief of the Six Characters delusional is that it is not accepted by any societal or cultural group.

The delusional idea that the Six Characters are living beings is what drives the family to look for an author to represent their story. But is this dysfunctional family truly delusional? The argument can be made that in order for society to maintain its reality, the characters must be delusional; but as Maher explains, delusional thinking cannot be considered aberrant.<sup>21</sup> He continues to say that the cognitive processes

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<sup>20</sup> In his introductory remarks in the book *Delusional Beliefs*, Thomas Oltmanns lays out specific criteria for determining if a person and his or her beliefs are indeed delusional. He says that a person is delusional if: 1) after viewing all of the evidence for and against the belief, other people consider it completely incredible; 2) he or she holds on to the belief with firm conviction regardless of the contrary evidence; 3) he or she is preoccupied with, or emotionally attached to, the belief and can focus on nothing else but the belief; 4) the belief is based on personal ideals rather than religious devotion, scientific exploration or political fanaticism (5).

<sup>21</sup> The idea that societal beliefs are what determine madness is also seen in Pirandello’s *Enrico IV* and *Uno, nessuno, centomila*. In her book *Understanding Luigi Pirandello*, Fiore Bassanese writes: “The mad Henry, like Vitangelo Moscarda (*Uno, nessuno, centomila*), challenges the basis of human thought: reason. People fear Henry and seek to accommodate his whims as a way of dismissing his vision, for all the mad cast doubt on the existence of certainties, deny the validity of logic and shake all human constructions” (81).

whereby delusions are formed do not significantly differ from those that are formed in a nondelusional manner (20). The Six Characters are doing what anyone else would do in their situation. They have a goal that they want to see realized and are taking the rational steps necessary to find an author to write their story and have it performed.

If the same belief can be judged as delusional or nondelusional depending on the social conditions and cultural beliefs of the believer, then what it comes down to is that social consensus seems to define the rationality or irrationality of an idea. On this subject, David Heise writes in his article “Delusions and the Construction of Reality,” that the critical issue is whether a person adheres to the social commitment of thinking in a way that other people choose to share. “Individuality in thinking is rejected when it becomes too egocentric” (259). Therefore consensus of the majority appears to be the overriding standard for judging a delusional person and his or her beliefs. It is no longer important what you think, but instead, who else shares your belief.

This is the approach that the Father takes in persuading the Director to become the author of their story. He tries to push his beliefs on the Director, and in order for the Director to take on the project the Father must successfully convince him that the Six Characters are indeed living beings, simply born as characters:

IL PADRE. Niente, signore. Dimostrarle che si nasce alla vita in tanti modi, in tante forme: albero o sasso, acqua o farfalla... o donna. E che si nasce anche personaggi!

IL CAPOCOMICO (con finto ironico stupore). E lei, con codesti signori attorno, è nato personaggio?

IL PADRE. Appunto, signore. E vivi, come ci vede. (97)

After this, and several other attempts by the Father to convince the Director that the Six Characters are alive, life and art come together as the delusional idea that a literary character could be a living being gradually becomes the accepted idea that the characters and actors agree to share. As Maher states, “the most important implication of all this is that we cannot always, or perhaps often, decide that a belief is delusional on the face of it” (17). If this is the case, then the Six Characters’ claim cannot be immediately accepted or denied. What the reader eventually discovers is that the reality of the Six Characters is found in a logical form of delusion.

In his book, *Le logiche del delirio*, Remo Bodei discusses the blurred line between logic and delusion and writes: “Il delirio si presenta quindi, tradizionalmente, come sinonimo di irrazionalità (assurdità, infondatezza, errore, caos) mentre il suo opposto speculare, la ragione, si definisce per contrasto mediante gli attributi dell’evidenza, della dimostrabilità, della verità e dell’ordine. Col tempo, i due concetti sono divenuti complementari” (VII). The fact that delusion and rational behavior can so easily be confused show why the Six Characters are so firm in their stance about their situation. The goal of the Six Characters is very easily understood: to become part of a literary work. According to Anna Balakian, author of the article “Six Characters and Surrealism,” the characters would cease to exist if they were unable to find a director and performers to recreate their story (191).

Although the objective of the Six Characters appears to be a delusional one, the steps the family takes to carry it out are quite rational. Chapman considers delusions to be “rational and systematic explanations of anomalous experiences” (174). She insists that the conclusions are reasonable because the explanations are

arrived at by using the same process that scientists would use to account for their findings. The Six Characters are attempting to understand and explain their situation and much like any rational person, they believe in the conclusions that they have come to. In their minds, there are no other rational conclusions that could explain their situation.

In *Sei personaggi*, it is the family that feels lost and wants to establish itself in this *strange world*.<sup>22</sup> This is what the family does when analyzing its own situation and coming up with an acceptable conclusion. For the Six Characters, according to Adriano Tilgher in his book *Studi sul teatro contemporaneo*, the formation of truth and illusion are one and the same (183). Delusional thoughts come from not being able to understand or explain one's own situation and it is this lack of understanding that causes the family to rationalize that they are living beings. The confusion of the Six Characters is evident by their entrance onto the stage. They wander in after the Stage Doorkeeper looking lost and confused. In Pirandello's words, "L'arrivo dei Sei Personaggi, che, entrati anch'essi nella sala, si saranno messi a seguirlo, a una certa distanza, un po' smarriti e perplessi, guardandosi attorno" (94).

Appearing lost and confused is not grounds for being classified as delusional and in fact not all critics are convinced that a person showing the previously mentioned symptoms should be classified as such. In Maher's article on delusion, he outlines the criticism against labeling people as delusional. Maher says that most people, scientists included, do not readily change their beliefs once they have formed a conclusion. To ask patients to abandon their delusion is equal to asking them to trust

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<sup>22</sup> According to Bodei, delusion is "paradoxically a project of the foundation of the unfindable, an attempt on the part of one who is lost to make oneself at home in a strange world, the search for an elsewhere to make one's own (Logics of Delusion 204).

other people's senses rather than their own, something that can be done, but something that most people are not willing to do (26). For this reason, the family members and the actors cannot agree on how the scenes should be acted out. The two groups have different "senses" when it comes to performing the Six Characters' story. For the Actors, what is important is the representation itself, while for the characters the only thing that matters is the authenticity of the representation. Drama, more than any other art form, explains Mariani, is at the mercy of subjectivity. The Six Characters, unable to hide their discontent concerning the interpretation of their story by the acting troupe, clearly understand this (202).

The term "delusional," according to Maher, has to do with societal preferences. The choice of magic and mystery over scientific research is too prevalent to be considered delusional (26). This has been seen in every culture in the history of mankind from ancient times where human sacrifices to the Gods were essential to a group's survival, to Native American rain dances, to modern superstitions such as knocking on wood or crossing one's fingers for luck. The fact that a large number of people believe in these traditions, exempt them from being considered delusional and blur the line between rational and delusional behavior.

So what is it that makes us consider the Six Characters delusional? What confirms their delusional status is their inability to analyze their own situation. The fact that the ideas of the Six Characters will never change, no matter what the evidence against their conviction is, eliminates their ability to think rationally. The family's unwavering insistence that they are living beings is what makes it delusional. This inability to analyze rationally their own situation is what separates them from the

rest of society. When determining delusional from nondelusional behavior, Chapman says that “the nondelusional person takes the usual step of considering more information about the world than the anomalous experience itself, while the delusional person responds to the experience as if it were the only datum available” (175-76). This is the way in which the family reacts, and, led by the Father and the Stepdaughter, they proceed with their cause as if it were the only possible choice of action. The family members will accept no other conclusion but the one that supports the idea that they were born characters and are unwilling to consider any other explanations. Because of their blind conviction to their thesis, they must be considered delusional. A rational person would be willing to look at other possibilities and the delusional Six Characters are not.<sup>23</sup>

Since the author that created them refuses to put the Six Characters in a literary work, they choose to seek out another author to finish the job. Once they find a suitable substitution, they convince him through a series of logical arguments and, even though the idea at first seems crazy to him, the Director is eventually won over and agrees to take on the job. The Director knows that it is a delusional idea but because he is a rational person, he is able to be swayed and change his opinion. The Father, who is delusional, holds firmly to his beliefs, not wavering no matter what the evidence against him. In his book *The Psychology of Anomalous Experience*, Graham Reed writes that delusions are infamously unshakable. Reed says: “Whatever counter-

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<sup>23</sup> Madness is a topic that is often discussed when referring to the protagonist of Pirandello’s play *Enrico IV*. The difference between Henry IV and the Six Characters is that Henry IV chooses to maintain his mad persona. On the topic of Henry IV’s madness, or lack thereof, Mazzaro writes in his book *Mind Plays*: “He reveals that, in truth, he had been ‘mad’ for ‘about twelve years,’ and upon regaining his senses, he found his place in society taken. The only place open for him was that of his ‘mad’ persona” (28).

evidence is presented, however much experience denies it, the delusion remains firm.” He goes on to say that “normal beliefs, however cherished, can be changed or modified by education, persuasion, coercion or the cumulative effect of contradictory evidence” (143). Because the Director is a reasonable human being, he is able to look at all the evidence and consider different points of view. Even though, as Giudice explains, the idea that a literary character could be a living being represents a completely illogical point of departure on which the whole construction of the play is based, the Father is able to gain ground (181). Through the discussion with the Father, the reader sees the Director’s tone change from: “Ma mi facciamo il piacere d'andar via, che non abbiamo tempo da perdere coi pazzi!” to: “Stiamo a sentire! stiamo a sentire!” and finally to: “Vediamo, tentiamo ... Forse potrà venir fuori veramente qualcosa di straordinario” (96, 104, 116).

In this case, the Six Characters are successful in making delusional ideas seem rational. If we agree that it can sometimes be difficult to decide whether an idea is delusional or rational, then the judgment of these concepts would have to relate to a person’s subjective reality. As David Heise says in reference to personal beliefs: “This reality is not as absolute as it seems. Different epistemologies yield different facts, different truths, and different realities” (260). The Six Characters are searching for answers in their own reality, and in their minds they are taking a very rational and reasonable approach.

The actors are not concerned with the small details of the story and interpret the part in their own way. For the Six Characters, this inaccurate representation is blasphemy. Again, they can only accept their interpretations and anything other than

their personal beliefs is unacceptable. According to Bianca Fergola in her book *La teatralità dal senso alla rappresentazione*, the characters and the actors live in two different worlds. One is the world of fiction in which the characters find reality and the other is the actors' world in which they give a reality to fictional characters (39). This difference of opinion on the accuracy of representation is summed up by the words of the Director: "Ma che verità, mi faccia il piacere! Qua siamo a teatro! La verità, fino a un certo punto!" (136). The actors will never be able to understand fully the characters or their situation, and, according to Mariani, the actors will even mistake the Six Characters for real people. The actors consider the family members to be people who, having lived their strange story in real life, want to put it on the stage for some hidden reason or attempt at financial gain (197).

What makes the Six Characters delusional is that they are constantly attempting to force their reality on others, and even on each other. In reference to *Sei personaggi*, Silvio D'Amico states in his book *Storia del teatro drammatico* that the tragedy of man is that he must delude himself in order to live (193). To understand their situation, the Six Characters have created their own realities. The imposing of these realities is especially prevalent between the Father and the Stepdaughter. It is the Father who has caused, for the most part, the suffering of the family. He forced the relationship between the Mother and the Secretary, sent away the Son, and tried to have sex with the Stepdaughter; yet he refuses to acknowledge the fact that he may have been responsible for the family's problems. In his reality he is not culpable, and the possibility that he could be never enters his mind. No matter what the charge against him, the Father continues to defend his "moral fortitude" and he always has



an answer for his critics: “Sfido! Assaltato così! Imponga un po’ d’ordine, signore, e lasci che parli io, senza prestare ascolto all’obbrobrio, che con tanta ferocia costei le vuol dare a intendere di me, senza le debite spiegazioni” (105).

Although one could argue that the fragile mental state of the Stepdaughter is the result of the actions taken, or not taken, by the Mother and the Father, she also lives in her own delusional reality.<sup>24</sup> The Stepdaughter claims to want out of the situation but keeps putting herself back in it. On the Stepdaughter’s inconsistency, Giudice writes: “The false path between premise and consequence in the Stepdaughter’s speech is present at almost every moment of the play” (174). Just as the Son who cannot bring himself to leave the stage, the Stepdaughter is bound to the Father and is his second in command in the search for an author. She hates the Father, yet desperately desires to recreate their scene of quasi-incest, where their sexual act was only stopped just in time because of the arrival of the Mother. In his book *Delusions of Everyday Life*, Leonard Shengold discusses a similar case where the relationship between a father and his daughter crossed the line of acceptable social behavior. He says: “The patient’s (the daughter’s) wish for change seems to be accompanied by its opposite. What was ‘delusional’ here was the defensive split whereby there was no way to integrate the contradictory wishes” (7). Just as in the case of the Doctor’s patient, the Stepdaughter wants the Father out of her life, but at the same time she forces him to maintain the family financially and to allow them to

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<sup>24</sup> After the death of the Secretary, the Stepdaughter was forced to become a prostitute to help support the family. This leads to the quasi-sexual encounter between the Father and the Stepdaughter. The Stepdaughter loves the Mother but also hates her for being obsessed with setting things right with the Son. Because of the shame she feels for abandoning the Son, the Mother cannot move on with her life or be a mother to the other children.

stay in his house. Although contrary to what she allegedly wants, all of her actions only serve to draw the two of them closer together.

It is as if Shengold were writing about the Father and the Stepdaughter when he comments: “Both the patient and her father were given to similar tendencies, involving all sorts of bizarre manners and practices; they were both full of duplicity for which they took no responsibility and were both subject to ... voluntary illusions” (6-7). Both the Father and the Stepdaughter have strong personalities and continually expect others to live by standards that they themselves are not willing to live by.<sup>25</sup> They demand that everyone listen to them but they constantly interrupt others. At one point, the Stepdaughter cannot control her awkward laughter that she says is caused by the portrayal of her by the Leading Actress. The cycle of laughter/apology that the Stepdaughter goes through represents the erratic behavior of the Father and the Stepdaughter. They switch from demanding to begging, rude to overly polite, and despite their constant attacks on one another, they are united in what Shengold calls, in clinical analysis, “mutual craziness.”

Even though the Son refuses to participate in the whole affair, he is by no means exempt from the delusions that control the family and their actions. Like the other characters, he is also looking for an author, but it is not a dramatic author that the Son wants to find.<sup>26</sup> The Son wants an author that will allow him to leave the family. He is looking to separate himself from their story and after trying unsuccessfully to leave, he refuses to participate in the representation. The fact that

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<sup>25</sup> The Father’s hypocrisy is reflected in his statement: “Ho sempre avuto di queste maledette aspirazioni a una certa solida sanità morale!” (108)

<sup>26</sup> The Son is not interested in a dramatic author because he does not want a part in the family’s play. He would prefer to be erased from the entire situation.

the Son refuses to associate with his family causes him to have a lack of identity. In his discussion on delusion and identity, Shengold says: “The frequently associated denial of external reality can amplify the diminution or break in one’s sense of identity” (162).<sup>27</sup> The only reality that the Six Characters have is that they are a family and without this familiar connection, they would cease to exist; there can be no son without a mother and a father. Stuck with an unbreakable familiar connection, the Son is forced to follow the lead of the Father and the Stepdaughter.

The Son feels the shame of the entire family and has not been able to overcome his past.<sup>28</sup> When discussing delusion and the past, Bodei writes: “Il passato si manifesta perciò in due modi: sciolto nella sua ricodificazione entro nuovi sistemi di segni o incapsulato nello spazio scavato dell’evento traumatico” (Le logiche del delirio 6). The Son’s psychological problems come from a childhood full of neglect, especially paternal, and a lack of affection. It was this lack of affection that caused the Son to isolate himself and constantly try to run away. As Shengold puts it, isolation and repression are effective tools when it comes to the distancing of responsibility. Isolation means to set something apart from feelings and conviction, while repression means pushing something from within the mind completely out of consciousness (165). The Son claims to have no part in the story, but it was his self-

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<sup>27</sup> Although the protagonist from Pirandello’s *Enrico IV* appears to be delusional, it is actually a question of identity and a search for self which drives said play. Henry IV is looking for his place in society and finds it in the historical character whose name and persona he has taken as his own. Concerning the situation of the literary character Henry IV, Mazzaro writes: “Injured in a fall from a horse during a carnival twenty years before, the protagonist loses his identity and retreats to the eleventh century for twelve years. Upon recovering his memory, he finds that he no longer fits into the changed world and, in paranoid fashion, chooses to preserve illusion by postulating his own irrational axioms” (18).

<sup>28</sup> Like many people who have had a traumatic experience, the Son tries to suppress his feelings and to forget his shame. “IL FIGLIO (al Padre). Ma che cos’è codesta frenesia che t’ha preso? Non ha ritegno di portare davanti a tutti la sua vergogna e la nostra! Io non mi presto! Non mi presto! E interpretato così la volontà di chi non volle portarci sulla scena!” (153).

imposed isolation, and the shame of the Mother that caused the Mother to go to him and leave the Little Girl and Young Boy unprotected. The end result of that choice causes the Little Girl to drown in the fountain and the Young Boy to shoot himself.

The delusion of the Six Characters is what leads them on their strange journey from lost character to being part of a literary work.<sup>29</sup> Even though their story is never actually performed by the actors, the fact that they are able to share it with the Director is enough to allow them to cross over from their purgatory to paradise. After their story is complete, they can dissolve into a literary work and, according to the nature of literary characters, live forever. With the completion of the Six Characters' story, the combining of life and art is now complete. At the beginning of the play, the Six Characters represent art in search of life. By the end, they have attained their goal of becoming *life* by telling their story. As Cerasi says: "In realtà, quello che i personaggi vogliono è semplicemente la vita sul palcoscenico, la vita rappresentata: i personaggi vogliono il mondo dell'arte" (129). The Six Characters are now part of the art world and will live forever as literary characters.

In conclusion, what we have discovered about delusion is that social consensus seems to define the rationality or irrationality of an idea. Although the family behaves more or less in a rational manner, what makes the Six Characters delusional is not only that they hold a belief that is not accepted by society, but that they hold the belief with unwavering conviction. The Six Characters will never change their minds, no matter what the evidence against their ideas is. In finding their reality and performing their story, the Six Characters walk the fine line between the concepts of delusional beliefs and rational behavior and in the end leave the actors

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<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of the play, Pirandello describes the Six Character as "smarriti e perplessi" (94).

and the reader wondering if what happened was reality or fiction. The Director expresses this confusion at the end of the play when he shouts: “Finzione! Realtà! Andate al diavolo tutti quanti! Luci!” (155).

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