

Pirandello's Theater and the Rules of the Delusional Mind

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ABSTRACT

SCOTT NELSON: Pirandello's Theater and The Rules of the Delusional Mind
(Under the direction of Dr. Federico Luisetti)

The dissertation analyzes how the concept of delusion is used in some of Pirandello's most influential plays. It explores how each character, or group of characters, uses a version of logic in an attempt to create a personal reality in the following plays: *Enrico IV*, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, *Così è (se vi pare)*, *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*, and *La patente*. The dissertation looks at what it means to have an identity and how people form an identity through a process of logical and delusional thought. In Pirandello's plays, each character's effort to create a personal reality is an attempt to establish a place in society and to be accepted by those around him. Many of the Pirandellian characters are not successful because what they see as logic is considered to be delusion by others. The work applies the concepts of Remo Bodei who sees delusional people as still having the ability to use logic and reason, but from a point of view that has been determined to be delusional. Instead of merely labeling his subjects as delusional, Bodei is interested in how they maintain their use of logic. Reality and delusion are not concepts that are limited to the characters in Pirandello's plays. When witnessing a play, the spectator must also decide if what he is seeing is fact or fiction. With that in mind, the dissertation also explores the theatrical norms that Pirandello challenges and the active role that the audience plays in a Pirandellian theatrical work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Luigi Pirandello is arguably one of the greatest writers in the history of Italian literature. While he is certainly one of the most studied 20th-century Italian writers, Pirandello somehow remains an enigmatic figure whose work continues to captivate readers and encourage study and investigation. As Pietro Frassica states in his book, *Her Maestro's Echo*, Pirandello's varied texts continue to provide a seemingly inexhaustible source of broadly different readings by successive generations of readers (xi).

During his lifetime Pirandello practiced several different genres such as prose, poetry and theater. His first published piece was a collection of poems and his second was a novel, *L'Esclusa (The Excluded Woman)*, in 1893. After the collapse of the family sulphur mine, Pirandello was forced to make his writing a moneymaking endeavor. Coincidentally, the novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal)* was published that same year, 1904, and it brought with it not only financial gain but also international fame. It was not until 1916, feeling that he had well established himself as a poet and novelist, that Pirandello decided to dedicate himself in earnest to theater. In that same year of 1916 Pirandello saw the production of two of his Sicilian dialect plays: *Pensaci, Giacomino! (Think about it, Giacomino!)* and *Liolà*. This was just the beginning of his theatrical success and, over the next decade, Pirandello would devote himself almost entirely to the theater, writing more than forty plays, including *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore (Six Characters in Search of an*

Author) in 1921 and *Enrico IV (Henry IV)* in 1922. Two years before his death on December 10th, 1936, Pirandello was recognized for his body of work with the Nobel Prize for literature.

Pirandello grew up in a Sicily that witnessed both extreme poverty and wealth. Both because of, and despite, the successful sulphur mine that Pirandello's father owned, Pirandello was well aware of the striking contrasts of daily Sicilian life. These contrasts would influence Pirandello's work as well as his life. In his famous 1908 essay, *L'umorismo (On Humor)*, Pirandello presents a sense of disproportion between ideals and reality. He distinguishes the humorous from the comic explaining that while the comic seeks only to make one laugh, the humorous seeks to show the contradiction of opposing ideas and consists in "the feeling of the opposite" that is produced by the activity of reflection. This idea is most famously expressed by the appearance of what Pirandello considers to be a ridiculous old lady.¹ Out of this essay came many of the concepts that would dominate Pirandello's work such as the dualism of life and form and its intricate relation within the psychology of the characters.²

¹ "Vedo una vecchia signora, coi capelli ritinti, tutti unti non si sa di quale orribile manteca, e poi tutta goffamente imbellettata e parata d'abiti giovanili. Mi metto a ridere. *Avverto* che quella vecchia signora è *il contrario* di ciò che una vecchia rispettabile signora dovrebbe essere. Posso così, a prima giunta e superficialmente, arrestarmi a questa impressione comica. Il comico è appunto un *avvertimento del contrario*. Ma se ora interviene in me la riflessione, e mi suggerisce che quella vecchia signora non prova forse nessun piacere a pararsi così come un pappagallo ... ecco che io non posso più riderne come prima, perché appunto la riflessione, lavorando in me, mi ha fatto andar oltre a quel primo avvertimento, o piuttosto, più addentro: da quel primo *avvertimento del contrario* mi ha fatto passare a questo *sentimento del contrario*" (116). "I see an old lady whose hair is dyed and completely smeared with some kind of horrible ointment; she is all made-up in a clumsy and awkward fashion and is all dolled-up like a young girl. I begin to laugh. I *perceive* that she is *the opposite* of what a respectable old lady should be. Now I could stop here at this initial and superficial comic reaction: the comic consists precisely of this *perception of the opposite*. But if, at this point, reflection interferes in me to suggest that perhaps this old lady finds no pleasure in dressing up like an exotic parrot ... then I can no longer laugh at her as I did at first, exactly because the inner working of reflection has made me go beyond, or rather enter deeper into, the initial stage of awareness," Luigi Pirandello, *On Humor* 113.

² As Susan Bassnett-McGuire points out in her book *Luigi Pirandello*, form is a term that is meant to include art, social position, idealism and dreams (25-6).

Despite Pirandello's long-term commitment to the literary genres of the novel and the short story, what made him stand out in the literary scene was his innovative approach to theater. Frassica describes how theater was the perfect medium for Pirandello's artistic expression because of the nature of theater to deal with ideas such as illusion, pretense, and role-playing. He clarifies his point by stating that the actors assume a role for an audience that, as he puts it, "accepts them as those characters and yet is also aware of their existence as actors" (xv).

When discussing his own work in Barcelona in 1924, Pirandello responded to a question about his theater with this remark: "People say that my drama is obscure and they call it cerebral drama. The new drama possesses a distinct character from the old: whereas the latter had as its basis passion, the former is the expression of the intellect. One of the novelties that I have given to modern drama consists in converting the intellect into passion" (Bentley 3). At times, in some of Pirandello's plays, it may seem that passion has trumped intellect, but what is actually present is a passion for intellect. The Pirandellian character is incredibly passionate, even to a fault, about his logic and intellect. This is a fact that sometimes leads him to create what might be considered a delusional reality.

As with any multi-faceted character, the Pirandellian character is more than just passion and intellect. The Pirandellian hero is often a self-analyzing and self-aware character who suffers from loss yet protests dramatically against it. As Umberto Mariani writes in his book *Living Masks: The Achievement of Pirandello*, Pirandello's characters know that their loss is final yet they resent it. They refuse to resign themselves to the chaos of formlessness and of insignificance. This chaos is what Mariani refers to as their conflict and their drama

(5).³ According to Massimo Castri, director of Pirandello's *Vestire gli ignudi* (*To Dress the Naked*), the Pirandellian character is defined by the impossibility of living in the present. He states: "Gli altri ti vivono sempre per quello che sei stato, per quello che loro t'immaginano essere, per quello che sarai; mai per quello che sei, o meglio che pensi di essere (*Pirandello ottanta* 24)."⁴

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, who had a nervous breakdown after the collapse of the family's sulphur mining business, in an asylum. Antonietta lived with her madness for several years, but after driving her daughter to attempt suicide, the family was forced to commit her to a mental institution. When asked by a journalist, in May of 1924, if his wife's illness allowed him to study the world of the mad, their psychology, or their logic, Pirandello had this to say: "Studiare, no. Chi soffre e vive un tormento di una persona che si ama non ha modo di studiare, perché dovrebbe mettersi nello stato d'indifferenza dello spettatore. Ma certo il vedere come si trasforma la vita nello spirito della mia povera compagna mi potè dare l'avvertimento a sentire, poi, nella creazione, la psicologia degli alienati." (*Pirandello: Biografia per immagini* 75).⁵ Understanding this "psychology of the

³ Mariani continues to say that the Pirandellian characters know that they will never arrive at an acceptable solution yet their longing for form and a shared reality are so strong that they continue to search and strive for this unattainable goal (6).

⁴ "Others always see you for what you used to be, for what they imagine you to be, for what you will be: never for what you are, or better yet, what you think you are" (trans. mine).

⁵ "Not to study it. Whoever suffers and lives the torment of a person he loves is unable to study it because that would mean assuming the indifference of a spectator. But to see life being transposed in the mind of my poor

alienated” is possibly what led Pirandello to give such a strong voice to the minority opinion in his work.

In his biography of Pirandello, Gaspare Giudice begins by quoting a novel that Pirandello wrote at age fifty. In said novel, *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio (The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio)*, one of the characters does not see the point of four different types of lighting over a sixty-year period. The old man, Signor Cesarino, is overwhelmed by technological advancements and questions the wisdom of constant change in the name of progress (1). Giudice attributes this idea to Pirandello himself, a man who was born in the middle of the nineteenth century and who saw great change over his lifetime.⁶ Unlike Signor Cesarino, however, Pirandello was not overwhelmed by technological advancement. Pirandello was willing to consider new ideas and he often used them to question traditional thinking and outdated social norms.

In his book, *Mind Plays*, Jerome Mazzaro points out that Pirandello was part of an era that questioned the absolutes in religion and mathematics and witnessed the development of new technologies and ideas (10). This calling into doubt of established beliefs undoubtedly influenced Pirandello’s views on reality and led him to believe that reality could be more subjective than objective.

When dealing with the subjectivity of reality, one must consider that ideas that have traditionally been considered delusional or mad by some could simply be seen as another point of view by others. Delusion, or madness, is an idea that is present in much of Pirandello’s work. In her introduction to *Pirandello: Three Plays*, Felicity Firth writes that in

companion enabled me later to convey the psychology of the alienated in my creative writing,” Pirandello, *Pirandello: A Biography* 119.

⁶ Some of those technological advancements during Pirandello’s lifetime include: electric lighting, the telephone, cinema, the radio, the automobile, and the airplane.

Pirandello's thought, the pretence of assumed madness is essentially the same as 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?

Pirandello's Theater and the Rules of the Delusional Mind explores the ideas of reality and delusion by looking at some of Pirandello's most influential plays in which each character, or group of characters, uses his own version of logic, or a logical form of delusion, in an attempt to create a personal reality.⁷ By exploring reality, delusion, and the space in between the two concepts, this study follows each character on his quest to create a personal reality. What results is that it is actually a lack of understanding that motivates the Pirandellian character. His effort to create a personal reality is an attempt to establish a place in society where he can be accepted and appreciated by those around him. Unfortunately this delusion of mutual understanding is what drives the Pirandellian character to the brink of madness and, in some cases, over the edge.

With so much mobility in today's society, we often take for granted how privileged we are in regard to personal travel. Yet with travel and moving to new places comes the struggle of trying to fit in with new surroundings and cultures. What this study focuses on is how an individual, or group of individuals, searches for his place in society. During Pirandello's time, society's rules and norms were much stricter than they are now. In Pirandello's plays, the Pirandellian character often struggles to find a place in society as he is traditionally considered someone who is out of place. Society sees him as an outsider who must be broken down and made to live the same way as everyone else. If he cannot be broken, he is shunned.

⁷ When I use the term "logical form of delusion," I am referring to a character's logical process to come up with a conclusion that society would consider delusional.

This study explores the Pirandellian character's struggle to form an identity in five plays: *Enrico IV*, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, *Così è (se vi pare)*, *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*, and *La patente*. It looks at what it means to have an identity and how people form this reality through logical and delusional thought during each character's journey. It examines the opposing forces that want to block certain realities from forming and how these groups use their own version of logic, reality, and delusion to accomplish this.

While Pirandello takes common ideas as subjects, his genius was in finding a new and interesting way to portray them. In this study I am using the concepts of reality and delusion, concepts that Pirandello explored in detail, and looking at them from a different point of view. I am not looking to point out social injustices. This study, instead, focuses on the character's journey not in spite of, but because of, his social failures. While it is inevitable to avoid the argument altogether, rather than focus specifically on whether or not Henry IV is sane or insane, for example, I look at his personal realities and what happens each time he transitions from one reality to another. In the chapter on *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* the study explores how the characters form their own personal reality, not through some personal triumph, but through a process of delusional thought.

While the questioning of reality generally focuses on the characters in the theatrical works, it would be negligent to ignore the role that the audience – sometimes scripted and other times spontaneously – plays in Pirandello's theater. During his time Pirandello challenged many of the established norms in theater and creative writing. One of the major norms that Pirandello confronted attacked the conventions of theater. Several of his plays turned theater upside down and made his audiences question their own assumptions and personal truths. When studying any Pirandellian play, it is important to look at the role that

the spectator plays. As the audience either plays a role in, or is affected by, the plays of Pirandello, the study evaluates the use of presence in theater. The audience is no longer a passive observer of a theatrical production. Instead it is required to participate in a show that often appears to be more reality than fiction.

In his book *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, Norman Holland explores the audience's response to Pirandello's plays. He states that the metatheatrical nature of the plays creates a sense of uncertainty in the audience who subsequently calls into question its own reality as well as the reality on stage (99). Pirandello, whose work dealt with many topics, excelled at making the spectator share the same feelings and emotions as the characters on stage. This is one of the main reasons that the opening performance of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* was such a failure. Not only could the audience not understand what was happening on stage, it could not deal with the emotional confusion and the questioning of reality that such a performance stirred up.

My theories for this study are based on the work of Remo Bodei, specifically, his book *Le logiche del delirio (Logics of Delusion)*. Bodei sees delusional people as still having the ability to use logic and reason, simply from a point of view that has been determined to be delusional. Instead of merely labeling his subjects as delusional, he is interested in how they maintain their use of logic. I am using a similar approach in this thesis. The characters, and society, use their own version of logic and delusion to justify their actions. They want to attain their goals despite the effect that their behavior might have on the people around them.

In the introduction to his book, 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).⁸ He states that deluded individuals must shape for themselves a personality and a reality, and he carefully explains how he has chosen to go against the grain when it comes to traditional thought on delusion and instead of focusing on why delusion occurs, he focuses on why, for the most part, a deluded individual continues to reason normally.⁹

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, "reality is not as absolute as it seems. Different epistemologies yield different facts, different truths, and different realities" (260). This is the world in which the Pirandellian character lives. He has his own facts, truths and, ultimately, his own reality.

In chapter two of the dissertation discusses the impossibility of forming a personal reality for the protagonist of *Enrico IV*. When dealing with said play, critics often focus on the "sanity" or "madness" of its protagonist. While living a persona of madness, Henry is in fact a logical character throughout the course of the play. The driving force behind his logic is ultimately his own inner struggle to establish a personal identity. This chapter examines Henry's temporary insanity, his recovery, and the effect that these, and other, events have on his establishing a personal identity. After discussing what it means to have an identity, the work examines the five realities that Henry experiences during the play and what happens

⁸ "Delusion, then, has traditionally been presented as synonymous with irrationality (absurdity, groundlessness, error, chaos), while its mirror image, reason, has been defined in terms of evidence, demonstrability, truth and order. Over time the two concepts have become complementary," Bodei, *Logics of Delusion* iv.

⁹ The ideas expressed by 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 form of logic.

each time he transitions to and from a particular reality. What Henry eventually discovers is that his search has been done in vain and by the end of the play he is forced to accept his temporary insanity as his permanent reality and to live out the remainder of his life as the historic German king and Holy Roman Emperor.

Chapter three makes 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. Through my examination of the family as a whole, and also as individuals, the reader sees how the tragedy unfolds and the part that each member of the family plays. It details the struggle of the six characters with the author and, more importantly, with each other. As the play progresses, the study follows the family’s quest to find an author and to see their story performed. Through their continued struggle we see how the six characters find their reality through a process of delusional thought.

The fourth chapter examines the social norms and group psychology employed by the characters in *Così è (se vi pare) (Right You Are! If You Think So)*.¹⁰ It follows the town elite in their attempt to discover the truth about the situation between Mr. Ponza, his wife, and his Mother-in-law, Mrs. Frola. While Pirandello holds the belief that multiple facets of the truth can exist, this work argues that the townspeople use a form of group psychology and group logic in an attempt to alter the personal reality of the Ponza/Frola family. Their delusional idea is not that the truth exists, but that it is a truth that fits within their social boundaries. While it can be argued that the Ponza/Frola family has already established a personal reality,

¹⁰ The title of the play has also been translated as *It Is So! (If You Think So)*.

this chapter studies how the townspeople attempt to destroy said reality and remake it in a way that they deem socially acceptable even if that means destroying the lives of the Ponza/Frola family in the process.

Chapter five investigates how presence in theater facilitates the questioning of reality in *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* (*Tonight We Improvise*). While exploring how the idea of presence is used in the work, this chapter attempts to discover how that affects the established reality of not only the characters (actors), but of the audience as well. Presence in theater can be understood as that which makes the fictional present. What may have happened in the past, or never at all for that matter, is happening now on stage in front of a live audience. What *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* does is to blur the line between a fictional present and a real life present. This investigation not only looks at how the play conforms to the rules of presence, but how it breaks them and what effect that has on the actors' situation. Some other questions I want to answer are: What is the reality of the actors and of the audience and how is that reality, and their conventional wisdom, called into question? What we see is that, as the play progresses, both the characters and the spectators begin to doubt what they had so recently and fervently believed to be the undisputed truth. They become trapped between reality and delusion.

The sixth chapter of this study explores the concepts of good and evil and the lack of understanding between Chiarchiaro and Judge D'Andrea in the play *La patente* (*The License*). As we have seen from other studies, the "truth" is whatever the majority determines it to be and being on the wrong side of this truth can be disastrous. As is the case with many of Pirandello's works, the truth in *La patente* is neither black nor white. No one knows that better than the accused *jettatore*, Chiarchiaro who, as a member of the working

class, continually suffers the injustices of an ignorant and superstitious society that has labeled him as someone to be feared and avoided. While he eventually chooses to embrace delusion, Chiarchiaro is the result of society's creation and lives and acts accordingly. Judge D'Andrea, on the other hand, lives as part of the social elite and believes in the power of the law to ensure that justice is done. After analyzing the concepts of good in evil in the play this chapter examines the mutual lack of understanding that takes place between the two lead characters and how that determines the work's final outcome.

While examining the ideas of delusion and reality, I compare these concepts with the conventional wisdom and societal norms that permeate the thinking of the dominant groups in the five plays. The end result is the futility of an individual to effect change, ironically, in a society that is both constantly changing and continually resisting change. In order to live in society, and by society's rules, the Pirandellian character must give up a part of himself and his identity. When he cannot, or is not willing, to play by society's rules he is forced out by the dominant group.

CHAPTER 2

Between Reason and Madness: The Impossibility of Establishing a Personal Reality in *Enrico IV*

When dealing with Pirandello's play *Enrico IV* critics often focus on the "sanity" or "madness" of its protagonist. While living a persona of madness, Henry IV is in fact a logical character throughout the course of the play, and the driving force behind his logic is ultimately his own inner struggle to establish a personal identity.¹¹ In his review of *Enrico IV*, Adriano Tilgher explains how life is forced to take a determined form and, by the play's end, is imprisoned in the identity of the historic king. Umberto Mariani builds on Tilgher's ideas and begins one of his own articles by citing Tilgher's description of the "profound and powerful logic" in *Enrico IV*. What Tilgher and Mariani sustain is that although Henry IV appears to be insane, he is acutely aware of everything going on around him and represents the most logical character of the play. While this has become the dominant view of many critics, Eric Bentley, in his article "*Il Tragico Imperatore*," aptly points out that the absence of Henry's delusion is not proof of his sanity (70). While this is an interesting topic for debate, the possible sanity or madness of the protagonist is only a small part of the play's complicated structure. "Sane or insane," as Bentley continues, "the protagonist is presented

¹¹ Although a name is never given to the protagonist other than Henry IV, some critics have attempted to provide one for him. In his book, *Il teatro di Pirandello*, Vincenzo di Maria refers to the protagonist as "signor X" before the accident and as "Enrico IV" after the accident. In his article "Enrico IV: The Tragic Author," Eric Bentley calls Henry IV "the young man" (13). Bentley also refers to Henry IV as "the nameless one" in his article "Il tragico imperatore" (74). In this chapter, I will refer to the protagonist by the only name that the reader is ever given: "Henry IV" or, as many other critics have done, simply "Henry."

as a deeply disturbed person” (70). The fact that this confusion and doubt exist only adds to the complexity of the play. Consequently, when Henry IV casts his rival Belcredi as the hostile Peter Damiani, one must question whether this is motivated by a personal dislike of Belcredi or if it is simply part of the historical delusion in which Henry IV lives (Mazzaro 24).

In the book, *The Making of Modern Drama*, Richard Gilman wisely warns the reader of not trying to reduce Pirandello’s work down to an easily identifiable term such as “intellectual” or “emotional.” He writes that characters and ideas are not limited to either illusion or reality, but both. This truth is made present on the stage and is a driving force in Pirandello’s complex dramatic art (160). For Pirandello, mutually exclusive alternatives do not exist and the path of mutual inclusion is the path that I intend to take in this chapter when dealing with delusion and reality. While they can be considered opposite ideas, for the Pirandellian character they are often one and the same.

In this chapter I examine Henry’s temporary insanity, his recovery, and the effect that these, and other, events have on his establishing a personal identity and reality. After discussing what it means to have an identity, I will examine what I call Henry IV’s five realities, or identities, that he experiences during the play and what happens each time he transitions to and from a particular reality.¹² What Henry eventually discovers is that his search has been done in vain. By the end of the play Henry is forced to accept his temporary insanity as his permanent reality and live out the remainder of his life as the historic German king and Holy Roman Emperor. When describing Henry IV, Bentley writes that what the protagonist gives us is the experience of a man with Pirandellian opinions applied with the

¹² Although the play begins many years after Henry’s fall, my analysis of Henry’s situation will follow a chronological order and discuss all of the stages that the protagonist goes through.

task of “constructing himself.” Bentley posits that that was the meaning of Henry’s “play-acting” even in advance of the masquerade and that that was the meaning of the masquerade itself and, in-voluntarily, of the protagonist’s insanity afterwards. He concludes by saying that the point of all of this is that Henry always failed (72).

In his article, “On Henry IV,” Maurice Valency discusses how the disastrous reception of *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* on its opening night in Rome led to the successful creation of *Enrico IV* (224). Pirandello had experienced little joy in his life and the rejection of his most original work only served to embitter him even more. Pirandello, who began the writing of *Enrico IV* immediately after the first performance of *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* finished what many consider his masterpiece in only four months. Valency speculates that if *Sei personaggi* had been well received, Pirandello would not have been able to write *Enrico IV*. When discussing the play and its author, Valency writes: “He distilled into it all the bitterness with which a lifetime of misfortune had inspired him, and all the scorn and indignation of an unforgiving nature. It was a magnificent act of revenge, and it was the high point of his genius. He never wrote better, or as well” (224).

The main character of *Enrico IV*, after suffering some form of amnesia caused by a fall from his horse, believes himself to be the German king and Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, who was born in 1056 and died in 1106. For twelve years he was stuck in this delusion and after regaining his memory he realizes that everyone has accepted his madness as his reality and treats him as if he really were the historic Henry IV. His dilemma, now that he has regained his grasp on reality, is whether to reenter society – after a twenty-year absence – or to remain in his delusion and to live out the rest of his life as the historic king.

The play begins with the description of Henry's villa, which has been furnished and decorated to look exactly like the throne room of the historic Henry IV, in the royal residence at Goslar in Germany. Two life size portraits representing a man and woman in carnival dress dominate the room. One is of Henry IV and the other is of the Marchioness Matilda of Tuscany.¹³

As the curtain rises, a group of men hired to play the part of the secret council to the king, dressed as 11th-century German knights, discuss their acting duties with the new arrival Berthold. Through this heated and confusing discussion, the audience learns that Berthold has studied the history of the French, not German, Henry IV. While Berthold tries to get up to date on his role, an announcement is made that the Marquis has arrived with some friends.¹⁴ Accompanying the Marquis, Charles Di Nolli, is the Marchioness Matilda Spina, her daughter Frida, the Baron Tito Belcredi, and Doctor Dionysius Genoni. Their plan, developed by the doctor, is to "shock" Henry out of his delusion. Before entering the room, Matilda and Belcredi fill the doctor in about Henry's eccentricities and about what happened after Henry fell from his horse. Belcredi views Henry's madness with cynicism while Matilda holds out hope that he can still be cured.¹⁵ They go on to tell the doctor that, after the fall, everyone thought Henry was fine until he began "living his part." As Belcredi explains: "Enrico IV, ecco! Proprio Enrico IV in persona, in un momento di furore!" (36).¹⁶

¹³ The paintings are of Henry at age 26 and Donna Matilda, with whom he was in love. While much of the play can be considered "historically accurate," there is no historic evidence that the German King and Holy Roman Emperor was ever in love with the Marchioness of Tuscany.

¹⁴ The young Marquis is the son of Henry's late sister and has been charged by her to maintain Henry's historic present until he can be cured of his delusion, something she felt was near at hand.

¹⁵ Belcredi continually refers to Henry as a good actor.

¹⁶ "He was Henry IV, Henry IV in person, in a moment of fury" (159).

At Landolph's insistence, the visitors decide to dress in character before entering Henry's chamber. As they enter Henry greets them in a fashion that their historic rank and stature would require. After Henry converses with his guests as if they were the historic figures that they are portraying, the Doctor informs the group that he considers the visit sufficient for diagnosing Henry's delusion.

The second act begins after the visit has taken place with Donna Matilda confessing her feeling that Henry recognized her. This is a thought that Belcredi and the Doctor quickly disregard as ridiculous, but after further thought the Doctor admits that a lucid moment is not outside the realm of possibility. As the discussion concludes, Frida enters wearing the dress that her mother, Donna Matilda, wore on the day of the masquerade and posed in for the portrait that hangs on Henry's wall. Frida is the mirror image of the portrait and the key to the doctor's plan of "shocking" Henry out of his delusion.

Before they can put their plan into action, Landolph enters telling the guests about Henry's sad emotional state after their visit. Landolph says that Henry is upset about what he has said to them and has asked the visitors to return. They agree and after this second visit Henry reveals the truth about his mental state to his advisors. Henry confesses that he is not at all mad and has simply been playing his part, something that he no longer wishes to do. As the advisors/actors look on in amazement, Henry explains how he has been playing the part of the madman for the past eight years. Having woken from his twelve-year delusional slumber, Henry explains his situation and what it means to be a madman.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the Doctor has put his plan in motion. In order to shock Henry out of his supposed delusion, the portraits have been replaced by the young Frida and Di Nolti. They stand inside of the empty frames dressed in the historic garments of the Marchioness of

¹⁷ This is a particularly interesting scene that will be explored in detail later in this chapter.

Tuscany and the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV. As the supposedly delusional Henry IV heads towards his bedroom, he hears the voice of Frida calling out to him. In a fit of panic, Frida jumps out of the frame in terror. In the chaos of the moment the lights come on as everyone rushes in to see what is happening. As it becomes apparent that Henry had recovered from his madness eight years earlier, everyone begins to discuss Henry's situation. Henry explains that after waking up twelve years after the accident, he decided that it would be easier for him to continue playing the part of the delusional Henry IV rather than dealing with the changes that have since occurred in the outside world. The protagonist has therefore chosen to live as the historic Henry IV for the past eight years.

After discussing the concept of reality and arguing about who is truly mad, Henry turns his attention to Frida and takes her into his arms. As the others attempt to free her, Henry orders his advisors to hold them back. As if accustomed to doing his bidding, they instinctually obey his order. Belcredi, breaking free, lunges towards Frida and is stabbed by Henry. Mortally wounded, Belcredi is carried off stage and the scream of Donna Matilda confirms that Belcredi has died. Henry's final act is to call his advisors to his side. He is now frozen in the mad persona of King Henry IV.

What must be kept in mind when dealing with *Enrico IV* is the play's temporal framework. In his article, "Henry IV and Time," Alberto De Vivo notes the play's three historical periods. The year 1922 is the year in which Pirandello wrote the play and 1920 is the year that the story begins. At this point, Henry is twenty-six years old and in love with Donna Matilda. This is also the year in which Henry falls off of his horse and begins his delusion as the historic German King. Finally, 1071 is the year that the historic Henry IV was penitent at Canossa and the period of time in which Pirandello's Henry IV has chosen to live.

De Vivo adds, importantly, that two other time periods need to be included to complete the protagonist's temporal framework. Those time periods are, he writes, Henry's crucial reawakening around the year 1912 and the time period of Henry's future. The future time period is to be understood as the dimension of the possible, the not yet, what he hopes will be (40-1). The future is also the time period that Henry yearns for and desperately attempts to regain. This is clearly expressed by Henry who begs the "Duchess" (Donna Matilda) and "Peter Damiani" (Belcredi) to intervene on his behalf and implore the Pope to release him from his eternal cage:

ENRICO IV. [...] Ma poi voi due, dopo la revoca della scomunica, dovrete implorarmi questo dal Papa che lo può: di staccarmi di là [*indica di nuovo il ritratto*] e farmela vivere tutta, questa mia povera vita, da cui sono escluso... Non si può aver sempre ventisei anni, Madonna! (58)

HENRY IV. But you two, when the excommunication is taken off, must ask the Pope to do this thing he can so easily do: to take me away from that; [*Indicating the portrait again.*] and let me live wholly and freely my miserable life. A man can't always be twenty-six, my Lady! (172)

Time is only one factor that influences the behavior of the protagonist of *Enrico IV* and his possibility of establishing a personal reality. While the twenty years that Henry lost essentially forbid him from returning to his previous life, his identity is continually determined through his interactions with the other characters. Henry's identity is in constant state of flux and regarding his mental state, confusion reigns from the beginning to the end of the play.

In the introduction to the book *Personal Identity*, Ellen Frankel Paul discusses Diotima's view on identity and states that what we think of as a continuing personal identity is in actuality an illusion. She posits that the people we are today are not necessarily the same as the people we were yesterday. Not only our bodies, but also our actions and thoughts will

change over time (vii). For Henry IV, his entire persona is an illusion, an identity that has been taken from history. His present is actually an imaginary past and in order for him to gain a future, he must get himself out of his historical past, i.e., his current present. Henry is caught in a form of delusion, or a perceived delusion, that has trapped him in his historic past/present. This delusion holds the key to his gaining of a future as is seen at the end of the play.

Henry cannot have a future because he refuses to drop the mask of the historic Henry IV. In her article “Pirandello’s Notion of Time,” Luisetta Chomel writes: “Fixed in the past of his historic role, Enrico lives in a timeless dimension, where present and future are both denied” (34).¹⁸ Although the safe choice for him is to remain inside of his now knowingly false delusion, Henry IV would like nothing more than to step outside of this illusion and return to the real world. Once he returns to society’s present, he will be given the possibility of a future. Regrettably, by the end of the play this is a choice that Henry can no longer make.

Unfortunately for the play’s protagonist, the person that he was before his accident no longer exists and who he is after he recovers from his amnesia is unknown even to him. Although Henry has the freedom to choose his own identity, he cannot seem to find an acceptable option and throughout the play he struggles with this dilemma. Bassanese discusses the public perception of Henry IV and how he is continually defined by his delusions and illusions. For all around him he is mad, but for the man who wears the mask of

¹⁸ In her book, *Understanding Luigi Pirandello*, Bassanese points out the mutability and fragmentation of time itself. If we analyze the imperial throne room, it becomes apparent that there is no clearly defined moment in time: The décor is medieval, the paintings modern and one of the servants is smoking a cigarette. When the newly hired Bertoldo arrives it turns out that he is in a completely different century having learned the part of the French Henry IV, not the German one that he has been hired to serve (80).

madness there is no such stability when dealing with identity. Henry is unable to maintain an intact self to call “I” (81).

One of the reasons why Henry IV is unable to maintain an intact self is what Edward Fesser calls, in his article “Personal Identity and Self-Ownership,” “the thesis of self ownership.” Fesser says that each individual has complete ownership of himself and that no innocent person can legitimately be made to be a slave because to take a person would be to steal him from himself (101). Because of his injury and resulting amnesia, Henry’s original identity was in a sense stolen from him and by the end of the play he has become a slave to his historic identity. It is precisely because Henry does not maintain ownership of his “self” that he struggles with his personal identity, an identity that is therefore in a constant state of flux.

When discussing how personal identities change, Paul cites Aristotle’s proposed solution to this problem. He said that when a substance undergoes a change, there is something about it that remains the same. Aristotle called this quality the “substratum.” Although an identity will change in many ways over time, it will retain the same substratum because essentially it keeps the same essence (vii-viii). Even after living a delusion for twelve years, Henry retains his “substratum.” The problem for Henry IV is that he has changed too much and that he has not changed enough. His mind has not progressed with the passing of time in the same way that his body has. Henry IV feels like those twelve years have been robbed from him and while the passing of time is evident in regard to his physical appearance, he still remains the same person he was twelve years ago. Henry finds this fact to be unacceptable considering that everyone else has progressed in what would be considered a normal fashion.

An important Bergsonian concept is that of “duration” which defines the theory of time, or the experience of time, and consciousness. According to Bergson, duration involves the succession of conscious states in an immeasurable flow. Real time, therefore, is the experience of duration and time itself is perceived as indivisible. As Bergson writes in his book *Matter and Memory*, duration is not the same for everything or everyone and, in reality, no one rhythm of duration exists by itself (275).

This idea is clearly at work in *Enrico IV*, where the protagonist attempts to transcend time. Henry IV, although he lives outside of time, is still affected by its passage. In his book *The Creative Mind*, specifically the chapter entitled “Introduction to Metaphysics,” Bergson presents the reader with the image of two spools with a tape running between them. As one spool lets out the tape, the other takes it up, representing, for Bergson, his idea of duration. Bergson also compares this idea to old age: As man grows older, his future grows smaller while his past grows larger. This, in a very roundabout way, is happening to Henry IV. As he descends into an old age that he is unable to acknowledge, his future is slowly and inevitably slipping away.

What Henry IV continually reaches for, but knows that he can never grasp, is the freezing of time. The irony of Henry IV is that the person who is trapped in time’s absence is the only one who is truly affected by time’s advancement.¹⁹ Henry IV expresses this idea by describing Belcredi for whom, according to Henry IV, life tomorrow will be exactly as it is today. De Vivo posits that for Belcredi and the other aristocrats nothing will ever change and, for them, time is simply a repetition of sameness. For Henry IV, however, this repetition is perceived as a condemnation (42). Henry IV is forced to use make-up and hair color to

¹⁹ Bassanese discusses the doctor’s plan for curing Henry IV and how it will force Henry IV to become aware of the passing of time and therefore rejecting his so-called delusional state (78).

maintain his mask of the twenty-six year old King Henry IV reflected by the image of his painting. Henry expresses his shock and disappointment when realizing that time passed him by and that it is time that he will never be able to get back.

In his article, "The Tragedy of the Man who Thinks," A. M. Fiskin notes that in many of Pirandello's plays appearance often becomes social reality. He says that in a world that is simply illusions, and personal motivations are unclear to oneself or any other person, the mask finally affects, directs and becomes the accepted reality (50-1). The social reality, and the driving force of *Enrico IV*, is the historic reality in which the protagonist lives and that everyone around him accepts as his world. Various realities are established throughout the play and every time one of the realities is broken, chaos ensues. When defining person and self, Feser defines these two concepts as two descriptions of one and the same kind of entity with *person* being what the outside world sees while *self* would be one's own ideas, or better said, the self seen from the inside (106). Henry is continually misunderstood and the label he is given by those around him rarely corresponds to how he sees himself.

To truly understand Henry IV and his search for identity, we must first look at his life as a whole and examine his five realities. I consider Henry's five realities, or identities, to be, first, Henry's life before the fall. Henry's second reality is his life after the fall and his ensuing madness. The next reality occurs after Henry recovers his sanity but decides to continue his life, and identity, as the historic Henry IV. The fourth reality is when Henry finally reveals to everyone that he has regained his sanity and that he had chosen to continue the charade as the historic German king and of his mad persona. The final reality, whose fate is sealed when the protagonist kills Belcredi, is Henry's permanent retreat into his mad persona.

Before his fall, Henry IV was a young Roman aristocrat brought up in the early twentieth century. Henry IV is described at age twenty-six by Donna Matilda, the woman he loved, and Belcredi, Henry's rival and the cause of his fall, as naïve and spontaneous but aware of his own actions. De Vivo calls Henry IV a man who is conscious of one of life's major paradoxes: that is, the conflict between living life spontaneously and thinking about it (41). This often led to Henry being misunderstood, a theme that continues throughout the play, leading to feelings of loneliness and of being alienated from the people around him.

Instead of putting on a grand pageant for the coming carnival season, before Henry's fall, the young aristocrats decided to masquerade as historic figures. When Donna Matilda assumed the role of the Marchioness of Tuscany, Henry chose to portray the historic German king so as to be near her, since he was courting her at the time. During the cavalcade the young protagonist fell off his horse, hit his head, and awoke believing himself to be the historic German king and Holy Roman Emperor.²⁰ Immediately after the fall no one around him noticed that anything was wrong with Henry. It was not until he appeared in the main room of the villa a couple of hours later that it became apparent that Henry IV was not faking his part, but was instead living it. Donna Matilda claims to have been the first to notice the change:

DONNA MATILDE. Lei immagina, dottore, che spavento, quando si comprese che egli invece, la sua, la recitava sul serio? ... Non dimenticherò mai quella scena, di tutte le nostre facce, sguajate e stravolte, davanti a quella faccia terribile maschera di lui, che non era più una maschera, ma la Follia! (35-36)

DONNA MATILDA. And you can imagine, Doctor, what terror struck into us when we understood that he, on the contrary, was playing his part in deadly earnest ... I shall never forget that scene – all our masked faces hideous and

²⁰ As Belcredi points out in regard to Henry's situation: “- taf! Una botta alla nuca – e non si è più mosso di là: Enrico IV” (37).

“Ha! A smack on the head, and he never moves again: Henry IV forever!” (159).

terrified gazing at him, at that terrible mask of his face, which was no longer a mask, but madness, madness personified! (158-59)

Because of the family's affluence, the young Henry's delusion was allowed to become a reality and in the Umbrian countryside he lived out his delusional existence as the medieval German king. His relatives, specifically his sister, decided to keep him in this artificial medieval setting thinking that they were doing what was best for him. By providing servants instructed to play the role of eleventh-century characters, Henry's delusion is allowed to flourish and lasts for more than a decade. As Bassanese points out, Henry has simply substituted form for being by taking on the life and identity of a man long dead. By making it his own, Henry lives out the pages of history through the memory of what he has studied and, more importantly, his own imagination. Henry dominates his present by completely rejecting it. He adjusts his appearance to suit his personal reality. He dyes his hair blond and dresses in medieval clothing. His residence has become a medieval castle whose location, that is to say identity, changes according to the ruler's whim (Bassanese 76).

In her article, "Experience, Agency, and Personal Identity," Marya Schechtman writes that in most circumstances, survival will involve identity. This means that the person as whom one survives will naturally be oneself. However, she continues, there does exist the possibility to survive as someone else (3). Henry's fall from his horse is so traumatic that when he wakes up he believes himself to be someone other than who he actually is. So in effect, Henry IV does not only survive as someone else, but completely assumes that new identity. Schechtman states that once we learn that we can have what matters in survival without identity, we see that primary interest is focused on survival rather than personal identity (3). This is why, as the reader will realize by the end of the play, Henry IV is able to

choose which identity, or mask, he will wear.²¹ Although none of the masks available to him are what he would necessarily choose on his own, Henry ends up choosing the one that gives him, and his lifestyle, the best chance of survival. With the murder of Belcredi, Henry's only chance of remaining a free man is by living a lie and fully accepting his identity, and madness, as the historic German king and Holy Roman Emperor.

The mask that Henry IV chooses to wear for approximately eight years is that of the historic German monarch. After twelve years of madness, Henry claims to have spontaneously recovered his sanity but decided to continue living the life that had been created after his accident. Although initially eager to rejoin his interrupted life, Henry realized that he had grown middle-aged as the historic figure Henry IV and that society was not eager to welcome him back. As is noted in Belcredi's description of the protagonist, Henry was already an outsider before he hit his head and became insane. It is an interesting description in which Belcredi refers to Henry's eccentricity as being both genuine and somewhat acted out. Belcredi believed this to be the case even in Henry's most spontaneous of actions; something that Belcredi claims caused Henry great suffering and led to personal fits of anger.

BELCREDI. A mio vedere, perché quella subitanea lucidità di rappresentazione lo poneva fuori, a un tratto, d'ogni intimità col suo stesso sentimento, che gli appariva – non finto, perché era sincero – ma come qualche cosa a cui dovesse dare lí per lí il valore... che so? d'un atto d'intelligenza, per sopperire a quel calore di sincerità cordiale, che si sentiva mancare. E improvvisava, esagerava, si lasciava andare, ecco, per stordirsi e non vedersi più. Appariva incostante, fatuo e... sí, diciamolo, anche ridicolo, qualche volta. (34)

BELCREDI. Evidently, because that immediate lucidity that comes from acting, assuming a part, at once put him out of key with his own feelings,

²¹ Some critics have argued that Henry is ruled by fear and, subsequently, unable to make an autonomous choice regarding his identity. While Henry's final identity is eventually chosen for him, I would argue that his deliberation process is dominated by logic and reason, not fear.

which seemed to him not exactly false, but like something he was obliged to give the value there and then of – what shall I say – of an act of intelligence, to make up for that sincere cordial warmth he felt lacking. So he improvised, exaggerated, let himself go, so as to distract and forget himself. He appeared inconstant, fatuous, and – yes – even ridiculous, sometimes. (157-58)

Henry, someone who was considered awkward and eccentric before his accident, knows that on returning to his previous identity he would be subject to public scrutiny and finger-pointing and would be forever branded “the recovered madman.” Because of this reasoning Henry elects to live out his days as a twentieth century madman in the guise of a medieval king. By faking his madness, Henry allows himself to exist in what Bassanese calls “the fixed confines of history” (77). This way Henry is able to live in an established and unchanging reality as apposed to the unknown that the rest of society must deal with on a daily basis. By choosing to live as an historic figure, Henry has essentially renounced his biological origins. As Ann Caesar says in her book *Characters and Authors in Luigi Pirandello*, naming is the most important moment in a process aimed at giving one an identity (114).²² His given name is of no importance and Henry IV, along with the reader, instead struggles to determine who Henry is today, not who he used to be. That is why, ultimately, Henry cannot return to his old life because he is no longer the person he used to be.

When looking at the etymology of the word “identity” we see that it is formed from the Latin *idem*, meaning “same” or “sameness,” and *entitas*, meaning “entity.” As it appears to be constantly changing, Henry’s identity is not something that would typically be defined as “same” or “sameness.” Through further exploration of word etymology, one also finds the word *identidem*, defined as “over and over.” In her unpublished manuscript, “There’s More

²² Here Caesar is referring specifically to another work by Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, but these words also ring true for *Enrico IV*. Throughout the play we know the protagonist only as Henry IV.

Than One 'I' in Identity: An Etymological Search for the Link Between Identity and Identification,” Wendy Hollway defines *identidem* as “a process of identity developed over time through repetition” (1). While Henry’s historic identity is originally forced upon him by his delusion, once he recovers and consciously decides to continue living as the historic king and Holy Roman Emperor, his life, and in part the life of his advisors, become an *identidem*, or an identity entrenched through repetition.

Like Henry IV, both Mattia, in *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, and Vitangelo, in *Uno, nessuno e centomila (One, No one, and One Hundred Thousand)*, experiment with their respective identities. The main difference between Henry IV and Mattia and Vitangelo is that Henry’s identity was imposed on him by his head injury and, for the reader, he is never known as anyone else. Even when Henry IV reveals that he is no longer mad, to the reader he is still the same person. After a promising youth, much like Mattia Pascal, Henry IV realizes that there is no place for him in his former life. Unlike Pascal though, Henry IV refuses to retake his name and resume his aristocratic life. While Pascal made a success of his new persona, his family and town have long since adjusted to his perceived death. He therefore decides to resume his life as Mattia Pascal by living on the outskirts of society. Henry IV, who would like to reclaim his former identity, lost twelve years of his life and now looks on his previous existence as being unworthy of being lived.

In their book *Time and Man*, L. R. B. Elton and H. Messel discuss the problems that ensue when one moves between the two different aspects of time that have been previously discussed and states that contradictions arise when the character ceases to be an outside observer of the scene and attempts to become an active participant (102). While Henry IV lives in his delusion everyone knows exactly how to treat him and therefore there are no

problems. But when he attempts to break out of his delusional persona and reenter society, the reality that had been established is broken and chaos ensues. Henry's advisors, who have become well established and comfortable in their roles as historic characters, are clueless as how to act once Henry reveals to them that he is no longer delusional. It is a strange twist of irony that even after Henry has apparently recovered his sanity he is still considered to be mad. The result is that no matter which reality Henry chooses to live in, it always seems to be the wrong one.

Caesar makes an interesting statement when she writes: "The Pirandellian hero is a character who in some sense has come through and has created for himself a life which, whether lived within the community he grew up in or not, is detached from the collective set of beliefs that works as that society's social glue" (161). Although the identity of the historic Henry IV was originally one that the protagonist took due to madness, over time it is one that he has shaped to his liking and it is one that he ultimately controls. For Henry, anything is possible because he is living a scripted history that in a sense he controls. Henry is living the history of the German Henry IV but essentially is in charge of his own actions. Like many writers and directors, Henry is free to invent episodes and characters that suit his mood and his current vision. When a new person enters his life, Henry has the possibility, within reason, to decide who that person is and why he is there. Henry can also order his advisors to bring someone to him, and they will obey.

ENRICO IV. È Pietro Damiani?

LANDOLFO. No, Maestà, è un monaco di Cluny che accompagna l'Abate.

ENRICO IV. (*torna a spiare il Belcredi con crescente diffidenza e, notando che egli si volge sospeso e imbarazzato a Donna Matilde e al Dottore, come per consigliarsi con gli occhi, si rizza sulla persona e grida*). È Pietro Damiani! – Inutile, Padre, guardare la Duchessa! (48)

HENRY IV. Is that Peter Damiani?

LANDOLPH. No, Sire. He is a monk from Cluny who is accompanying the Abbot.

HENRY IV. (*Looks at Belcredi with increasing mistrust, and then noticing that he appears embarrassed and keeps glancing at Donna Matilda and the doctor, stands upright and cries out*). No, it's Peter Damiani! It's no use, Father, looking at the Duchess! (166-67)

Sadly, what gives him this freedom is also what imprisons him. Henry is stuck in his delusional creation with no clear route of escape.

Costa makes an interesting observation when he refers to Henry IV as the counterpart of the old woman whom Pirandello describes in his essay *L'umorismo*. In the passage that was cited in the introduction, Pirandello describes the sad fate of the old lady who attempts to look young even at the expense of her dignity. While Henry has his own reasons for making such a grotesque use of make-up, the reader cannot help but feel sorry for this middle-aged man who feels trapped inside his portrait as a young man (20). By taking a closer look at *L'umorismo*, this connection becomes even clearer. As Pirandello writes in his famous essay: "Le forme in cui cerchiamo d'arrestare, di fissare in noi questo flusso continuo, sono i concetti, sono gli ideali a cui vorremmo serbarci coerenti, tutte le finzioni che ci creiamo, le condizioni, lo stato in cui tendiamo a stabilirci" (157).²³ Unfortunately for Henry, this was not a choice he felt could be made. Instead, the identity of the historic German king was imposed on him by his fall and the compliance of those around him. After awaking from his madness and realizing that he had essentially lost twelve years of his life, Henry feels it is in his best interest to continue the charade.

If we return to *L'umorismo*, we see that there is more that needs to be understood from Pirandello's argument and that one cannot simply stop time. Pirandello continues: "Ma

²³"The forms in which we seek to stop, to fix in ourselves this constant flux are the concepts, the ideals with which we would like consistently to comply, all the fictions we create for ourselves, the conditions, the state in which we tend to stabilize ourselves" (137).

dentro di noi stessi, in ciò che noi chiamiamo anima, e che è la vita in noi, il flusso continua, indistinto, sotto gli argini, oltre i limiti che noi imponiamo, componendoci una coscienza, costruendoci una personalità” (157).²⁴ Even after regaining his sanity, Henry chooses to maintain the identity of the historic monarch for another eight years. While for a time this secret was Henry’s personal joke,²⁵ he eventually comes to realize that this is a lifestyle that he can no longer continue, and no longer wants to continue living.²⁶ Henry’s life, until this point, has been what Bassanese refers to as the embodiment of Pirandellian paradox. She calls him “the sane madman, the self-conscious mask, the imprisoned maverick” (79).

The question that has yet to be sufficiently answered is why Henry IV has chosen to live his delusion and maintain his current identity now that he is perfectly capable of returning to society as his former self. According to Schechtman, survival is a matter of the utmost practical importance and whatever relation defines personal identity over time also bears the importance that we attach to survival (1-2). After Henry’s fall he believes himself to be the historic Henry IV and even after his realization that his life has been a lie for twelve years, he chooses to continue living his delusional reality. This is due to the fact that life as he once knew it has passed him by and in his mind his survival was most easily achieved by

²⁴ “But within ourselves, in what we call the soul and is the life in us, the flux continues, indistinct under the barriers and beyond the limits we impose as a means to fashion a consciousness and a personality for ourselves” (137).

²⁵ ENRICO IV. Non vedi come li paro, come li concio, come me li faccio comparire davanti, buffoni spaventati! E si spaventano solo di questo, oh: che stracci loro addosso la maschera buffa e li scopra travestiti; come se non li avessi costretti io stesso a mascherarsi, per questo mio gusto qua, di fare il pazzo! (86)
HENRY IV. Don’t you see, idiot, how I treat them, how I play the fool with them, make them, make them appear before me just as I wish? Miserable, frightened clowns that they are! And you are amazed that I tear off their ridiculous masks now, just as if it wasn’t I who had made them mask themselves to satisfy this taste of mine for playing the madman! (189)

²⁶ ENRICO IV. Basta! Finiamola! Mi sono seccato! (86)
HENRY IV. Enough! Let’s stop it. I’m tired of it! (189)

continuing with the charade that had been built around him. Henry clearly expresses his feelings of frustration and loss when he says:

ENRICO IV. Me n' accorsi in un giorno solo, tutt' a un tratto, riaprendo gli occhi, e fu uno spavento, perché capii subito che non solo i capelli, ma doveva esser diventato grigio tutto così, e tutto crollato, tutto finito: e che sarei arrivato con una fame da lupo a un banchetto già bell' e sparecchiato. (109-10)

HENRY IV. I perceived it all of a sudden, one day, when I opened my eyes; and I was terrified because I understood at once that not only had my hair gone grey, but that I was all grey, inside; that everything had fallen to pieces, that everything was finished; and I was going to arrive, hungry as a wolf, at a banquet which had already been cleared away ... (203)

Many of the things that Henry has lost, or never possessed in his real life, he has gained by assuming his historic persona. Henry has the power to summon whomever he wishes and all play his game but much like with his former identity, he is mocked and laughed at behind his back. He is a king who is feared by his servants who do his bidding without question:

ENRICO IV. Inginocchiatevi! (*Li forza a inginocchiarsi tutti a uno a uno*) Vi ordino di inginocchiarvi tutti davanti a me – così! E toccate tre volte la terra con la fronte! Giù! ... Su, via, pecore, alzatevi! M' avete obbedito? (88)

HENRY IV. Well then, by God, down on your knees, down on your knees! (*makes them go down on their knees one by one.*) I order you to go down on your knees before me! And touch the ground three times with your forehead! Down, down! ... Get up, sheep! You obeyed me, didn't you? (190)

Bentley writes that the reader's first impulse is to call what Henry is doing "living the illusion" and being the only one who is able to see through it. But of course, as Bentley accurately points out, the others see through it too. The difference is that they don't know that he sees through it as well resulting in a compact based on a misunderstanding created by a benevolent act of deception (69-70).

During the stage action at the end of act 2, Henry reveals the fact that he is no longer insane. With this knowledge the confused attendants immediately run to pass on the information to the marchesa, Belcredi, and the doctor who are deep in discussion on their plan of “shocking” Henry out of his state of delusion. The resulting shock is not felt by Henry, instead it is felt by everyone around him. After revealing the truth Henry calmly explains to his advisors how out of the convenience of everyone around him, he had to carry on the masquerade. The result of this announcement is the same as every other time Henry’s reality changes: chaos. Henry’s attendants cannot accept what he is saying and are subsequently stricken with fear. By this time they had grown accustomed to Henry’s “madness” and knew exactly how to deal with it. Now that he claims to have regained his sanity, anything is possible. For his attendants, it is the tension of a mysterious danger that is even more unbearable than danger itself. According to Joost Meerloo in his book *Patterns of Panic*, people’s nerves cannot handle the thought of an unknown enemy. This vague fearful expectation acts on their fantasies and leads to the anticipation of all kinds of mysterious dangers that they themselves begin to provoke (23). Although they do not consider Henry IV to be their enemy, his servants know that he is capable of anything; therefore causing their fear of this unknown entity. They feared what Henry IV might have done because of the fact that he was a “madman,” and yet, they fear the “sane” Henry IV even more. This fear and confusion is not lost on Henry IV who, if nothing else, is still an incredibly astute and perceptive person.

Henry realizes that the actors who were hired to play the part of his advisors are at a loss for words because they no longer know what to believe. Everything made sense to them when Henry IV was simply “crazy” but now that he may in fact be cured they do not know

what to do. The fact that Henry IV explains everything to them in such a calm and logical manner only serves to unnerve them even more. Henry IV points this out to Bertoldo who appears a bit more stupefied than the others: “Ma lo vedi? Lo vedi? Tu stesso! Lo hai anche tu, ora, lo spavento negli occhi!” (91).²⁷

While the protagonist cannot be considered an autobiographical figure for the author, Henry does represent many of Pirandello’s ideas and concepts. When in May of 1924 Pirandello was asked by a journalist if his wife’s mental illness allowed him to study the logic of the “mad,” Pirandello concluded his response to the question with this: “Il pazzo costruisce senza logica. Essa è la forma e la forma è in contrasto con la vita. La vita è informe e illogica. Perciò io credo che i pazzi siano più vicini alla vita. Niente c’è di determinato in noi. Noi abbiamo dentro tutte le possibilità. Tanto è vero che da noi impensatamente e improvvisamente può scappare fuori il ladro, il pazzo” (Pirandello, *Biografia per immagini* 75-76).²⁸

Valency calls reality, for the sane, a house of detention as closely guarded as an asylum for lunatics and says that the penalty for escape is alienation. In *Enrico IV* the hero has gained, through his madness, insights that sane people cannot understand and do well to avoid. Henry has discovered how fragile society’s reality truly is and has seen for himself how thinly it is all held together (227). Like many Pirandellian characters, the protagonist has gone down a path that offered him an alternative reality. For Henry, madness, a state of mind no more irrational or impractical than society’s reality, has become his personal reality.

²⁷ “You see? You see? ... You have terror in your own eyes now” (192).

²⁸ “The lunatic constructs without logic. Logic is form and form is in contrast with life. Life is formless and illogical. So I think that the mad are closer to life. There is nothing fixed and determined in us. We have within ourselves every possibility, and suddenly, unexpectedly, the thief or the lunatic can jump out of any one of us,” Pirandello, *Pirandello: A Biography* 119.

Because there exists such a fine line between delusion and reality, living outside of societal norms often inspires terror in those who are not considered to be “mad.” Henry attempts to explain this to his terrified assistants who find themselves shaken and disoriented, not knowing what is real and what is delusion:

ENRICO IV. Perché trovarsi davanti a un pazzo sapete che significa? Trovarsi davanti a uno che vi scrolla dalle fondamenta tutto quanto avete costruito in voi, attorno a voi, la logica, la logica di tutte le vostre costruzioni! – Eh! Che volete? Costruiscono senza logica, beati loro, i pazzi! O con una loro logica che vola come una piuma! Volubili! Volubili! Oggi così e domani chi sa come! (91-92)

HENRY IV. Do you know what it means to find yourselves face to face with a madman – with one who shakes the foundations of all you have built up in yourselves, your logic, the logic of all your constructions? Madmen, lucky folk! Construct without logic, or rather with a logic that flies like a feather. Voluble! Voluble! Today like this and tomorrow – who knows! (192)

Now that everyone knows that the protagonist has been faking his madness for the past eight years, Henry finally feels free to speak his mind. According to Umberto Mariani in his book *Living Masks*, *Enrico IV* is a drama about hypocrisy and loss. Mariani explains that, although Henry IV appears to be insane, he is actually the most self-aware and logical character of the play. Henry is continually confronted with difficult choices that he alone must make and as Mariani states: “Henry’s drama lies not so much in the loss of the best years of his manhood, but in the understanding of the meaning of that loss” (54). Finally Henry has revealed the truth and he can now express the pain and loss that he has been forced to deal with over the past eight years. These painful feelings are what lead Henry IV to realize that he cannot regain the identity that he lost some twenty years ago: “Le cose, come

si mutarono; gli amici, come mi tradirono; il posto preso da altri, per esempio... che so!) (108).²⁹

Over the past eight years Henry has learned how to play his part as the madman to perfection. This, as Henry IV explains, is why he is cured because unlike the others whom Henry says are not even aware of their own madness, Henry IV knows how to play his part quietly. Henry had apparently made peace with his situation – the acceptance of illusion as a way of life – until the group charged with “curing him,” ruins his illusion. This idea and Henry’s proceeding actions are what lead to the commotion that concludes with Henry killing his rival Belcredi. According to Costa, when Henry sees that Belcredi, his hated rival who had already won the favor of the woman that Henry had courted so long ago, wants to separate him from Frida, who represents the young Matilda, Henry kills him with Bertold’s sword, thus avenging a past and a present wrong (22). After stabbing Belcredi the protagonist retreats back into his mad persona of the historic Henry IV, a role that by the end of the *Enrico IV* Henry announces he will continue to play forever:

ENRICO IV. Ora sí... per forza... (*li chiama attorno a sé, come a ripararsi*)
qua insieme, qua insieme... e per sempre! (116)

HENRY IV. Now, yes ... we’ll have to (*Calls his valets around him as if to protect him.*) here we are ... together ... for ever! (208)

Once Henry kills Belcredi, his assumed role becomes his permanent reality. Henry no longer has the possibility of choosing his identity or more importantly, his reality. Schechtman says that it is psychological, rather than physical, continuation that is what matters to us in survival (3). While Henry will survive no matter which identity he chooses, after killing Belcredi it is in his best interest to choose the mad persona of the historic

²⁹ “How things change, how my friends deceived me, how my place was taken by another, and all the rest of it!” (202).

German king, a choice on which the survival of his lifestyle depends. Henry IV has been living as a historic character for over twenty years. Life as he once knew it has passed him by and the only choices available to him become to live as an outsider, ridiculed by society, or to continue to wear the mask of the historic Henry IV. Although he would like to free himself from said mask, that becomes an impossibility with the death of Belcredi. “The ‘loss of self’ here,” according to Bentley, “is not mere absence of self, let alone a mere theory that there is no self; it is an assault on the self by the self. At the psychological center of this play is psychic masochism, brilliantly suggested at the outset by the nagging, irritable, sarcastic tone in which Belcredi and Matilda address each other.” (73-74).

Bentley concludes that the *nameless one's* final assault upon himself takes the form of murder. By killing Belcredi, Henry has completely destroyed his original self/identity and in order to avoid the consequences of his actions the protagonist is forced to embrace his madness and to retreat into his historic persona. As De Vivo accurately points out, in this sense the mask that Henry wears is now imposed on him by outside forces and social norms (45). For the previous eight years Henry was allowed to play his own game. Now his game has become his prison because it has forced him to live out the rest of his life as the mad king.

Since the publication of *Enrico IV*, critics have debated the sanity or madness of Henry IV. Bassanese notes that Henry's final actions are the proof of his lunacy in society's eyes, but can blind rage and revenge for a wrong long ago committed be considered the actions of a madman? Henry is completely aware of the fact that Belcredi was responsible for his accident and that he has since won the favor of Donna Matilda, the woman whom Henry was courting before his head injury. For the twelve years that Henry IV was insane, he was

unaware of the passing of time and ignorant of the actions of the people who used to be part of his life. He lived as the historic Henry IV and – for the madman – nothing else existed. By the end of the play, however, Henry IV no longer appears to be mad but he is getting worked up. The final act of murder occurs when Henry realizes that those around him will never understand him and that they are in fact trying to maintain his status as perpetrator of the situation rather than its victim. In the final act it becomes apparent that Belcredi is not willing to accept his responsibility for Henry's situation. This is something that Henry cannot accept and in a blind rage he kills Belcredi, who is once again attempting to take something away from him.

The final reality for Henry is no longer that of victim, but that of murderer. As Costa points out, Henry will no longer be considered simply a colorful and harmless madman, but a dangerous paranoiac (22). In fact, the concluding image we have of the protagonist before the curtain falls on his drama is one that is highly tragic. The final description of Henry IV is shocking and shows the horror that Henry feels about the crime he has just committed and that forces him permanently into his mad persona.

ENRICO IV. (*rimasto sulla scena tra Landolfo, Arialdo e Ordulfo, con gli occhi sbarrati, esterrefatto dalla vita della sua stessa finzione che in un momento lo ha forzato al delitto.*) (116)

HENRY IV. (*who has remained on the stage between Landolph, Harold and Ordulph, with his eyes almost starting out of his head, terrified by the life of his own masquerade which has instantaneously driven him to crime.*) (208)

CHAPTER 3

Delusional Thought in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*

Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore 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 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 chapter, I 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. 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 chapter, I examine the family as a single entity and 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. I will detail the Six Characters' struggle with the author and – more importantly – with each other. Through the family's continued struggle, we will see how the Six Characters find their reality through a process of delusional thought.

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* that 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.³⁰ 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 che li caccio via ... e così alla fine il romanzo da fare verrà fuori fatto. (qtd in Boschiggia 77)

Caught in a terrible drama, they visit me to get themselves put into a novel. An obsession. And I don't want to know about it. I tell them it's no use. What do I care about them? What do I care about anything? And they show me all their sores. And I send them packing ... and in this way finally the novel-in-the-making turns out to be made. (Bentley 60)

Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore begins with a disgruntled acting troupe trying to rehearse for a play, Pirandello's *Il giuoco delle parti* (*The Rules of the Game*). The group is

³⁰ The Six Characters have not been fully developed as literary characters. They have been created by an author who refuses to complete their story.

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 ignores his direction and the Leading Man starts an argument over the script and whether or not it should be followed. The arrival of the Six Characters is where the play gets interesting and where the confusion begins.

The play itself, *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, the performance incensed the Roman audience to such an extent that the actors were nearly booed off the stage and Pirandello was barely able to escape 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," she writes, "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 groundbreaking 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 in cerca d'autore* 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 first explore what happens in the play.

As the Six Characters wander onto the stage, a strange aura surrounds them, intensifying the confusion on stage. Pirandello introduces the Six Characters as a family that

consists of the Father, the Mother, the Stepdaughter, the Son, the Young Boy and the Little Girl. At this point, 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 continually 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.³¹

As these Six Characters wait on the side of the stage, the Doorman tells the

³¹ 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.

Director that there are some people here to see him.³² 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,"³³ plays right into the hands of the Stepdaughter who responds: "Tanto meglio, tanto meglio, allora, signore! Potremmo esser noi la loro commedia nuova" (96).³⁴

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 creò, vivi, non volle poi, o non potè materialmente, metterci al mondo dell'arte" (98).³⁵ 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.

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

³² 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.

³³ "But there's no author here. We are not rehearsing a new piece" (215).

³⁴ "So much the better, so much the better! We can be your new piece" (215).

³⁵ "Yes, that is the word! In the sense, that is, that the author who created us alive no longer wished, or was no longer able, materially to put us into a work of art" (218).

simple woman, as he puts it, “per la tua umiltà ti sposai” (106),³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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 his actions have caused great harm to the family. One thing the Father continues to bring up is his desire for a *solida sanità morale*,³⁸ 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 each day. One day, the Father takes it too far and instead of just watching, approaches the Stepdaughter with a gift. The Father’s actions cause the new family to move away and the result, as they had hoped, is that the Father loses contact with them.

³⁶ “It was just for your humility that I married you” (224).

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ *solid moral sanity*

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.³⁹

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.

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

³⁹ 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, having since moved back in with the Father, feels that he is the only legitimate child because he was the product of the marriage between the Father and the Mother. He rejects the Mother’s presence because, in his mind, she abandoned him.

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. With the request of the Father to recreate the scene, however, Madame Pace slowly walks out onto the stage.⁴⁰

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.

Once the actors begin, 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).⁴¹ 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

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ "But they are certainly not us!" (256).

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 begging 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, instead of 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 truly taking place 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: “*Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* shook the foundations of realistic drama ... 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 in cerca d’autore*, subsequently, came later 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 in cerca d’autore* opens with an acting troupe rehearsing for another play, Pirandello’s *Il gioco delle parti*. In his commentary on the work, 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*)?⁴² 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).⁴³ More importantly, 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. 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). What made this play so successful, however, 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

⁴² 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).

⁴³ “Born alive in the head of the author, but wanted to live in reality” (trans. mine).

underlying themes and messages, some of which came from Pirandello's imagination while others came from the direct influence of the outside world.

The traumatic event of confining his wife to a mental asylum may have subconsciously influenced Pirandello when writing *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. The characters, like Pirandello's mentally unstable wife, have an identity but do not recognize their story.⁴⁴ Mulrine makes a similar observation when he points out that the Father represents Pirandello in many respects. 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 in cerca d'autore*, 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 the 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

⁴⁴ 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.

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)

THE LEADING MAN. (*to the Director*) Excuse me, but must I absolutely wear a cook's cap?
THE DIRECTOR. (*annoyed*) I imagine so. It says so there anyway (pointing to the *book*).
THE LEADING MAN. But it's ridiculous!
THE DIRECTOR. (*jumping up in a rage*) Ridiculous? Ridiculous? (213)

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. 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 that demand perfection from the actors, not the director.

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 that 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. Boschiggia 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).⁴⁵

The characters repeatedly use the word *nascere*. According to them, they were born, not created by an author and in order to truly 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 family members 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)

THE FATHER. Nowhere! It is merely to show you that one is born to life in many forms, in many shapes, as tree, or as stone, as water, as butterfly, or as woman. So one may also be born a character in a play.

THE DIRECTOR. (*with feigned comic dismay*) So you and these other friends of yours have been born characters?

THE FATHER. Exactly, and alive as you see! (217)

In the foreword to the play Pirandello writes: “il dramma è la ragion d’essere del personaggio; è la sua funzione vitale: necessaria per esistere” (80).⁴⁶ 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 può ridersi anche della morte...

⁴⁵ “They are the incarnation of a conceptual truth, not born from nature, but from fantasy, that is by the second truth that is the real truth that coincides with life” (trans. mine).

⁴⁶ “This drama is the character’s *raison d’être*, his vital function, necessary for his existence” (368).

Vogliamo vivere, signore!” (98-99).⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ When Bodei talks about this concept in his book *Le logiche del delirio*, he is referring to a way of life, or as he states, “di 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).⁴⁹

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.

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

⁴⁷ “Because he who has had the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death ... We want to live” (218).

⁴⁸ 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 chapter, 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.

⁴⁹ “of articulating perceptions, images, thoughts, beliefs, affects or moods according to principles of their own that do not conform to the criteria of argumentation and expression shared by a determinate society” (ix).

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. One objective 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 (Short Stories for a Year)*, specifically the chapter titled *La tragedia d' un personaggio (The Tragedy of a Character)*, 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 occorre 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)

I persist in my old habit of giving audience every Sunday morning to the characters of my future short stories. Five hours, from eight to one. I almost always find myself in bad company. I don't know why, but these receptions of mine seem, as a rule, to be attended by the most discontented people in the world, people it's really absolute misery to have to deal with: either they're afflicted by some strange disease or other, or else they've got themselves entangled in the most specious of fates, people with whom it's really a torment to deal. I listen to them all with infinite forbearing; I take down each one's name and circumstances; I take into account their feelings and aspirations. But I must also add, by my nature and to my misfortune, I myself am not easily pleased. Patience, courtesy – yes, I have those; but I don't like being hoodwinked. And it's my custom to get to the bottom of each matter, making a long, detailed investigation. (May 94)

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. 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 in cerca d'autore*: "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).⁵⁰ 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 in cerca d'autore*, the latter written some ten years later.

⁵⁰ "No one could know better than you, that we are living beings – more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes. Less real perhaps, but more alive! One is born into life in so many ways, my dear sir" (99).

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 in cerca d'autore* 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 in cerca d'autore*, especially the Father who, as previously mentioned, appears to be based somewhat on Pirandello.

The culmination of the concept of art and life comes to a head at the end of the work 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)

THE LEADING LADY. He's dead! Poor boy! He's dead!

THE LEADING MAN. What do you mean dead? I don't believe it!

SOME ACTORS. He's dead! Dead!

OTHER ACTORS. No, no, it's only make believe, it's only pretence!

THE FATHER. (*with a terrible cry*) Pretence? Reality, sir, reality! (276)

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 that can move and speak on their own terms. They have learned to defend themselves from everyone, including 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 (*La differenza italiana* 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 Stepdaughter clearly expresses the confusion and frustration that the family feels in their desperate attempts to convince the author to finish their story.⁵¹ “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” (202). This is the situation in which the Six Characters find themselves. They are creations of

⁵¹ The Stepdaughter 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 chiave 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).

“It’s true, I too have sought to tempt him, many, many times, when he has been sitting at his writing table, feeling a bit melancholy, at the twilight hour. He would sit in his armchair too lazy to switch on the light, and all the shadows that crept into his room were full of our presence coming to tempt him, - and then I alone, alone ... in those shadows! Ah! My life! My life! Oh, what scenes we proposed to him – and I tempted him more than any of the others!” (269).

an author who has decided not to develop their story and these Six 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 that he, the Father, is going through in an attempt to discover who he is. In this way, the Father seeks to justify the horrible things that he has done:

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)

THE FATHER. For the drama lies all in this – in the conscience that I have, that each one of us has. We believe this conscience to be a single thing, but it is many sided. There is one for this person, and another for that. Diverse consciences. So we have this illusion of being on person for all, of having a personality that is unique in all our acts. But it isn't true ... and that it would be an atrocious injustice to judge us by that action alone, as if all our existence were summed up in that one deed! (231-32)

The Six Characters 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).⁵² 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

⁵² “In the course of existence, accordingly, each individual experiences different versions of himself, which include passages that have not been translated into the language of the successive layers. Each individual thus proves to be “divided” – a “dividual” – traversed by fault lines and cracks” (5).

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, on the other hand, 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 member 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 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 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 of having 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’” (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” (100-01).⁵³ 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; the Son, quiet and reclusive; and the two children, who have no voice whatsoever. Elio Gioanola explains the familiar relationship not as a hateful one, but as one that is lacking love. “Non c’è odio edipico tra i personaggi, dettato da rivalità,” Gioanola explains, “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).⁵⁴ 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

⁵³ “When this little darling here, when God suddenly takes this dear little child away from that poor mother there; and this imbecile here does the stupidest thing like the fool he is, you will see me run away. Yes gentlemen, I shall be off. But the moment hasn’t arrived yet” (219-20).

⁵⁴ “There is not oedipal hate between the characters, dictated by rivalry, but a hate psychologically more archaic dictated by division and by dividing, for which the characters reciprocally persecute one another because of the extreme lack of love (and one only has to think about the young boy who lets his little sister drown in the fountain and then shoots himself)” (trans. mine).

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 that 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).⁵⁵ He claims to show the face of high morality but the Stepdaughter unmask 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:

⁵⁵ 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.

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)

THE STEPDAUGHTER. Oh yes, that's true enough. When I was a kiddie, so so high, you know, with plaits over my shoulders and knickers longer than my skirts, I used to see him waiting outside the school for me to come out. He came to see how I was growing up.

THE FATHER. This is infamous, shameful! (227)

It is as Pirandello says, “per l’uno significa castigo e per l’altra vendetta” (11).⁵⁶ 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’” (62).⁵⁷ 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. With that the family moves into the house of the Father where the atmosphere is one of strong tension because of the Son who sees their presence as one of intrusion.⁵⁸

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

⁵⁶ “for one it means punishment and for the other vendetta” (trans. mine).

⁵⁷ “The demand made on the weaker party then takes the form of a power game in which the one who submits effectively says: ‘I’ll become what you want me to as long as you take care of me’” (62).

⁵⁸ 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)

THE FATHER. No, in time! In time! Fortunately I recognized her ... in time. And I took them back home with me to my house. You can imagine now her position and mine; she, as you see her; and I who cannot look her in the face (231)

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” (82).⁵⁹ 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” (82).⁶⁰ What the Mother wants is to 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 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” (12).⁶¹ 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.

⁵⁹ “Nature fixed in the figure of a mother” (371).

⁶⁰ “Because she hopes to take life from him, perhaps? No: because she hopes the Director will have her present a scene with the Son in which she would put so much of her own life. But it is a scene which does not exist, which never has and never could take place” (370).

⁶¹ “The blocking of the future, as compulsion to repeat the past, is real in the cases in which the subject’s projection towards the future is indeed barred” (10).

While the Mother represents the *mater dolorosa*, the Stepdaughter represents the whore. As is usually the case, this was not her choice. Instead, she was forced by Madame Pace to accept this role in order to help the family survive. The Stepdaughter describes their painful situation and the sacrifices she was forced to make when Madame Pace would make her pay for the work that her mother had already done.

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).⁶² 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, the first-born child 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).⁶³ 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 cannot 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

⁶² "A strong tenderness for her little sister" (trans. mine).

⁶³ "I've got nothing to do with it, and don't want to have; because you know well enough that I wasn't made to be mixed up in all this with the rest of you" (232).

has a part to play in the story, forces him to go through with it. 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 to the play 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.⁶⁴

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,

⁶⁴ 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).
"What truth, come on! Here we are at the theater! Truth up to a certain point!" (trans. Mine).

costruzioni della fantasia immutabili: e dunque più reali e consistenti della volubile naturalità degli Attori” (94).⁶⁵ 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 risponderai che lei è un pazzo! (143)

THE FATHER. Can you tell me who you are?

THE DIRECTOR. (*perplexed, half smiling*) What? Who am I? I am myself.

THE FATHER. And if I were to tell you that that isn’t true, because you are me?

THE DIRECTOR. I should say you were mad! (264)

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). *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* 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:

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)

THE FATHER. A character sir, may always ask a man who he is. Because a character has really a life of his own, marked with his especial

⁶⁵ “The Characters should not in fact appear as ghosts, but as created realities, immutable constructions of fantasy: and therefore more real and consistent than the Actors and their variable nature” (trans. mine).

characteristics; for which reason he is always 'somebody.' But a man – I'm not speaking of you now – may very well be nobody ... all of this present reality of yours is fated to seem a mere illusion to you tomorrow. (265)

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 must be exactly how they remember things, 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.⁶⁶ 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'adopere 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 FATHER. Still, I must say that try as this gentleman may, with all his good will and wonderful art, to absorb me into himself ...

THE LEADING MAN. Go on, go on.

THE FATHER. The performance he will give, even doing his best with make-up to look like me, it will be difficult to act me as I really am. (245)

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

⁶⁶ The representation must be exact in order for the Six Characters to recognize it as their own.

from being consummated. In the end, the Young Boy 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 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 “il 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).⁶⁷ 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).

We must, first of all, not presume that others, outside of ourselves, are only as we see them. If we do, it means that we have a unilateral conscience; that we are not aware of others; that we don't realize others in us, to use the expression of Josiah Royce, with a living representation for others and for us. (trans. mine)

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).

⁶⁷ “The presentation of the drama in which the six characters are involved appears tumultuous and never proceeds in an orderly manner. There is no logical development, no concatenation of the events” (373).

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 the 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 that 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?⁶⁸

⁶⁸ 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

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 instead of delusional. What makes the belief of the Six Characters delusional is that it is an idea that is not accepted by any societal or cultural group.

The 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.⁶⁹ He continues to say that the cognitive processes 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

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).

⁶⁹ 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*, Fiora 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).

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, 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. After several 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 *Le logiche del delirio*, 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).⁷⁰ 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 in cerca d'autore*, it is the family that feels lost and wants to establish itself in this *strange world*.⁷¹ 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

⁷⁰ “Delusion, then, has traditionally been presented as synonymous with irrationality (absurdity, groundlessness, error, chaos), while its mirror image, reason, has been defined in terms of evidence, demonstrability, truth and order. Over time, the two concepts have become complementary” (ix).

⁷¹ 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).

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, in Pirandello's words, "smarriti e perplessi" (94).⁷²

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 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, when 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

⁷² "lost and confused" (trans. mine).

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 "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. 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 Six Characters are not.⁷³

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

⁷³ Madness is a topic that is often discussed when referring to the protagonist of Pirandello's play *Henry 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).

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-evidence is presented, however much experience denies it, the delusion remains firm.” He goes on to say, “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 facciano 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).⁷⁴

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.

⁷⁴ “Will you oblige me by going away? We haven’t time to waste with mad people” (216).

“Let’s hear them out. Listen!” (222)

“Well ... I’m almost tempted. It’s a bit of an idea. One might have a shot at it” (236).

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. The two worlds that the actors and the characters live in are not compatible and this difference of opinion on the accuracy of representation is summed up by the words of the Director who reminds the Father that they are in the theater and truth can only be tolerated up to a certain point. 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 in cerca d'autore*, 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 continually 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).⁷⁵

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. 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. Although contrary to what the Stepdaughter allegedly wants, all of her actions only serve to draw the two of them closer together.

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.⁷⁶ 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

⁷⁵ "I would asks you, sir, to exercise your authority a little here, and let me speak before you believe all she is trying to blame me with. Let me explain" (223-24).

⁷⁶ The Father's hypocrisy is reflected in his statement: "Ho sempre avuto di queste maledette aspirazioni a una certa solida sanità morale!" (108)
"I have always had these damn inspirations of a certain solid moral sanity" (trans. mine).

another, they are united in their mutual desire to see their idea of having their story performed become a reality.

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. 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 the Son refuses to associate with his family causes him to have a lack of identity. 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. Like many people who have had a traumatic experience, the Son tries to suppress his feelings and to forget his shame. 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” (6).⁷⁷ The Son’s psychological problems come from a childhood full of neglect, specifically paternal, and a lack of affection. It was this lack of affection that caused the Son to isolate himself and to constantly attempt to run away. As Leonard Shengold puts it, in his book *Delusions of Everyday Life*, 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

⁷⁷ “Thus the past manifests itself in two ways: either as dissolved in its recodification within new systems of signs, or as encapsulated in the space carved out by the traumatic event” (4).

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-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. 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 literary 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).⁷⁸ 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 make the Six Characters delusional is not only that they hold a belief that is not accepted by society, but also that they hold the belief with unwavering conviction. The Six Characters will never change their minds, no matter what the evidence against their ideas may be. In finding their own personal reality and performing their story

⁷⁸ "In reality, what the characters want is simply a life on stage, a represented life: the characters want the world of art" (trans. mine).

the Six Characters walk the fine line between the concepts of delusional beliefs and rational behavior and in the end, they leave the actors and the reader wondering if what happened was reality or fiction. The Director best expresses this confusion at the end of the play when he shouts: “Finzione! Realtà! Andate al diavolo tutti quanti! Luci!” (155).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ “Fiction? Reality? To hell with all of it. Lights!” (trans. mine).

CHAPTER 4

Social Norms, and Group Psychology: The Power of Logic to Create Delusion in *Così è (se vi pare)*

In her book *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*, Jean Alter discusses the roles and rules that govern mainstream society. In the chapter entitled “Theatre as life,” Alter says that social roles derive from society’s need for order and that each person plays the role that corresponds to his status. “The source of theatre roles,” writes Alter, “lies in social roles defined by society. But if theatre were really to imitate reality,” she continues, “... then social roles enacted on the stage would have no informational interest, since the spectators would know them already by their own experience” (44). According to this perspective, the genius of Pirandello’s theater consists in his ability to present everyday situations in innovative ways. In *Così è (se vi pare)*, for example, neither the townspeople’s interest in discovering the truth, nor the versions that Signora Frola and Signor Ponza provide are by any means novel or even of particular interest. What captivated audiences and critics alike was the method in which Pirandello presented the situation and the characters’ interactions with one another. By presenting both Signora Frola and Signor Ponza as possessors of two different and contradictory truths, the play is able to defy conventional reality while remaining inside the parameters of social roles.

Written in 1917, *Così è (se vi pare)* is a play that questions the objectivity of reality and truth. As many critics have noted, the central theme of the play is that the truth cannot be

known because it differs according to a particular individual's perception. In her book, *Understanding Luigi Pirandello*, Fiora Bassanese states that the play is "the dramatic enactment of the principle of subjective relativity and functions as an extensive elaboration of the themes of illusion and reality" (51). In his book, *Quasi niente, una pietra*, Enrico Cerasi recognizes the play as "uno dei primi tentativi di Pirandello di trovare una verità che non sia *episteme*" (114).⁸⁰ Walter Starkie, in his book *Luigi Pirandello*, calls *Così è (se vi pare)* "a satirical joke against those people who consider truth a readymade object, fixed and immutable" (143).

In *Così è (se vi pare)*, the fact that the people of the town demand one single truth – when one does not appear to exist – is what causes them to feel the need to create a truth. While the townspeople's truth essentially remains the same throughout the play, either Signor Ponza or Signora Frola must be mad, it vacillates wildly from one end to the other with every piece of new information. What is equally interesting is the reaction of the audience. Whether witnessing a performance or reading the work, one quickly gets caught up in the moment and is overwhelmed by the suspicion that only one truth *must* exist. Just like the characters on stage, the audience also seeks to solve the mystery through the use of rational conjecture. The result for both characters and actors is a web of contradictions, multiple possibilities, red herrings, and dead ends that continue throughout the story (Bassanese 48).

Even after having read the play several times, I, the informed reader, cannot help but speculate about who is telling the *truth* and who is mad. I get the nagging feeling that if I delve a little deeper into the story, if I read between the lines, I could be the one to crack the

⁸⁰ "...one of Pirandello's first attempts to find a truth that is not *episteme*" (trans. mine). The term *episteme* comes from Greek and is used to mean "knowledge or science."

code. I could be the one to figure out who is telling the truth and who is mad. That is in fact, the true madness of the work. This obsession with discovering the “truth” is what drives the play for both the characters and the audience. It is not until the reader realizes that it is delusional to believe that there is a single truth to be discovered that he can finally understand the message that Pirandello is trying to get across. Not only is the truth subjective, but society’s insistence on always needing to know the truth also comes with a dark side. The societal belief and behavior of “for the greater good” or “in the public interest” often comes at the expense of a select minority group. These ideas are often driven by the personal greed of a small yet influential group and their desire to maintain the rules and norms of the established society. When discussing what the play represents, Bassanese accurately points out that Pirandello’s bourgeois drama provides a new understanding of the individual’s struggle. This new understanding is based both on feeling and reason and struggles against the oppressive forces of society (61).⁸¹

While many critics have discussed the reason for Pirandello to write this play as his desire to move past an epistemic truth, others have focused on the play as a social commentary about personal privacy and minding one’s own business. While Signora Frola appears to want privacy out of respect for her son-in-law, Signor Ponza wants nothing more than to be left alone. He has no desire to share the details of either his past, or current, private life. The problem for Ponza, however, is that his living arrangement breaks the social norms of that region and arouses the curiosity of the people living in the small town. The public perception is that Ponza is maintaining two households: his own, in which he and his wife

⁸¹ In his 1964 book, *Small Groups: Some Sociological Perspectives*, Clovis Shepherd makes a similar statement. He writes: “... the phenomena to which the psychologist should direct his attention are what the individual subjectively perceives, not what the observer perceives as the ‘objective reality.’ Thus the source of social-psychological phenomena is held to be in the person, and not in the environment” (24). Once again, Pirandello proves to be well ahead of his time when dealing with social or psychological issues in his work.

live, and that of his mother-in-law, Signora Frola. While that seems perfectly normal in today's society, the public perception in the play is that Ponza is keeping his mother-in-law away from her daughter for some nefarious reason with blatant disregard for what is considered socially acceptable.⁸²

When discussing social roles on the stage, Alter writes that performances can and do transform these roles with the goal of either increasing their prestige or, as is the case in *Così è (se vi pare)*, to ridicule them. She continues to say that while the stage draws its inspiration from reality, real-life situations, with their roles and rules, generate theater situations that live by their own rules and created roles (46). In *Così è (se vi pare)*, Pirandello draws on reality in order to be able to question it. His social commentary shows what happens when the importance of upholding social norms trump basic human civility.⁸³

While many interesting themes are brought up in the play, in this chapter I will examine the social norms and group psychology employed by the characters in their attempt to discover the truth about the Ponza/Frola situation. While Pirandello holds the belief that multiple facets of the truth can exist, what I will argue is that the townspeople use group psychology and group logic in an attempt to alter the personal reality of the Ponza/Frola family. Their delusional idea is not that the truth exists, but that it is a truth that fits within their social boundaries and that it will lead to the reestablishing of the personal reality of the Ponza/Frola family. Their idea is that Signora Ponza must be either Signor Ponza's second wife or Signora Frola's daughter.

⁸² Critics sometimes mention a sort of in-law incest as part of this familiar arrangement. While it is true that Signor Ponza and Signora Frola have a closer than what might be considered normal son/mother-in-law relationship, I would argue that it comes out of their shared misery and history together rather than out of any sexual attraction or feelings between the two.

⁸³ Sicilian social norms will be explored in detail in the final chapter of this study.

In her article, *The Imprisoning gaze in Pirandello*, Ruth Gard refers to the elite's behavior as "a disciplinary inquisition from the townspeople who dislike and disapprove of the straying from social convention and then subject the family to a form of Foucauldian examination in a bid to explain their deviant behavior" (72). In this chapter I will not simply stop at defining the behavior of the townspeople. What I will do is look at how the local elite uses its tactics in an attempt to redefine the Ponza/Frola personal reality. I will also examine, in this chapter, the townspeople's obsession with discovering the truth; whatever it may be. Unlike in the previous two chapters, this is not a case of a person, or group of people, trying to define or construct his/their own personal reality. The familiar triangle of Signor Ponza, Signora Frola, and Signora Ponza has already established a personal reality but it is a reality that the townspeople, with the exception of Laudisi, refuse to accept. The reality that the townspeople are attempting to create for the newcomers is that of renegade and social deviant. While this is not what the newcomers would chose for themselves, it is the only reality that fits within the established norms of the town elite.

In an attempt to rationalize the situation, the townspeople act in a completely irrational manner. They fail to see what is right in front of them and their quest for the truth becomes an obsession that nearly tears the Ponza/Frola family apart. The play ends with Signora Frola deciding that she should leave town and with Signor Ponza resigning from his position as secretary to the town Prefect. The last we see of the pair is them walking away holding each other and in tears. Pirandello describes it this way: "E tutti e due abbracciati, carezzandosi a vicenda, tra due diversi pianti, si ritireranno bisbigliandosi tra loro, parole affettuose. Silenzio" (108).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Their arms about each other's waists, and holding each other up affectionately, Ponza and his mother-in-law withdraw through the rear door. They are both weeping. Profound silence in the company (137).

As for the idea of the play, it appears to be quite simple.⁸⁵ Signor Ponza, his wife, and his mother-in-law, Signora Frola, have moved into a small town where Signor Ponza has taken the job of secretary to the town Prefect. As the story unfolds and certain secrets are revealed, it is determined by the townspeople that either Signor Ponza or his mother-in-law, Signora Frola, must be insane. During a visit with the town elite, Signora Frola claims that her son-in-law went mad four years ago when her daughter, Ponza's first wife, died. Even though Ponza remarried, he holds the belief, according to Signora Frola, that his new wife is actually his old wife. For his part, Ponza maintains that Signora Frola went mad after the death of her daughter and only survives by believing that Ponza's second wife is in actuality her living daughter. The question then that captivates our attention and drives the play is: Which one of the two is crazy: Signor Ponza or Signora Frola?

In regards to where the play takes place, Pirandello tells us only: "In un capoluogo di provincia. – Oggi" (Maschere nude 3).⁸⁶ After a short description of the characters present at the start of Act I, the play opens with Amalia telling her brother, Lamberto Laudisi, how she and her daughter, Dina, were not properly received when they called on Signora Frola. While Laudisi considers this a minor offence at best, Amalia is furious and goes so far as to suggest that Signor Ponza, who was the cause of a second rejection, should be punished for disrespecting them and the rules of polite society.

AMALIA. Un atto di giusta riparazione, se mai! Perché non si lasciano due signore, lì come due pioli, davanti alla porta (8)

⁸⁵ In order to get a better idea about the play, one should read the short story entitled *La signora Frola e il signor Ponza, suo genero* (Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, her son-in-law). It is the bases for the play and is told from the point of view of one of the local residents of the town of Valdana. The narrator recounts the story taking a hard line stance that either Signor Ponza or Signora Frola must be delusional.

⁸⁶ "Our Own Times, in a Small Italian Town, the Capital of a Province" (Naked Masks 61). In *La signora Frola e il signor Ponza, suo genero* the name of the town is Valdana. In his article *Pirandello, dal racconto al teatro*, Dante della Terza refers to Valdana as a type of "nowhere city" (103).

AMALIA. I think he deserves all he gets! That is not the way to treat two ladies (61-62)

As the debate continues, the butler announces the arrival of the three town gossips, Signor Sirelli, his wife, and Signora Cini. All three are eager to know the *truth* about the newcomers. As Signora Sirelli puts it, “noi veniamo qua come alla fonte, siamo due povere assetate di notizie” (13).⁸⁷ To this point, all the gossips know is that that the village where Signor Ponza and family were living was recently destroyed by an earthquake and that the three are in mourning because of the loss of all their relatives in the disaster. While the group is gossiping about Signor Ponza and Signora Frola, Signor Agazzi arrives to announce that he has arranged a visit from Signora Frola herself and soon thereafter, the old lady is announced.

Signora Frola, described as a slight, older lady, with an aura of sadness about her, apologizes for the negligence of her “dovere” (social duties), defends her strange familiar situation, and recounts how she lost all of her relatives in the village earthquake. This is by no means satisfactory to the group that pursues her with questions. Through their interrogation, they are able to discover that Signor Ponza loves Signora Frola’s daughter so much and guards her so jealously that he insists that all of their communication go through him. Despite what can be considered his “flaws,” Signora Frola calls Signor Ponza a loving and generous son-in-law. After she leaves, the group (and the audience) condemns Signor Ponza for his apparent cruelty. After Signor Frola has left the house, Signor Ponza arrives to a cold reception. Just as the town gossips seem to have everything figured out, he throws them off with a complicated explanation about his mother-in-law with the conclusion being that she is insane. Ponza says that her daughter is dead and that his present wife is actually

⁸⁷ “We have come her as to the fountain of knowledge. We are two pilgrims athirst for the truth” (67).

his second wife, not Signora Frola's daughter. Signor Ponza only keeps them separated as a way of protecting his new wife from a woman that is not her mother. Just as was the case with Signora Frola, Ponza's story is quite convincing and is accepted as the truth, or better yet, the current version of the truth.

As the group is processing this new turn of events, the butler announces another visitor: Signora Frola has returned and informs the group that it is not she, but rather Signor Ponza who was once mad and, although now aware of the truth, keeps up the delusion as a way of maintaining the status quo. His delusion caused him to believe that his first wife, Signora Frola's daughter, is dead. Signora Frola explains that her daughter survived her incident but as a way of placating Ponza's delusions, she agreed to remarry him and pretend to be his second wife. Signora Frola, completely aware of the truth, feigns her madness as a way of playing her part in order to sustain Signor Ponza's delusion and calm his fears of losing his wife, whom he keeps locked in their apartment. As Signora Frola leaves, the group is stunned and confusion reigns. The curtain falls with Laudisi laughing and asking them for the truth.⁸⁸

Act Two begins in Signor Agazzi's study. Agazzi is on the phone with Centuri, the police commissioner, and is asking him if he has any new information about Signor Ponza's situation. Centuri regrettably, for both the townspeople and the audience who by now is just as curious as they are, reports that all the village records were destroyed in the earthquake. In the wake of this disappointing news, Laudisi provides a possible solution. He advises Agazzi and Sirelli to believe both stories, or neither of them, and sums up their situation and the essential conflict of the play.

LAUDISI. E chi dei due? Non potete dirlo voi, come non può dirlo nessuno.

⁸⁸ Laudisi is the only one who is willing to accept the idea of a subjective truth.

...creando lei a lui, o lui a lei, un fantasma che ha la stessa consistenza della realtà, dove essi vivono ormai in perfetto accordo, pacificati. E non potrà essere distrutta, questa loro realtà, da nessun documento, poiché essi ci respirano dentro, la vedono, la sentono, la toccano! – Al più, per voi potrebbe servire il documento, per levarvi voi una sciocca curiosità. (54)

LAUDISI. Well, which one? You can't tell, can you? Neither can anybody else! ... She has created for him, or he has created for her, a world of fancy which has all the earmarks of reality itself. And in this fictitious reality they get along perfectly well, and in full accord with each other; and this world of fancy, this reality of theirs, no document can possibly destroy because the air they breathe is of that world. For them it is something they can see with the eyes, hear with their ears, and touch with their fingers. Oh, I grant you – if you could get a death certificate or a marriage certificate or something of the kind, you might be able to satisfy that stupid curiosity of yours. (98)

Laudisi's advice is of course ignored as Agazzi says he wants facts, not philosophy, which he is certain they will soon have. With that Sirelli proposes that they bring the two of them, Ponza and Frola, face to face in order to have them hash it out and discover the truth. Agazzi agrees and sets the plan in motion. Both Signor Ponza and Signora Frola are to be brought to the house without the other knowing.

After all have left the house except for Laudisi, Signora Cini and Nenni arrive in search of gossip. Laudisi, the only one not completely caught up in the whole affair, convinces the ladies that a certificate of the second marriage has been found. After having felt certain that Signora Frola was in the right, the ladies quickly change their mind with this bit of information. Once they have convinced themselves that Signora Frola must then be mad, Laudisi suggests that the certificate may be a fraud. Once again, confusion is king and Dina arrives convinced that Signora Frola is telling the truth and that this meeting should be cancelled. Signora Frola has shown her and Amalia letters written to her by her daughter. Arguments ensue until Signor Ponza and Signora Frola arrive just as planned. From the study, Ponza hears Signora Frola playing the piano. He becomes upset because he claims that

it is piece that his wife Lina used to play. Because Signora Frola is so eager to go along with Ponza's apparent delusions, all are convinced that he must be mad. Yet as soon as his mother-in-law leaves the room Ponza regains his composure and explains to them that he was only acting agitated in order to help Signora Frola endure the sorrow of her daughter's death and to keep her illusions alive. After Ponza leaves, the group is once again stupefied. All except Laudisi, whose laughter again fills the stage as the curtain falls, remain confused and dismayed by this failure to produce the *truth*.

Act three begins with more disappointing news. Police Chief Centuri arrives with a vague piece of information that leads to nothing. He also refuses, despite Laudisi's insistence to finish the matter once and for all, to make something up one way or the other. With more uncertainty than ever, Laudisi suggests that they go right to the source and interview Signora Ponza. The plan appears full proof, as they will simply ask her whether she is Signor Ponza's second wife or Signora Frola's daughter.

Even though Ponza declares his intentions to resign from his post, the prefect is still able to convince him to bring in his wife for questioning. As Signor Ponza is arriving with his wife, Signora Frola arrives to tell Ponza that she has decided to leave town. Upon seeing who she believes to be her daughter, Signora Frola runs to Signora Ponza calling out her name "Lina!" At the same time, Signor Ponza dashes into the room screaming "No! Julia!" He is too late to stop Signora Frola from embracing the woman she believes to be her daughter. Once again caught in the middle, Signora Ponza begs them both to leave and Signor Ponza and Signora Frola walk away crying arm in arm. The final words of Signora Ponza, like the rest of action that takes place during the play, only serve to add to the confusion and doubt of the townspeople and the audience alike.

SIGNORA PONZA. La verità? È solo questo: che io sono, sì, la figlia della signora Frola –

TUTTI. (con un sospiro di soddisfazione). – ah!

SIGNORA PONZA. (subito c. s.). – e la seconda moglie del signor Ponza. ... e per me nessuna! Nessuna! ... io sono colei che mi si crede (109)

SIGNORA PONZA. The truth? Simply this: I am the daughter of Signora Frola ...

ALL. (with a happy intake of breath). Ah!

SIGNORA PONZA. and the second wife of Signor Ponza. ... and, for myself, I am nobody! ... I am she whom you believe me to be (138)

When discussing Pirandello's theater, Ann Caesar points out Pirandello's concern with the individual as a social being and states: "Whatever the lengths his characters go to try to divest themselves of the imprint other people, families, and whole communities have left on them, his characters remain saturated in the social" (84). In this regard, *Così è (se vi pare)* is no different than any other of Pirandello's works of theater. The play itself is constructed by clearly dividing a small group of the town elite, whose desire to discover the truth supported by social etiquette leads to the dehumanization of the Ponza/Frola family, from three individuals who are the victims of a morbid curiosity. The question then is: Why are the townspeople so intent on discovering the *truth* and what are the results of their inquiry?

In order to be able to answer these questions, we must first investigate the townspeople's process. They use a form of group psychology and group logic in an attempt to discover what they are willing to accept as the truth about the Ponza/Frola family. The newcomers appear satisfied with their familiar arrangement and it is only the social pressure from this oppressive group that causes them to reveal their personal philosophies on the matter. From these meetings, and a need for social order, it is the townspeople who attempt to reshape the Ponza/Frola reality to one that fits into their accepted social structure.

Returning to an idea from the previous chapter, we see that when determining delusional from nondelusional behavior the nondelusional person is willing to consider more information than just the anomalous experience itself. The delusional person, conversely, responds to the experience as if it were the only datum available and, therefore, the only possibility (Chapman 175-76). The townspeople are intent on discovering the truth and are convinced that they will in fact discover not only the truth about the situation, but a version of the truth that they deem acceptable. Laudisi, who believes that both Signor Ponza and Signora Frola can simultaneously maintain their own versions of the truth, unsuccessfully tries to explain this possibility to the town elite. This is an idea that they simply are not willing to acknowledge and Agazzi dismisses Laudisi's claim by labeling it as mere philosophy: "Filosofia, caro, filosofia! Lo vedremo, lo vedremo adesso se non sarà possibile! ... Vedremo chi riderà meglio alla fine" (54).⁸⁹ Agazzi clearly sees philosophy as inferior to his own way of thinking and reasoning. He claims to be using a form of logic based on facts, but what he is really doing is using his own facts and his own conventional wisdom.

The principles taken from conventional wisdom, according to Aubrey Fisher in his book, *Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process*, are generally considered credible, not because they are actually true, but simply because they are conventional; that is, many people believe them to be true. Conventionality can give credibility to an idea even though it might not be based on reality. He writes that at its best, conventional wisdom serves only to oversimplify the situation and desensitize one to reality. In reference to group communication, which abounds with 'folk wisdom,' conventional wisdom severely inhibits to produce a quality decision or decision-making process and does

⁸⁹ "Philosophy, my dear boy, philosophy! And I have no use for philosophy. Give me facts! ... I'll bet you we get to the bottom of it sooner or later" (98).

not lead to the improvement of group communication (7). Throughout the play we see that the townspeople's original idea never evolves. It simply remains in its infant stages only varying slightly when group consensus determines that either Signor Ponza or Signora Frola is the one who is telling the truth.

As has been previously mentioned, the conventional wisdom held by Agazzi and the rest of the town elite is that there can only be one truth and that either Signor Ponza or Signora Frola must be mad.⁹⁰ Whether one believes that discovering the truth is the driving factor behind the townspeople's behavior or that it is merely a cover up for their true intentions, the fact of the matter is that townspeople believe that Signor Ponza and Signora Frola must be made aware that their blatant disregard of established social behavior is not acceptable. Each society is different and chooses to apply its own set of rules but as Alter points out, expressions such as "one should stay in one's place" or "behave properly!" remind us that there are always rules to be followed. People fall into different categories. These categories can be defined by several factors such as origins, power, profession, age, sex, etc. but it is important to realize that each category requires a different type of personal behavior (Alter 44).

Gossip is one way that the townspeople disseminate their information and form consensus on what should be done with the newcomers. In his book, *The Psychology of Group Aggression*, Arnold Goldstein describes gossip as a means for people to become informed about norms regarding appropriate social behavior. Goldstein writes: "Gossip also serves an influence purpose. It is an opportunity not only for social comparison but also for

⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that none of the participants ever propose the idea that both Signor Ponza and Signora Frola could be mad. While this could be a possible solution, it would break from the established truth that one or the other must be crazy. Dissent – with the exception of Laudisi – is an act that none of the town elite dare attempt.

social control” (46). The gossip, generated by the arrival of the Ponza/Frola family and the successive interrogations that the townspeople conduct with Signora Frola and then Signor Ponza, only serves to fuel the flame of curiosity that becomes obsession and interview that becomes persecution. As more visitors arrive, the need to know more only increases. We see this with the arrival of the Sirellis and their friend Signora Cini, who has accompanied the Sirellis under the pretense of making the acquaintance of Amalia and Dina.

SIGNORA SIRELLI. Ah, signora mia, noi veniamo qua come alla fonte.

Siamo due povere assetate di notizie.

AMALIA. E notizie di che, signore mie?

SIGNORA SIRELLI. Ma di questo benedetto nuovo segretario della Prefettura. Non si parla d'altro in paese (13)

SIGNORA SIRELLI. Ah, Signora, we have come to your house as to the fountain. We are two poor people desparate for news.

AMALIA. And what news do you two ladies wish to have?

SIGNORA SIRELLI. Why about this blessed new secretary at the Prefecture. The whole town is speaking of nothing else (67)

While gossip plays an important role in the play, *Così è (se vi pare)* was not Pirandello's first attempt at exploring the ways in which secrets and gossip are used both to maintain social norms and expel, or at least segregate, those who transgress them. This comes in Pirandello's *L'esclusa (The Excluded Woman)*, a novel that shows how what people believe carries far more weight than the actual truth. In the article "Freedom and Fragmentation: The Excluded Woman," Felicity Firth and Julie Dashwood call *L'esclusa* a story of a woman who is wrongly accused of adultery and who is repudiated by her husband and rejected by her father and by society at large (175). It is only after being shunned by society that the play's protagonist, Marta Ajala, is driven into the arms of her would-be lover Gregorio Alvignani. When discussing the idea of public perception with Marta, Alvignani has this to say: "Oh mia cara, quando io dico: 'La coscienza non me lo permette,' io dico:

‘Gli altri non me lo permettono, il mondo non me lo permette.’ La mia coscienza! Che cosa credi che sia questa coscienza? È la gente in me, mia cara! Essa mi ripete ciò che gli altri le dicono” (127).⁹¹

Another example of gossip and social control comes from the short story *Certi obblighi* (*Certain Obligations*). In this case, the lamplighter Quaqueo would like to ignore the transgressions of his wife and get on with his life but, unfortunately, that is something that society will not allow. Quaqueo laments: “Un marito può benissimo in cuor suo non curarsi affatto dei torti della propria moglie. Ebbene, nossignori, ha l’obbligo di curarsene. Se non se ne cura, tutti gli altri uomini e finanche i ragazzi glielo rinfacciano e gli danno la baja” (*Novelle per un anno* 446).⁹² This type of social justice is so ingrained in society that even the children feel the need to point out behavior that is not considered to be socially acceptable.

Returning to *Così è* (*se vi pare*), it is clear that the gossip spread by the townspeople is generated by the actions of the newcomers. Unfortunately, the tragedy that they have suffered has become secondary, with the townspeople’s obsession for the truth and establishing of social norms as primary. In his article “Così è (se vi pare): l’emergenza di una contraddizione,” Walter Geerts outlines the social offences committed by the Ponza/Frola clan. He points out that a marriage without children, Signor Ponza’s maintaining of his mother-in-law’s household as well as his own, the relationship between Signora Frola and her daughter, and Signor Ponza’s *excessive love* for his wife are all factors that not only peak

⁹¹ “Oh, my dear, when I say: ‘My conscience won’t let me,’ I’m saying: ‘Others won’t let me, the world won’t let me.’ My conscience! What do you think this conscience is? It is people in me, my dear. It repeats to me what others tell it” (trans. mine).

⁹² “A husband can perfectly well in his heart be completely indifferent to the wrongdoings committed by his own wife. Well, that’s not how it is, dear sirs, he is obliged to pay attention. If he does not, all the other men and even the children will throw it in his face and mock him,” Pirandello, *Short Stories* 164.

the interest of the townspeople, but also their wrath (90). For the townspeople, this list of offenses is something that they take seriously and feel the need to remedy. Like a detective investigating a crime, they attempt to piece together the facts of the case in hopes of solving the mystery. Unfortunately for Signor Ponza and Signora Frola, this investigation turns into a persecution.

The perspective of the play is almost completely seen from the townspeople's point of view. They are the ones who control the narrative and it is no wonder that the audience also gets caught up in their social inquiry. What is more interesting, however, is how the character's, and audience's, opinions change each time Signor Ponza or Signora Frola has a chance to speak. As eagerly as the group had been to believe Signor Ponza's version of the story about his mother-in-law's madness, they just as quickly accept Signora Frola's explanation that Signor Ponza, instead, is the one who lives in an unbalanced state of mind. "How swiftly our opinion changes," writes Vittorini, "before a reality which is inconstant and variable because it is colored by the sentiment of those who participate in it" (125). This shows how the townspeople, who claim that they are working with facts, are not only unqualified but unable to discern fact from fiction. This lack of knowledge that might cause some to give up their inquiry, only fuels the townspeople's commitment to their cause. In Pirandello's short story, *La signora Frola e il signor Ponza, suo genero*, the narrator sums up the confusion that the townspeople are dealing with regarding the Ponza/Frola situation:

... e ogni qual volta per caso l'uno s'imbatte nell'altra per via, subito con la massima cordialità si mettono insieme; egli le dà – la destra e, se stanca, le porge il braccio, e vanno così, insieme, tra il dispetto aggrondato e lo stupore e la costernazione della gente che li studia, li squadra, li sia e, niente!, non riesce ancora in nessun modo a comprendere quale sia il pazzo dei due, dove sia il fantasma, dove la realtà. (*Novelle per un anno* 2379)

And whenever one of them happens to run into the other along the street, they immediately get together with the utmost cordiality. He walks along the street side and, if she's tired, offers her his arm. And they precede along together like that, amid the puzzled annoyance and the stupor and consternation of the people who examine them well, look them up and down, spy on them and ... nothing comes of it. They still are unable in any way to find out which of the two is mad, where fantasy ends and where reality begins. (Pirandello, *Tales of Madness*, 115)

What allows the persecution to continue is the idea that as long as everyone else is doing it, then it is okay. If it were just one person it would be intrusive, but since the whole town is participating it becomes the accepted norm.⁹³ The townspeople feel not only justified but also obligated to move Signor Ponza and Signora Frola like pawns on a chessboard. The newcomers are trapped in the townspeople's game and, in effect, put on a show to the delight of everyone around them. They have been completely dehumanized and Signora Sirelli goes so far as to call Signor Ponza a monster. Her curiosity outweighs her fear as Signor Ponza, a man that she has never met, enters the Agazzi home.

SIGNORA SIRELLI. Per carità, lo riceva qua, Commendatore! – Ho quasi paura; ma una grande curiosità di vederlo da vicino, questo mostro! (33)

SIGNORA SIRELLI. Oh please, Signor Agazzi, let him come in! I am really afraid of the man; but I confess the greatest curiosity to have a close look at this monster! (84)

Not only is this *mostro* about to be paraded out in front of the town elite in order to satisfy their curiosity, he is also about to be judged by the social court. This is his chance to prove his innocence, something at which the women of the town elite hope he fails. Garde points out that communal discipline and punishment – “the trial” – take place in the third act

⁹³ SIGNORA SIRELLI. (*a Laudisi, minacciandolo con un dito*). Ma come non si lascia prendere dalla smania che è in tutti ormai, di penetrar questo mistero che rischia di faci impazzire tutti quanti? Io non ci ho dormito stanotte? (55)

SIGNORA SIRELLI. (*catching sight of Laudisi and shaking a finger at him*). But how is it a man like you, in the presence of such an extraordinary situation, can escape the curiosity we all feel to get at the bottom of this mystery? Why, I lie awake nights thinking of it! (99)

in which representatives of the town's hierarchy of civic officials, accompanied by the original group of town elite, are assembled in the roles of presiding judges. "These representatives of governing institutions," Garde writes, "shore up the townspeople's faction with visible power and authority, rendering the social gaze all the more inescapable and manifestly underlining its merciless, besieging nature" (74-75). The results of the "trial" have been predetermined and the verdict rendered is that of guilty. The punishment is that the newcomers are to be labeled social outcasts and, ultimately, it causes the Ponza/Frola family to decide to leave town.

In *Così è (se vi pare)* social control is not just limited to the subjects of the gossip: Signor Ponza, Signora Frola and Signora Ponza, but also to the participants. Gossip, according to Goldstein should be considered malicious and demeaning not only to the absent third parties, but also indirectly to its participants as well (46). As the members continue to gossip, the group consensus becomes the established opinion and to say anything else would lead to role deviation, something only Laudisi has the courage, or desire, to do.

While others might feel that things had gone too far, to say so would only lead to becoming an outcast oneself. In his book *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* Alastair MacIntyre explains that individuals live within a particular space interwoven into a set of social relationships. If that space is taken away they essentially cease to exist socially or, at best, they become a stranger or social outcast (33-34). For the town elite, social status and acceptance is too important to risk on some newcomers. It is much easier to simply allow oneself to get caught up in the hunt and immersed in the search for the truth. Participating in the persecution of the Ponza/Frola family is much easier than forming one's own opinions. Laudisi, who is often referred to by critics as the voice of reason and awareness, is the only

one who is willing to accept the possibility of multiple realities and individual truths. Because of this dissent, the group dismisses him as being crazy or eccentric. As Cerasi accurately explains: “Laudisi, insomma, ha superato la concezione epistemica della realtà” (116).⁹⁴

When dealing with social roles, Fisher tells us that a certain range of behaviors and a certain range of deviation from norms is to be expected and that members will interact and behave within the allotted range of allowable behaviors without being perceived as deviant (185-6). Laudisi, on the other hand, is what Fisher would call an “opinion deviant,” that is, someone who disagrees with other group members on the content of ideas. Fisher writes that the opinion deviant is tolerated and perhaps even admired by fellow group members because of his rational and independent way of thinking.⁹⁵ Laudisi is allowed a great deal of leeway by the group, who simply sees him as eccentric and somewhat of a trouble maker, yet his position in the group and within society, is never questioned.

While Laudisi remains, for the most part, an outsider looking in on the proceedings of the group, we should not be so quick to label him as “morally superior” to the rest of the town elite. Laudisi holds to a different set of beliefs yet he still conforms to society’s norms. Even though he protests against the “inquisition” of the Ponza/Frola family, he eagerly watches, and even takes part, in the investigation. After having his idea dismissed that different truths can exist for different people, Laudisi expresses his desire to watch the

⁹⁴ “Laudisi, in short, has overcome the concept of an epistemic reality” (trans. mine).

⁹⁵ While the group, and possibly the audience, only tolerate Laudisi’s behavior, he is often admired by the critics who see his deviance as one of genius and he is said to be the only one who sees things for how they truly are.

process take place and asks for, as he puts it, “licenza di seguitare a ridere all fine” (54).⁹⁶

Although he is “the voice of reason,” his main concern is not the well being of the Ponza/Frola family, but instead to be able to laugh at his friends and family when they realize that they are not able to discover the one and only truth. For the others, their main concern is discovering the truth and maintaining social norms. That desire, consequently, trumps the feelings of the newcomers. For Laudisi, it is philosophy and reason. Instead of appealing to their sense of decency, Laudisi tries to convince the others that his position is the right one through a series of logical arguments.

While some critics refer to the Ponza/Frola situation as three people who have established their own truth, Vittorini refers to their way of thinking as a belief that does not correspond to the truth. He states that the power of illusion is what gives Signor Ponza and Signora Frola the calm that they have reached for. By creating their own story, they have forced on themselves a belief that, while not corresponding to the truth, was more manageable than accepting the actual truth itself (127). This is an idea that the townspeople might be able to accept, yet understanding and compassion is not something they are capable of giving. Their craving for one objective truth cannot be satiated through philosophy, reason, or compassion. Even the police chief, who denies Laudisi’s request and refuses to put an end to the situation, is also seeking the one undeniable truth. During their search for the truth they never stop to answer the question around which the play revolves: Is an objective and categorical truth always present? And why is finding out the truth so important?

Conflict within a social system has traditionally been viewed as a delicate balance of opposing forces. There are forces that threaten to disrupt the system and forces which attempt to maintain the system. In *Così è (se vi pare)* the newcomers are threatening to disrupt the

⁹⁶ “...permission to laugh when you’re through” (99).

system while the town's elite is trying to maintain it. According to this view, a social system is perpetually in a state of conflict and at any time it is in danger of tipping toward the disruptive forces that could destroy the system (Fisher 229). If the Ponza/Frola situation is allowed to continue without an acceptable explanation, for example, one or the other must be crazy, then the social system as they know it is in danger of collapsing. Because this system has become so idealized by the town elite, any deviant behavior is seen as a failure and must subsequently be eradicated by any means necessary.

As the play goes on and the tension builds, the townspeople take on a type of mob mentality. Any suggestion that goes against the established idea is refuted using what the elite call common sense and any idea that their common sense cannot approve of is immediately disregarded. When discussing mob mentality, Raymond Momboisse writes, in his book *Riots, Revolts and Insurrections*, that as tension grows, individuals become less responsive to outside stimulation and more responsive to influences within the group, creating among its members an internal rapport and collective hypnosis. During this process, according to Momboisse, "the individual loses his self-control and responds only to the dictates of the crowd as a whole. The individual loses critical self-consciousness ... for mob anonymity absolves him of individual responsibility" (16-17).

As previously mentioned, this mob mentality absolves the townspeople from any feelings of guilt that they might have had regarding the treatment of the Ponza/Frola family. They are free to achieve their goal by any means necessary and in fact, they feel that they are owed an explanation from Signor Ponza. Much to Signor Ponza's dismay, when the townspeople try to convince him to allow them to question his wife, Agazzi points out what he calls a *doppio sgarbo* (double discourtesy):

AGAZZI. Tanto più che ha cercato anche d'impedire in tutti i modi – anche a costo d'un doppio sgarbo a mia moglie e alla mia figliuola – che la suocera venisse qua a parlare.

PONZA (*prorompendo, esasperato*). Ma che vogliono loro da me? In nome di Dio! Non basta quella disgraziata? Vogliono qua anche mia moglie? Prefetto, io non posso sopportare questa violenza! (100)

AGAZZI. His mistake in the first place, governor, was trying to prevent his mother-in-law from coming here and calling – a double discourtesy, mark you, to my wife and to my daughter.

PONZA. But what in the name of God do you people want of me? You've been nagging and nagging at that poor old woman next door; and now you want to get your clutches on my wife. No, governor! I refuse to submit to such an indignity! (131)

While clearly upset, Ponza eventually does give in to the townspeople's *violenza*, specifically at the governor's insistence, and agrees to bring his wife before the eager crowd.⁹⁷ Before Signor Ponza returns with his wife, it appears as though the townspeople's plan of reestablishing the trio's personal reality is about to work. Signor Frola, the other victim of the story, has decided, meanwhile, to leave town with the hope that her disappearance will put an end to the inquisition and allow Signor Ponza and his wife the chance to live as a "normal" married couple.

With the arrival of Signora Ponza, the townspeople feel that they will finally get the truth that they have been searching for but, as Bassanese points out, "given the multiplicity of the perceived self, the plausibility that only two possible solutions exist to the riddle of Mrs. Ponza is simplistic and naïve" (52). If both Signor Ponza and Signora Frola claim her as their own, that is only because she allows them to do so. Signora Ponza has made it clear that she

⁹⁷PONZA. Lei dunque mi obbliga?

IL PREFETTO. Le ripeto che glielo domando per il suo bene. Potrei anche pretenderlo come suo superiore!
(101)

PONZA. So you really insist, governor?

PREFECT. I insist, but as I told you, in you own interest. You realize, besides, that I might have the legal right to question her! (131)

is everyone and no one. Her identity changes and multiplies with every new encounter, yet it is all an illusion as each new identity undermines the last.

It is interesting to note that Signora Ponza, the one who has apparently been physically and metaphorically imprisoned by Signor Ponza and played the role of daughter to Signora Frola, remains so defiant in the face of the townspeople. When discussing the behavior of Signora Ponza, Garde posits: “On a symbolic level she represents a truth that is impenetrable and unfixable” (77). While she maintains the conflicting visions of her family, that is, being whatever they need her to be, Signora Ponza refuses to appease the crowd of onlookers who are attempting to pierce the walls of her private life. The townspeople, who so easily pulled the strings of Signor Ponza and Signora Frola, are powerless in front of Signora Ponza’s impenetrable gaze. She refuses to play their game or to bow down to their social pressure. Being that she is, in her words, *nessuna e colei che mi si crede* (109),⁹⁸ Signora Ponza has nothing to lose and nothing to gain. She lives outside of society’s rules and society’s gaze.

In the end, the townspeople are unable to establish a satisfactory reality for the newcomers but they are successful in re-establishing social behavior. The social deviants have been punished and apparently run out of town. While the townspeople will never know the truth about who was mad and who was not, they have successfully regained control of social order and accepted behavior.⁹⁹ The play ends essentially the same way it began, with

⁹⁸ “no one and she whom you believe me to be” (138).

⁹⁹ As Vittorini says, “It would be futile to speculate upon whether Signora Frola or Ponza is right. The play hinges on the fact that the identity of the wife remains a mystery” (128).

Laudisi asking a question to which only he can say yes: “Ed ecco, oh signori, come parla la verità! Siete contenti?” (109).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ “And there, my friends, you have the truth! Are you satisfied?” (138).

CHAPTER 5

Questioning Reality: Exploring the Fictional Mode of Presence in in *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*

In her book, *Reading Theatre*, Anne Ubersfeld states that the essential characteristic of theatrical communication is that the receiver considers the message coming from the stage to be unreal, or better said, untrue (24). Written in 1929, and first performed in 1930, *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* is an attempt to question what is real or true. The work attempted to erase the boundaries between reality and fiction while challenging the audience's perception of what it meant to witness a theatrical performance. Based on the short story *Leonora, Addio (Goodbye Leonora)*, *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* is one of Pirandello's most exploratory plays and the third work of what is considered his "Play-within-a-play" trilogy.¹⁰¹ Throughout the play, the *receiver*, a term that Ubersfeld uses to define the audience or reader of the play, cannot be sure that what he is seeing is either unreal or untrue. With this work, Pirandello once again shook the foundation of the established reality and conventional wisdom of mainstream theater and the spectators who attended his theatrical productions. Instead of taking a fictional story and trying to make it come to life on stage, Pirandello is taking real life situations and turning them into fiction.¹⁰² In their introduction to the play J. Douglas Campbell and Leonard G. Sbrocchi explain that the work can be seen

¹⁰¹ *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* and *Ciascuno a suo modo (Each in His Own Way)* make up the remaining two thirds of the trilogy.

¹⁰² This is seen through prepared audience participation and actors purposely breaking character in the middle of the performance as well as Dr. Hinkfuss's continual interruptions.

as a play about the experience of attending a performance of *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* (12).

“Tutto il teatro recita!”¹⁰³ Pirandello famously and accurately once said to one of his designers and coproducers, Guido Salvini. During the performance of the play, because of their participation in the dialogue, it was impossible to know whether the other people sitting in the audience were to be considered *real* or *fictional* spectators. The same thing can be said about the action that is taking place on stage where the actors are trying to make factual a fictional event. Though they are knowingly acting, they attempt to make it look as if what they are doing is actually real and spontaneous. By the end of the play, however, the spectator is most likely questioning his own conventional wisdom and what he suspects to be true: that the actors are simply reciting rehearsed lines from a prepared script as opposed to reacting spontaneously to what is happening in front of them on stage.

The actors switch so easily from clearly acting to apparently improvising that even when reading the text the reader must constantly remind himself that the words on the page have been, and always will be, the same.¹⁰⁴ As Bassnett points out in her article, “Art and Life in L. Pirandello’s *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*,” the play is “an illustration, both in content and form, of that clash between fluidity and fixity, between the freedom of changing impressions and the binding limitations of absolute aims” (83). Much like in *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*, the characters of *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* already know how their

¹⁰³ “The whole theater acts!” (trans. mine).

¹⁰⁴ Some critics have argued – in regards to the work of William Shakespeare – that the physical reality of the stage works against the spectators’ attempts to lose themselves in his dramatic creations. Through reading, they argue, the reader can lose himself in the world of Shakespeare while in the theater there are numerous outside influences from the ‘real’ world that distract the spectator’s attention from the unreal essence that is drama (Power 20). A question to consider is whether or not it would be better to read Pirandello’s work or to see it performed. With a play like *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* numerous complications present themselves to any theater group considering a production of the work.

own story is going to end and are simply reliving it, albeit in a “spontaneous and improvised” fashion. Their character’s story is not a past or a present that can be changed. It is instead something that they must relive even when they know it will end in tragedy. The Character Actress expresses this idea when she addresses the disgruntled feelings of the Leading Actress whose story is the tragedy that drives the play.

L’ATTRICE CARATTERISTA (*La cerca attorno*). Vieni, vieni avanti, figliuola mia disgraziata; non è tempo ancora che tu te ne stia così. (281)

THE CHARACTER ACTRESS (*referring to her daughter Mommina*). Come here my poor unfortunate daughter; it’s not time yet for you to be like that. (48)

While at times the line between reality and fiction is questioned, there are also times when it is unmistakably marked as fiction. This is clearly conveyed during the death scene of the Old Comic Actor known within the play as Sampognetta. Trying to perform his death scene, Sampognetta is prevented from coming on stage by the confusion of the actors. Finding them all out of character, the Old Comic Actor appeals to Dr. Hinkfuss for help. As Hinkfuss straightens out the actors and gets the scene going, the Old Comic Actor cannot help but smile because of what he considers to be outstanding acting by the other participants.

LA SIGNORA IGNAZIA. Si può sapere almeno perché sorridi così?
(*Ancora una volta restano tutti sospesi in una breve pausa d’attesa.*)
SAMPOGNETTA. Perché mi compiaccio di come siete tutti più bravi di me. (344)

SIGNORA IGNAZIA. Could you at least tell us why you’re smiling like that?
(*Once again there is a brief pause; they all remain out of character.*)
SAMPOGNETTA. Because I’m pleased to see how much better you all are at this than I am. (85)

After Dr. Hinkfuss protests his breaking character, Sampognetta explains how he wants to play the scene. When he gets to the end of his description, Sampognetta, the

character, dies and the play continues with his family around him and all back in character. From one moment to the next the reader sees the actors switch from discussing how to perform the play, to living it. As Campbell and Sbrocchi suggest, what affects us in this scene – and essentially, Pirandello may be implying, what affects us in all theatre – is as much the *process* as much as the *product* of theatrical transformation (17).

One of the most interesting aspects of *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* is how the participants of the play switch back and forth from actors to characters. Their constant questioning of their own reality and fiction is ultimately what causes their revolt against Dr. Hinkfuss at the end of the play. In his article, “Struttura narrativa e struttura drammatica in *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*,” Steen Jansen discusses Pirandello’s attempt to break down the boundaries between fiction and reality. He points out how this is done within the text as well as on the stage. As the reader will discover, reality and fiction are questioned in both the outer and the inner play (55).¹⁰⁵ Eventually the actors, and the audience, begin to question their role in the performance as well as the identities of the actors and by the end of the work it is difficult to comprehend what it means to be a subject in a play.

In his book, *Theory/Theatre*, Mark Fortier defines what it means to be a subject and says that it is to be something other than free or autonomous, that is, something other than self-created or independent of others. But at the same time, subjective also implies a subject that is capable of independent action and self-direction (83). This is essentially the plight of every Pirandellian character: he must be self-motivated and independent, yet in reality he has very little control over his own situation. This is also what Dr. Hinkfuss is asking of the actors and what they attempt to revolt against. On the one hand, Dr. Hinkfuss wants to

¹⁰⁵ The outer play being, of course, the entire production while the inner play is the story of *Leonora, addio!* that the actors perform on stage.

control the action with prepared scenes and a structured plot. On the other hand, he expects the actors to be passionate and spontaneous, essentially creating the action that is seen on stage from within them.

With this situation in mind, Campbell and Sbrocchi appropriately ask the question: How can the actors be both passionately alive and subservient to the rigorous structures Dr. Hinkfuss demands? (16). This situation is the reality that the actors must confront and by the end of the play it is too much for them to handle. Pirandello prepared his theater in a way that would force audiences to experience the idea of a changing or unstable reality that he had been feeling and experiencing in his own life. He wanted to make the audience experience this questioning of their own reality and of their own conventional wisdom. To achieve this end, by the end of *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*, the actors start to question their own reality. They realize that they cannot live in both reality and fiction and after Mommina dies during the enactment, Hinkfuss comes running onto the stage to applaud the performance. As he interrupts the action, we are all left wondering – irrationally – if the Leading Actress is truly dead. Pirandello understood what it meant to question reality and adeptly has the actors playing the role of the audience’s subconscious and asking the question that everyone in the theater is thinking. In *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*, it can be noted, the audience will find a remembered past and a freshly experienced present intertwined with Pirandello’s original and meaningful statements about art, life, and the process of theater (Ragusa 246). The genius of this work is not that life and art are intermixed, but rather how it is done and the emotions that it generates in the actors and the audience.

The play itself questions the idea of reality and what is real. What this chapter investigates is how presence in theater facilitates the questioning of said reality. While

exploring how the idea of presence is used in the work, I discover how that affects the reality of the characters (actors) as well as the audience. In his book, *Presence in Play*, Cormac Power defines presence as being the “simultaneity between consciousness and an object of attention” (3). An easier way of understanding this would be by interpreting the viewer as consciousness and the stage as the object of attention. It has been said that staged drama is unlike any other form of fictional discourse because it brings to life the experience of presence; that is, theater is able to make the fictional present.¹⁰⁶ In order to understand how presence is staged, one must look at how theater presents, and represents, its illusions to an audience (Power 8). In my investigation of *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* I not only look at how the play conforms to the rules of presence, but how it breaks them as well and what effect that has on the actors’ situation. Some other questions I want to answer are: What is the reality of the actors and of the audience? How is that reality called into question? What is the conventional wisdom of the actors and the audience in regards to theater? And how is that conventional wisdom questioned and/or modified throughout the play? “It is the very potential of theater,” Power argues and Pirandello would probably agree, “to put presence into play that enables us to consider the importance of theater as an art form that can allow us to reflect upon and question the construction of ‘reality’ in the contemporary world” (9). What I explore is the construction of reality and fiction in the theatrical world of Luigi Pirandello and, specifically, the characters of the play *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* as seen through the concept of presence. In this work the actors embrace delusion to give life to their characters. It is a delusion, however, that they cannot control.

¹⁰⁶ It has been argued that film is a medium that achieves a similar end. While film can make present the fictional, staged drama in a theater is a much more personal experience where the audience must suspend disbelief while allowing for scene and location changes. Theater is always performed live while film can be prerecorded, edited, or recreated before it is made available to the public.

In order to understand what role presence plays in the work, we must first review what takes place during the performance. What is interesting to note in the work is the absence of the author's name at the beginning of the play. In fact, the prologue reads: "L'annuncio di questa commedia, così nei giornali, come nei manifesti, dev'essere dato, senza il nome dell'autore" (251).¹⁰⁷ The credit, at least for the time being, is instead given to the supposed director, Dr. Hinkfuss.¹⁰⁸ Pirandello describes Dr. Hinkfuss as a man condemned, slightly taller than the length of a normal man's arm but with a great mane of hair. What Dr. Hinkfuss lacks in stature, he attempts to make up for it with his presence on stage.

The work begins with some of the theater patrons wondering aloud what is happening behind the curtain. As Dr. Hinkfuss comes out on stage he quickly takes control of the crowd and explains that, while the actors have yet to appear on stage, the play has actually already begun. Dr. Hinkfuss informs that audience that he is there to prepare it for what it is about to see and after a few requests reveals that the author of the play is none other than Luigi Pirandello. Despite this piece of information Dr. Hinkfuss assures the crowd that he alone is responsible for the production that they, the spectators, are about to witness.¹⁰⁹ Dr. Hinkfuss explains that he selected one of Pirandello's stories because, as he puts it, "è forse il solo che

¹⁰⁷ "The announcement of the play in the newspapers and on posters must appear without the name of the author" (31).

¹⁰⁸ In his book, *Luigi Pirandello*, Gaspare Giudice claims that Hinkfuss was the name of Pirandello's landlord in Berlin from December 1928 to February 1929 (501).

¹⁰⁹ Pirandello spent several years in Germany and that country's influence on his work has been well documented. In her article, "A Tribute to the Magic of Theatre: *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*," Jennifer Lorch explains the importance of the role of the director in German theater. Lorch states that it was the director's job not just to reproduce what the author has written, but to produce a work of art inspired by the author's text. "It was this process of unraveling and analysis," writes Lorch, "that constituted both the director's freedom and his work" (269-70). Pirandello also had experience with this during his time as director of the *Teatro dell'Arte* from 1925-1928. By staging the plays of others, as well as his own work, Pirandello would have been able to reflect on the limitations an author has over a production of his work (Giannini 1364).

abbia mostrato di comprendere che l'opera dello scrittore è finita nel punto stesso ch'egli ha finito di scriverne l'ultima parola" (260).¹¹⁰ Dr. Hinkfuss is, therefore, apparently both director and creator of the theatrical production.¹¹¹

Shortly after having told the audience that he had not come out on stage to give them a lecture, Dr. Hinkfuss proceeds to give a somewhat lengthy lecture on the idea of art and life. After this lecture, and before the actors can take their turn on the stage, Dr. Hinkfuss sets the scene for the performance. "L'azione," he says, "si svolge in una città dell'interno della Sicilia, dove le passioni son forti e covano cupe e poi divampano violente: tra tutte, ferocissima, la gelosia. La novella rappresenta appunto uno di questi casi di gelosia, e della più tremenda, perché irrimediabile: quella del passato" (266).¹¹² The La Croce family, around which the play revolves, lives in relative seclusion from the rest of the town because of its openness to outsiders. The family's openness leads to scandal and slander for the rest of the town, something that the La Croce family openly challenges. The family is made up of the father, Signor Palmiro, known as Sampognetta because he always goes around distracted and whistling. The mother, Signora Ignazia, is originally from Naples and is known as *La Generala* because of her demanding and fiery personality. The rest of the family is made up of the four daughters, Mommina, Totina, Dorina, and Nenè who are described as pretty, passionate and sentimental.

¹¹⁰ "He is the only theater writer I know who has shown some understanding of the fact that the work of a writer ends the moment he puts his last work down on paper" (35).

¹¹¹ Dr. Hinkfuss, as Lorch accurately points out, represents what Pirandello saw as the general excess of German scenic direction (273).

¹¹² "The action," he says, "takes place in a city in the interior of Sicily, where passions are strong; they smolder inside, then burst out violently. And the fiercest of them is jealousy. It's a case of jealousy that this story presents, and it's the most terrible kind of jealousy, because it allows for no remedy: jealousy of the past" (39).

At this point, Dr. Hinkfuss finally introduces the actors and this is where the doctor runs into his first problem. As he tries to introduce his cast to the audience, the actors make it clear that they are already in character and do not appreciate being presented by their real names. The Leading Actor emphasizes this point of view by saying that in order to be Rico Verri, he must live as Rico Verri. The Character Actress, who expresses her desires to perform without the limitations of a particular place or pre-arranged action, seconds the idea. As Lorch points out, art has begun to take over life and the actors are becoming the characters that they were hired to portray and are starting to live, not act, their parts (272).

To quiet the notion that the actors' disapproval of using their real names might be an affront on the doctor's authority, Hinkfuss tells the crowd that their disappointment was simply part of the performance. In an attempt to maintain absolute control of the situation Dr. Hinkfuss has now quarreled with both the audience and his actors, something that will continue throughout the performance.¹¹³

The show finally begins with what appears to be some sort of warm up that includes comments and suggestions from Dr. Hinkfuss. Gradually the actors take over and after a five minute break the curtain rises revealing what Pirandello calls a bit of local Sicilian color: a religious procession heading towards a local church. As the last person enters the church and the music slowly fades out, the sounds of jazz music blare out of a local Cabaret where several patrons are laughing at Sampognetta's expense.¹¹⁴ Once outside, Sampognetta runs into his wife and four daughters on their way to the theater. They are accompanied by the

¹¹³ This is, of course, a planned chaos that is meant to challenge the perception of reality and the established norms of theatrical productions.

¹¹⁴ The patrons have constructed two horns, symbolizing his status as a cuckold, which they have attached to Sampognetta's hat without him noticing.

young military men who know how things are done on, as they call it, *il Continente*.¹¹⁵ After a short discussion, and by order of Dr. Hinkfuss, the stage becomes the inside of the theater where Signora Ignazia, her four daughters, and Rico Verri and the other young military officials are loudly taking their seats to the protests of the other theater patrons.

As the protests grow louder, Dr. Hinkfuss interrupts the action to announce the end of the scene and to prepare the audience for the intermission. Unlike in other plays where the actors stay backstage to prepare for the next act while the audience is free to mingle in the foyer, in *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* the action continues right through the break.

IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS. Quella parte del pubblico che è solita uscire tra un atto e l'altro dalla sala potrà andare, se vuole, ad assistere allo scandalo che questa benedetta gente seguirà a dare anche nel ridotto del teatro ... mescolati tra gli spettatori, quelli che avete veduto anche voi, uscire dal palco, per il solito intervallo tra un atto e l'altro. (300)

DR. HINKFUSS. Those of you who usually leave the auditorium during the intermission can go if you want, and watch these fine people continue to make a scandal out in the foyer. ... Those same people you saw leaving their box will spend the interval mingling with the audience. (58-59)

For those who have decided to remain in their seats, Dr. Hinkfuss has prepared something for them as well. With a clap of his hands the performance continues simultaneously in the foyer and on the stage. While the actors split into four different groups to mingle off stage, Dr. Hinkfuss is preparing his aviation scene. On the stage one now finds an airfield with a small white officer's quarters all under a vast and dark starry sky. After the intermission, so as to explain what was going on to anyone who has missed it, Dr. Hinkfuss discusses the play with the audience. During the discussion, which includes thoughts on the actions of the character Rico Verri, the Leading Actor playing the role of Verri feels the need

¹¹⁵ *The Continent* is the name that the characters use to describe mainland Italy. The officers are constantly talking about how people behave *on the Continent* and they use that to influence the behavior of the family, specifically the four daughters.

to clarify his character's life ambitions. He insists that Verri is not a career officer and will be out of his uniform soon. By now the questioning of art and life is in full effect and it is difficult for the audience to tell when the performers are acting or living their part.

The action picks up again in the living room of the La Croce family with Signora Ignazia suffering from a terrible toothache. While suffering, she is surrounded by her daughters and the officers. Rico Verri is on his way to the all-night pharmacy in search of some medicine. After having recited the *Ave Maria* in an unsuccessful attempt to cure her pain, Signora Ignazia asks the group of young people to sing for her. All agree except for Mommina who knows that Verri, who is incredibly jealous and has a terrible temper, would not approve. After some cajoling from her mother Mommina joins in and the group sings Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. Verri, having finally returned, sees Mommina singing, is overcome by a feeling of betrayal and anger and attacks the other officers. As the commotion dies down, Verri attempts to justify his actions by pointing out his feelings for Mommina. After more arguing, and to the dismay of Dr. Hinkfuss, the Leading Actor breaks character and declares that the scene is ruined. Emotions are running high and feelings are starting to get hurt as the actors become, more and more with each scene, the characters that they are portraying.

Next is the scene in which the drunken Sampognetta is supposed to die. After an altercation at the Cabaret, Sampognetta is stabbed and staggers back home. In all of the confusion from the previous act, none of the other actors pays him any attention. In frustration he appeals to Dr. Hinkfuss who intervenes on his behalf. After getting the actors back in character, Dr. Hinkfuss asks the Old Comic Actor to perform his scene. The scene starts again with Sampognetta being carried in by the singer and a customer from the Cabaret. As soon as the Character Actress sees him, she becomes Signora Ignazia and she

and Mommina begin screaming. Now it is the Old Comic Actor who is out of character. As all those around him hysterically discuss what has happen to poor old Sampognetta, the Old Comic Actor watches with a relaxed smile on his face. Apparently still upset about how the scene began, the Old Comic Actor gets into an argument with Dr. Hinkfuss about how he should perform his death scene. Finally, exacerbadated, he simply says: “E va bene! Ecco fatta la scena: (*s’abbandona sul divano*) sono morto!” (345).¹¹⁶

After more complaints from Dr. Hinkfuss, the Old Comic Actor tells him what he needs to get into character and before our very eyes he gradually becomes Sampognetta and dies. The emotion of the moment is so strong that the actresses shed real and uncontrollable tears. With that, Dr. Hinkfuss ends the scene and calls for the stage to go to black. As the curtain closes and the lights focus on him, Dr. Hinkfuss proceeds to tell the family’s story after the death of the father. The La Croce family now lives in poverty and Mommina, despite the strong arguments to the contrary from her mother and sisters, has agreed to marry Rico Verri. Verri, who by now is a jealous monster, has taken Mommina to live in his hometown along the Sicilian coastline. There Mommina and their two children live infinitely locked up in their house to which Verri alone has a key.

As Dr. Hinkfuss finishes speaking about the family’s poverty and his opinion of the family’s situation, the Secretary informs him that the actors no longer want to act under his direction. They give Dr. Hinkfuss an ultimatum: either he goes or they go. When Dr. Hinkfuss attempts to resolve the situation the actors tell him that they need parts to play, not lives to create. The more they discuss the current situation, the more they get sucked into their characters and into the family’s story. Everything now appears spontaneous and the actors are starting to lose their own personal distinction between their real selves and the

¹¹⁶ “All right! Here’s the scene: (*He drops onto the sofa*) I’m dead!” (trans. mine).

characters they are supposed to be playing. With the questioning of their own reality, the actors tell Dr. Hinkfuss that they either want to be able to act spontaneously and improvise without any interruptions from him or they want lines and scenes to perform. They will allow Dr. Hinkfuss to direct the play, but they cannot accept both direction and improvisation at the same time.

With this Dr. Hinkfuss is forced out of the theater while the actors exclaim that there is no longer a need for him to be there. The actors are ready to truly improvise without any outside suggestions from Dr. Hinkfuss. Now that the director has been thrown out of the theater, the actors decide to take over the staging and scene directions and are free to act as they see fit. There is only a moment of confusion before the actors decide what to do. The lighting has been prepared and the set no longer controls their actions.

The actors, who now appear to be autonomous, move on to the next scene. The Leading Actress must now become the Mommina that is older and physically destroyed by the unhappy marriage to Rico Verri. From one moment to the next she is transformed, through the use of makeup by the actresses playing the part of the mother and sisters, from young and full of life to bitter, old and alone. When the Leading Actress doubts her ability to perform without the set properly arranged, the other actors advise her to simply imagine herself in her cell and that that would be enough for the walls to appear around her. As all of this is happening, the actors – some in character and other not – discuss the sad fate of Mommina. With the conclusion of their discussion, Rico Verri arrives home gloomy and sullen. He immediately begins his inquisition of Mommina, demanding to know what she has been thinking about and then wanting to know what she dreams about when she sleeps. Mommina, now broken, has no answer for him and that only serves to feed his rage. Verri

keeps Mommina locked in the house yet he sees himself as the victim; that is, the victim of betrayal by her memories.

The other actors now fully in character and upset by the argument between Verri and Mommina lash out at Verri, who protests that they are not present and so therefore must remain silent. This quickly turns into an argument between Verri and the women of the family and ends with Verri screaming that he is going mad. Mommina, now embracing her two little girls, is informed by her mother and sisters that they are in town and that Totina will be singing *Il Trovatore* at the local theater.

Mommina, who knows *Il Trovatore* by heart, begins to sing for her two little girls. Overcome by emotion, she performs until her heart gives out and she dies. With this Dr. Hinkfuss returns to the stage. Distracted by Dr. Hinkfuss's entrance onto the stage, the actors momentarily forget about the scene that just took place. A moment later, though, attention is brought back to the Leading Actress' performance and questions quickly arise as to whether or not she is truly dead. Of course she is not, but our desire as an audience to believe what we see has forced us to question reality. We know that it is simply a play being performed but, because it is done so well, we believe for a moment it is real. Once again, the actors complain that the strain of improvisation is too much for them to handle and they request the use a script from which they can act out memorized lines. In the end even Dr. Hinkfuss reluctantly agrees that the power of improvisation is too much and consents to written parts, but not to an author.

IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS. No, l'autore no! Le parti scritte, sí, se mai, perché riabbiano vita da noi, per un momento, e... (*rivolto al pubblico*) senza più le impertinenze di questa sera, che il pubblico ci vorrà perdonare. (387)

DR. HINFUSS. No, not an author, no! The written parts, maybe, yes, if you must, so that they can come to life for a moment through us, but

(*turning to the audience*) without any more of this evening's irregularities, for which the audience may wish to forgive us. (109)

When discussing the idea of dramatic presence, James Urmson in his article "Dramatic Representation" refers to drama as "counter-factual" and says that it can be clearly distinguished from actuality. "Any member of the audience," writes Urmson, "who does not realize that the interpretation is counter-factual will be mistaking drama for actuality" (338). Pirandello is doing exactly the opposite with *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*. By blurring the dramatic and the factual, he is once again breaking the conventions of drama. Without having read the script ahead of time, it would be impossible to tell when the actors are improvising and when they are reciting predetermined lines. The same can be said about the audience's participation. Knowing who is part of the acting troupe and who is simply a disgruntled viewer would be impossible without advanced knowledge. Because theater takes place before a live audience, the idea of the fictional "now" often coexists in tension with the staged "now." As viewers we see what is happening at that moment on the stage and assume that to be fiction and so the question as to what is present is opened up (Power 3-4). The question then is: What role does presence play in the work and how does it affect the delusion and reality of the characters?

In regards to *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* I consider the actors to be following the traditional idea of presence when they are in character. When they break out of character, while they are still making the fictional present, they are doing it in a way that appears to be based in reality. Even when the actors break out of character it could be argued that the present moment is increased because the actors appear to be living the moment as real people, not as characters. This means that breaking the rules of presence in theater does not necessarily mean breaking out of a present moment. For my analysis, when the actors are

participating in the play within the play they are following the rules of presence and when they break out of character they are breaking the rules of presence. The space in between presence and what I shall call “non-presence” is the space where delusion meets reality for the actors. The actors, by the end of the performance, become stuck in this space and it is eventually too much for them to handle. That is why they eventually rebel against Dr. Hinkfuss and his theatrical direction.

The first breaking of the rules of presence takes place before the play within the play even begins. While the audience is waiting for the play to begin, certain noises are coming from behind the curtain. Have the actors already begun the performance or are they actually arguing with one another? The audience, left wondering if what they are witnessing is part of the performance, argues with Dr. Hinkfuss about whether or not the show has started. Their conventional wisdom tells them that a play does not begin until the curtain rises but after Dr. Hinkfuss’s elaborate explanation of what would take place during the evening’s experience, the crowd is left thinking that anything could happen.

IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS (*con fredda durezza*). Che ha da osservare il signore?

IL SIGNORE DELLE POLTRONE. Nulla. Sono contento d’averlo indovinato.

IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS. Indovinato che cosa?

IL SIGNORE DELLE POLTRONE. Che quei rumori facevano parte dello spettacolo.

IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS. Ah sí? Davvero? Le è parso che siano stati fatti per trucco? ... Si disilluda, caro signore. Ho detto prologo involontario. (257)

DR. HINKFUSS (*with cold severity*). You have something to say, sir?

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE ORCHESTRA. No. I’m just pleased to have guessed right.

DR. HINKFUSS. Guessed what?

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE ORCHESTRA. That those noises were part of the show.

DR. HINKFUSS. Oh? Really? You thought we were playing games with you? ... No, don’t flatter yourself, sir. I said an *involuntary* prologue. (34)

Once Dr. Hinkfuss has put the audience in its place, he turns his attention to the acting troupe. In the beginning, the actors do not seem ready to follow Dr. Hinkfuss's orders to improvise. They are not accustomed to this type of theater and would prefer to simply recite their lines and their parts on stage.¹¹⁷ The Leading Actress appears more apprehensive than most about participating. Her complaint is that she does not feel secure and is unsure about her role in the action. She is accustomed to making a fictional event come to life on stage and is comfortable with the traditional idea of presence in theater. While the story they are about to perform is always based in fiction, the idea that it has to come naturally and spontaneously from inside of each actor is what causes the Leading Actress to panic. It is the Character Actress, instead, that is most excited about the situation. She possesses the same take-charge attitude as her character, Signora Ignazia, and reassures the others that things will work out fine.¹¹⁸ While her experience as an actress is also grounded in the traditional idea of presence in theater, the Character Actress is willing to break that tradition and let her character live inside of her. Once this confusion and apprehension is resolved, the actors are finally ready to perform but not only does Dr. Hinkfuss have to persuade the actors to participate in this nontraditional performance, he must also reassure the audience. Perhaps having learned from a disastrous opening night of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, Pirandello decided to have Dr. Hinkfuss's presence as a type of safety net for a confused and

¹¹⁷ The term "defamiliarizing art" is often used to describe a performance that relies on the unexpected breaking of the basic conventions of theater (Alter 108). While Pirandello does attempt to disorient his audience, the work has much more substance than just the initial shock value that one gets when first approaching the play. *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* causes the viewer to question the conventional wisdom of theatrical productions, the role of the actors and the role of the audience.

¹¹⁸ Campbell and Sbrocchi describe the Character actress as professional and enthusiastic. While not always on target, she is willing to take charge and get things done. She knows what it takes to make a play work and although she sometimes gets ahead of the story, her energy allows her to carry a scene and when necessary, dominate the stage (15)

surprised audience.¹¹⁹ With order restored, Dr. Hinkfuss informs the audience that the play is about to begin.

Dr. Hinkfuss is attempting to maintain order and essentially control the reality of the audience and of the actors. He claims to be innovative yet strives simply to maintain the status quo. It is the actors, as the audience will discover, who will push the boundaries of accepted reality and make the audience question their own preconceived notions. Dr. Hinkfuss, on the one hand, wants his actors to improvise yet he is continually pulling them back from their assumed reality.¹²⁰ From the beginning of the work Dr. Hinkfuss is contradicting his own idea of improvisation. The Leading Actor points this out when Dr. Hinkfuss, using actor's real name, calls him out to the stage to introduce him to the audience.

IL PRIMO ATTORE (*rivenendo fuori*). Ma no signore! Lei non presenterà me al pubblico che mi conosce. Non son mica un burattino, io, nelle sue mani, da mostrare al pubblico come quel palco lasciato lì vuoto o una sedia messa in un posto anziché in un altro per qualche suo magico effetto! ... per aver pronte le parole che debbono nascere, nascere dal personaggio che rappresento, e spontanea l'azione e naturale ogni gesto; il signor ... (c. s.) deve vivere il personaggio di *Rico Verri*, essere *Rico Verri*. (270)

THE LEADING ACTOR. No! You will not introduce me! The audience knows me. I am not a puppet for you to show to the public like that box you have left empty, or some chair that you put in a particular place to create some magical effect. ... If I'm to keep the action flowing naturally, and every gesture spontaneous, Mr. _____ must *live* the character of *Rico Verri*, he must be *Rico Verri*. (41-42)

¹¹⁹ IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS. Del resto, sarò io qua tra voi, pronto a intervenire a un bisogno, o per ravviare a un minimo intoppo la rappresentazione, o per supplire a qualche manchevolezza del lavoro con chiarimenti e spiegazioni; il che (mi lusingo) vi renderà più piacevole la novità di questo tentativo di recita a soggetto. (265) DR. HINKFUSS. I'll be there among you, ready to step in if necessary, to get the show going if things go wrong, to clarify or explain to make up for any shortcomings. If I may say so, this will make the novelty of this experiment in improvisation more pleasing to you. (39)

¹²⁰ As Bassnett points out, Dr. Hinkfuss continually reminds everyone that he is in control. Nothing can happen that he does not know about and that he has not previously approved. While he claims to have made this Pirandellian work his own, Dr. Hinkfuss is still bound by the story outline on which the play is based (83).

As previously mentioned, because a theatrical performance takes place before a live audience, the idea of the fictional “now” often conflicts with the staged “now.” Theater constantly has to confront this idea of the present moment and at various points throughout its history, theater has developed new ways to heighten the spectator’s cognizance of this moment (Lavender 189). In *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*, because of the play within a play and the fact that the actors are not fixed characters, the audience is confronted with both the presence of the actors and the characters. While the actors try to suppress the presence of their true selves, their constant breaking of character, i.e. the conventional rules of presence, only serve to heighten the spectator’s own sense of presence.

In his book, *The Dramatic Imagination*, Robert Edmond Jones says that theater and drama is to be aware of the “now.” He refers the “now” of the drama as being unreality, and refers to the “now” of the theater as reality.¹²¹ The problem, Jones writes, is trying to fit the two together because, as he says, there is no greater art than letting reality shine through fiction (28). *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* comes as close as is possible to a “now” of the drama and a “now” of the theater making up a whole performance. A perceived reality is constantly breaking through the fiction of the inner play as both the actors and the director, Dr. Hinkfuss, bring a halt to the action whenever they please.

Returning to the presence of the spectator, the question that needs to be explored is: What, and more importantly, whom is the audience witnessing? What each member of the audience must determine for himself is whether he is watching a performance of a rehearsed play or an improvised creation of spontaneous action. Throughout a theatrical production the spectator is constantly made aware of the performers’ bodies, the stage configuration, and the

¹²¹ Jones is referring to the performance on the stage as being fiction and the theater itself and everything in it as reality. While the now of the inner play of *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* is Sicily, the now of the outer play and for the audience is the date and time that they find themselves in the theater.

living moment of representation. During *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* a performer's body language often says more than his words. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the two major scenes that make up the inner play. These are the death scene of Sampognetta, which takes place shortly after the intermission, and Mommina who dies at the end of the play during the work's culminating act. Before looking at these scenes, however, it is necessary to follow the progression of the play to see how the actors gradually build up to the final scene in which they are completely immersed in the characters that now inhabit their bodies. This fusion between actor and character is traditionally the accepted norm in theater. Ragusa writes, however, that in Pirandello's work the experience for the spectator is destabilizing because it is a fusion that is forced on his conscious (247). What the audience will discover is that when the actors finally arrive to the goal of living the presence of the characters they are playing – something that every actor strives for – that is the moment that they lose a part of themselves.¹²² The moment the actors start to question their own reality is when they realize that they can no longer continue with Dr. Hinkfuss's experiment. They cannot live in both the presence and the non-presence of theater. For the actors, their reality cannot be both actor and character at the same moment.

While the actors are initially hesitant to immerse themselves in their characters, by the intermission they seem much more comfortable and committed to the experiment at hand. Mommina and Verri even go so far as to question why the audience is watching them and listening to their conversation in the foyer.

MOMMINA. Stai zitto, per carità! Tutti gli occhi sono addosso a noi.
VERRI. Io vorrei sapere che hanno da guardar tanto e stare a sentire ciò che diciamo tra noi. (310)

¹²² The difference in *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* is that the actors are creating their own action as opposed to reciting lines from a prepared script.

MOMMINA. Please be quiet. Everyone is looking at us.
VERRI. I'd like to know why they have to keep looking at us and listening to our private conversations. (66)

These comments, while innocent enough when taken at face value, are interesting because it is the first time that all of the actors are in character.¹²³ While a theatrical performance is meant to be observed, the moment the characters are aware of being watched they question the presence of the audience. This moment is an interesting role reversal that causes the audience to wonder about their personal role in the performance. When participating in the play within the play, the characters are at the theater as spectators, not as actors.

The audience, now mingling with the actors in the foyer, has become part of the play as well. But how do the characters see them? Are they the townspeople watching the same play or are they spectators who are simply part the audience watching *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*? The answer according to Pirandello would have to be both. Not only did Pirandello want to question the conventions of theatrical performance, he also wanted to question what it meant to witness a theatrical performance. Pirandello does this by first having the characters question why the spectators are watching them and listening to their conversations. He does this again later by making the spectators feel as if they are eavesdropping on the conversation between Mommina and Verri as it becomes heated and personal. At this point in the action, it is difficult for the audience to remember that this is a play being performed by actors.¹²⁴ The spectator's sense of presence is now at its highest

¹²³ As the play progresses, the names used in the script to denote who is speaking change from the names of the actors to the names of the characters. Yet as quickly as the names changed, they are just as quickly changed back when the actors break character.

¹²⁴ In her article, "The Character as Director: From *Leonora addio!* to *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*," Dorothea Stewens calls the play within the play "fiction impersonating life" (70). If we want to believe, however, that the actors are actually improvising, then a more appropriate way of putting it would be: life impersonating fiction.

point.¹²⁵ He is both the watcher and he is being watched. There is no escape for the audience. Even during the intermission, a time when traditionally spectators could get a break from the action, the play continues in the theater as well as in the foyer. There is no break from the action because the audience has become part of the action. As is the case with real life, time cannot simply be stopped to accommodate an appropriate pause in the action.

In his article, “On the Impression of Reality in Cinema,” Charles Metz comments that the theater is too real and because of this, theatrical fictions yield only a weak impression of reality (9). While that may be the case with other theatrical works, the “reality” incorporated into *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* only serves to increase the feeling that what the actors are doing is both real and spontaneous. This is made even clearer by the Leading Actor’s negative reaction to how his fight scene was playing out. After Verri returned from the all night pharmacy with the medicine for Signora Ignazia’s toothache, his anger erupts when he sees Mommina singing with the others in an attempt to ease her mother’s pain. With tempers flaring and emotions running high on all sides, Verri can no longer contain himself and it seems that his emotions have gotten the better of him. As he breaks out of character it is hard to imagine that the Leading Actor is just pretending. As things are generally planned to succeed, it is easier to believe that something is improvised, or better put, authentic, when it goes wrong. The Leading Actor’s anger and disappointment about how the scene is playing out is what makes it so easy for the audience to believe that what he is saying is real and heartfelt. As the other actors express approval of how the scene is playing out, Verri cannot hide his anger and resentment and lets everyone know how he feels.

NENÈ E DORINA (*ridendo e battendo le mani*). Benissimo! Bravissimo!

¹²⁵ Witnessing this type of performance would be unsettling for someone who was used to a more traditional theater. As Bassnett suggests, like the Leading Lady who calls for the security of a script, the audience wants the security of what would be considered traditional performance (87).

VERRI (*c. s. indignato*). Ma che bravissimo! Scempiaggini! Così si guasta tutta la scena! E non la finiamo più.

IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS (*sorgendo dalla sua poltrona*). Ma no, perché? Filava tutto così bene! Avanti, avanti! (337)

NENÈ AND DORINA (*Laughing and clapping their hands*). Bravo, bravo!

VERRI. What do you mean “bravo?” Don’t be stupid! The whole scene is ruined! And we’ll never finish!

DR. HINKFUSS (*rising from his seat*). No, no! Why? Everything was going so well! Go on, go on! (82)

Before the actors are ready to fully immerse themselves in the action and become the characters that they are portraying, they will drift in and out of character. Nowhere is this more artfully done than during the death scene of Sampognetta, played by the Old Comic Actor. During the conclusion of Verri’s argument with Dr. Hinkfuss and the other actors, the Old Comic Actor makes his way through them stained in blood and clutching his stomach. He arrived in character as Sampognetta but as soon as he gets Dr. Hinkfuss’s attention he immediately breaks character and begins lodging his complaint. Yet as the Old Comic Actor begins to speak, as himself, he also refers to himself as his character Sampognetta.

SAMPOGNETTA. Ma insomma, signor Direttore, io picchio, picchio, picchio, così tutto insanguinato; ho le budella in mano; devo venire a morir sulla scena, che non è facile per un attore brillante; nessuno mi fa entrare; trovo qua lo scompiglio; gli attori smontati; mancato l’effetto che mi ripromettevo di cavar fuori dalla mia entrata, perché pur così grondante sangue e moribondo, sono anche ubriaco; domando a lei come si rimedia adesso? (339)

SAMPOGNETTA. To make a long story short, Doctor Hinkfuss, I knock, knock, knock, all covered with blood like this; I have my guts in my hands, I’ve got to come on stage to die – and that’s not easy for an old comedian – and no one lets me in. And what do I find here? Confusion. The actors are all out of character. And the effect of my entrance was lost, because I’m not only bleeding and dying, but I’m drunk as well. So tell me – what are we going to do about this? (83)

With some prodding from Dr. Hinkfuss the scene resumes with all of the actors back in character except for the Old Comic Actor who is now in some sort of limbo between

reality and fiction. When Dr. Hinkfuss and the other actors call him out on this, Sampognetta voices his frustrations and then simply drops onto the sofa announcing his own death. After more protests from Dr. Hinkfuss, the Old Comic Actor explains how he would have liked to perform the scene and as he gets into more detail what he is saying spontaneously becomes action and Sampognetta dies with his family grieving all around him.

In his book, *Our Town and Other Plays*, Thornton Wilder writes that when place is emphasized in theater, it is harnessed to and limited by time (11). In the case of the death of Sampognetta, the beauty of the scene is that time is not present. Because of the actors' continual breaking of character, the spectator is living the present moment with him. It is as if through his explanation of how he would like his death scene to be played, we the audience have been invited to not only share this intimate moment, but voice our concerns and give our suggestions as well. When the Old Comic Actor slips back into character we are ready to get back in character along with him and play our role as more than just spectators of a theatrical performance. This is, as Julian Hilton describes in his book *Performance*, both the actor and the audience's acceptance of what Hilton calls "acts of designation." This means that the audience accepts what the actors are telling them and the actors agree to convey a belief in what they themselves are saying (14). For a play in which the actors continually break character, it is surprisingly easy for the audience to follow the actors throughout their journey.

As reality gradually takes over fiction, the presence and direction of Dr. Hinkfuss becomes irrelevant since the actors are now living out the story as the characters that they were originally attempting to portray. Once the actors realize that the story is inside of them they can free themselves from Dr. Hinkfuss's control. As the Leading Actor says: "La vita

che nasce non la comanda nessuno!” (358).¹²⁶ This is the point in which the actors give Dr. Hinkfuss the previously mentioned ultimatum: either he leaves the auditorium or the actors will. This is set off by Dr. Hinkfuss’s speech to the audience in which he describes how he would have liked the Leading Actress to play the part of Mommina and how she disagrees with his vision. Dr. Hinkfuss has arrived to a level of awareness that he cannot understand. He voices several issues that he subsequently contradicts through his actions. “He is a satirical figure,” writes Bassnett, “a pedant who mouths what he cannot practice or comprehend” (85). The battle between the absolute and the relative has been decided. Dr. Hinkfuss, who has tried to impose order on everything including improvisation, can no longer force his vision on the actors who have now committed themselves to bringing life to their characters. The actors no longer accept Dr. Hinkfuss’s direction and for a short time are excited to let theater live through them.

What is interesting to note is how quickly and easily we the reader/audience slip right back into the story as if it were actually happening in front of us. We see now, with Dr. Hinkfuss gone, that the actors have become their characters and have brought them to life. Even as the actors prepare everything for the scene we still want to believe that it is the character, not the actor that we are watching. What helps make this such a smooth transition is the work’s continual referral to the audience. By making the spectator a part of the play, the audience is more invested and willing to participate in the performance. When the Leading Actor is confessing his feelings about the play to the Leading Actress and discussing their characters’ relationship, he references the presence of the audience. As he is pouring his heart out, the Leading Actor explains how the audience is now a part of the performance and

¹²⁶ “Nobody can direct life as it is coming into being!” (93).

cannot be sent away. The spectators are, as the Leading Actor describes them, part of a tribunal that will both hear the characters and judge them.

In her book, *Performance Art*, Rose Lee Goldberg explains how through performance actors were trying to bring the artwork and the spectator closer together by reducing the element of alienation, i.e. distance, between the performer and the viewer. By doing this, Goldberg writes, the two would experience the work simultaneously (152). This is what is now taking place in *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)*. Both the actors and the audience have rid themselves of Dr. Hinkfuss's oppressive direction and are now free to let the story play out naturally. The collaboration begins the minute the actors take over the stage direction and lighting controls. When the Leading Actress asks about the lack of a set, specifically the walls of her cell, the Character Actress explains what the actors and the audience must do for the scene to be successful. Essentially, if they all chose to believe that the walls of the cell are there, then the walls are there.

L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA. Basta che tu ti ci senta, figlia, dentro la tua carcere; apparirà, la vedranno tutti, come se l'avessi attorno! (359)

THE CHARACTER ACTRESS. All it needs if for you to feel that you're inside your jail, child; then it will appear. Everyone will see it just as though it were there around you! (94)

The Character Actress gives this advice to the Leading Actress in preparation for her portrayal of Mommina's death scene. As the Leading Actress begins to "feel" that she is in her cell, it slowly begins to happen.

In order to make this transaction complete the other actresses must turn Mommina's future into her present. In one brief moment, Mommina's past, present and future merge into one. As the women are presently making Mommina look old and ugly for her terrible future, they are at the same time talking about how they used to do a similar thing in an effort to

make Mommina look pretty. Once this sad transformation is complete, Mommina's present becomes that of a mad woman who is locked in a room from which there is no escape. Verri holds the key that he jealously guards and allows no one else to possess.

Once Verri arrives on the scene, he enters the room and immediately berates Mommina about her endless and needless suffering. He alone, Verri exclaims, is the true victim of Mommina's and her family's wickedness. Verri's claim is that his only mistake was having married Mommina, a mistake that continually causes him to suffer and that drives him to the brink of madness. The other actors, so caught up in the argument between Verri and Mommina, can no longer remain silent and watch. Now fully in character, Nenè, Dornina, Totina and Signora Ignazia come to Mommina's defense despite the protests from Verri that they are not there. Without the limitations forced on them by Dr. Hinkfuss, the characters have the freedom to move beyond the limits of time and place. Anything is possible in this dream like state where the laws governing life do not exist (Bassnett 88). Even Verri, who tries to deny their presence, is unable to block out the voices of Mommina's mother and sisters.

NENÈ. (*dal buio, insorgendo*). Oh vile! Adesso le parla di noi!

VERRI. (*gridando, terribile*). Silenzio! Voi qua non ci siete!

LA SIGNORA IGNAZIA (*venendo verso la parete, dal buio*). Belva, belva, te la tieni addentata, lí dentro la gabbia, a dilaniarla.

VERRI (*toccando la parete due volte con la mano, e due volte, al tocco, rendendola visibile*). Questo è muro! Questo è muro! – Voi non ci siete!
(371)

NENÈ (*from the darkness, protesting*). The coward! Now he's talking to her about us!

VERRI (*shouting, frightful*). Quiet! You are not here!

SIGNORA IGNAZIA (*coming toward the wall, from the dark*). You animal! You wild beast! There you are in you cage, and you have her between your jaws, tearing her apart!

VERRI (*touches the wall twice with his hand, making it visible each time*). This is a wall! This is a wall! You are not here! (100-01)

This is once again a case of fiction interrupting reality. The characters are living their parts and seeing Mommina suffer is too much for her family to handle and they are compelled to try and help her. Even when their help breaks the boundaries of accepted reality the audience is able to allow it because of the fact that it is an emotional response. While the play lacks a clear and concise story line, it is full of emotion and emotion is something that everyone can relate to. How many countless times, as spectators of a play or a film, have we wanted to reach into the screen or onto the stage to help the victim of an egregious injustice? Pirandello anticipates this and has the characters, which have become spectators themselves, attempt to do what audiences have done since the beginning of fictional productions. The other characters, like the audience of a film, are powerless and all they can do is scream helplessly at the tyrant, as their words do nothing to help the victim or remedy the situation. Despite their desire to help, all they can do is watch in vain as Mommina suffers and eventually dies. After having finished singing all the parts of *Il Trovatore* to her astonished young daughters who have known nothing of the outside world, Mommina's heart gives out and she collapses onto the floor.

At the height of the play the line between fiction and reality is more blurred than ever. After Mommina dies Dr. Hinkfuss comes running on stage. As he interrupts the action, we are all left wondering if the Leading Actress is dead. Of course she is not but our desire as an audience to believe what we see has forced us to question the obvious reality that it is simply a play being performed. Yet because it is done so well, with so much emotion, we believe for a moment that it is real. Pirandello understood this and he skillfully has the other actors also fall into the same trap. They also question if the Leading Actress is okay or not. Once again,

they have become part of the audience. Even as the actors in the play, they did not know exactly what would happen with the Leading Actress.

L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA (*mostrando la Prima Attrice ancora a terra*).

Ma perché non s'alza la signoria? Se ne sta ancora lì...

L'ATTORE BRILLANTE. Ohé, non sarà morta per davvero?

L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA. Si sente male davvero? (386)

THE CHARACTER ACTRESS (*indicating the Leading Actress still lying on the floor*). But why doesn't Miss _____ get up? Why is she still lying there ...

THE COMIC ACTOR. Oh! I hope she's not really dead!

THE CHARACTERS ACTRESS. Is she really feeling ill? (109)

In this final moment of the story, the actors' presence on stage has merged with their personal reality. The combining of reality and fiction in this dreamlike delusion is too much for them to handle and the actors voice their complaints to Dr. Hinkfuss, who concedes that they may be right. While he initially believed that by controlling the *creazione scenica* – using actors and technicians to fulfill the effect he wanted to create – he could control the action on stage, Dr. Hinkfuss eventually realizes that the success of the play depends on others coming to life to perform the story. Yet by coming to life, the play becomes subject to life's rules and variations and cannot be controlled or consistently repeated (Bassnett 91). This is why Dr. Hinkfuss agrees to consider a script, as he would rather concede improvisation than lose control of the direction of the performance. Ironically, the actors also choose to abandon improvisation in favor of stability. Their freedom is also their burden and the thought of having to continually “live” their parts is overwhelming and emotionally draining. This feeling is passionately expressed by the Old Comic Actor who sums up the strain that this type of theater puts on the actors and the pressure they are under.

L'ATTORE BRILLANTE. Eh, sfido! Se vuole che si viva... Ecco le conseguenze! Ma noi non siamo qua per questo, sa! Noi siamo qua per recitare, scritte, imparate a memoria. Non pretenderà mica che ogni sera uno

di noi ci lasci la pelle! (386)

THE COMIC ACTOR. If he wants us to live ... look what happens! But that isn't what we're here for, you know! We're here to perform written parts, as we've memorized them. You can't expect one of us to drop dead here every night! (111)

Dr. Hinkfuss's final remark is dedicated to the audience. He asks for its forgiveness regarding the night's *irregularities*. The audience's idea about what a theatrical production has been flipped upside down. The spectators, much like the actors, are torn between the allures of improvisation and the safety of conventional and traditional theater. It has often been written that Pirandello "destroyed" traditional drama and theater. While his influence is undeniable, I would prefer to denote his contributions to theater as allowing it to reach its full potential. By breaking the barriers between the stage and the audience and between fiction and reality Pirandello opened theater to an infinite number of possibilities. In *Questa sera si recita (a soggetto)* we are continually reminded of the various levels of belief and disbelief involved in our observation of a theatrical performance (Campbell and Sbrocchi 11). In this work Pirandello was able to make the choice of belief or disbelief for us.

CHAPTER 6

The Reality of Good and Evil and the Delusion of Mutual Understanding in *La patente*

Like many other concepts, the idea of good and evil comes from man's desire to make sense of the world around him. In his book *Images, Heroes, and Self-Perceptions*, Lou Benson discusses how ancient peoples personified evil in the form of unfriendly spirits that were to be blamed when bad things befell the world of men (94). What this did was situate the source of evil in one place and gave man an object on which to fix blame or a target against which he could fight back. Attitudes on the subject, as can be seen through historic documents and Pirandello's work, were no different in Pirandello's Sicily, where superstition and tradition dominated daily life.

In the case of *La patente*, man's need for an enemy has led us to Chiarchiaro, the supposed possessor of the Evil Eye. He is a poor and uneducated man whose misfortune has caused him to lose his job and has forced him to live off the charity of his son in order to survive. Chiarchiaro has been living with his reputation as a *jettatore* and protested violently against it for the past 2 years. After exploring every possible solution, he can no longer fight against public opinion and ultimately decides to embrace his fate as the *jettatore* that everyone claims him to be.

CHIARCHIARO. E lo sa di che campiamo adesso tutt'e quattro? Del pane che si leva di bocca il mio figliuolo, che ha pure la sua famiglia, tre bambini! E le pare che possa fare ancora a lungo, povero figlio mio, questo sacrificio per me? Signor giudice, non mi resta altro che di mettermi a fare la professione di jettatore! (171)

CHIARCHIARO. And do you know on what the four of us have been living?
On the bread which my son takes out of the mouths of his family, a wife and
three small children. How much longer can this poor son of mine continue to
sacrifice? Your Honor, my only recourse is to exercise the profession of Evil
Eye! (129)

The saddest part of this wretched story is that Chiarchiaro and his family – a wife and two daughters – have nowhere to go and no way to remedy their situation. Even if they elected to leave town, something that they are wary to attempt, Chiarchiaro’s infamy as a *jettatore* would follow them wherever they decided to go. The simple fact of the matter in this complicated situation is that, much like reality and delusion, the difference between good and evil is not as easily discernable as we might like to think and the answers on how to deal with these concepts are even more complex. Chiarchiaro understands this, but Judge D’Andrea does not. D’Andrea cannot seem to understand why Chiarchiaro is doing what he is doing. The good judge, for all of his merits, believes in the old adage that the truth will set you free. What he does not understand-unfortunately for Chiarchiaro-is that the truth is whatever society deems it to be and being on the wrong side of that truth is a lonely and dangerous place to be.

The mutual lack of understanding regarding the *truth* and the concepts of good and evil is what leads Chiarchiaro to call Judge D’Andrea his greatest enemy.¹²⁷ For D’Andrea, someone who has never had to confront the idea of good and evil anywhere but in a courtroom, the distinction is black and white. The Judge thinks that he is helping Chiarchiaro by not believing him to be a *jettatore*. He believes that by convincing Chiarchiaro to drop his

¹²⁷ Chiarchiaro refers to Judge D’Andrea as his worst enemy because he does not believe that Chiarchiaro possesses the Evil Eye. Chiarchiaro’s “power” requires that all believe that he is dangerous otherwise there would be no reason for anyone to fear his presence or pay for him to go away. Beatrice Corrigan discusses this idea in her article “Pirandello and the Theatre of the Absurd” and writes: “Pirandello holds that the individual cannot feel secure in his illusion unless he can persuade others to share it” (6). Judge D’Andrea is the final holdout in Chiarchiaro’s illusion. Once D’Andrea is convinced, Chiarchiaro will have the whole town at his mercy.

defamation case against the men who made the sign against the Evil Eye when Chiarchiaro walked past them, a case that Chiarchiaro is certain to lose, that everything will be fine. Chiarchiaro, of course, disagrees and believes that proceeding with the case is the most logical, in fact only, course of action. Judge D'Andrea sees things from a different point of view and believes reason and the law as being on the side of the good. As much as Chiarchiaro attempts to clarify his point of view, Judge D'Andrea cannot understand why Chiarchiaro would want to proceed with his current course of action.

Much as in *Enrico IV*, the protagonist of *La patente* is forced to wear a mask of madness that society has imposed on him.¹²⁸ Driven by fear and the idea of self-preservation, things are often done in the name of “the public good.” This practice, however, is generally only useful for scoring political points or fueling mob mentality. In the case of *La patente*, being labeled as one who possesses the Evil Eye has both destroyed and revived the life of Chiarchiaro.¹²⁹ The public's fear of what Chiarchiaro *might* do has driven him to the margins of society, but by the end of the play he is no longer the victim of public injustice who wants to clear his name. Instead, it is the judge who wants to clear Chiarchiaro of his infamous title while the man accused of being a *jettatore* specifically wants to have that belief reinforced.

While Chiarchiaro is a member of the working class, Judge D'Andrea is part of the elite and out of touch with the public. He spends his days talking to his Goldfinch, the last living memory of his late mother, and, as he puts it, administering justice to the pitiful wild creatures. His nights, on the other hand, he spends staring at and talking to the stars. All of the judge's activities lead him to be teased and made fun of by his colleagues but because of

¹²⁸ While I will maintain that both Henry IV and Chiarchiaro are indeed sane and aware of their actions, there is an ongoing debate over the sanity or madness of these characters due to the murder that Henry commits and Chiarchiaro's insistence that he is in fact a *jettatore*.

¹²⁹ I use revived strictly in an economic sense.

his standing as part of the social elite, his strange behavior is tolerated and he is simply regarded as an eccentric.¹³⁰ The judge's physical appearance is also in contrast with his social status and in the short story, *La patente*, from which the play is derived, Pirandello describes Judge D'Andrea as having a disturbing physical appearance that is in direct contrast to his strong moral fortitude (473).

If Chiarchiaro is to be considered the "evil" in this play, then Judge D'Andrea, Chiarchiaro's mental mirror image, must be considered the "good."¹³¹ Although both characters are non-conventional in regard to their problem-solving methods, their distance from their fellow-men, rather than create a sense of solidarity between them, pits them against one another in a duel in which the realist, Chiarchiaro, defeats the idealist, D'Andrea, and the irrational wins out over the rational (Ragusa 209). Yet how can two people who appear to be so similar, be considered so different in the eyes of society? While Judge D'Andrea and Chiarchiaro essentially believe the same thing, an incredible lack of understanding exists between the two men. While the differences between D'Andrea and Chiarchiaro are stark, their thinking follows a very similar line. Their use of reason and logic is almost identical, yet they cannot seem to understand one another.

In this chapter I explore the relationship between Judge D'Andrea and Chiarchiaro and their apparent inability to communicate with one another. This lack of understanding is a result of their differing views on the concepts of good and evil and how these ideas are regarded by society. While D'Andrea does not believe in curses or superstition, the society in

¹³⁰ This is also the case with Laudisi in *Così è se vi pare*. Were he not a member of the social elite, his behavior would have sent him to the margins of society along with Signor Ponza and his family.

¹³¹ This is a subjective good and evil that is determined by society. I refer to Judge D'Andrea as Chiarchiaro's mental mirror image because of their similar use of logic and reason. The two men make the same argument but they do it from the opposite point of view.

which he lives does believe in them. The Sicilian culture, which Chiarchiaro understands much better than Judge D'Andrea, is on full display in *La patente*.¹³² As George Bernstein accurately points out in his article, *Pirandello: The Sicilian Experience*, there are specific elements that continually emerge victorious in the works of Luigi Pirandello. These elements can all be interpreted as playing a crucial role in Sicilian life and are the following: rage, vengeance, illusions, and deception (105). While these are typically considered negative characteristics, it shows us that Pirandello chose to show the Sicily in which he grew up and portray ideas that represented his own truths and personal realities.¹³³ Each one of these elements plays an important role in *La patente* and at one point or another, Chiarchiaro himself embodies each characteristic.

While Sicilian culture and history have been studied extensively, Pirandello's Sicilian plays have often been considered lesser works and sometimes have even been ignored completely.¹³⁴ As for the critical literature regarding *La patente*, the work has repeatedly been pushed to the side with the focus and attention falling on the more significant three-act plays that preceded and followed it chronologically (Ragusa 205). While Pirandello's *La patente*, written in 1917, is one example of work that has been overlooked, both the play and the short story can be seen as a bases for some of Pirandello's most creative and successful plays; one such example being *Enrico IV*. Chiarchiaro is one of the first characters to possess

¹³² It should be noted that Judge D'Andrea does not speak Sicilian the way that the other characters do. According to Privitera, the judge was probably born and raised somewhere on mainland Italy and then later appointed to his federal position in Sicily (117).

¹³³ When discussing Pirandello's opinions of the Sicilian ruling class Privitera writes: "He treats the members of a faded Sicilian aristocracy with contempt. His marquises and barons are decadent, penniless fops. His dislike for the Sicilian clergy is undisguised. He depicts them as hypocritical parasites, who live off the fat of the land, are attached to the upper classes, and treat peasants and members of the lower class with open scorn" (vii).

¹³⁴ Privitera states in the introduction to his translations of Pirandello's plays in Sicilian that: "as it was for all educated Sicilians, Italian was his (Pirandello's) second language, the one in which he wrote his major works" (v).

the traits that, when enriched and deepened, will blossom into more complex personalities in some of Pirandello's future works (Vittorini 56).¹³⁵

While discounted, *La patente* has not been completely ignored by the critics. Walter Starkie in his analysis of the play notes the irony of the play and discusses how Pirandello satirizes the superstition that dominated southern Italy. Much like Manzoni in *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) and the *La storia della colonna infame* (*The Story of the Infamous Column*), Pirandello tells the story of a man whose life has been destroyed by a false accusation. Bassanese also comments on the irony of *La patente* and discusses Chiarchiaro's transformation from victim to victimizer. She points out that Chiarchiaro's thirst for vengeance against a society that has shunned him and his family is so strong that it has been transformed into evil in his mind and in his persona (151). Adriano Tilgher, who shares a similar opinion when discussing *La patente*, calls Chiarchiaro's situation the "accettazione di una maschera imposta a forza" (158).¹³⁶ After being pushed to the brink of desperation and misery, Chiarchiaro has no choice but to choose the mask of evil over the only other possibility: extinction.

Unlike the short story, the play does not include, and even excludes, much of the background information about Judge D'Andrea. He is no longer the central figure. That place is taken by Chiarchiaro who appears much more self-confident and in control in the play than in the story. Essentially, it appears, Chiarchiaro has been set free and is ready to claim his place in society after being its outcast for the past two years.

¹³⁵ Some examples are Henry IV from *Enrico IV*, Mattia Pascal from *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, and Vitangelo Moscarda from *Uno, nessuno, e centomila*.

¹³⁶ "Acceptance of a mask that has been imposed by force" (trans. mine).

The scenery for the play is Judge D'Andrea's chambers. Like any other learned man's office, his too is filled with books and notebooks presumably filled with court documents. Also in his chambers is a large birdcage that often holds the goldfinch that his dead mother once owned. The bird represents the Judge's final connection to the deceased woman. The play begins with Judge D'Andrea entering his office carrying the goldfinch in a small birdcage. He immediately transfers the bird to the larger cage before summoning the porter Marranca. The Judge is now ready, as he puts it, to "amministrare la giustizia a questi poveri piccoli uomini feroci" (157).¹³⁷

When Marranca arrives, Judge D'Andrea tells him to go to the house of Don Rosario Chiarchiaro. Before the Judge can finish his request Marranca has jumped back in fear, making a fist with his index and little fingers pointing downward (the horns) to ward off the Evil Eye and warns the Judge not to mention Chiarchiaro's name. The Judge, annoyed at what he considers to be ignorant nonsense, orders Marranca to inform Chiarchiaro that the Public Prosecutor wants to speak with him and for him to come right away. As Marranca is leaving, three other judges – colleagues of Judge D'Andrea's – enter dressed in their judicial robes and hats. The judges immediately begin teasing D'Andrea about his goldfinch that he carries with him at all times. "Tutto il paese," informs the Third Judge, "ti chiama: il Giudice Cardello" (158).¹³⁸ Judge D'Andrea's response is to attack the pretentiousness of the judges' attitudes and attires and, after discussing the cruel nature of having to dispense "justice," Judge D'Andrea talks about the injustice of the case that he must try.

D'ANDREA. Iniquo, perché include la più spietata ingiustizia contro alla quale un pover'uomo tenta disperatamente di ribellarsi, senza nessuna probabilità di scampo. C'è una vittima qua, che non può prendersela con

¹³⁷ "to administer justice to these pitiful, wild creatures" (119).

¹³⁸ "You know what they call you all over town? The Goldfinch Judge" (120).

nessuno! (160)

D'ANDREA. Unjust, because a poor man is trying desperately to fight against a ruthless injustice, without a hope of winning. A victim with no way of fighting back! (121)

D'Andrea's rant on injustice has piqued the interest of the judges who want to know what the case is and who is involved. This interest, however, quickly turns to fear, when D'Andrea mentions the name Chiarchiaro. The reaction of the three judges is the same reaction that Marranca had when D'Andrea first spoke the name Chiarchiaro: they jump back in fear and make the sign against the Evil Eye. These men who are supposed to impartially dispense justice share the same prejudices and preconceived notions as the rest of the town. They see Chiarchiaro as being crazy and possessing the Evil Eye. Only D'Andrea believes otherwise and points out this obvious contradiction: "Ecco, vedete? E dovrete proprio voi rendere giustizia a questo pover'uomo!" (160).¹³⁹

After a brief philosophical monologue by D'Andrea on the nature of man and his desire to shape the "facts" of a particular situation to suit his beliefs, the judges are interrupted by the return of Marranca. When he arrived at Chiarchiaro's home, Marranca explains that the man was not at home so he informed the daughter, Rosinella, of Judge D'Andrea's wish that he come see him as soon as possible. In a panic, Rosinella returns with Marranca to see the judge herself. D'Andrea, who at first does not want to see her, reluctantly agrees to let her in. With this the three judges leave and the D'Andrea is left alone with Rosinella, who is described as about sixteen years old and poorly dressed but very neat.

Fearful that the law is out to punish her family even more, Rosinella explains that her family is just poor and unlucky. Judge D'Andrea, realizing that she has misunderstood the situation, explains to her that it is her father who is setting himself up against the law, not the

¹³⁹ "Do you see? You should be the one giving justice to this poor fellow!" (121).

other way around. This only serves to frighten the girl even more and she begs D'Andrea to make her father drop the suit. That, according to D'Andrea, is exactly what he is trying to do and that is why he wants to talk to Chiarchiaro. After briefly discussing the family's futile options, Chiarchiaro arrives to face his summons. This sends Rosinella into a panic because she has been instructed by her father not to leave the house and D'Andrea sends her out a secret door as he prepares for the entrance of Chiarchiaro.

Pirandello's frightening description of Chiarchiaro sets the scene for the encounter between the Judge and the supposed madman, but it is Judge D'Andrea whose violent verbal attack begins the confrontation. Chiarchiaro on the other hand, despite his disturbing outward appearance, remains cool and collected and questions whether or not D'Andrea believes that Chiarchiaro possesses the Evil Eye. It is not until Judge D'Andrea attempts to put his hand on Chiarchiaro's shoulder that Chiarchiaro shows some emotion. As he pulls back trembling, Chiarchiaro exclaims that the Judge should not touch him. This, however, is for D'Andrea's own good because according to Chiarchiaro the judge could go blind from this simple gesture. The judge, of course, does not believe in the Evil Eye and the two go back and forth about what course of action is in Chiarchiaro's best interest. Realizing that D'Andrea is not understanding Chiarchiaro's point of view, he decides to give him a rudimentary lesson and explains that, much like a judge who must have a degree to practice law, Chiarchiaro needs an official license as proof of his power as possessor of the Evil Eye.

After all of this Judge D'Andrea is still not convinced and only feels a deep pity towards Chiarchiaro and his situation. Demanding his license, Chiarchiaro stands up and pounds his cane on the floor. He has barely finished speaking the words when a large window slowly opens, as if by the wind, and slams into the goldfinch's large cage. As the

cage comes crashing down Judge D'Andrea runs over to find that his goldfinch, the only living remembrance of his late mother, is dead.

The play concludes with the arrival of the other three judges. They hear the crash and ask what has happened, freezing at the sight of Chiarchiaro. Shocked, D'Andrea can only mutter the words: "Il vento... la vetrata... il cardellino" (174).¹⁴⁰ Chiarchiaro is quick to inform all of them that it was neither the wind nor the window that caused the accident. Because D'Andrea refused to believe in his power, Chiarchiaro was forced to give him proof and has just used his powers to kill the bird. Chiarchiaro then turns his attention to the three judges and tells them that they are all going to die unless they "pay the tax." The three gladly pay, even asking God for help, in hopes that Chiarchiaro will leave. The curtain comes down for the final time over a victorious Chiarchiaro. His last words are directed at Judge D'Andrea: "Ha visto? E non ho ancora la patente! Istruisca il processo! Sono ricco! Sono ricco! (174).¹⁴¹

Forced by public fear and irrationality, Chiarchiaro must embrace superstition and myth in order to survive. Each moment that passes only serves to increase the sense of Chiarchiaro's exclusion, of his absolute difference between himself and others which robs him even – as it will later rob Henry IV – of the right to his name (Ragusa 210). His identity is now so caught up in how society views him that he is seen as nothing else but a man who possesses the Evil Eye. Chiarchiaro's name of *jettatore* and his self-image is one that has been imposed on him by society.

In his book, *The Question of the Other*, Bernhald Waldenfels discusses the process of naming and writes that the given name that everybody receives should be considered a half-

¹⁴⁰ "The wind... the window... the goldfinch..." (130).

¹⁴¹ "Did you see? And I don't even have my license yet! Try the case! I'm rich! I'm rich!" (trans. mine).

alien name because it is imposed upon us by others (84). For Chiarchiaro, the term *jettatore* is much more than just a given name; he has been labeled by society as evil. Not only is he an outsider and someone to be avoided, but he is someone to be hated and punished as well. However unwarranted it may be, this imposed identity has become Chiarchiaro's personal reality.

As has been discussed above, society has always had the need for something, or someone, to blame for the ills that befall it. In the case of *La patente*, Chiarchiaro has become society's villain but he is clearly not evil in the traditional sense of the word. According to Benson, society often creates its own criminals and this is indeed the case for Chiarchiaro. He is a villain who has been created by society and must embrace said title in order to survive. "For some people," writes Benson, "crime is the only way out of a very oppressive situation. They realize that there is no hope of ever getting out of the vicious cycle of poverty without taking what appears to them to be the only reasonable steps" (99). Chiarchiaro appears to have no choice but to become the evil that society has deemed him to be. He acts the part of the *jettatore* by dressing himself up and by behaving crazily whenever in public, but simply being pushed in the direction of evil does not absolve him of guilt in this situation. It is easy to see Chiarchiaro as the victim in this horrible situation, yet Chiarchiaro himself expressed his feelings of hatred and rage against society to Judge D'Andrea after the judge calls Chiarchiaro's plan a tax on ignorance.

D'ANDREA. La tassa dell'ignoranza!

CHIARCHIARO. Dell'ignoranza? Ma no, caro lei! La tassa della salute!

Perché ho accumulato tanta bile e tanto odio, io, contro tutta questa schifosa umanità, che veramente credo, signor giudice, d'aver qua, in questi occhi, la potenza di far crollare dalle fondamenta un'intera città! (173)

D'ANDREA. A tax on ignorance!

CHIARCHIARO. On ignorance? Not at all, Dear Sir. It will be protection

money. Because I've collected so much bile and hatred against this foul humanity, that I really believe, Your Honor, I have in these eyes, the power to make a whole city crumble right down to its foundations! (129-30)

So the question is: What is the reality of good and evil and where does Chiarchiaro fit in regard to these terms? We know the outcome of the story and what the future holds for Chiarchiaro, but the question of how Chiarchiaro became what he is in the end is still unclear. From the encounter between Judge D'Andrea and Rosinella, then later with Chiarchiaro himself, we learn that there are four people involved in the family tragedy. We also discover that Chiarchiaro has been unemployed for over a year and that he is the object of a merciless persecution by the majority of society. Lastly, we learn that there is nowhere for his family to go because Chiarchiaro's reputation would follow the family members wherever they went.

To answer the question of how Chiarchiaro became the man he is at the end of the play, we must analyze the creation of his identity as one who has the Evil Eye. According to Waldenfels, there is no such thing as a ready-made individual. Instead, there is only a process of individualization that all members of a society must go through and all of our actions, thoughts and feeling are interwoven with what others feel, perceive, say or do (84). After initially being accused of possessing the Evil Eye Chiarchiaro tried to fight this accusation but because an overwhelming number of people perceived him to be a *jettatore*, his true self is eventually overcome by public opinion.

Fear, for most people, is a normal human reaction. It is a built-in survival mechanism with which all people are equipped. First fear signals an approaching danger and then prepares us to deal with it (Gower vii). This signaling of danger is something that has served humans well for centuries but it is what to do about it that has caused us so many problems.

For the Sicilian society in *La patente*, Chiarchiaro and his supposed Evil Eye represents an approaching danger. The problem for Chiarchiaro is how said society has chosen to deal with him. Instead of confronting the situation in a reasonable manner, the people have succumbed to superstition and panic and have shunned Chiarchiaro. The results of these actions are best summed up in the words of Chiarchiaro's daughter, Rosinella: "Non lavora più da un anno, capisce? Perché l'hanno cacciato via, l'hanno gettato in mezzo a una strada; fustigato da tutti, sfuggito da tutto il paese come un appestato!" (164).¹⁴² When people see Chiarchiaro they run away, when they are forced to be in his presence, they make the sign against the Evil Eye. Modern man has been liberated from a primitive fear and this allows him to think and behave in a rational and intelligent manner. When, for whatever reason, that fear returns, panic replaces intelligence and rationality. The reaction to panic, Meerloo posits, is such that it culminates in what he calls "a demoniac discharge of passions, a pandemic of repressed actions, nearly unbelievable to the civilized mind" (18). While this might seem a bit of an exaggeration to the reader of the play, Chiarchiaro would most likely consider this to be an accurate explanation of his current situation for he is the one against whom any kind of violent act can be justified. He is the enemy that society must have in order to express its hatred and release its pent-up hostility.

Because what he believes, before Chiarchiaro embraces his identity of evil, holds no sway over society, Chiarchiaro has no social power. Social power, according to Benson, has been defined as the ability to control the behavior of other human beings (211). Chiarchiaro has been ostracized by society and when he fights against the main stream his actions only serve to marginalize him even more than he already is. He has been labeled the villain and

¹⁴² "He's been out of work for almost a year, fired by everybody and treated as though he had the plague!" (124).

receives all of the negative treatment that one would expect to come with being considered evil. The irony of the story is that up until this point, Chiarchiaro has stayed within the means of the law in an attempt to remedy his situation. He has been frustrated and denied opportunities at every turn. Every attempt to find work and continue with his life has been denied him. The logical conclusion is, of course, that Chiarchiaro sees the futility of ever making it in the traditional and approved ways. In a situation like this one the excluded figure decides, or it is decided for him, that the only road open to him is to seek economic or social advancement in what should be considered deviant ways (Benson 102). It is not until he chooses to operate outside of the norm and embrace this deviation from the law that Chiarchiaro's situation begins to improve.

Once he elects to become the villain that society has deemed him to be, Chiarchiaro is free to claim all of the benefits that come with living outside of the law. The villain, in general and in the case of Chiarchiaro, wants the same things that the supposed hero wants, with the difference being that he is willing to ignore the local laws and ground rules. The villain does not have to respect the standards of his culture and the conventions of a society are there for him to use against those who try to stop him (Benson 94). Chiarchiaro turns justice on its head as he uses his damnation as a "license" to practice his trade of *jettatore*. In the end it is Chiarchiaro, the villain, who gets his revenge against the society that created him.

As has been seen throughout history, not all criminals are created equal. It is clear that society wants some of its lawbreakers to be punished and others to be glorified. Also, criminals are expected to fit a certain image. This is why Chiarchiaro dresses the part of

jettatore.¹⁴³ In order to reinforce people's belief that he does indeed possess the Evil Eye, Chiarchiaro must look like someone that could have the Evil Eye. Influencing the opinions of others is one of the most pervasive and lasting forms of power and in order to convince the public that he is indeed a *jettatore*, Chiarchiaro must embody local superstition and lore. It is not until the moment when he embraces his misfortune that Chiarchiaro is able to turn his curse into social power and take control of the actions of those around him. While Chiarchiaro must act in a way that should be considered evil to improve his chances of survival, it would be naïve to simply consider him an evil person.

In her book, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature*, Rivka Ulmer writes that the user of the Evil Eye is not necessarily an evil person, but rather a person with an inclination towards evil (33). Even after more than a year of unbearable treatment at the hands of society, Chiarchiaro remains at heart a good person. Like anyone else, he simply wants to be able to provide for his family, but after all of the wrong that has been done to him, a strong inclination towards evil has been created in him. Even though he expresses bitterness and hatred in his discussion with Judge D'Andrea, Chiarchiaro remains logical and respectful in his actions and explanations and never lets emotion completely rule his comportment. As we have learned by now, Pirandello rarely expresses his truths as black and white and Chiarchiaro's situation is no different. While he will live outside of the law and

¹⁴³ *E come Chiàrchiaro entra, va via di furia. Rosario Chiàrchiaro s'è combinata una faccia da jettatore che è una meraviglia a vedere. S'è lasciato crescere su le cave gote gialle una barbaccia ispida e cespugliuta; s'è insellato sul naso un pajo di grossi occhiali cerchiati d'osso che gli dànno l'aspetto d'un barbagianni; ha poi indossato un abito lustro, sorcigno, che gli sgonfia da tutte le parti, e tiene una canna d'India in mano col manico di corno. Entra a passo di marcia funebre, battendo a terra la canna a ogni passo, e si para davanti al giudice. (166)*

(Rosario Chiarchiaro has made up his face to look like that of one who has the Evil Eye, truly a wonder to behold. He has let a rough, tangled beard grow on his yellow, hollow cheeks. Perched on his nose is a huge pair of glasses, with thick lenses, like those worn by people with eye trouble. He is wearing a glossy, mouse-colored suit that bulges out in every direction. In one hand, he carries a bamboo cane. He enters with a funereal step, to the cadenced beat of the cane on the floor, and stops in front of the judge). (125)

must be held accountable for his actions, Chiarchiaro is the result of society's creation and will live and act accordingly.

By the time the meeting between Chiarchiaro and Judge D'Andrea takes place, Chiarchiaro has realized that his only means of survival is to become the *jettatore* that society has determined him to be. While Chiarchiaro knows exactly what he is doing, and has set his plan in motion, Judge D'Andrea does not understand the complexity of the situation and sees trusting in the sanctity of the law as the only way forward. This lack of understanding is what causes Chiarchiaro to explain his situation and label Judge D'Andrea as an enemy that must be defeated at all costs.

The two men's misunderstanding begins with the defamation suit with which Chiarchiaro is proceeding. Judge D'Andrea foresees the outcome as being disastrous for Chiarchiaro while the accused *jettatore* has come to the conclusion that this is his only possible course of action. Both men agree that Chiarchiaro has been the victim of this egregious situation but where they differ is how it should be resolved. Judge D'Andrea sees the situation for what it truly is: Chiarchiaro is the victim and this case will justify the wrong that society has done to him. As one whose logic is limited by society's limitation and the statutes of the law, the good judge is not capable of considering other options. D'Andrea's naiveté about Chiarchiaro's situation leads to this misunderstanding and encourages his belief in simple solutions to a problem that is much more complex than it appears to be. If Chiarchiaro proceeds with the defamation suit, Judge D'Andrea can only imagine one possible outcome. D'Andrea explains this to his colleagues who, like the rest of society, believe Chiarchiaro to be deranged and see him as someone that should be avoided at all costs.

D'ANDREA. Ha voluto, in questo processo, prendersela con due, coi primi due che gli sono capitati sotto mano, e – signori – la giustizia deve dagli torto, torto, torto, senza remissione, ribadendo così, ferocemente, l'iniquità di cui questo pover'uomo è vittima. (160)

D'ANDREA. He is suing two people he picked almost at random, and, believe me, gentlemen, justice will rule against him mercilessly, thus confirming, fiercely, the very wrong for which he is being victimized. (121)

D'Andrea is the only one of the judges – supposed educated men of reason – that believes that Chiarchiaro has been wrongly labeled. When D'Andrea, in the short story, seeks advice from his colleagues on how to handle Chiarchiaro's case, the three judges respond with fear and superstition. Instead of looking at the case objectively from a point of law, the judges either put their hands into their pockets to “touch iron,” make the sign against the Evil Eye with their fingers, or reach for the talisman hanging from their watch chains. There are three judges and for each of the three superstitious gestures a character has emerged (Ragusa 214). With even these men from the governing elite against him, what chance does Chiarchiaro truly have? Reason ceases to exist once delusion has become the accepted norm and that is why Chiarchiaro must embrace delusion and become the monster everyone thinks him to be.

What Chiarchiaro needs to get on with his life is one hundred percent compliance. Either everyone, or no one, must believe that he has the Evil Eye and since everyone except for Judge D'Andrea appears to believe in it, Chiarchiaro only has one more person to convince.¹⁴⁴ There is no going back to the status quo and there is nothing Chiarchiaro can do that will convince the townspeople, peasants and elite alike, that he is anything other than a *jettatore*. Whether or not Chiarchiaro actually possesses the evil eye is irrelevant; he simply

¹⁴⁴ Even Chiarchiaro's daughter Rosinella is convinced that her father has gone mad. While she knows that he does not have the Evil Eye, in her discussion with Judge D'Andrea she repeatedly refers to her father as acting crazy and being out of his mind.

must seem to have it (Witt 123). This is why Chiarchiaro dons his new “uniform” and only needs his “license” to complete the deal.

From the beginning of their meeting Judge D’Andrea tries to convince Chiarchiaro to drop the suit that Chiarchiaro insists must proceed. Instead of listening to his side of the story, Judge D’Andrea immediately chastises Chiarchiaro for what he calls nonsense and tells the poor man that he should be ashamed of his behavior. This ignorance and inability to see the situation for what it truly is, is in direct contrast to Chiarchiaro’s clear understanding of what he must do to survive. While D’Andrea does have sympathy for Chiarchiaro’s situation, his feelings of mental and moral superiority limit his understanding of the best course of action. “The paradox of the situation,” writes Ragusa, “is that Chiarchiaro has understood something which D’Andrea, in spite of his inclination to reflection, his indignation at the injustice done Chiarchiaro, and the long hours spent pondering a course of action, has not” (221-22). What Chiarchiaro has understood is that superstition and myth are too strong to be overcome by logic and reason and that following Judge D’Andrea’s suggestions would only serve to marginalize him even more and possibly lead to the breaking of his already battered family. Despite all of his best efforts, it is impossible for D’Andrea to help Chiarchiaro and the more he tries to help the more he seems to miss the point and the more that Chiarchiaro pulls away.

CHIARCHIARO. Non solo le farò vedere che lei non capisce niente; ma anche toccare con mano che lei è un mio nemico. (169)

CHIARCHIARO. Not only will I show you that you haven’t understood, but I’ll also show you that you are my enemy. (127)

The biggest misunderstanding between the two men is over the course of action that Chiarchiaro has chosen to take. D’Andrea, being a man of the law, knows that the court will

rule against Chiarchiaro and continues to berate him on what he considers to be an insane choice. What he fails to realize is that Chiarchiaro has not made this choice of his own freewill and that receiving his *patente* is the only way that Chiarchiaro can salvage what is left of his pitiful existence. A person is free to the extent that he can do the things that he wants to do, but this means that he must have some power (Benson 222). When fighting the charges against him Chiarchiaro had no power or freedom. He is neither free to go where he pleases nor do what he wants. Everyone shuns him because he refuses to use his “power.” Once he decides to embrace his role, and the Evil Eye, he has both power and freedom. He can go where he pleases and people will stay out of his way. While not respected, Chiarchiaro is feared, and this fear will allow him to control others and to have power over them as the ability to influence others is one of the greatest powers that man can possess.

Because Judge D’Andrea cannot recognize Chiarchiaro’s way of thinking as anything but absurd, he is unable to comprehend the motives behind the man’s actions. It is not until Chiarchiaro clearly explains his intentions that the judge begins to understand what the supposed *jettatore* is trying to do.

CHIARCHIARO. Ma in questa domanda appunto è la prova, signor giudice, che lei non capisce niente! Io mi sono querelato perché voglio il riconoscimento ufficiale della mia potenza. Non capisce ancora? Voglio che sia ufficialmente riconosciuta questa mia potenza terribile, che è ormai l’unico mio capitale, signor giudice!

D’ANDREA (*facendo per abbracciarlo, commosso*). Ah, povero Chiarchiaro, povero Chiarchiaro mio, ora capisco! Bel capitale, povero Chiarchiaro! (170)

CHIARCHIARO. Your asking that question proves right off that you don’t understand what this is all about. I am suing them because I want official recognition of my power – Do you still not understand? I want the authorities to officially recognize my terrible power, which now is my only capital, Your Honor.

D’ANDREA (*deeply moved, and about to embrace him*). Oh, poor Chiarchiaro,

my poor Chiarchiaro, now I understand. A fine capital that is, Chiarchiaro.
(128)

Even after this explanation, Judge D'Andrea can still not see how his *bel capitale* will help Chiarchiaro. Once again, the judge's limited scope of reason will not allow him to consider any possibilities that exist outside of the main stream. The Pirandellian character is unique, not only because of his distinct perception of reality, but also because he continually imposes himself upon author, fellow characters, and spectators alike in an unusual yet recognizable manner. The *patente* that Chiarchiaro desires to possess would thus become the material equivalent of the artistic form that other Pirandellian characters plead for.¹⁴⁵ It is the stamp of reality – an identity – conferred on a character that has lost his own sense of it because his personality has in some way been corrupted by the society in which he wishes to belong (Ragusa 215-16). Chiarchiaro's only way forward is to completely embrace his new identity and even after making this clear to D'Andrea, the judge still refuses to play his part in Chiarchiaro's grand plan. He only feels pity for this unfortunate victim, but pity will not free Chiarchiaro of his burden. He must have his license and he has to convince Judge D'Andrea to proceed with the case in order to get it because, as Chiarchiaro says: "Appena lei mi fa ottenere la patente, entro in campo! (172)."¹⁴⁶ The problem for Chiarchiaro, and what leads to him calling the judge his worst enemy, is that D'Andrea does not believe that Chiarchiaro has the Evil Eye. In order to influence D'Andrea's way of thinking in the desired direction Chiarchiaro must express his power in a way that D'Andrea can understand. While

¹⁴⁵ CHIARCHIARO. E dunque! Voglio anch'io la mia patente. La patente di jettatore. Con tanto di bollo. Bollo legale. Jettatore patentato dal regio tribunal! (171)
CHIARCHIARO. Well, then. I, too, must have one – a license as an Evil Eye – with an official, legal stamp – An Evil Eye, licensed by the royal court! (128)

¹⁴⁶ "As soon as you help me get my license, I'll go into action!" (129).

D'Andrea expresses his power from his position of judge, an authority supported by society and law, Chiarchiaro must use other means.

“Under certain circumstances,” states Benson, “we are all subject to the power of others. Sometime we submit willingly; at other times we submit in spite of our wishes” (216). Chiarchiaro’s only hope of validating his powers is to make D’Andrea submit in spite of his own wishes to the contrary. With the pounding of his cane on the floor, a window in the judge’s chambers slowly opens and causes the judge’s birdcage to be knocked to the ground. In the process, the goldfinch inside the cage has died. Although he fervently claims responsibility for the death of the bird, whether or not Chiarchiaro is responsible for this death is irrelevant.¹⁴⁷ With the death of his goldfinch, Judge D’Andrea has lost the thing that he held dearest. For D’Andrea the goldfinch, the last living reminder of his deceased mother, had taken the place of human affection and represented his sense of continuity and identity (Ragusa 226). The sympathy that the judge had early felt for Chiarchiaro has been turned to horror as hate has triumphed over love and superstition over reason.

¹⁴⁷ CHIARCHIARO. Ma che vento! Che vetrata! Sono stato io! Non voleva crederci e glien’ho dato la prova! Io! Io! (174)

CHIARCHIARO. It was neither the wind nor the window. It was I... I! He didn’t want to believe me and I gave him proof of my power! (130)

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

People who see things from a different point of view often find it difficult to determine where they fit within society's social structure. Societal norms and conventional wisdom are not always based on reason or logic. They are instead often determined by tradition and a general aversion to change. With the exception of the social elite, the Pirandellian characters that do not follow the social norms are forced to live on the margins of society. Their lives are a constant struggle between what they see as how they want to live their lives and what society will allow.

Pirandello was raised in a time full of uncertainty and change. What he hoped to accomplish through many of his works was to expose the ignorance of shunning people or new ideas simply because they were different. This was a problem that Pirandello saw growing up in Sicily. The backward thinking of the poor and the elitist thinking of the rich were a constant source of displeasure for him. These ideas are expressed through the logic and delusion of the characters in Pirandello's plays that are explored in this dissertation.

In these five plays, the Pirandellian character refuses to take the easy way out and simply conform to society's wishes. He knows the importance of a personal identity and fights to create one. Regardless of how his search is concluded, this pursuit is a burden that he bears until the end. It is a struggle that shows the length to which society will go to uphold its norms and customs. While not all truths fit into everyone's personal beliefs, social norms

dictate that there is a right and wrong answer. According to society, the wrong answers have dire consequences. The end result is that the characters have no choice but to accept the reality that society has created for them. They must also accept the role that delusion plays in each character's search for a personal identity. As Bodei has explained, delusion does not prohibit one from thinking logically. What delusion does is limit one's ability to use reason. In the five plays some of the characters could be considered delusional and other completely rational. Regardless of how the characters are seen, delusion plays a strong part in each of the works.

While in *Enrico IV* it quickly becomes evident that Henry IV is not able to create his own personal identity, the protagonist is adept enough to control his environment. His supposed delusion is both his biggest weakness and his greatest asset. It allows him to transition to and from each particular reality and live in the space between reality and delusion. What Henry IV learns is that survival and identity do not go hand in hand. He can, and ultimately must, survive as the person that society has deemed him to be. His delusion became society's reality and despite his struggle against it, that is where he must live out the rest of his days.

The Six Characters, in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, use a process of delusional thought to create a personal reality. As unfinished characters without an author they must complete their own story. 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. Although the Six Characters appear to be behaving rationally they must be considered delusional because of the egocentricity of their beliefs. They are unable to analyze their own situation and the fact that their ideas will never

change, no matter what the evidence against their conviction is, eliminates their ability to think rationally. In finding their reality through delusional thought, the Six Characters are able to do what very few Pirandellian characters have been able to do: successfully create a personal reality.

Così è (se vi pare) is a play, more than any other, about conforming to social norms and accepting conventional wisdom. It is these oppressive forces that nearly tear the Ponza/Frola family apart and drive them out of town. Delusion, in this case, is employed by the townspeople who cannot get past the idea that only one objective truth exists and that it is their duty to discover that truth. Signor Ponza and Signora Frola are helpless victims in the face of the townspeople's delusion and their obsession with social order and control. Although the Ponza/Frola family has already established a personal reality, it is not one that the town's elite is willing to accept. Through their endless attacks, the townspeople's delusion becomes the Ponza/Frola family's reality and ultimately their destruction. In the end, the townspeople are unable to discover the truth about the newcomers but they are successful in re-establishing the rules of social behavior.

Questa sera si recita (a soggetto) blurs the line between a fictional present and a real life present. Once the actors begin to live as the characters they are supposed to be portraying, the delusion becomes too much for them to handle. This is a delusion that is also felt by the audience that quickly begins to question its role in the performance as well. By the end, both the characters and the spectators doubt what they had so recently and fervently believed to be the undisputed truth. They have become trapped between reality and delusion.

In *La patente*, Chiarichiaro represents the evil that society needs in order to function. He is the person that is blamed when things go wrong. He desperately fights against society's

delusion that has labeled him as a *jettatore*. In this case the truth is irrelevant and it is not until Chiarchiaro embraces this delusion that he can begin to benefit from society's rules. He understands the reality of good and evil and uses this to his advantage. It is Judge D'Andrea, on the other hand, that does not understand the power of delusion and the subjectivity of the truth. He believes in the power of the law and that of the truth. This lack of understanding, although D'Andrea does not initially realize it, is what pits the two men against one another. Chiarchiaro ultimately has a much better understanding of good and evil. After having lived as both an upstanding citizen and as a villain, Chiarchiaro has learned to make others submit to his power and to thrive in a society that has completely shunned him.

Pirandello is an author that has been studied in great detail for nearly a century yet new material is continually being published about his work. While there is no evidence to support a claim that Pirandello had any formal training in psychoanalysis, his work is clearly an investigation of the mind and into the way that one thinks and behaves.¹⁴⁸ His literary body of work was well ahead of its time and reflected, according to Kenneth Hodess in his article "In Search of a Divided Self: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into the Drama of Pirandello," a "modern psychoanalytic awareness of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships" (133). This dissertation explores the character's journey in his attempt to form a personal reality. It focuses on the character's journey not in spite of, but because of, his social failures. By looking at these plays through the lens of delusion I was able to explore the reality in which

¹⁴⁸ When discussing Pirandello's position in contemporary literature, Robert Brustein, in his book *Theatre in Revolt*, writes: "Pirandello's influence on the drama of the 20th century is immeasurable. In his agony over the nature of existence, he anticipates Sartre and Camus; in his insights into the disintegration of personality and the isolation of man, he anticipates Samuel Beckett; ... in his approach to the conflict of truth and illusion, he anticipates Eugene O'Neill; ... in his experiments with the theatre, he anticipates a host of experimental dramatists, including Thornton Wilder and Jack Gelber; in his use of the interplay between actors and characters, he anticipates Jean Anouilh; ... The extent of even this partial list of influences marks Pirandello as the most seminal dramatist of our time ..." (316).

each Pirandellian character lives. In each of the five plays, those realities were either created by the characters themselves or by the society in which they are trying to live.

Many of the problems for the Pirandellian character are caused by his inability to accurately portray his own being, or self-image. As Hodess writes, others do not often see the Pirandellian character in the way that he sees himself (135). While it is true that we cannot always see the truth about our own reality or ourselves, there are often cases where we are simply misunderstood by those around us. While this dissertation touches on some of these points, this is the direction that I would like my research to go in the future. I plan to delve much deeper into the realm of how an identity is created, what it means to have an identity, and how each identity is seen by both its possessor and by those around him. As identities are not static, who we are and how we relate to others are continuously evolving questions that require our constant attention.

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