

An existentialist reality: pirandello's six characters



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Every decision, every breath one takes, and every step one ever walks brings one closer to a single goal — to find the meaning of life. The summation of one's decisions, steps, and movements through life shapes one's individual existence and leads to proliferation of the damning idea of finding that sense of meaning. For many, this pursuit is never realized, and to others, the entire idea of successfully finding the meaning of the deep, dark mystery of life might be impossible. Despite this skepticism, many search for meaning in daily events, attempting to find the overall meaning of life. In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, actors attempt to run through a Pirandello production, but the value comes from the lessons they learn. The actors and characters in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* display a yearning to find the meaning of life, but descend into a darkened existentialist state when faced with the crushing realization of the world around them, as Pirandello tries to point readers down a different path in life. Throughout the play, those in it try and find meaning from their daily actions to shed deeper light on the greater meaning of life. If they thought that their daily actions were to be meaningless, they would surely descend into a darkened mental state, so it is crucial for them to attempt to acquire knowledge of life from their mundane and minute actions of the day. Firstly, consider the director. His job is to orchestrate the play, to ensure its success, and that all the actors fulfill their roles adequately. It is in his management of the actors that he gets a sense of meaning, not only in his job, but in life as a whole. In that regard, he enjoys doing his line of work, and relishes the satisfaction he gets from what he does. He continuously meddles in the performance of the actors, because to him, that meddling is what gives him

power, and thus, a sense of meaning. The actors, in general, try to make some sense out the play they are putting on, and give themselves some meaning. To accurately portray the characters of the play, it is necessary for the actors to understand these characters themselves. Therefore, they struggle, but persist to try and find their own meaning in the words they speak and the actions they undertake in the play. As the father says on page 12, " You have created living beings — more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes! Less real, but perhaps more true" (Pirandello 12).

Next, this search to find meaning from daily life can be seen in the actions of the father, step-daughter, mother and son as well. The father is perhaps the best example of this search for knowledge of life having meaning. He is pretty unsure over what to make of life, as seen through when he sent his wife and daughter away (17). Especially after his run-in with his step-daughter at Madame Pace's shop, his life is continuously tossed around and upside-down. The father offers up deeper, more philosophical takes on what the play itself is about, or what the actions of the actors and the characters mean. His consistent philosophical anecdotes indicate a desire to find deeper knowledge (28). The step-daughter too seeks this knowledge. Exploited but vivacious, the step-daughter is perhaps the character that seems the most confused about where they are in life and where they are going. In the actor troupe, she tends to stir the pot and cause others to question why things happen, in accordance with her own questioning. The mother is constantly in grief, searching for a solution to cure her dismal existence. It is clear that she is not content with life, and goes through the motions day-in and day-out, yearning for the day that she might find true meaning that will free her from

her despair and sadness that she carries with her on a daily basis. She seems to be constantly tortured by something as simple as her past and her existence, and her grief can really be pinpointed when the step-daughter and the father share their experience in Madame Pace's shop (16). Just like the mother, the son is unhappy, specifically with his role in the play. He yearns for more, for a deeper existence, as he tends to have a rather facile role within the play. As he yearns for more, he yearns for a purpose for to his acting, even if he does not actively have it.

Lastly, when the characters inevitably fail to acquire the knowledge they search for, their lives spiral down an existentialist path to a deeper, darker trance, offering a cautionary tale. The director is clearly a part of this descent. As the set turns into chaos, the director's own sanity seems to descend as well. He continually berates members of the cast for not meeting his expectations, and generally loses control of his own emotions. His own purpose in directing the play, and the authority he has over the actors is put into question. Without this, he freaks out, eventually ending the production in a fit of rage. In general, the actors begin to go wild at the end of play. They run around in a sense of mayhem, challenging nearly everything the director says, with their own performances offering no consolation. The father specifically begins to sink deeper and deeper in an existentialist state, feeling the meaningless nature of life and feeling like a pawn in a chess game. He continues to ponder the philosophical nature of things, questioning the meaning of life. He begins to even take on a rather nihilistic view, openly disparaging aspects of the world around him (62). The step-daughter escalates her theatrics to obscene levels. She hands on the end of every

word, threatening to break into tears or create drama at the drop of a feather. The performance overcomes her, and given that she has not found anything of value from the play, she demands attention to keep her relevance (68). The mother, too, creates a scene. After the dramatic events at the end of the play, she continues on her dismal way, crying consistently. She questions the meaning of life, in light of the recent events, and her negative view on life is evident. Lastly, the son freaks out about his lines (or lack thereof) and how he is representing the author's interests. He cares about this to a considerable degree, almost to the point of violence. His descent into anger from his existentialist state is fueled by the lack of concrete intention by the author. In assigning his own meaning to the play, he places his own value in it, to become emotionally connected.

Six Characters in Search of an Author displays a cautionary tale. Pirandello demonstrates the search for meaning in life, demonstrated by the characters, especially in the way of the father and the step-daughter. The characters try and find meaning from their performances in the play, but they do not find what they seek. Pirandello offers a cautionary tale, as the characters fall into states of contemplating life with dark, grim views. The play warns readers not to fall into the same traps as the characters, and shows that failing to find the knowledge that is sought after will lead to a dismal, sad existence. Overall, the play shows a descent into a darkened existentialist state.