

Pirandello and
picasso: "which one
of the two of us is
crazy?" an analysis of
so ...



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In *Right You Are (If You Think So)*, Luigi Pirandello questions absolute truth by presenting various and contrasting perspectives of the same objects. The practice of highlighting multiple perspectives by showing several angles of the same object at once is one of the key elements of the Cubist art movement, co-founded by Pablo Picasso. Similarly, Pirandello presents characters from various perspectives of others, providing sometimes incongruous ideas about the same character. Both Cubist works and the characters in Pirandello's play are fragmented forms in order to emphasize various viewpoints. The effects of Cubism and Pirandello's work reveal the malleability of universal truth by showing how while one perspective is absolutely true to one person, it can be entirely false for another. The practice of showcasing multiple perspectives in both Cubism and *So It Is (If You Think So)* denounces the notion of a single unified truth and suggests that one must consider and respect all viewpoints, even if they differ from one's own.

Cubism is a revolutionary art movement by Braque and Picasso that emerged in the early 1900s and is described as "a movement which denied single point perspective" (Glaves-Smith). It is an art form that fragments a single object or form into smaller and more detailed parts that highlight "a multiplicity of viewpoints, so that many different aspects of an object could be simultaneously depicted in the same picture" (Chilvers). In this way, various people observing the same piece of art can view it from multiple perspectives, disproving the idea of a single viewpoint. In her book *Picasso*, Gertrude Stein explains that "when [Picasso] ate a tomato the tomato was not everybody's tomato, not at all and his effort was not to express in his

way the things seen as everyone sees them, but to express the thing as he was seeing it" (17). Picasso, known for co-founding Cubism, stresses the importance of the subjective experience. Picasso's sole concern with his own experience of the tomato and disregard of how it appears to everyone else denounces a singular absolute truth and emphasizes one's subjective reality.

In *Right You Are (If You Think So)*, Pirandello uses a Cubist approach to viewing characters by showing multiple perspectives of them. Lamberto Laudisi explains that "[he is] really the way [one] see[s] [him]. But this does not stop [him]...from also being what [he] is to [one's] husband, [one's] sister, [one's] niece, and the lady here... because they, too, are in no way wrong" (148). Laudisi explains that different people view him differently, and they are all correct in their own way because it is their subjective reality; what is true to one person is not necessarily true to another. This notion is also illustrated through the character of Mrs. Ponza. Mr. Ponza believes her to be his second wife and Mrs. Frola believes her to be her daughter. The entire plot of the play is constructed around the question of truth, and which one of them is correct. Some of the people believe Mr. Ponza is correct, and some believe Mrs. Frola is the one telling the truth, to which Mrs. Ponza finally responds: " what? The truth? The truth is simply this. Yes I am the daughter of Mrs. Frola...and Mr. Ponza's second wife...and for myself no one!" (205). In this sense, Mrs. Ponza can be considered a Cubist piece of art being looked at from multiple perspectives. To Mr. Ponza, she is his second wife, and to Mrs. Frola, she is her daughter, showing how she changes based on their subjective experience of her. She even appears more as an apparition or an object of the unreal as she " comes forward in a rigid

manner, dressed in mourning, with her face covered by a thick, black, impenetrable veil" (205). She appears like a statue, further contributing to Pirandello's effect of making her a symbol for the absence of one universal truth and drawing a comparison of her as a sort of Cubist piece of art. Mrs. Ponza's final words, " I am the one you believe me to be," echo the effects of Cubism and intentions of artists like Picasso (206). Importance is not placed on the collective's perspective of her, but rather on the subjective and individual experience of her.

Even if the majority of people agree on one perspective, people's identity by nature is fragmented. People are constantly performing variations of their identity depending on their audience, the people they are in front of. The concept of performativity suggests that even within the individual there is no singular identity. In Act Two Scene Three, Laudisi speaks to his own reflection in the mirror and asks " which one of the two of us is crazy?" and points his finger at his mirror (173). In this bizarre conversation with his own reflection, Laudisi suggests that what he is doing is no different than the people chasing after the truth about Mrs. Ponza's identity. He asserts that they are " chasing after the ghostly image of others. And they believe that it is something different" (173). The implication is that chasing after a unified singular identity of someone is impossible because people are not one fixed form. Laudisi often expresses notions of performativity throughout the play, suggesting that chasing after one unified identity of a person is futile, and trying to establish a " true," singular, and fixed identity of Mrs. Ponza is futile, because there is none. Mrs. Ponza proves this with her final statements that " for [her]self [she] is no one" and "[she is] the one [they]

believe [her] to be" (206). This seemingly frustrating conclusion of the play demonstrates that whichever version of the truth people choose to accept is the only version that matters. Her identity is fragmented into being Mr. Ponza's second wife, and also Mrs. Frola's daughter, and Laudisi's fragmentation of himself into two beings, himself and the ghostly image of himself, or his performed identity, is similar to the fragmentation used in Cubism. Cubist pieces of art are fragmented to highlight the individual pieces that make up the full physical form, and "such fragmentation and rearrangement of form meant that a painting could now be regarded less as a kind of window through which an image of the world is seen, and more as a physical object on which a subjective response to the world is created" (Chilvers). Just as the Cubist artists use fragmentation to reveal the various perspectives and subjective responses one can have to the same piece of art, Pirandello uses fragmentation of characters to emphasize how different people view others in different ways, and suggests that there is no single unifying way to look at something.

The multiple perspectives presented in both *Right You Are (If You Think So)* and in Cubism stress the importance of the subjective experience. Laudisi exposes the problems with trying to establish an objective perspective when he explains that "[Mrs. Frola] has created for him, or [Mr. Ponza] for her, a fantasy that has the same consistency of reality itself and in which both of them live in perfect accord and at peace with one another. And this reality of theirs can never be destroyed by any document, because they can breathe this world of theirs" (170). The Ponza-Frola family is not unhappy with their situation; it is the meddling of the townspeople in their subjective realities

that causes unrest and distress. Laudisi suggests that the multiple perspectives of Mrs. Ponza is not a bad thing because they all accept their own realities and live peacefully. The effects of Pirandello's play and Cubism stress that one must "respect that which others see and touch, even if it is the opposite of what [they themselves] see and touch" (148). It is imperative that in seeing these multiple perspectives, there is an understanding that others will have subjective realities that are not the same as one's own reality. It is important, then, that one considers and respects multiple perspectives in order to capture a fuller picture of reality.

Pirandello's work *Right You Are (If You Think So)* can be read as a Cubist piece of literature. It exposes multiple perspectives by fragmenting the identities of Lamberto Laudisi and Mrs. Ponza, the same way that cubism fragments physical forms to highlight how one can view a single object from multiple angles. The ending of the play suggests the futility in aiming for a single, unified truth, and Laudisi's examination of the townspeople's obsession with the Frola-Ponza family suggests that it is wrong to seek this proposed ideal of one objective truth. Instead, one should respect the fact that there are multiple perspectives, and what is true to one person may not be true to oneself. Ultimately, denouncing a singular truth and emphasizing the importance of subjective reality suggests that one should consider others' perspectives and respect dissenting opinions.

Works Cited

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