

(Question 3)

Producer-Author? Examining the Producer's Authorial Motivations in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the early 20th century, the image of the producer (*capocomico*) as a key figure of authority on the stage who functioned separately from the actors was new for the Italian theatre.¹ While previous *capocomici* were the “lead actor,”² this new producer became an “organising spirit and interpreter behind the entire production” who “overs[aw] rehearsal and the production process.”³ Out of this, critics such as Luigi Pirandello began to closely examine the relationship between a script and its performance, noticing new tensions in artistic authority and interpretation: theatre could be approached as a “spectacle” (lead by the producer) or a “dramatic text” (lead by the author).⁴ In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello brings this tension to the forefront by dramatizing the question of whether or not a producer can objectively “[take] on the authorial task of completing [the Characters’] stories.”⁵ In this essay, I examine how the Producer’s proclivity for theatrical performances influences his perception of authorship, jeopardizing any chance of finishing or *translating*⁶ the Characters’ incomplete text. In my view, it is this inclination for the stage that leads to his failure as a Producer-Author.

II. THE PRODUCER AS TRANSLATOR

Before the Characters arrive, the Producer displays a strong predilection for the stage by preparing *The Rules of the Game* for performance. At the rehearsal, he demonstrates a “respect

¹ Farrell, Joseph. Introduction to *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, lxvi- lxvii. United Kingdom: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 2004, lxvii.; Santeramo, Donato. “Pirandello's Quest for Truth: Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore,” in *Luigi Pirandello*, eds. Manuela Gieri and Gianpaolo Biasin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 37.

² Farrell, lxvii.

³ Ibid., lxvii.

⁴ Santeramo, 37.

⁵ Jestrovic, Silvija. “The Paradox of the Author’s Death: An Introduction” in *Performances of Authorial Presence and Absence The Author Dies Hard* (Leamington Spa, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 12.

⁶ This term comes from Dr. Bart Van den Bossche’s lecture titled “Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*” given on December 16th, 2022. See Pages 14-16; 21.

for the integrity of the author's script"⁷ by refusing to omit minor details, such as the cook's hat. This commitment to textual absoluteness represents a sense of separateness between the text and the *mise en scène*; the author has authority over the former while the Producer has authority over the latter. Importantly, this does not imply a univocal interpretation of the text's story. As Pirandello says in 'Illustratori, attori, traduttori,' "No matter how much the actor tries to penetrate into the writer's intentions, he will unlikely be able to see as the writer did, to feel the character as the author did, to realize the character on the stage as the author wanted."⁸ Thus the Producer is a theatrical *translator* who uses his stage-based authority and subjective interpretation to transform pre-existing texts into performances.

III. AUTHORSHIP FOR PERFORMANCE SAKE

Without a completed text, the Producer is incapable of *translating* anything substantial to the stage. When the Characters arrive without their author nor a finished script, their story – as well as any hypothetical performance of it – is fundamentally incomplete and unstable. Out of desperation, the Characters believe anyone can take up the authorial position, and they plead with the Producer for closure. Intimately knowing the traditional structures of separation and authority already discussed, the Producer is weary towards this idea at first and dismisses the Characters as interrupters.⁹ But, interestingly, the Characters are eventually able to convince him to authorially take up their story by invoking *theatrical language*. "You'll see what wonderful scenes will come right out of it!" the Father says; "It'll be enough to sketch it out simply first and then run through it."¹⁰ With this in mind, it is my view that the Producer does not actually wish to inherently become an author for authorship's sake. Instead, taking up the Characters' text should be perceived as a means to an end for him, a solution to the lack of a script for the Characters' story he now wishes to *translate* to the stage.

⁷ Farrell, lxvii.

⁸ Santeramo, 40.

⁹ While rehearsing *The Rules of the Game*, the Producer tells the Characters "Go away. We haven't time to waste on idiots" (Pirandello, Luigi. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Translated by John Linstrum. United Kingdom: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 2004. Act 1, 11-12). He also shows a commitment to the integrity of the text by asking, "where is your script?" (Act 1, 15).

¹⁰ Pirandello, Act 1, 33.

More evidence for the Producer's lack of tangible interest in authorial labels occurs after a basic (but incomplete) outline of the Character's story has been written. In preparing to stage a rehearsal of the outline, the Producer quickly disassociates from authorial responsibilities and titles. The Characters who were just openly invited into his office are now received suspiciously as they express their concerns about representation on the stage. By being more interested in their potential performability, the Producer fails to see them as embodied creations – "What is a lived scene for them is in [his] eyes only the provisional run-through of a fiction."¹¹ Simultaneously, the Producer begins to lightly make fun of the Characters and authorship in general by negatively associating them with insatiability. In regard to their complaints about representation, he says, "Right then. That's enough of that. [...] We'll [The Producer and Actors] rehearse this later on our own, as we usually do. It's always a bad idea to have rehearsals *with authors there*! They're never satisfied."¹² In the midst of the stage, the Producer returns to the clear dichotomy of text and performance, leaving the Characters to be perceived again as interrupters.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE PRODUCER'S VANITY

While the Producer has a clear sense of authority over the stage, he cannot obtain the needed authority over the text. By vainly assuming the latter can simply be established out of his own preexisting stage-based authority and theatrical aspirations, he inadequately provides the definitive voice the Characters need, leaving them "prey to their [own] conflicts."¹³ In the end, the text is left unfinished and any potential performance abandoned. If the Characters' original author is a "criminal"¹⁴ for abandoning them, the Producer is a "criminal" for approaching their authorship without textual authority and for the sake of performance.

By having the Producer attempt and fail as a Producer-Author, Pirandello brings the tension between text and performance individuality to the forefront. The author cannot simply become the Producer and the Producer cannot simply become the author. Each figure develops

¹¹ Farrell, xviii.

¹² Pirandello, Act 2, 54. My italics.

¹³ Santeramo, 42.

¹⁴ Ibid. Act 1, 14.

their own sense of authority on either the stage (as with the Producer) or the text (as with the author). If the Producer is a *translator* between the text and its performance, the author must also be understood as a *translator* between the Characters and the written text. By assuming he can simply become a *translator* of both realms, the Producer ultimately gives the Characters false hope for textual closure to a story that was destined to remain unfinished as soon as their author abandoned them.

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