



# **Six Characters in Search of an Author and Other Plays**

*Luigi Pirandello , Mark Musa (Translator)*

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**Six Characters in Search of an Author and Other Plays** Luigi Pirandello , Mark Musa (Translator)  
**Pirandello (1867-1936) is the founding architect of twentieth-century drama, brilliantly innovatory in his forms and themes, and in the combined energy, imagination and visual colours of his theatre.** This volume of plays, translated from the Italian by Mark Musa, opens with *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello's most popular and controversial work in which six characters invade the stage and demand to be included in the play. The tragedy *Henry IV* dramatizes the lucid madness of a man who may be King. In *So It Is (If You Think So)* the townspeople exercise a morbid curiosity attempting to discover 'the truth' about the Ponza family. Each of these plays can lay claim to being Pirandello's masterpiece, and in exploring the nature of human personality each one stretches the resources of drama to their limits.

## Six Characters in Search of an Author and Other Plays Details

Date : Published June 29th 1995 by Penguin Classics

ISBN : 9780140189223

Author : Luigi Pirandello , Mark Musa (Translator)

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Plays, Drama, Theatre, European Literature, Italian Literature, Classics, Fiction

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**Ali says**

One of the most progressive writers of 20th. century with a wonderful revolutionary look on human and history.

[illegible]

## Terri Jacobson says

Luigi Pirandello is an Italian writer of drama, short stories, novels and poems. He received the 1934 Nobel Prize in Literature. The play I am reviewing here, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, premiered in 1921.

The story is a play within a play. A group of six characters interrupts a rehearsal of a play (another work by Pirandello). Their author has abandoned them, and they are searching for someone else to finish their story. The director is angry at first, but as the details of their story emerge, he becomes fascinated. They begin to stage the new play.

The story that moves on from here offers a feast of ideas. What is reality and what is illusion? One of the characters, the Father, argues that he is more real than the director.

"FATHER: Oh, not a thing, sir. It was merely to show you that if we [*again he indicates himself and the other Characters*] have no other reality beyond the illusion, it would be also a good idea for you not to trust in your own reality, the one you breathe and feel today within yourself, because--like that of yesterday--it is destined to reveal itself as an illusion tomorrow.

DIRECTOR [*turning to make fun of him*]: Ah, very good indeed! You actually would go so far as to say that this play that you have come to act out here is more true and more real than I am!

FATHER [*in all seriousness*]: But there is no doubt about it, sir.

DIRECTOR: More real than me?

FATHER: But if your reality can change from one day to the next...

DIRECTOR: But we know it can change! Of course it can! It keeps on changing like anyone else's.

FATHER [*with a shout*]: But ours does not, sir! You see, the difference is this: it does not change, it cannot change, nor can it be another, because it is fixed--this way--this is it--for ever--it's a terrible thing, sir!

Immutable reality--it should make you shudder to be near us!"

But can characters in literature change?

"FATHER: ...When a character is born, he immediately assumes so much independence, even from his own author, that he can be imagined by everybody in a number of other situations in which the author never thought of putting him, and sometimes he even acquires a meaning the author never dreamed of giving him!"

Then there is the question--is my reality the same as yours?

"FATHER: But can't you see that all the trouble lies here! In the words! All of us have a world full of things inside of us, each of us his own world of things! And how can we understand one another, sir, if in the words I speak I put the meaning and the value of things as I myself see them, while the one who listens inevitable takes them according to the meaning and the value which he has in himself of the world he has inside of *himself*. We think we understand each other; we never understand one another..."

In the "theater in a theater" aspect of the play, we get to look at the complicated relationship between the author, the actors, and the characters themselves. These are ideas that fascinate me, and you can follow Pirandello's ideas as deep as you want. The writing in this play is remarkable. This is a work I will go back to for further reflection. A five star reading experience all the way.

I want to thank my good friend Dhanaraj for recommending this incredible drama to me.

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## Isabelle says

So glad a friend found me this book of plays! Intelligent farces with curious characters, full of personality and wit. 'So It Is', the last play stands out as the extremes of curiosity of strangers - town gossip gone wild.

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## Val says

Lamentablemente no está aquí una edición en español, ni siquiera una que sólo sea "Six Characters in Search of an Author" que es la única obra de Pirandello que leí.

Ahora sí, recomendando leer esta obra de teatro. Derrocha ingenio y originalidad, nos pone en un mundo paradójico donde unos personajes de ficción interrumpen el ensayo de una obra de teatro. Lo que ellos reclaman es que su autor los ha abandonado y quieren ver concluida su historia, la cuál es dramática y estresante. Nosotros somos como el director y los actores que no comprenden nada, se ríen de la situación y no saben del todo cómo reaccionar... pero mediante el guion vaya pasando nos vamos a olvidar y vamos a

formar parte de esa extraña situación.

Me encantaría ver algún día una puesta en escena de esta obra, ya que al ser tan compleja y extraña es más que obvio que sólo se llega a su verdadera comprensión mediante la puesta en escena.

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### **Deborah Schuff says**

I had heard about the play Six Characters...and was interested in reading it but didn't really want to spend money buying yet another book. When I got a Kindle, I found this version and happily downloaded it. I found these plays to be very thought-provoking about the nature of reality and identity. Indeed, as the Nobel Prize site says:

[[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prize...](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prize...)]

"Pirandello is always preoccupied with the problem of identity. The self exists to him only in relation to others; it consists of changing facets that hide an inscrutable abyss. .... His characters attempt to fulfill their self-seeking roles and are defeated by life itself which, always changing, enables them to see their perversity. This is Pirandello's humour, an irony which arises from the contradictions inherent in life." Sounds dull, doesn't it? They aren't. His plays are filled with "real" flesh-and-blood people that you have met before. Enjoy!

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### **Akemi says**

Interesting idea of making Actors the characters and a separate set of Characters within the play, and I suppose it was new in the 1920's, but meh. I like the idea of exploring levels of truth- what's more real, life or art? But at the same time, the plot is a bit gimmicky. There are some powerful moments, but not many. I dunno, perhaps a little too intellectual and not emotional enough for me, along with a lack of impressive language. Then again, it is translated, so that doesn't really help.

FATHER: You have created living beings- more alive than those that breathe and wear clothes! Less real, perhaps; but more true!

FATHER: But that's the whole root of the evil. Words. Each of us has, inside him, a world of things- to everyone, his world of things. And how can we understand each other, sir, if, in the words I speak, I put the sense and value of things as they are inside me, whereas the man who hears them inevitably receives them in the sense and with the value they have for him, the sense and value of the world inside him? We think we can understand each other but we never do.

DIRECTOR: Oh, come on, you must have done some acting!

FATHER: No, no, sir, only as every man acts the part assigned to him- by himself or others- in this life.

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### **Elizabeth Pyjov says**

Masterpiece. HILARIOUS masterpiece.

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## Greg Fanoë says

Nobel Prize Project

Year: 1934

Winner: Luigi Pirandello

Review: I thought all these plays were good, Henry IV was probably my favorite. They all explore similar themes of the nature of truth. I dunno, I enjoyed them but they lacked the impact they probably had 90 years ago when they were written. To be honest, these may have worked better as philosophical essays than as dramas, there's just not much here that excites me.

Verdict: 80 years after his win, Luigi Pirandello is still widely read and loved, certainly not true of all of the Nobel winners of that era. He was highly influential and reading him and those who he inspired makes it tough to take realistic theater seriously. Even though I didn't love these I don't have any real issue with the win. On the other hand, he was a noted fascist who melted down his Nobel medal for use in the Abyssinia campaign. So screw him.

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## Jimmy says

The theater of Luigi Pirandello relentlessly begs the question, within a theatrical context, of what is realistic and what is fictional drama. An appropriate, recent example of Pirandello's influence at work is Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, NY*, a film in which the main character Caden's attempt to make a theatre about "everything" results in a sort of solipsistic confusion about what he is actually experiencing and what is merely an acted out rendition of his past (or present for that matter). Kaufman, who does have a slight background in the theatre himself, took this theme and reinvigorated what was an already innovative idea.

This of course makes for a very theoretical type of theater. And Pirandello, once he has laid out his main concept, spends much of the time within his plays musing on exactly what makes staged performance, theater. Take *Six Characters in Search of an Author* for example. A theater group is putting on Pirandello's own play, *Ille Gioco del Parti (the Game of Roles)*. The play is interrupted by a quarreling family of six. The father of the family explains that they are in search of someone to finish their story. After explaining their background and current conflict, he pleads with the director of the play to complete this real-life drama. Pirandello tactfully juxtaposes the actors doing the Pirandello play, and the characters who almost seem to invade the theater with their dramatic reality. So the question that keeps coming up here is, well, to put it frankly; what is reality? Pirandello was part of a theater movement called anti-illusionism, or theatricalism. This movement rejected realism in favor of dreamlike symbolism. It shows too. Despite the fact that the father's character defends his family's actual situation and how steeped in reality it is, Pirandello is still trying to make the point that this is yet another layer of some sort of theatrical drama. The odd thing about this play is that the actual situation and history of the family seems irrelevant after a point. It is rather the questions about theater that Pirandello poses that makes *Six Characters in Search of an Author* such an engaging play.

The other two plays in this Penguin edition, *Henry IV* and *So It Is (If You Think So)* are concerned with the

same basic questions. Although in these plays there is a more solid emphasis on how madness can play an important role in determining what is real and what is imagined or fictionalized. *Henry IV* is all about a man who is diagnosed by his family as insane, in light of which an historically based fiction is created to appease his delusions. The question here is, is he actually mad, or is he the one placating his family's madness? *So It Is (If You Think So)* assesses the reliability of personal testimony as truth. One family, the Agazzi's, are obsessed with the mysterious lives of another family, the Ponza's. Regardless of the source of truth about the Ponza's living situation, the Agazzi's would never be content. Once again, this is Pirandello questioning the reliability of language as well as personal testimony.

Pirandello's epistemology is so utterly pessimistic and distrustful that his plays can be a bit long-winded. Despite the playful brilliance of this content, his trademark, endless meta-questioning tends to overwhelm most of the dramatic elements. It's almost unfortunate in a way because it seems as if some of his plays could actually be written as theoretical essays on theater rather than actual plays. Still, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is a delightful piece of modernist theater, and was an incredibly innovative play for its time.

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## Praj says

They say I was born in June. The day, the year somehow ceases to exist. I live with my mother. She stares at the wall, singing songs unnoticing my existence in the house. Is this how being an orphan feels like? I used to work at Madame Pace's dress shop. Only it wasn't a dress shop. It was a whore house where I used to entertain clients throughout the night. My mother was unaware of my earnings, but as if it mattered. Then, one day I fell in love. In fact, I fell in love with his eyes. The same brown affectionate eyes that I own. They were so memorable, they were mine. I could see myself in them. My eyes on this strange face, mesmerizing yet daunting. He was my client, elderly yet so affectionate. Months went by, but he never visited me again. I looked for him but no avail. They say, he shot himself out of guilt. He was my biological father. The shame of seducing his own blood ate him up after finding my truth. So, as I lay in a pool of blood, the cold metal burning against my sinful hands, I pierce the sharp edge into the warm blob of flesh. I killed my baby. I killed my brother. I practically cease to exist now. Shame and numbness has weighed my soul into nothingness. The man once my mother had left my father for took her away. So, here I come to you with an unfilled life and an unfinished story pleading you to bring an authored conclusion.

"You imbecile", yelled the stage-manager. "You expect me to believe this garbage and let my actors perform your absurdity".

"Yes", I affirm, "The settings should be realistic and the truth should be told in its unaltered form."

"I am an unrealized character sir", I humbly say, "I need you to finish my story and bring it to life".

The stage manager now enraged walks away hurling obscenities and muttering, "Acting is our business here. Truth up to a certain point, but no further"; as he looks at me with a sardonic smile.

Pirandello illuminates the 'Theatre of Absurd' genre in this bizarre performance. A form of drama that emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed, repetitious and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations and plots that lack realistic or logical development. Purely in its

theatrical form he depicts a tale of six characters in search of an author who is able not only to complete their fragmentary story but to perform their ingenuous legitimacy. A story which is not a story after all. Through the numerous arguments between the six characters and the stage manager about portrayal of reality in its unaltered state to the audiences marks the debate of life reality v/s stage reality. The sense of illusion what is illustrated to be a reality on performance stage is far from the factual forms.

The plethora of reality television that demarcates an entire generation outlook mutates the genuineness of its characters. How real are the nuances of these actors who state publicly that their respected shows are not scripted but spontaneous? The movies that state 'based on a true story', how far do they enact the truth or is pragmatism edited to normalization of absurdity. Pirandello stresses on the theatre being an illusion of reality where actors masquerade real emotions through rehearsals and mutability.

A brilliant existentialism perception of individuals being characters all through their life portraying roles that their born into and the normality of emotions attached to their specific roles. Who are we? The roles that we are born into or the tangible roles we want to play.

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## **Rhys says**

A book containing three plays by the original master of metafictional theatre. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is a famous work. It's about the contrast between having form and being form. It's a difficult and tricky play and one that is quite devastating in its emotional, psychological and ontological implications.

The second play in this book *Henry IV* is about the sincerity of madness and the validity of the supposedly sane world. Nothing is quite what it seems as a character plays a real man who turns himself into a character who may or may not really believe that he is that character.

The third and final play in the volume is the remarkable *So it is (If you think so)* which despite dating from an earlier time than the previous two plays is no less profound in its examination of life, truth and knowledge. The theme of this work is how we can never really know anything definite about anyone because we are all multi-faceted beings who show only one facet at a time.

Pirandello is certainly one of my favourite playwrights.

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## **Alan says**

A great work, perhaps the best play of the 20thC. And a standard for great art: Think you've written really well? Did the audience fight for 20 minutes at the end, divided between hostility and admiration? That's what happened 10 Maggio '21, Teatro Valle di Roma. (Interesting that around then Italy won a gold medal in the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, but the Belgian band did not know the new Italian national anthem: they played O Sole Mio--and all the stands sang along. Unfortunately, the writer Capurro [?] had died a couple years earlier.)

The first reviewer said the issues of art vs life, and the nature of play-writing and performance are universal.



It is also, of course, metadramatic, with the Son asseverating, "I am an undeveloped character."  
The Capocomico (not really a "producer," but head of the troupe) treats the real lives of the people they stage as if they're invented--which brutalizes the "real" people.  
Illusion, the question that ends it. Is death acted?  
Now, may I add, Giordano Bruno's one comedy, *Candelaio*, is also metadramatic--in 1582! In the last scene the Latin teacher, just beaten as he did his students, is asked to look at the audience, "Doesn't it seem you're on stage?" Yes, it does. "At what point in the drama would you like to be?" The End! "Then hold up the Plaudite sign."

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## **Jon Deal says**

Pirandello is awesome. Clever, witty and marvelous.

Somewhere in the world there is a picture of me next to his statue in Agrigento, Sicily, Italy.

I'd like to have that picture back. I was skinny and had hair back then.

Anyway, can't recommend Pirandello enough.

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## **Sajan says**

Reality is not real but constructed. From this constructed standpoint, which is called reality, conformity and anomaly become easily distinguishable. Conformity is aligned with sanity and anomalies are indicative of madness. For instance, donning military uniform to attend classes might be thought of as an act of madness on account of the violation of social norms.

Nevertheless, anomalies are not acts of insanity but marks different taste and perception of an anomalous individual. Henry 4, in this play, is a character who plays the role of a 11th Century German king. He takes his role so seriously that he, seemingly, forgets his own identity. He walks around in his castle with a lantern while his make-believe attendants and counsellors use electric bulbs as soon as he is out of sight.

The masquerade appeals to reader's notice and points out at the ubiquitous role-performing carried out by almost all individuals, though in oblivion. It is, in order to keep up with conformity, incumbent upon every one to perform various roles from time to time. A man is, most often, required to play the role of a son, husband, father, brother, friend, 'good' citizen. This act of role-performing leaves no room for originality. All performers are clowns, or at least that's what the protagonist is trying to get across. The question is of a choice now : should we play clowns or madmen?

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## **Barry Pierce says**

In this collection of three of Pirandello's plays, including his most famous work *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, a common question threads itself through each: what is real and what is fiction?

In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, a family of 'characters' invade the rehearsal of a play and demand to find an author. 'One is born to life in many forms,' the father says 'as a tree, or a stone, as water, a butterfly... or as human. And one can also be born as a character.' These characters are stuck without a text.

The whole play is a musing on what is real and what isn't, and to some extent the role of the author, AND begs the philosophical question of what happens to characters outside of their author's text? There's a lot going on. I feel I need a good lecture series on the whole thing. But it is enjoyable if you're into the whole Theatre of the Absurd stuff.

My favourite play in the collection was the second play, *Henry IV*. It involves a man who receives a head injury and believes himself to be Henry IV (the German one, not the French one or the English one). So, all his family and friends dress up as characters from the era of Henry IV, decorate his house to look like a palace, and all play along with his fantasy. Doctor after doctor visits him but nobody can cure him.

I found *Henry IV* to be a more competent musing on 'characters'. Each character in this play is playing another character for the amusement of the supposed King Henry. They're all acting a play within a play. It is also a meditation on madness and begs the question, who is really mad? Henry IV or the people who play along with his fantasy? This was a really stellar play.

The final play is an odd drama. *So It Is (If You Think So)* involves two characters who try to claim that the other is insane, due to the particulars of a marriage. Then all the other characters spend the rest of the play trying to figure out which one is actually sane and telling the truth and which is lying and insane. It's something of a farce-cum-detective play about, once again, madness and people believing their own lies. (I've a feeling Pirandello has a thing about madness and the nature of fiction eh?)

*So It Is (If You Think So)* is the weakest of the bunch but is still a fine play.

Overall this collection is a nice little compendium of probably Pirandello's best-known works. I feel I could probably hold my own in a conversation about Pirandello now (which will probably never happen but \*just in case\*).

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## Gregorio says

The three plays in this collection are interesting because they are more about the concept over characterizing any characters, although the last play *So it is (If you think so)* is the most interested in its individual characters. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is the most interesting concept, and the toughest to pull off, but Pirandello pulls it off rather well. The plays probably need to be seen over being read (as all plays, but especially this one) as the words do not really create a climax as the images do. On the dialogue of all three plays, it is often a little dry, but that may be due to the translation. *So it is (If you think so)* has the best dialogue of all three, as the dialogue matches the characters quite well, but the first two plays' dialogue seems to lay on the side of the poetic over what people would say, although this is more justified in *Henry IV*. And speaking of *Henry IV*, that is probably the best play of the bunch. Although the characters aren't as fleshed out as *So it is (If you think so)*, the play is the most interesting, and has the best character (*Henry IV*) in all of his plays, mostly because of his philosophy, and his uncertain madness, which is the theme of the play.

The theme of uncertainty is the focal point of all three plays, as well as the complications of relativity, and the idea of the persona always being in movement, that is, that one is always changes how they act around different people, and for each person they are almost someone else, so the question Pirandello likes to bring up is can you say that you are you if you are always changing? Can you be defined? As a playwright who enjoys writing about this topic, and thinking about it, it is quite rewarding, but if you have thought about the

subject in depth before Pirandello only lays down the basics of the theories.

Overall, grand plays.

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### **Ray LaManna says**

This is a classic of absurdist theater written in 1921... while a manager is directing another Pirandello play six characters show up without an author and only a sketchy plot. It's a bit disconcerting...BUT it makes us think about the difference between reality the unreality of drama.

This is considered one of the greatest plays of the 20th century.

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### **Gertrude & Victoria says**

A farce! *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is a remarkable invention of genius by the Italian Nobel laureate, Luigi Pirandello, which mixes the real with the verisimilar, where a drama is acted out within a drama. In this work he explores the ambiguous nature of reality and truth.

This drama is in two acts, which can be read in around ninety minutes. A director and a company of actors are in preparation for their rehearsal. Then six people or characters - a father and his family - who have already made their way into the hall, interrupt them. They say they are in search of an author and intrude on to the stage. Incredulous and reluctant as the director is, not to mention the actors, the six characters are allowed to state their case piece by piece. The director thinks they are a crazy bunch of fools, but never has a chance to have them thrown out. Eventually he is persuaded by this family of characters and taken to their story. Subsequently he readies his actors to attempt it. But the six insist that they be allowed to act out their own story, instead of the company of professional actors, since they are already familiar with the story.

The whole series seems preposterous and that is one point of the drama that Pirandello brings to light. Here Pirandello mixes reality and art, with the appearance of reality imitating art, but it is actually art's imitation of reality. Or is it? This farcical sketch of man's fallibility in distinguishing one from the other is well worth the initial confusion that ensues upon reading the first pages.

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### **Tso William says**

Six Characters in Search of an Actor is a highly original play by the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello. The play starts with six characters coming to the stage, claiming that they were invented by the author but were rejected by him. They demanded the Manager to stage their drama. A confusing family tragedy unfolds between and among the six characters (the father, mother, step-daughter, son, boy, child). It is therefore a play about a play within a play and theatre within a theatre.

The characters moans that the actors can never represent them because the characters are more than real than the actors. Actors act because the characters are in the book. What if, as it is now in the play, the characters themselves come to live on the stage? Do we need actors anymore?

Fresh from reading Stanislavski's Actor Prepares, these questions interest me. On actors' role, Stanislavski said, 'At such times a creative artist feels his own life in the life of his part and the life of his part identical with his personal life. This identification results in a miraculous metamorphosis.' Actor makes a character to come to live through his imagination and emotional memory. He contributes his own creative inputs to make a metamorphosis, implying that the character is no longer the author's sole ownership but is rather transformed by the actor.

However if the characters themselves were on the stage, the actors would have been superfluous. As the Father repeatedly said, the actors could never represent them, no matter how skillful their actings were.

At heart, the issue is reality. Paradoxically the characters are more real than the actors insofar the characters are fixed and timeless in a book while actors and people in general are merely illusions by their daily changing. However if reality were defined as physical certainty, then individuals had the physical bodies of which the characters were lacking.

Luigi Pirandello is credited as the precursor of absurdism, existentialism and post-modernism. I haven't read his other plays but this play alone is enough to peep into his complex brain.

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## Joseph says

I performed in "Six Characters..." and read "So it is (If you think so)" in college. The performing experience was brutal, a mixture of the awkwardness of the script and an ill-conceived production that lacked focus and meaning and even sense. The faint memory of "So it is" led me to pick up this collection again--a play that I remembered featuring gossiping neighbors and a purported story that changed every time a new character had their say completely convincing everyone that their perspective was the truth, only to have another character enter and convince everyone the complete opposite in the next scene. It was a good bit of writing wizardry, and I enjoyed reviewing it a second time and would like to see it performed one day. Having recently seen, "The Skin I Live In," I impulsively made parallels. Both feature stories that are high drama -- soap operatic -- in a realistic style.

The real pleasure though was the third play that I had never read called Henry IV about a man who was presumably mad and thought he was the historic Henry IV (of the 11th century?) whose nephew has as a consequence built a throne room for him and employed men to be his subjects simply to assuage his fantasies. A great play with great passages for the Henry IV characters. It touches on all the Pirandello themes, insanity, truth and illusion, acting and reality, but with a very surprising and interesting and dense script.

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