

# Six characters in search of an author – Act I

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**Six characters in search of an author: Ian McKellen, Alison Prior, Margaret Drabble and John Fortune. ADC Theatre, Cambridge (UK), 1959**

**Six characters in search of an author  
Act I**

## **Characters**

### **Characters of the Comedy in the Making**

The Father

The Mother

The Step-Daughter

The Boy

The Child

(The last two do not speak)

The Son

Madame Pace

### **Actors of the Company**

The Manager

Leading Lady, Leading Man, Second Lady

L'Ingenu

Juvenile Lead

Other Actors and Actress

Property Man

Prompter

Machinist

Manager's Secretary

Door-Keeper

Scene-Shifters

*Daytime. The Stage of a Theatre.*

*The spectators will find the curtain raised and the stage as it usually is during the day time. It will be half dark, and empty, so that from the beginning the public may have the impression of an impromptu performance. Prompter's box and a small table and chair for the manager. Two other small tables and several chairs scattered about as during rehearsals. The Actors and Actresses of the company enter from the back of the stage: first one, then another, then two together; nine or ten in all. They are about to rehearse a Pirandello play: *Mixing it Up. (Il giuoco delle parti)*: Some of the company move off towards their dressing rooms. The Prompter who has the "book"*

*under his arm, is waiting for the manager in order to begin the rehearsal. The Actors and Actresses, some standing, some sitting, chat and smoke. One perhaps reads a paper; another cons his part. Finally, the Manager enters and goes to the table prepared for him. His Secretary brings him his mail, through which he glances. The Prompter takes his seat, turns on a light, and opens the "book."*

**The Manager** (*throwing a letter down on the table*): I can't see

(*To Property Man*): Let's have a little light, please!

**Property Man**: Yes sir, yes, at once.

*A light comes down on to the stage.*

**The Manager** (*clapping his hands*): Come along! Come along!  
Second act of "Mixing It Up."

*Sits down.*

*The Actors and Actresses go from the front of the stage to the wings, all except the three who are to begin the rehearsal.*

**The Prompter** (*reading the "book"*): "Leo Gala's house. A curious room serving as dining-room and study."

**The Manager** (*to Property Man*): Fix up the old red room.

**Property Man** (*noting it down*): Red set. All right!

**The Prompter** (*continuing to read from the "book"*): "Table already laid and writing desk with books and papers. Bookshelves. Exit rear to Leo's bedroom. Exit left to kitchen. Principal exit to right."

**The Manager** (*energetically*): Well, you understand: The principal exit over there; here, the kitchen.

(*Turning to actor who is to play the part of Socrates*): You make your entrances and exits here.

(*To Property Man*): The baize doors at the rear, and curtains.

**Property Man** (*noting it down*): Right!

**Prompter** (*reading as before*): "When the curtain rises, Leo Gala, dressed in cook's cap and apron is busy beating an egg in a cup. Philip, also dressed as a cook, is beating another egg. Guido Venanzi is seated and listening."

**Leading Man** (*To Manager*): Excuse me, but must I absolutely wear a cook's cap?

**The Manager** (*annoyed*): I imagine so. It says so there anyway. (*Pointing to the "book."*)

**Leading Man**: But it's ridiculous!

**The Manager** (*jumping up in a rage*): Ridiculous? Ridiculous? Is it my fault if France won't send us any snore good comedies, and we are reduced to putting on Pirandello's works, where nobody understands anything, and where the author plays the fool with us all?

(*The Actors grin. The Manager goes to Leading Man and shouts*): Yes sir, you put on the cook's cap and beat eggs. Do you suppose that with all this egg-beating business you are on an ordinary stage? Get that out of your head. You represent the shell of the eggs you are beating!

(*Laughter and comments among the Actors*): Silence! and listen to my explanations, please!

(*To Leading Man*): "The empty form of reason without the fullness of instinct, which is blind." – You stand for reason, your wife is instinct. It's a mixing up of the parts, according to which you who act your own part become the puppet of yourself. Do you understand?

**Leading Man**: I'm hanged if I do.

**The Manager:** Neither do I. But let's get on with it. It's sure to be a glorious failure anyway. (*Confidentially*): But I say, please face three-quarters. Otherwise, what with the abstruseness of the dialogue, and the public that won't be able to hear you, the whole thing will go to hell. Come on! come on!

**Prompter:** Pardon sir, may I get into my box? There's a bit of a draught.

**The Manager:** Yes, yes, of course!

*At this point, the Door-Keeper has entered from the stage door and advances towards the manager's table, taking off his braided cap. During this manoeuvre, the Six Characters enter, and stop by the door at back of stage, so that when the Door-Keeper is about to announce their coming to the Manager, they are already on the stage. A tenuous light surrounds them, almost as if irradiated by them – the faint breath of their fantastic reality. This light will disappear when they come forward towards the actors. They preserve, however, something of the dream lightness in which they seem almost suspended; but this does not detract from the essential reality of their forms and expressions.*

*He who is known as The Father is a man of about 50: hair, reddish in colour, thin at the temples; he is not bald, however; thick moustaches, falling over his still fresh mouth, which often opens in an empty and uncertain smile. He is fattish, pale; with an especially wide forehead. He has blue, oval-shaped eyes, very clear and piercing. Wears light trousers and a dark jacket. He is alternatively mellifluous and violent in his manner.*

*The Mother seems crushed and terrified as if by an intolerable weight of shame and abasement. She is dressed in modest black and wears a thick widow's veil of crêpe. When she lifts this, she reveals a wax-like face. She always keeps her eyes*

*downcast.*

*The Step-Daughter, is dashing, almost impudent, beautiful. She wears mourning too, but with great elegance. She shows contempt for the timid half-frightened manner of the wretched boy (14 years old, and also dressed in black); on the other hand, she displays a lively tenderness for her little sister, The Child (about four), who is dressed in white, with a black silk sash at the waist.*

*The Son (22) tall, severe in his attitude of contempt for The Father, supercilious and indifferent to The Mother: He looks as if he had come on the stage against his will.*

**Door-keeper** (*cap in hand*): Excuse me, sir...

**The Manager** (*rudely*): Eh? What is it?

**Door-keeper** (*timidly*): These people are asking for you, sir.

**The Manager** (*furious*): I am rehearsing, and you know perfectly well no one's allowed to come in during rehearsals!

(*Turning to the Characters*): Who are you, please? What do you want?

**The Father** (*coming forward a little, followed by the others who seem embarrassed*): As a matter of fact... we have come here in search of an author...

**The Manager** (*half angry, half amazed*): An author? What author?

**The Father**: Any author, sir.

**The Manager**: But there's no author here. We are not rehearsing a new piece.

**The Step-Daughter** (*vivaciously*): So much the better, so much the better! We can be your new piece.

**An Actor** (*coming forward from the others*): Oh, do you hear

that?

**The Father** (*to Step-Daughter*): Yes, but if the author isn't here...

(*To Manager*): unless you would be willing...

**The Manager**: You are trying to be funny.

**The Father**: No, for Heaven's sake, what are you saying? We bring you a drama, sir.

**The Step-Daughter**: We may be your fortune.

**The Manager**: Will you oblige me by going away? We haven't time to waste with mad people.

**The Father** (*mellifluously*): Oh sir, you know well that life is full of infinite absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true.

**The Manager**: What the devil is he talking about?

**The Father**: I say that to reverse the ordinary process may well be considered a madness: that is, to create credible situations, in order that they may appear true. But permit me to observe that if this be madness, it is the sole *raison d'être* of your profession, gentlemen.

*The Actors look hurt and perplexed.*

**The Manager** (*getting up and looking at him*): So our profession seems to you one worthy of madmen then?

**The Father**: Well, to make seem true that which isn't true... without any need... for a joke as it were... Isn't that your mission, gentlemen: to give life to fantastic characters on the stage?

**The Manager** (*interpreting the rising anger of the Company*): But I would beg you to believe, my dear sir, that the

profession of the comedian is a noble one. If today, as things go, the playwrights give us stupid comedies to play and puppets to represent instead of men, remember we are proud to have given life to immortal works here on these very boards!

*The Actors, satisfied, applaud their Manager.*

**The Father** (*interrupting furiously*): Exactly, perfectly, to living beings more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes: beings less real perhaps, but truer! I agree with you entirely.

*The Actors look at one another in amazement.*

**The Manager**: But what do you mean? Before, you said...

**The Father**: No, excuse me, I meant it for you, sir, who were crying out that you had no time to lose with madmen, while no one better than yourself knows that nature uses the instrument of human fantasy in order to pursue her high creative purpose.

**The Manager**: Very well, – but where does all this take us?

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

**The Father**: Exactly, and alive as you see!

*Manager and Actors burst out laughing.*

**The Father** (*hurt*): I am sorry you laugh, because we carry in us a drama, as you can guess from this woman here veiled in black.

**The Manager** (*losing patience at last and almost indignant*): Oh, chuck it! Get away please! Clear out of here!



(*To Property Man*): For Heaven's sake, turn them out!

**The Father** (*resisting*): No, no, look here, we...

**The Manager** (*roaring*): We come here to work, you know.

**Leading Actor**: One cannot let oneself be made such a fool of.

**The Father** (*determined, coming forward*): I marvel at your incredulity, gentlemen. Are you not accustomed to see the characters created by an author spring to life in yourselves and face each other? Just because there is no "book"

(*Pointing to the Prompter's box*): which contains us, you refuse to believe...

**The Step-Daughter** (*advances towards Manager, smiling and coquettish*): Believe me, we are really six most interesting characters, sir; side-tracked however.

**The Father**: Yes, that is the word!

(*To Manager all at once*): 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. And this was a real crime, sir; because he who has had the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. He cannot die. The man, the writer, the instrument of the creation will die, but his creation does not die. And to live for ever, it does not need to have extraordinary gifts or to be able to work wonders. Who was Sancho Panza? Who was Don Abbondio? Yet they live eternally because – live germs as they were – they had the fortune to find a fecundating matrix, a fantasy which could raise and nourish them: make them live for ever!

**The Manager**: That is quite all right. But what do you want here, all of you?

**The Father**: We want to live.

**The Manager** (*ironically*): For Eternity?

**The Father**: No, sir, only for a moment... in you.

**An Actor**: Just listen to him!

**Leading Lady**: They want to live, in us...

**Juvenile Lead** (*pointing to the Step-Daughter*): I've no objection, as far as that one is concerned!

**The Father**: Look here! look here! The comedy has to be made.

(*To the Manager*): But if you and your actors are willing, we can soon concert it among ourselves.

**The Manager** (*annoyed*): But what do you want to concert? We don't go in for concerts here. Here we play dramas and comedies!

**The Father**: Exactly! That is just why we have come to you.

**The Manager**: And where is the "book"?

**The Father**: It is in us! (*The Actors laugh*): The drama is in us, and we are the drama. We are impatient to play it. Our inner passion drives us on to this.

**The Step-Daughter** (*disdainful, alluring, treacherous, full of impudence*): My passion, sir! Ah, if you only knew! My passion for him!

*Points to the Father and makes a pretence of embracing him.*

*Then she breaks out into a loud laugh.*

**The Father** (*angrily*): Behave yourself! And please don't laugh in that fashion.

**The Step-Daughter**: With your permission, gentlemen, I, who am a two months' orphan, will show you how I can dance and sing.

*Sings and then dances Prenez garde à Tchou-Tchin-Tchou:*

Les chinois sont un peuple malin,  
De Shangal à Pekin,  
Ils ont mis des écriteaux partout:  
Prenez garde à Tchou-Tchin-Tchou.

**Actors and Actresses:** Bravo! Well done! Tip-top!

**The Manager:** Silence! This isn't a café concert, you know!

*(Turning to the Father in consternation):* Is she mad?

**The Father:** Mad? No, she's worse than mad.

**The Step-Daughter** *(to Manager):* Worse? Worse? Listen! Stage this drama for us at once! Then you will see that at a certain moment I... when this little darling here...

*(Takes the Child by the hand and leads her to the Manager):* Isn't she a dear?

*(Takes her up and kisses her):* Darling! Darling!

*(Puts her down again and adds feelingly):* Well, when God suddenly takes this dear little child away from that poor mother there; and this imbecile here.

*(Seizing hold of the boy roughly and pushing him forward):* does the stupidest things, like the fool he is, you will see me run away. Yes, gentlemen, I shall be off. But the moment hasn't arrived yet. After what has taken place between him and me.

*(indicates the Father with a horrible wink):* I can't remain any longer in this society, to have to witness the anguish of this mother here for that fool...

*(indicates the Son):* Look at him! Look at him! See how indifferent, how frigid he is, because he is the legitimate son. He despises me, despises him *(Pointing to the boy),*

despises this baby here; because... we are bastards.

*(Goes to the Mother and embraces her)*: And he doesn't want to recognize her as his mother – she who is the common mother of us all. He looks down upon her as if she were only the mother of us three bastards. Wretch!

*She says all this very rapidly, excitedly. At the word "bastards" she raises her voice, and almost spits out the final "Wretch!"*

**The Mother** *(to the Manager, in anguish)*: In the name of these two little children, I beg you...

*(She grows faint and is about to fall)*: Oh God!

**The Father** *(coming forward to support her as do some of the Actors)*: Quick, a chair, a chair for this poor widow!

**The Actors**: Is it true? Has she really fainted?

**The Manager**: Quick, a chair! Here!

*One of the Actors brings a chair, the others proffer assistance. The Mother tries to prevent the Father from lifting the veil which covers her face.*

**The Father**: Look at her! Look at her!

**The Mother**: No, no; stop it please!

**The Father** *(raising her veil)*: Let them see you!

**The Mother** *(rising and covering her face with her hands, in desperation)*: I beg you, sir, to prevent this man from carrying out his plan which is loathsome to me.

**The Manager** *(dumbfounded)*: I don't understand at all. What is the situation?

*(To the Father)* Is this lady your wife?

**The Father:** Yes, gentlemen: my wife!

**The Manager:** But how can she be a widow if you are alive?

*The Actors find relief for their astonishment in a loud laugh.*

**The Father:** Don't laugh! Don't laugh like that, for Heaven's sake. Her drama lies just here in this: she has had a lover, a man who ought to be here.

**The Mother** (*with a cry*): No! No!

**The Step-Daughter:** Fortunately for her, he is dead. Two months ago as I said. We are in mourning, as you see.

**The Father:** He isn't here you see, not because he is dead. He isn't here – look at her a moment and you will understand – because her drama isn't a drama of the love of two men for whom she was incapable of feeling anything except possibly a little gratitude – gratitude not for me but for the other. She isn't a woman, she is a mother, and her drama – powerful sir, I assure you – lies, as a matter of fact, all in these four children she has had by two men.

**The Mother:** I had them? Have you got the courage to say that I wanted them?

(*To the Company*): It was his doing. It was he who gave me that other man, who forced me to go away with him.

**The Step-Daughter:** It isn't true.

**The Mother** (*startled*): Not true, isn't it?

**The Step-Daughter:** No, it isn't true, it just isn't true.

**The Mother:** And what can you know about it?

**The Step-Daughter:** It isn't true. Don't believe it.

(*To Manager*): Do you know why she says so? For that fellow

there. (*indicates the Son*): She tortures herself, destroys herself on account of the neglect of that son there; and she wants him to believe that if she abandoned him when he was only two years old, it was because he (*indicates the Father*) made her do so.

**The Mother** (*vigorously*): He forced me to it, and I call God to witness it.

(*To the Manager*): Ask him (*indicates Husband*): if it isn't true. Let him speak.

(*To Daughter*): You are not in a position to know anything about it.

**The Step-Daughter**: I know you lived in peace and happiness with my father while he lived. Can you deny it?

**The Mother**: No, I don't deny it...

**The Step-Daughter**: He was always full of affection and kindness for you.

(*To the Boy, angrily*): It's true, isn't it? Tell them! Why don't you speak, you little fool?

**The Mother**: Leave the poor boy alone. Why do you want to make me appear ungrateful, daughter? I don't want to offend your father. I have answered him that I didn't abandon my house and my son through any fault of mine, nor from any wilful passion.

**The Father**: It is true. It was my doing.

**Leading Man** (*to the Company*): What a spectacle!

**Leading Lady**: We are the audience this time.

**Juvenile Lead**: For once, in a way.

**The Manager** (*beginning to get really interested*): Let's hear them out. Listen!

**The Son:** Oh yes, you're going to hear a fine bit now. He will talk to you of the Demon of Experiment.

**The Father:** You are a cynical imbecile. I've told you so already a hundred times.

*(To the Manager):* He tries to make fun of me on account of this expression which I have found to excuse myself with.

**The Son** *(with disgust):* Yes, phrases! phrases!

**The Father:** Phrases! Isn't everyone consoled when faced with a trouble or fact he doesn't understand, by a word, some simple word, which tells us nothing and yet calms us?

**The Step-Daughter:** Even in the case of remorse. In fact, especially then.

**The Father:** Remorse? No, that isn't true. I've done more than use words to quieten the remorse in me.

**The Step-Daughter:** Yes, there was a bit of money too. Yes, yes, a bit of money. There were the hundred lire he was about to offer me in payment, gentlemen...

*Sensation of horror among the Actors.*

**The Son** *(to the Step-Daughter):* This is vile.

**The Step-Daughter:** Vile? There they were in a pale blue envelope on a little mahogany table in the back of Madame Pace's shop. You know Madame Pace – one of those ladies who attract poor girls of good family into their ateliers, under the pretext of their selling *robes et manteaux*.

**The Son:** And he thinks he has bought the right to tyrannize over us all with those hundred lire he was going to pay; but which, fortunately – note this, gentlemen – he had no chance of paying.

**The Step-Daughter:** It was a near thing, though, you know!

*Laughs ironically.*

**The Mother** (*protesting*): Shame, my daughter, shame!

**The Step-Daughter**: Shame indeed! This is my revenge! I am dying to live that scene... The room... I see it... Here is the window with the mantles exposed, there the divan, the looking-glass, a screen, there in front of the window the little mahogany table with the blue envelope containing one hundred lire. I see it. I see it. I could take hold of it... But you, gentlemen, you ought to turn your backs now: I am almost nude, you know. But I don't blush: I leave that to him (*indicating Father.*)

**The Manager**: I don't understand this at all.

**The Father**: Naturally enough. I would ask 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.

**The Step-Daughter**: Ah yes, explain it in your own way.

**The Father**: But don't you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do. Look here! This woman (*indicating the Mother*) takes all my pity for her as a specially ferocious form of cruelty.

**The Mother**: But you drove me away.

**The Father**: Do you hear her? I drove her away! She believes I really sent her away.

**The Mother**: You know how to talk, and I don't; but, believe



me, sir (*To Manager*), after he had married me... who knows why?... I was a poor insignificant woman...

**The Father:** But, good Heavens! it was just for your humility that I married you. I loved this simplicity in you.

*(He stops when he sees she makes signs to contradict him, opens his arms wide in sign of desperation, seeing how hopeless it is to make himself understood):* You see she denies it. Her mental deafness, believe me, is phenomenal, the limit *(Touches his forehead):* deaf, deaf, mentally deaf! She has plenty of feeling. Oh yes, a good heart for the children; but the brain – deaf, to the point of desperation

**The Step-Daughter:** Yes, but ask him how his intelligence has helped us.

**The Father:** If we could see all the evil that may spring from good, what should we do?

*At this point the Leading Lady who is biting her lips with rage at seeing the Leading Man flirting with the Step-Daughter, comes forward and says to the Manager.*

**Leading Lady:** Excuse me, but are we going to rehearse today?

**The Manager:** Of course, of course; but let's hear them out.

**Juvenile Lead:** This is something quite new.

**L'Ingénue:** Most interesting!

**Leading Lady:** Yes, for the people who like that kind of thing.

*Casts a glance at Leading Man.*

**The Manager** (*to Father*): You must please explain yourself quite clearly.

*Sits down.*

**The Father:** Very well then: listen! I had in my service a poor man, a clerk, a secretary of mine, full of devotion, who became friends with her.

*(indicating the Mother):* They understood one another, were kindred souls in fact, without, however, the least suspicion of any evil existing. They were incapable even of thinking of it.

**The Step-Daughter:** So he thought of it – for them!

**The Father:** That's not true. I meant to do good to them – and to myself, I confess, at the same time. Things had come to the point that I could not say a word to either of them without their making a mute appeal, one to the other, with their eyes. I could see them silently asking each other how I was to be kept in countenance, how I was to be kept quiet. And this, believe me, was just about enough of itself to keep me in a constant rage, to exasperate me beyond measure.

**The Manager:** And why didn't you send him away then – this secretary of yours?

**The Father:** Precisely what I did, sir. And then I had to watch this poor woman drifting forlornly about the house like an animal without a master, like an animal one has taken in out of pity.

**The Mother:** Ah yes...

**The Father** *(suddenly turning to the Mother):* It's true about the son anyway, isn't it?

**The Mother:** He took my son away from me first of all.

**The Father:** But not from cruelty. I did it so that he should grow up healthy and strong by living in the country.

**The Step-Daughter** *(pointing to him ironically):* As one can see.

**The Father** (*quickly*): Is it my fault if he has grown up like this? I sent him to a wet nurse in the country, a peasant, as she did not seem to me strong enough, though she is of humble origin. That was, anyway, the reason I married her. Unpleasant all this may be, but how can it be helped? My mistake possibly, but there we are! All my life I have had these confounded aspirations towards a certain moral sanity.

(*At this point the Step-Daughter bursts into a noisy laugh*): Oh, stop it! Stop it! I can't stand it.

**The Manager**: Yes, please stop it, for Heaven's sake.

**The Step-Daughter**: But imagine moral sanity from him, if you please – the client of certain ateliers like that of Madame Pace!

**The Father**: Fool! That is the proof that I am a man! This seeming contradiction, gentlemen, is the strongest proof that I stand here a live man before you. Why, it is just for this very incongruity in my nature that I have had to suffer what I have. I could not live by the side of that woman (*indicating the Mother*) any longer; but not so much for the boredom she inspired me with as for the pity I felt for her.

**The Mother**: And so he turned me out – - .

**The Father**: – well provided for! Yes, I sent her to that man, gentlemen... to let her go free of me.

**The Mother**: And to free himself.

**The Father**: Yes, I admit it. It was also a liberation for me. But great evil has come of it. I meant well when I did it; and I did it more for her sake than mine. I swear it.

(*Crosses his arms on his chest; then turns suddenly to the Mother*): Did I ever lose sight of you until that other man carried you off to another town, like the angry fool he was? And on account of my pure interest in you... my pure interest, I

repeat, that had no base motive in it... I watched with the tenderest concern the new family that grew up around her. She can bear witness to this. (*Points to the Step-Daughter*)

**The Step-Daughter:** 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!

**The Step-Daughter:** No. Why?

**The Father:** Infamous! infamous!

(*Then excitedly to Manager explaining*): After she (*indicating Mother*) went away, my house seemed suddenly empty. She was my incubus, but she filled my house. I was like a dazed fly alone in the empty rooms. This boy here (*indicating the Son*) was educated away from home, and when he came back, he seemed to me to be no more mine. With no mother to stand between him and me, he grew up entirely for himself, on his own, apart, with no tie of intellect or affection binding him to me. And then – strange but true – I was driven, by curiosity at first and then by some tender sentiment, towards her family, which had come into being through my will. The thought of her began gradually to fill up the emptiness I felt all around me. I wanted to know if she were happy in living out the simple daily duties of life. I wanted to think of her as fortunate and happy because far away from the complicated torments of my spirit. And so, to have proof of this, I used to watch that child coming out of school.

**The Step-Daughter:** Yes, yes. True. He used to follow me in the street and smiled at me, waved his hand, like this. I would look at him with interest, wondering who he might be. I told my mother, who guessed at once. (*The Mother agrees with a nod*) Then she didn't want to send me to school for some days; and

when I finally went back, there he was again – looking so ridiculous – with a paper parcel in his hands. He came close to me, caressed me, and drew out a fine straw hat from the parcel, with a bouquet of flowers – all for me!

**The Manager:** A bit discursive this, you know!

**The Son** (*contemptuously*): Literature! Literature!

**The Father:** Literature indeed! This is life, this is passion!

**The Manager:** It may be, but it won't act.

**The Father:** I agree. This is only the part leading up. I don't suggest this should be staged. She (*Pointing to the Step-Daughter*), as you see, is no longer the flapper with plaits down her back – .

**The Step-Daughter:** – and the knickers showing below the skirt!

**The Father:** The drama is coming now, sir; something new, complex, most interesting.

**The Step-Daughter:** As soon as my father died...

**The Father:** – there was absolute misery for them. They came back here, unknown to me. Through her stupidity! (*Pointing to the Mother*) It is true she can barely write her own name; but she could anyhow have got her daughter to write to me that they were in need...

**The Mother:** And how was I to divine all this sentiment in him?

**The Father:** That is exactly your mistake, never to have guessed any of my sentiments.

**The Mother:** After so many years apart, and all that had happened...

**The Father:** Was it my fault if that fellow carried you away? It happened quite suddenly; for after he had obtained some job

or other, I could find no trace of them; and so, not unnaturally, my interest in them dwindled. But the drama culminated unforeseen and violent on their return, when I was impelled by my miserable flesh that still lives... Ah! what misery, what wretchedness is that of the man who is alone and disdains debasing liaisons! Not old enough to do without women, and not young enough to go and look for one without shame. Misery? It's worse than misery; it's a horror; for no woman can any longer give him love; and when a man feels this... One ought to do without, you say? Yes, yes. I know. Each of us when he appears before his fellows is clothed in a certain dignity. But every man knows what unconfessable things pass within the secrecy of his own heart. One gives way to the temptation, only to rise from it again, afterwards, with a great eagerness to re-establish one's dignity, as if it were a tombstone to place on the grave of one's shame, and a monument to hide and sign the memory of our weaknesses. Everybody's in the same case. Some folks haven't the courage to say certain things, that's all!

**The Step-Daughter:** All appear to have the courage to do them though.

**The Father:** Yes, but in secret. Therefore, you want more courage to say these things. Let a man but speak these things out, and folks at once label him a cynic. But it isn't true. He is like all the others, better indeed, because he isn't afraid to reveal with the light of the intelligence the red shame of human bestiality on which most men close their eyes so as not to see it. Woman – for example, look at her case! She turns tantalizing inviting glances on you. You seize her. No sooner does she feel herself in your grasp than she closes her eyes. It is the sign of her mission, the sign by which she says to man: "Blind yourself, for I am blind."

**The Step-Daughter:** Sometimes she can close them no more: when she no longer feels the need of hiding her shame to herself, but dry-eyed and dispassionately, sees only that of the man

who has blinded himself without love. Oh, all these intellectual complications make me sick, disgust me – all this philosophy that uncovers the beast in man, and then seeks to save him, excuse him... I can't stand it, sir. When a man seeks to "simplify" life bestially, throwing aside every relic of humanity, every chaste aspiration, every pure feeling, all sense of ideality, duty, modesty, shame... then nothing is more revolting and nauseous than a certain kind of remorse – crocodiles' tears, that's what it is.

**The Manager:** Let's come to the point. This is only discussion.

**The Father:** Very good, sir! But a fact is like a sack which won't stand up when it is empty. In order that it may stand up, one has to put into it the reason and sentiment which have caused it to exist. I couldn't possibly know that after the death of that man, they had decided to return here, that they were in misery, and that she (*Pointing to the Mother*) had gone to work as a modiste, and at a shop of the type of that of Madame Pace.

**The Step-Daughter:** A real high-class modiste, you must know, gentlemen. In appearance, she works for the leaders of the best society; but she arranges matters so that these elegant ladies serve her purpose... without prejudice to other ladies who are... well... only so so.

**The Mother:** You will believe me, gentlemen, that it never entered my mind that the old hag offered me work because she had her eye on my daughter.

**The Step-Daughter:** Poor mamma! Do you know, sir, what that woman did when I brought her back the work my mother had finished? She would point out to me that I had torn one of my frocks, and she would give it back to my mother to mend. It was I who paid for it, always I; while this poor creature here believed she was sacrificing herself for me and these two children here, sitting up at night sewing Madame Pace's robes.

**The Manager:** And one day you met there...

**The Step-Daughter:** Him, him. Yes sir, an old client. There's a scene for you to play! Superb!

**The Father:** She, the Mother arrived just then...

**The Step-Daughter** (*treacherously*): Almost in time!

**The Father** (*crying out*): 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.

**The Step-Daughter:** Absurd! How can I possibly be expected – after that – to be a modest young miss, a fit person to go with his confounded aspirations for “a solid moral sanity”?

**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 one person for all, of having a personality that is unique in all our acts. But it isn't true. We perceive this when, tragically perhaps, in something we do, we are as it were, suspended, caught up in the air on a kind of hook. Then we perceive that all of us was not in that act, 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. Now do you understand the perfidy of this girl? She surprised me in a place, where she ought not to have known me, just as I could not exist for her; and she now seeks to attach to me a reality such as I could never suppose I should have to assume for her in a shameful and fleeting moment of my life. I feel this above all else. And the drama, you will see, acquires a tremendous value from this point. Then there is the position of the others... his...  
(*indicating the Son*)



**The Son** (*shrugging his shoulders scorn fully*): Leave me alone! I don't come into this.

**The Father**: What? You don't come into this?

**The Son**: I've got nothing to do with it, and don't want to have; because you know well enough I wasn't made to be mixed up in all this with the rest of you.

**The Step-Daughter**: We are only vulgar folk! He is the fine gentleman. You may have noticed, Mr. Manager, that I fix him now and again with a look of scorn while he lowers his eyes – for he knows the evil he has done me.

**The Son** (*scarcely looking at her*): I?

**The Step-Daughter**: You! you! I owe my life on the streets to you. Did you or did you not deny us, with your behaviour, I won't say the intimacy of home, but even that mere hospitality which makes guests feel at their ease? We were intruders who had come to disturb the kingdom of your legitimacy. I should like to have you witness, Mr. Manager, certain scenes between him and me. He says I have tyrannized over everyone. But it was just his behaviour which made me insist on the reason for which I had come into the house, – this reason he calls "vile" – into his house, with my mother who is his mother too. And I came as mistress of the house.

**The Son**: It's easy for them to put me always in the wrong. But imagine, gentlemen, the position of a son, whose fate it is to see arrive one day at his home a young woman of impudent bearing, a young woman who inquires for his father, with whom who knows what business she has. This young man has then to witness her return bolder than ever, accompanied by that child there. He is obliged to watch her treat his father in an equivocal and confidential manner. She asks money of him in a way that lets one suppose he must give it her, must, do you understand, because he has every obligation to do so.

**The Father:** But I have, as a matter of fact, this obligation. I owe it to your mother.

**The Son:** How should I know? When had I ever seen or heard of her? One day there arrive with her (*indicating Step-Daughter*) that lad and this baby here. I am told: "This is your mother too, you know." I divine from her manner (*indicating Step-Daughter again*) why it is they have come home. I had rather not say what I feel and think about it. I shouldn't even care to confess to myself. No action can therefore be hoped for from me in this affair. Believe me, Mr. Manager, I am an "unrealized" character, dramatically speaking; and I find myself not at all at ease in their company. Leave me out of it, I beg you.

**The Father:** What? It is just because you are so that...

**The Son:** How do you know what I am like? When did you ever bother your head about me?

**The Father:** I admit it. I admit it. But isn't that a situation in itself? This aloofness of yours which is so cruel to me and to your mother, who returns home and sees you almost for the first time grown up, who doesn't recognize you but knows you are her son... (*Pointing out the Mother to the Manager*): See, she's crying!

**The Step-Daughter** (*angrily, stamping her foot*): Like a fool!

**The Father** (*indicating Step-Daughter*): She can't stand him you know.

(*Then referring again to the Son*): He says he doesn't come into the affair, whereas he is really the hinge of the whole action. Look at that lad who is always clinging to his mother, frightened and humiliated. It is on account of this fellow here. Possibly his situation is the most painful of all. He feels himself a stranger more than the others. The poor little chap feels mortified, humiliated at being brought into a home

out of charity as it were. (*In confidence*): He is the image of his father. Hardly talks at all. Humble and quiet.

**The Manager:** Oh, we'll cut him out. You've no notion what a nuisance boys are on the stage...

**The Father:** He disappears soon, you know. And the baby too. She is the first to vanish from the scene. The drama consists finally in this: when that mother re-enters my house, her family born outside of it, and shall we say superimposed on the original, ends with the death of the little girl, the tragedy of the boy and the flight of the elder daughter. It cannot go on, because it is foreign to its surroundings. So after much torment, we three remain: I, the mother, that son. Then, owing to the disappearance of that extraneous family, we too find ourselves strange to one another. We find we are living in an atmosphere of mortal desolation which is the revenge, as he (*indicating* Son) scornfully said of the Demon of Experiment, that unfortunately hides in me. Thus, sir, you see when faith is lacking, it becomes impossible to create certain states of happiness, for we lack the necessary humility. Vaingloriously, we try to substitute ourselves for this faith, creating thus for the rest of the world a reality which we believe after their fashion, while, actually, it doesn't exist. For each one of us has his own reality to be respected before God, even when it is harmful to one's very self.

**The Manager:** There is something in what you say. I assure you all this interests me very much. I begin to think there's the stuff for a drama in all this, and not a bad drama either.

**The Step-Daughter** (*coming forward*): When you've got a character like me.

**The Father** (*shutting her up, all excited to learn the decision of the Manager*): You be quiet!

**The Manager** (*reflecting, heedless of interruption*): It's new...

hem... yes...

**The Father:** Absolutely new!

**The Manager:** You've got a nerve though, I must say, to come here and fling it at me like this...

**The Father:** You will understand, sir, born as we are for the stage...

**The Manager:** Are you amateur actors then?

**The Father:** No. I say born for the stage, because...

**The Manager:** Oh, nonsense. You're an old hand, you know.

**The Father:** No sir, no. We act that rôle for which we have been cast, that rôle which we are given in life. And in my own case, passion itself, as usually happens, becomes a trifle theatrical when it is exalted.

**The Manager:** Well, well, that will do. But you see, without an author... I could give you the address of an author if you like...

**The Father:** No, no. Look here! You must be the author.

**The Manager:** I? What are you talking about?

**The Father:** Yes, you, you! Why not?

**The Manager:** Because I have never been an author: that's why.

**The Father:** Then why not turn author now? Everybody does it. You don't want any special qualities. Your task is made much easier by the fact that we are all here alive before you...

**The Manager:** It won't do.

**The Father:** What? When you see us live our drama...

**The Manager:** Yes, that's all right. But you want someone to write it.

**The Father:** No, no. Someone to take it down, possibly, while we play it, scene by scene! It will be enough to sketch it out at first, and then try it over.

**The Manager:** Well... I am almost tempted. It's a bit of an idea. One might have a shot at it.

**The Father:** Of course. You'll see what scenes will come out of it. I can give you one, at once...

**The Manager:** By Jove, it tempts me. I'd like to have a go at it. Let's try it out. Come with me to my office.

*(Turning to the Actors):* You are at liberty for a bit, but don't step out of the theatre for long. In a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, all back here again!

*(To the Father):* We'll see what can be done. Who knows if we don't get something really extraordinary out of it?

**The Father:** There's no doubt about it. They *(indicating the Characters)* had better come with us too, hadn't they?

**The Manager:** Yes, yes. Come on! come on!

*(Moves away and then turning to the Actors):* Be punctual, please!

*Manager and the Six Characters cross the stage and go off. The other Actors remain, looking at one another in astonishment.*

**Leading Man:** Is he serious? What the devil does he want to do?

**Juvenile Lead:** This is rank madness.

**Third Actor.** Does he expect to knock up a drama in five minutes?

**Juvenile Lead:** Like the improvisers!

**Leading Lady:** If he thinks I'm going to take part in a joke

like this...

**Juvenile Lead:** I'm out of it anyway.

**Fourth Actor.** I should like to know who they are... (*Alludes to Characters*)

**Third Actor.** What do you suppose? Madmen or rascals!

**Juvenile Lead:** And he takes them seriously!

**L'Ingénue:** Vanity! He fancies himself as an author now.

**Leading Man:** It's absolutely unheard of. If the stage has come to this... well I'm...

**Fifth Actor:** It's rather a joke.

**Third Actor:** Well, we'll see what's going to happen next.

*Thus talking, the Actors leave the stage; some going out by the little door at the back; others retiring to their dressing-rooms. The curtain remains up. The action of the play is suspended for twenty minutes.*

**1921 – Six characters in search of an author**

**A comedy in the making in three acts**

**[Introduction, Analysis, Summary](#)**

**[Pirandello's preface](#)**

**[Characters, Act I](#)**

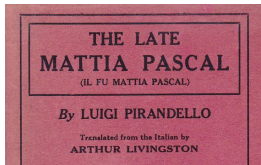
**[Act II](#)**

**[Act III](#)**

**In Italiano – [Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore](#)**

**En Español – [Seis personajes en busca de autor](#)**

Pirandello in English



### 1904 – The Late Mattia Pascal

What author will be able to say how and why a character was born in his fantasy? The mystery of artistic creation is the same...



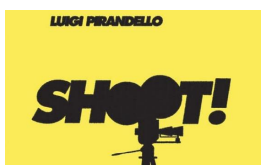
### 1909 – The light of the house opposite (Il lume dell'altra casa)

It happened one evening, one Sunday, when he had just come in from a long walk. Tullio Buti had taken that bedroom two months or...



### 1910 – Sicilian limes (Lumie di Sicilia) – Drama in one act

Time and circumstances can change your loved one to the point of becoming other than what he was: painfully labile and changeable reveals the object...



### 1915/1925 – Shoot! (The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio, Cinematograph Operator)

Based on the absurdist journals of fictional Italian camera operator Serafino Gubbio, Shoot! documents the infancy of film in Europe-complete with proto-divas, laughable production schedules,...



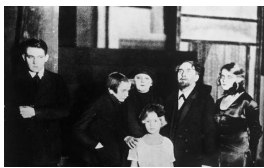
### 1917 – Right you are! (If you think so) – Drama in three acts

In Right you are, seven characters—he liked to deploy more than the customary two or three on stage at a time—seven respectable, middle-class types in...



### 1918 – War (Quando si comprende)

“War” by Luigi Pirandello focusses on the real problems of ordinary people, which makes this story relatable to realism. Realism is present in this story...



### 1921 – Six characters in search of an author

A comedy in the making in three acts. Six Characters in Search of an Author created Luigi Pirandello’s international reputation in the 1920s and is...



### 1922 – Henry IV – Drama in three acts

Henry IV is a man who went mad after being knocked off his horse during a masquerade. At the time he was playing the part...





### [Pirandello in English – Introduction](#)

Luigi Pirandello was born in Caos, near Girgenti, on the island of Sicily, which was to be the inspiration of his writings. “I am a...

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