

# Six characters in search of an author – Act III

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*Six characters in search of an author, Tavistock Little Theatre, London, 1948*

## Six characters in search of an author Act III

*When the curtain goes up again, it is seen that the stage hands have shifted the bit of scenery used in the last part, and have rigged up instead at the back of the stage a drop,*

*with some trees, and one or two wings.*

*A portion of a fountain basin is visible. The Mother is sitting on the right with the two children by her side. The Son is on the same side, but away from the others. He seems bored, angry, and full of shame. The Father and the Step-Daughter are also seated towards the right front. On the other side (left) are the Actors, much in the positions they occupied before the curtain was lowered. Only the Manager is standing up in the middle of the stage, with his hand closed over his mouth in the act of meditating.*

**The Manager** (*shaking his shoulders after a brief pause*): Ah yes: the second act! Leave it to me, leave it all to me as we arranged, and you'll see! It'll go fine!

**The Step-Daughter**: Our entry into his house (*indicates Father*): in spite of him... (*indicates the Son*):

**The Manager** (*out of patience*): Leave it to me, I tell you!

**The Step-Daughter**: Do let it be clear, at any rate, that it is in spite of my wishes.

**The Mother** (*from her corner, shaking her head*): For all the good that's come of it...

**The Step-Daughter** (*turning towards her quickly*): It doesn't matter. The more harm done us, the more remorse for him.

**The Manager** (*impatiently*): I understand! Good Heavens! I understand! I'm taking it into account.

**The Mother** (*supplicatingly*): I beg you, sir, to let it appear quite plain that for conscience' sake I did try in every way...

**The Step-Daughter** (*interrupting indignantly and continuing for the Mother*):... to pacify me, to dissuade me from spiting him.

(*To Manager*): Do as she wants: satisfy her, because it is

true! I enjoy it immensely. Any how, as you can see, the meeker she is, the more she tries to get at his heart, the more distant and aloof does he become.

**The Manager:** Are we going to begin this second act or not?

**The Step-Daughter:** I'm not going to talk any more now- But I must tell you this: you can't have the whole action take place in the garden, as you suggest. It isn't possible!

**The Manager:** . Why not?

**The Step-Daughter:** Because he (*indicates the Son again*) is always shut up alone in his room. And then there's all the part of that poor dazed-looking boy there which takes place indoors.

**The Manager:** Maybe! On the other hand, you will understand – we can't change scenes three or four times in one act.

**The Leading Man.** They used to once.

**The Manager:** Yes, when the public was up to the level of that child there.

**The Leading Lady.** It makes the illusion easier.

**The Father** (*irritated*): The illusion! For Heaven's sake, don't say illusion. Please don't use that word, which is particularly painful for us..

**The Manager** (*astounded*): And why, if you please?

**The Father:** It's painful, cruel, really cruel; and you ought to understand that.

**The Manager:** But why? What ought we to say then? The illusion, I tell you, sir, which we've got to create for the audience...

**The Leading Man.** With our acting.

**The Manager:** The illusion of a reality.

**The Father:** I understand; but you, perhaps, do not understand us. Forgive me! You see... here for you and your actors, the thing is only – and rightly so... a kind of game...

**The Leading Lady** (*interrupting indignantly*): A game! We're not children here, if you please! We are serious actors.

**The Father:** I don't deny it. What I mean is the game, or play, of your art, which has to give, as the gentleman says, a perfect illusion of reality.

**The Manager:** Precisely – !

**The Father:** Now, if you consider the fact that we (*indicates himself and the other five Characters*), as we are, have no other reality outside of this illusion...

**The Manager** (*astonished, looking at his Actors, who are also amazed*): And what does that mean?

**The Father** (*after watching them for a moment with a wan smile*): As I say, sir, that which is a game of art for you is our sole reality.

*Brief pause.*

*He goes a step or two nearer the Manager and adds:* But not only for us, you know, by the way. Just you think it over well. (*Looks him in the eyes*): Can you tell me who you are?

**The Manager** (*perplexed, half smiling*): What? Who am I? I am myself.

**The Father:** And if I were to tell you that that isn't true, because you and I...

**The Manager:** I should say you were mad – ! (*The Actors laugh*):

**The Father:** You're quite right to laugh: because we are all

making believe here.

(*To Manager*): And you can therefore object that it's only for a joke that that gentleman there (*indicates the Leading Man*), who naturally is himself, has to be me, who am on the contrary myself – this thing you see here. You see I've caught you in a trap! (*The Actors laugh*):

**The Manager** (*annoyed*): But we've had all this over once before. Do you want to begin again?

**The Father**: No, no! That wasn't my meaning! In fact, I should like to request you to abandon this game of art (*looking at the Leading Lady as if anticipating her*) which you are accustomed to play here with your actors, and to ask you seriously once again: who are you?

**The Manager** (*astonished and irritated, turning to his Actors*): If this fellow here hasn't got a nerve! A man who calls himself a character comes and asks me who I am!

**The Father** (*with dignity, but not offended*): A character, sir, may always ask a man who he is. Because a character has really a life of his own, marked with his especial characteristics; for which reason he is always "somebody." But a man – I'm not speaking of you now – may very well be "nobody."

**The Manager**: Yes, but you are asking these questions of me, the boss, the manager! Do you understand?

**The Father**: But only in order to know if you, as you really are now, see yourself as you once were with all the illusions that were yours then, with all the things both inside and outside of you as they seemed to you – as they were then indeed for you. Well, sir, if you think of all those illusions that mean nothing to you now, of all those things which don't even seem to you to exist any more, while once they were for you, don't you feel that – I won't say these boards – but the very earth under your feet is sinking away from you when you

reflect that in the same way this you as you feel it today – all this present reality of yours – is fated to seem a mere illusion to you tomorrow?

**The Manager** (*without having understood much, but astonished by the specious argument*): Well, well! And where does all this take us anyway?

**The Father**: Oh, nowhere! It's only to show you that if we (*indicating the Characters*): have no other reality beyond the illusion, you too must not count overmuch on your reality as you feel it today, since, like that of yesterday, it may prove an illusion for you tomorrow.

**The Manager** (*determining to make fun of him*): Ah. excellent! Then you'll be saying next that you, with this comedy of yours that you brought here to act, are truer and more real than I am.

**The Father** (*with the greatest seriousness*): But of course; without doubt!

**The Manager**: Ah, really?

**The Father**: Why, I thought you'd understand that from the beginning.

**The Manager**: More real than I?

**The Father**: If your reality can change from one day to another...

**The Manager**: But everyone knows it can change. It is always changing, the same as anyone else's.

**The Father** (*with a cry*): No, sir, not ours! Look here! That is the very difference! Our reality doesn't change: it can't change! It can't be other than what it is, because it is already fixed for ever. It's terrible. Ours is an immutable reality which should make you shudder when you approach us if

you are really conscious of the fact that your reality is a mere transitory and fleeting illusion, taking this form today and that tomorrow, according to the conditions, according to your will, your sentiments, which in turn are controlled by an intellect that shows them to you today in one manner and tomorrow... who knows how?... Illusions of reality represented in this fatuous comedy of life that never ends, nor can ever end! Because if tomorrow it were to end... then why, all would be finished.

**The Manager:** Oh for God's sake, will you at least finish with this philosophizing and let us try and shape this comedy which you yourself have brought me here? You argue and philosophize a bit too much, my dear sir... You know you seem to me almost, almost...

*(Stops and looks him over from head to foot):* Ah, by the way, I think you introduced yourself to me as a – what shall... we say – a “character,” created by an author who did not afterward care to make a drama of his own creations.

**The Father:** It is the simple truth, sir.

**The Manager:** Nonsense! Cut that out, please! None of us believes it, because it isn't a thing, as you must recognize yourself, which one can believe seriously. If you want to know, it seems to me you are trying to imitate the manner of a certain author whom I heartily detest – I warn you – although I have unfortunately bound myself to put on one of his works. As a matter of fact, I was just starting to rehearse it, when you arrived.

*(Turning to the Actors):* And this is what we've gained – out of the frying-pan into the fire!

**The Father:** I don't know to what author you may be alluding, but believe me I feel what I think; and I seem to be philosophizing only for those who do not think what they feel, because they blind themselves with their own sentiment. I know

that for many people this self-blinding seems much more “human”; but the contrary is really true. For man never reasons so much and becomes so introspective as when he suffers; since he is anxious to get at the cause of his sufferings, to learn who has produced them, and whether it is just or unjust that he should have to bear them. On the other hand, when he is happy, he takes his happiness as it comes and doesn't analyze it, just as if happiness were his right. The animals suffer without reasoning about their sufferings. But take the case of a man who suffers and begins to reason about it. Oh no! it can't be allowed! Let him suffer like an animal, and then – ah yet, he is “human”!

**The Manager:** Look here! Look here! You're off again, philosophizing worse than ever.

**The Father:** . Because I suffer, sir! I'm not philosophizing: I'm crying aloud the reason of my sufferings.

**The Manager** (*makes brusque movement as he is taken with a new idea*): I should like to know if anyone has ever heard of a character who gets right out of his part and perorates and speechifies as you do. Have you ever heard of a case? I haven't.

**The Father:** You have never met such a case, sir, because authors, as a rule, hide the labour of their creations. When the characters are really alive before their author, the latter does nothing but follow them in their action, in their words, in the situations which they suggest to him; and he has to will them the way they will themselves – for there's trouble if he doesn't. When a character is born, he acquires at once such an independence, even of his own author, that he can be imagined by everybody even in many other situations where the author never dreamed of placing him; and so he acquires for himself a meaning which the author never thought of giving him..



**The Manager:** Yes, yes, I know this.

**The Father:** What is there then to marvel at in us? Imagine such a misfortune for characters as I have described to you: to be born of an author's fantasy, and be denied life by him; and then answer me if these characters left alive, and yet without life, weren't right in doing what they did do and are doing now, after they have attempted everything in their power to persuade him to give them their stage life. We've all tried him in turn, I, she (*indicating the Step-Daughter*) and she. (*indicating the Mother*)

**The Step-Daughter:** It's true. I too have sought to tempt him, many, many times, when he has been sitting at his writing table, feeling a bit melancholy, at the twilight hour. He would sit in his armchair too lazy to switch on the light, and all the shadows that crept into his room were full of our presence coming to tempt him.

*(As if she saw herself still there by the writing table, and was annoyed by the presence of the Actors):* Oh, if you would only go away, go away and leave us alone – mother here with that son of hers – I with that Child – that Boy there always alone – and then I with him (*just hints at the Father*) – and then I alone, alone... in those shadows!

*(Makes a sudden movement as if in the vision she has of herself illuminating those shadows she wanted to seize hold of herself):* Ah! my life! my life! Oh, what scenes we proposed to him – and I tempted him more than any of the others!

**The Father:** Maybe. But perhaps it was your fault that he refused to give us life: because you were too insistent, too troublesome.

**The Step-Daughter:** . Nonsense! Didn't he make me so himself?

*(Goes close to the Manager to tell him. as if in confidence):* In my opinion he abandoned us in a fit of depression, of

disgust for the ordinary theatre as the public knows it and likes it.

**The Son:** Exactly what it was, sir; exactly that!

**The Father:** Not at all! Don't believe it for a minute. Listen to me! You'll be doing quite right to modify, as you suggest, the excesses both of this girl here, who wants to do too much, and of this young man, who won't do anything at all.

**The Son:** No, nothing!

**The Manager:** You too get over the mark occasionally, my dear sir, if I may say so.

**The Father:** I? When? Where?

**The Manager:** Always! Continuously! Then there's this insistence of yours in trying to make us believe you are a character. And then too, you must really argue and philosophize less, you know, much less.

**The Father:** Well, if you want to take away from me the possibility of representing the torment of my spirit which never gives me peace, you will be suppressing me: that's all. Every true man, sir, who is a little above the level of the beasts and plants does not live for the sake of living, without knowing how to live; but he lives so as to give a meaning and a value of his own to life. For me this is everything. I cannot give up this, just to represent a mere fact as she (*indicating the Step-Daughter*) wants. It's all very well for her, since her "vendetta" lies in the "fact." I'm not going to do it. It destroys my *raison d'être*.

**The Manager:** Your *raison d'être*! Oh, we're going ahead fine! First she starts off, and then you jump in. At this rate, we'll never finish.

**The Father:** Now, don't be offended! Have it your own way – provided, however, that within the limits of the parts you

assign us each one's sacrifice isn't too great.

**The Manager:** You've got to understand that you can't go on arguing at your own pleasure. Drama is action, sir, action and not confounded philosophy.

**The Father:** All right. I'll do just as much arguing and philosophizing as everybody does when he is considering his own torments.

**The Manager:** If the drama permits! But for Heaven's sake, man, let's get along and come to the scene.

**The Step-Daughter:** It seems to me we've got too much action with our coming into his house.

*(indicating Father):* You said, before, you couldn't change the scene every five minutes.

**The Manager:** Of course not. What we've got to do is to combine and group up all the facts in one simultaneous, close-knit, action. We can't have it as you want, with your little brother wandering like a ghost from room to room, hiding behind doors and meditating a project which – what did you say it did to him?

**The Step-Daughter:** Consumes him, sir, wastes him away!

**The Manager:** Well, it may be. And then at the same time, you want the little girl there to be playing in the garden... one in the house, and the other in the garden: isn't that it?

**The Step-Daughter:** Yes, in the sun, in the sun! That is my only pleasure: to see her happy and careless in the garden after the misery and squalor of the horrible room where we all four slept together. And I had to sleep with her – I, do you understand? – with my vile contaminated body next to hers; with her folding me fast in her loving little arms. In the garden, whenever she spied me, she would run to take me by the hand. She didn't care for the big flowers, only the little

ones; and she loved to show me them and pet me.

**The Manager:** Well then, we'll have it in the garden. Everything shall happen in the garden; and we'll group the other scenes there.

*(Calls a Stage Hand):* Here, a backcloth with trees and something to do as a fountain basin.

*(Turning round to look at the back of the stage):* Ah, you've fixed it up. Good!

*(To Step-Daughter):* This is just to give an idea, of course. The Boy, instead of hiding behind the doors, will wander about here in the garden, hiding behind the trees... But it's going to be rather difficult to find a child to do that scene with you where she shows you the flowers.

*(Turning to the Boy):* Come forward a little, will you please? Let's try it now! Come along! come along!

*(Then seeing him come shyly forward, full of fear and looking lost):* It's a nice business, this lad here. What's the matter with him? We'll have to give him a word or two to say.

*(Goes close to him, puts a hand on his shoulders, and leads him behind one of the trees):* Come on! come on! Let me see you a little! Hide here... yes, like that. Try and show your head just a little as if you were looking for someone...

*(Goes back to observe the effect, when the boy at once goes through the action):* Excellent! fine!

*(Turning to Step-Daughter):* Suppose the little girl there were to surprise him as he looks round, and run over to him, so we could give him a word or two to say?

**The Step-Daughter:** It's useless to hope he will speak, as long as that fellow there is here...

*(indicates the Son):* You must send him away first.

**The Son** *(jumping up):* Delighted! Delighted! I don't ask for anything better.

*Begins to move away.*

**The Manager** *(at once stopping him):* No! No! Where are you going? Wait a bit!

*The Mother gets up alarmed and terrified at the thought that he is really about to go away. Instinctively she lifts her arms to prevent him, without, however, leaving her seat.*

**The Son** *(to Manager who stops him):* I've got nothing to do with this affair. Let me go please! Let me go!

**The Manager:** What do you mean by saying you've got nothing to do with this?

**The Step-Daughter** *(calmly, with irony):* Don't bother to stop him: he won't go away.

**The Father:** He has to act the terrible scene in the garden with his mother.

**The Son** *(suddenly resolute and with dignity):* I shall act nothing at all. I've said so from the very beginning.

*(To the Manager):* Let me go!

**The Step-Daughter** *(going over to the Manager):* Allow me?

*(Puts down the Manager's arm which is restraining the Son):* Well, go away then, if you want to!

*(The Son looks at her with contempt and hatred. She laughs and says):* You see, he can't, he can't go away! He is obliged to stay here, indissolubly bound to the chain. If I, who fly off when that happens which has to happen, because I can't bear him – if I am still here and support that face and expression

of his, you can well imagine that he is unable to move. He has to remain here, has to stop with that nice father of his, and that mother whose only son he is.

*(Turning to the Mother):* Come on, mother, come along!

*(Turning to Manager to indicate her):* You see, she was getting up to keep him back.

*(To the Mother, beckoning her with her hand):* Come on! come on!

*(Then to Manager):* You can imagine how little she wants to show these actors of yours what she really feels; but so eager is she to get near him that... There, you see? She is willing to act her part.

*And in fact, the Mother approaches him; and as soon as the Step-Daughter has finished speaking, opens her arms to signify that she consents.*

**The Son** *(suddenly):* No! no! If I can't go away, then I'll stop here; but I repeat: I act nothing!

**The Father** *(to Manager excitedly):* You can force him, sir.

**The Son:** Nobody can force me.

**The Father:** I can.

**The Step-Daughter:** Wait a minute, wait... First of all, the baby has to go to the fountain...

*Runs to take the Child and leads her to the fountain.*

**The Manager:** Yes, yes of course; that's it. Both at the same time.

*The second Lady Lead and the Juvenile Lead at this point separate themselves from the group of Actors.*

*One watches the Mother attentively; the other moves about studying the movements and manner of the Son whom he will have to act.*

**The Son** (to Manager): What do you mean by both at the same time? It isn't right. There was no scene between me and her. (*indicates the Mother*) Ask her how it was!

**The Mother**: Yes, it's true. I had come into his room...

**The Son**: Into my room, do you understand? Nothing to do with the garden.

**The Manager**: It doesn't matter. Haven't I told you we've got to group the action?

**The Son** (*observing the Juvenile Lead studying him*): What do you want?

**The Juvenile Lead**: Nothing! I was just looking at you.

**The Son** (*turning towards the second Lady Lead*): Ah! she's at it too: to re-act her part! (*indicating the Mother*)

**The Manager**: Exactly! And it seems to me that you ought to be grateful to them for their interest.

**The Son**: Yes, but haven't you yet perceived that it isn't possible to live in front of a mirror which not only freezes us with the image of ourselves, but throws our likeness back at us with a horrible grimace?

**The Father**: That is true, absolutely true. You must see that.

**The Manager** (to second Lady Lead and Juvenile Lead): He's right! Move away from them!

**The Son**: Do as you like. I'm out of this!

**The Manager**: Be quiet, you, will you? And let me hear your mother!

(*To Mother*): You were saying you had entered...

**The Mother**: Yes, into his room, because I couldn't stand it any longer. I went to empty my heart to him of all the anguish that tortures me... But as soon as he saw me come in...

**The Son**: Nothing happened! There was no scene. I went away, that's all! I don't care for scenes!

**The Mother**: It's true, true. That's how it was.

**The Manager**: Well now, we've got to do this bit between you and him. It's indispensable.

**The Mother**: I'm ready... when you are ready. If you could only find a chance for me to tell him what I feel here in my heart.

**The Father** (*going to Son in a great rage*): You'll do this for your mother, for your mother, do you understand?

**The Son** (*quite determined*): I do nothing!

**The Father** (*taking hold of him and shaking him*): For God's sake, do as I tell you! Don't you hear your mother asking you for a favor? Haven't you even got the guts to be a son?

**The Son** (*taking hold of the Father*): No! No! And for God's sake stop it, or else...

*General agitation. The Mother, frightened, tries to separate them.*

**The Mother** (*pleading*): Please! please!

**The Father** (*not leaving hold of the Son*): You've got to obey, do you hear?

**The Son** (*almost crying from rage*): What does it mean, this madness you've got?

(*They separate*): Have you no decency, that you insist on



showing everyone our shame? I won't do it! I won't! And I stand for the will of our author in this. He didn't want to put us on the stage, after all!

**The Manager:** Man alive! You came here . . .

**The Son** (*indicating Father*): He did! I didn't!

**The Manager:** Arent't you here now?

**The Son:** It was his wish, and he dragged us along with him. He's told you not only the things that did happen, but also things that have never happened at all.

**The Manager:** Well, tell me then what did happen. You went out of your room without saying a word?

**The Son:** Without a word, so as to avoid a scene!

**The Manager:** And then what did you do?

**The Son:** Nothing... walking in the garden... (*Hesitates for a moment with expression of gloom*):

**The Manager** (*coming closer to him, interested by his extraordinary reserve*): Well, well... walking in the garden...

**The Son** (*exasperated*): Why on earth do you insist? It's horrible!

*The Mother trembles, sobs, and looks towards the fountain.*

**The Manager** (*slowly observing the glance and turning towards the Son with increasing apprehension*): The baby?

**The Son:** There in the fountain...

**The Father** (*pointing with tender pity to the Mother*): She was following him at the moment...

**The Manager** (*to the Son anxiously*): And then you...

**The Son:** I ran over to her; I was jumping in to drag her out when I saw something that froze my blood... the boy standing stock still, with eyes like a madman's, watching his little drowned sister, in the fountain!

*The Step-Daughter bends over the fountain to hide the Child. She sobs.*

**The Son:** Then...

*A revolver shot rings out behind the trees where the boy is hidden.*

**The Mother** (*with a cry of terror runs over in that direction together with several of the Actors amid general confusion*): My son! My son!

*(Then amid the cries and exclamations one hears her voice):*  
Help! Help!

**The Manager** (*pushing the Actors aside while They lift up the boy and carry him off*): Is he really wounded?

**Some Actors.** He's dead! dead!

**Other Actors:** No, no, it's only make believe, it's only pretence!

**The Father** (*with a terrible cry*): Pretence? Reality, sir, reality!

**The Manager:** Pretence? Reality? To hell with it all! Never in my life has such a thing happened to me. I 've lost a whole day over these people, a whole day!

## **Curtain**

**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

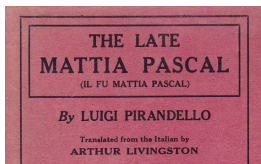
### Act II

### Act III

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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...



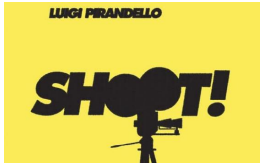
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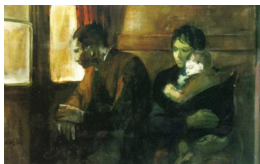
■ [1915/1925 – Shoot! \(The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio, Cinematograph Operator\)](#)

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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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