

The Dichotomy of illusion and reality as 'Existential Conundrum' in Luigi Pirandello's Six characters in search of an author: Decoding the 'Overanxious' attitude in the play

Tirthankar Laskar

Ex P.G Student (2018-2020) and Independent Scholar

Department of English, Tripura University

ORCID ID - <http://orcid.org/0009-0006-3417-7076>

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the notion of 'existential conundrum' which arises due to the dichotomy of illusion and reality and stands as an overanxious attitude in the metatheatrical play "Six Characters in Search of an Author" by Luigi Pirandello. The study analysed various texts, biographies and articles and reached to the understanding that the human psyche faced the dilemma and therefore it becomes difficult to interpret the innate detail of the psyche which the characters on the stage were trying to locate for themselves in order to look back at them in terms of identity as only being present on the stage does not make them characters, but actors playing characters. And therefore, they do not have their proper settled identity in reality or in illusion and so this marks the uneasy feeling of the characters who are constantly in search of author as Pirandello pokes fun on the genre and on author who are the two very important sections of a play. The paper employs exploratory, participatory and qualitative research method. The study has been taken forward from a varied perspective. The research done in this paper is an authentic contribution, as the paper intends to unfold by posing questions about traditional ideas of identity, reality, and truth in pieces and invites viewers and readers to go on an existential and self-exploration trip of the human psyche. The findings provide a promising future for this study that bring out appropriate solution and tend to complete the research gap. The research findings in the play mention about the deep understanding of the intricacies of human life which never ceases to captivate and uplift readers everywhere. Thus, this frames question on the theatrical tradition and provides significant new perspectives on human nature enlightening the new prism of study.

Keywords: Dichotomy, illusion, reality, existential conundrum, overanxious, metatheatre

INTRODUCTION

Luigi Pirandello is a celebrated dramatist, novelist, and short-story writer known for his deep examination of the complexity of identity and human existence. Born in Sicily, Italy on June 28, 1867, Pirandello's literary contributions—particularly his groundbreaking work "Six Characters in Search of an Author"—have had a profound impact on the field of modern literature. Family and personal strife plagued Pirandello's early years, which had a big impact on his artistic themes. Drawing on his personal experiences with sadness and his father's mental illness and eventual death, he developed a profound comprehension of the human mind and the existential crisis that frequently accompanies it. In his writings, he explores identity, reality, and the elusive nature of truth; these experiences served as the basis for his investigations.

One of Pirandello's most well-known and significant pieces is "Six Characters in Search of an Author," which was composed in 1921. The play centres on a cast of characters who unexpectedly show up during a play's rehearsal and want to have their narrative told. These characters, cut off from all stories, act out their own terrible story in an attempt to find closure. Pirandello deftly explores existentialist issues, the nature of creative creativity, illusion vs truth, and the blurring lines between fact and fiction. The play's key themes are identity and existence's flux. The characters, who are first restricted to the creator's ideas, struggle with their assigned tasks and long for freedom. Their unwavering quest for recognition and the truth casts doubt on the idea of fixed identities by bringing to light the complexity of human nature and the diversity of selves that exist inside each person.

In addition, Pirandello poses the uncomfortable idea of life's absurdity to the audience. He highlights the fundamental ridiculousness of existence itself via the characters' fruitless attempts to find purpose and consistency in a chaotic environment. The disjointed storyline and fantastical aspects of the play reflect how fractured reality is, challenging viewers to consider how they perceive reality to be. In addition to revolutionising theatrical narrative, Pirandello's approach to metatheatre was also revolutionary. He encourages the audience to actively participate in the theatrical development process by obfuscating the distinction between reality and the stage.

Due to its timeless examination of the human condition, "Six Characters in Search of an Author" has captured the attention of audiences all over the world. Its themes are relevant to all cultures and age groups, encouraging viewers to consider the central problems of life and the impermanence of truth. Pirandello's work will always be relevant in the canon of contemporary literature because of his unmatched understanding of the human mind and his inventive use of narrative methods.

OBJECTIVES

- i) To evaluate the dichotomy of illusion and reality as 'Existential Conundrum' in the Pirandello's play and also decoding the 'Overanxious' nature that is present in the atmosphere of the metatheatrical play.
- ii) To explore the various concepts like – character differences, metatheatre, internal conflict and paradoxes presented by Pirandello in the play and furthermore like – intricacies of human life.

iii) To make sure that the author can prove the point which is marked as a research gap, and also focuses on the existential understanding as a theme and the play's overly anxious attitude for the audience, in order to draw attention to the problems that are found mixed in, with the other ideas as textual references.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

The research approaches implemented to examine the topic include observational, exploratory, and participatory methods in order to achieve interactive, hermeneutic and analytic study. Furthermore, it is clear that this study employs the post-empiricism and qualitative method as this metatheoretical approach provides a new insight altogether. The method in the research is improved by critical analytical study, which involved a thorough reading of the texts and a section-by-section analysis to uncover the noteworthy and unique study outcomes. Numerous secondary sources have been examined in addition to the critical analytical study, including journals and biographies from various web sources.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The existential lens may be used to study the literature review and other articles written by literary critics to examine how the characters in the play "*Six Characters in Search of an Author*" strive for identity and purpose, which depicts conflict and tension in the play. Pirandello's play is frequently discussed in scholarly works concerning existentialist theatre as a leading example of existential issues in drama. They look at the ways existentialist philosophy and the characters' quest to find meaning and identity in an absurd world. The Absurdist movement is the main subject of Martin Esslin's book "*Theatre of the Absurd*". Esslin also explores the absurdity of human life in Pirandello's play within the framework of existentialist theatre, as it examines the relationship between existentialism and theatre. Pirandello's play is sometimes compared to other existentialist works, including those by Albert Camus or Samuel Beckett. These comparative analyses draw attention to the parallels and discrepancies in the ways that existential topics are approached in various literary contexts.

Anne Paolucci's book "*Pirandello's Theatre: The Recovery of Modern Stage for Dramatic Art*" delves into the ways in which Pirandello's theatrical innovations—such as "*Six Characters in Search of an Author*"—have influenced modern drama and existentialist philosophy. It also offers a thorough overview of his theatrical innovations.

It highlights the examination of the historical and cultural background that Pirandello depicted in order to provide light on the existential dilemma. Consequently, in order for the reader to comprehend the philosophical and social currents of the day, they must decode the cognitive relevance, which highlights the vitality of the characters' quest for meaning throughout the play. A book by Lisa Sarti titled "*Pirandello's Visual Philosophy: Imagination and Thought Across Media*" delves into the visual philosophy of Pirandello and could provide some understanding of the existential elements of his works, such as "*Six Characters in Search of an Author*," and how they are represented in creative arts and media.

Additionally, Pirandello's "*Six Characters in Search of an Author*" emphasises the idea of "existential conundrum", which is an excessively anxious attitude brought about by the contrast

between illusion and reality. This highlights the play's continuing significance and intricacy, which the audience had to figure out and unfold.

Furthermore, by emphasising each of the perspectives that critics and scholars have provided through the synthesis of the literature study, many more avenues exist in Pirandello's masterwork and its significance can be traced within the larger context of literature, theatre, and philosophy that allows for a thorough and developing discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dichotomy of Illusion and reality as 'Existential Conundrum' and decoding the 'Overanxious' attitude in the play

Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author" revolves around the idea of the duality between illusion and reality. As the characters wrestle with their own existence and the hazy boundaries between what is genuine and what is really a façade, this existential dilemma permeates the play. By means of the characters' internal conflicts and paradoxes, Pirandello delves into their shortcomings, emphasising their incapacity to comprehend their own identities and the ramifications of their acts. The characters' incapacity to reconcile the flexibility of reality with their manufactured identities is one of their primary flaws. Every character feels imprisoned by the parts that have been assigned to them and is powerless to escape the story that has been thrust upon them. The Father, Mother, Stepdaughter, and Son—who are presented as characters from an incomplete play looking for closure—serve as examples of this. They long for independence, yet they can never go beyond the confines of their made-up world, because they are slaves to the demands of their roles as evident in Act II of the play –

“The Manager[to PROPERTY MAN]. Just have a look, and see if there isn't a sofa or divan in the wardrobe . . .

Property Man. There's the green one.

The Step-Daughter. No no! Green won't do. It was yellow, ornamented with flowers -- very large! arid most comfortable!

Property Man. There isn't one like that.

The Manager. It doesn't matter. Use the one we've got.

The Step-Daughter. Doesn't matter? it's most important!

The Manager. We're only trying it now. Please don't interfere. [To PROPERTY MAN.] See if we've got a shop window -- long and narrowish.

The Step-Daughter. And the little table! The little mahogany table for the pale blue envelope!

Property Man[to MANAGER]. There's that little gilt one.

The Manager. That'll do fine.

The Father. A mirror.” (Act 2, pp. 22)

The conflict between the characters' made-up world and the performers' and director's actual attempt to present a separate play lies at the core of the play. The performers and director step in to help the characters, who feel abandoned by their writer, find closure and meaning in their

experiences. Their life is, nonetheless, fundamentally contradictory since they both aspire for autonomy and agency but are constrained by their predetermined roles.

Furthermore, the characters' insistence on living in their own universe draws attention to their delusions and disassociation from reality. They make it harder to distinguish fact from fiction by pressuring the director and performers to give them credit and validation. This is especially clear in the exchanges between the players and the characters, who are fighting for their own identities while performing a different play. The protagonists' incapacity to discriminate between truth and illusion finally highlights their existential dilemma and personal shortcomings. The characters' innate contradictions and inconsistencies are another flaw in them. It is challenging to understand the characters' genuine intentions because of the vagueness surrounding their motivations and acts throughout the play. For instance, the Father veers between authoritarianism and tenderness, while the Stepdaughter alternates between manipulation and innocence. These inconsistencies add to the protagonists' psychological agony and further undermine their sense of self, as the dramatist reveals it in Act 1 of the play-

"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"? "(Act 1, pp. 16)

Ultimately, the characters' downfall is caused by their persistent belief in their own reality. They turn to extreme means that only help to solidify their fictitious roles as they grow more and more desperate to claim their identities. This may be seen in the sad outcome that befalls the Stepdaughter, who is driven to suicide by her need for approval and autonomy. The characters' inevitable demise is sealed by their unwillingness to acknowledge the flexibility of reality, underscoring the flaw in them.

"Six Characters in Search of an Author" by Luigi Pirandello examines the existential dilemma of the characters' incompatibility between illusion and reality. Pirandello reveals the characters' incapacity to comprehend their own identities and the repercussions of their acts via their conflicts and inconsistencies. The characters' eventual collapse highlights the complexity of human existence and the hazy boundaries between fiction and reality. It is ultimately brought about by their insistence on their own reality and their innate inconsistencies. The basic conflict in contemporary theatre is addressed in Pirandello's works: the desire to enhance the illusoriness of all theatre while simultaneously attempting to create an extra-theatrical illusion on stage. According to modern drama, theatre is a performing and representational art form, much like dance or music. Actors on stage are both real people and the embodied forms of imaginary characters.

Characters presented by Pirandello on the Stage to reflect the 'Overanxious' attitude in the play

One of the main characters in the play and the head of the household is the Father. The Father frequently exercises his dominance and authority over the other characters. He wants the performers and director to approve of their plot since he cares so much about it being finished. Beneath his tough demeanour, though, is a fragility and a need for closure. On the other hand, the Mother is a complicated figure who is divided between her need for fulfilment and her parental impulses. She battles her own goals and aspirations while yet being protective of her kids. The Mother's torn personality enhances her character and makes family interactions more difficult.

The stepdaughter is one of the most mysterious characters in the drama, appears to be naive and cunning. She uses seduction and deception frequently in an attempt to get attention and autonomy. Much of the play's turmoil stems from the Stepdaughter's unclear intentions and deeds as she works through the complexity of her relationships with the other characters. The Son is a disturbed boy who struggles with his own aspirations and identity. He frequently questions the Father's authority and the demands made of him since he is a disobedient and aggressive person. As he looks for meaning and purpose in a world characterised by deception and uncertainty, The Son's psychological battle reflects the play's wider existential concerns. The Boy stands as an underused figure in the drama, the Boy symbolises purity and innocence. He is vital in drawing attention to the other characters' weaknesses even though he is frequently eclipsed by their more significant disputes.

Nextly, the Director, though not one of the "six characters" looking for an author, is a crucial component of the play. He acts as a go-between for the performers and the characters, helping them work out the nuances of their relationships and trying to give their disjointed stories some consistency. The play's direction and the resolution of the central existential dilemma depend heavily on the Director's work.

The story of "Six Characters in Search of an Author" is propelled forward by these characters' complexities and inconsistencies as they wrestle with existential issues of identity, reality, and the essence of life. By skillfully creating characters that each represent a distinct aspect of the human experience, Pirandello encourages his audience to consider the intricacies of the human condition as evident in the play –

“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.” (Act 1, pp. 6)

A perfect Metatheatrical Play by Luigi Pirandello

Drama critic, Lionel Abel coined the term "metatheatre" in 1963, and this piece is among the most well-known instances of it. Metatheatre is defined by Abel as a play in which the characters are "aware of their own theatricality." Theatre's artificiality is highlighted through metatheatre. It purposefully brings up the fact that the audience is seeing an illusion and invites them to consider where the lines separating truth from illusion should be drawn. Exaggerated gestures or strange and unlikely actions might be present in the performance. The illusory "fourth

wall" that separates the audience from the play's onstage environment can be broken by characters speaking directly to the audience. Metatheatre might involve characters "acting out their roles" or referencing works of literature. The theatrical canon was further expanded by later European authors including Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, Jean Genet, and Samuel Beckett because of Pirandello's work. According to a renowned drama critic Robert Brustein, Pirandello is said to be the father of the contemporary theatre as Metatheatre portrays drama about drama and somewhere the subject of the drama is aware of itself as a literary object and is prioritizing on the process of its own making.

Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author" is a classic example of metatheatre, a dramatic device that blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction by highlighting the play's theatrical quality. By employing metatheatre, Pirandello challenges traditional ideas of storytelling and emphasises the fragmented aspect of human existence by bringing absurdity to the stage. The play makes extensive use of metatheatre, one of which being the upending of conventional narrative forms. The spectator is immediately thrown into a metafictional universe where characters do not only exist inside the pages of their own stories. Disorientation results from the six characters' entrance into another play's rehearsal because it becomes difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. The absurdity of life itself, where meaning is frequently elusive and reality is open to interpretation, is mirrored in this disintegration of narrative coherence. In addition, Pirandello breaks down the illusion of dramatic representation by using metatheatre, which is visible in the Act 3 of the play -

"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 STEPDAUGHTER bends over the fountain to hide the CHILD. She sobs.] 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. " (Act 3, pp.48)

The investigation of the author's function and the autonomy of characters in "Six Characters in Search of an Author" is another facet of metatheatre. Through the help of the actors and director,

the titular characters—who feel that their creator has abandoned them—hope to find closure and conclusion in their narrative. This metafictional premise poses important queries concerning the agency of individuals inside a narrative framework and the link between creator and creation. Pirandello emphasises the random nature of narrative and the fundamental foolishness of trying to impose order upon chaos by erasing the lines between author and character. Pirandello also challenges the idea of objective reality by using metatheatre. Multiple levels of reality are created by the play-within-a-play framework, and they all overlap and cross in surprising ways. The audience's sense of truth is unsettled by this fragmentation of reality, which prompts them to consider the nature of reality itself. More complexity arises from the characters' insistence on their own reality in the face of doubt shown by the director and performers. The absurdity of human existence, where truth is elusive and subjective, is highlighted by this blurring of reality and fiction.

Pirandello also explores the issue of existential alienation through the use of metatheatre. The play's characters are stuck in their own stories and are unable to break free from the constraints of their assigned roles. As the characters struggle with the absurdity of their life, their awareness of their own fictitious position heightens this sense of existential malaise. In particular, the Stepdaughter personifies this feeling of alienation as she tries to find acceptance and agency in a society that rejects her independence. Her terrible destiny is a harsh reminder of the absurdity that permeates human existence and keeps people imprisoned in their own stories.

Pirandello also challenges conventional narrative norms and audience expectations by employing metatheatre. The format of the play within a play requires the audience to actively interact with the text in order to unravel the layers of interpretation and meaning that are woven throughout the story. This participatory method of storytelling reflects the absurdity of life itself by evoking a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. As they consider the existential topics explored in the play, the audience is compelled to face the inconsistencies and complexity of human existence.

Using metatheatre, "Six Characters in Search of an Author" challenges traditional ideas of storytelling and emphasises the fragmented aspect of human existence by bringing absurdity to the stage. Pirandello challenges the audience to consider the nature of reality, representation, and truth by upending established narrative frameworks, challenging notions of authorship and autonomy, and exploring existential alienation. As a consequence, a provocative and intellectually engaging piece that defies theatrical tradition and provides significant new perspectives on human nature is created.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Luigi Pirandello is still regarded as a titan of literature, whose deep understanding of the intricacies of human life never ceases to captivate and uplift readers everywhere. By posing questions about traditional ideas of identity, reality, and truth in pieces such as "Six Characters in Search of an Author," he invites viewers and readers to go on an existential and self-exploration trip. His legacy lives on as evidence of the ability of art to shine a light on even the darkest recesses of the human psyche.

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