

Thomas Kilroy

PIRANDELLOS

Two plays

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

and

HENRY (*after* HENRY IV)



Gallery Books

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SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH
OF AN AUTHOR

ACT ONE

Sound: Walking feet on a hard surface. A large projection screen as front drop. Moving/slide images of the Family, walking: FATHER; MOTHER with the two children, BOY and GIRL, close beside her, holding hands; SON and STEPDAUGHTER. They are walking along an empty, bleak road (artificial, stylized stage setting?), their backs to camera and to us. We are following them.

Pirandello's suggested ages for Family:

FATHER 'about fifty'

LITTLE GIRL 'four years'

LITTLE BOY 'little more than ten'

SON 'about twenty'

(MOTHER and STEPDAUGHTER not given)

They are dressed in 'Sunday best', vintage nineteen forties or fifties: clearly a family of some means. FATHER in solid tweeds, crombie coat, MOTHER in widow's black, hat and veil down over her face. STEPDAUGHTER in black/greys. They, and the LITTLE BOY and LITTLE GIRL, wear black mourning diamond patches on their arms. The STEPDAUGHTER is to one side in the group and the SON lags behind. Hold this image for a few minutes to establish a grim journeying to Nowhere. Then fade and fly out the screen.

Behind this: Upstage, a raised thrust stage out from the back wall. The back wall is another, identical projection screen, now white, unlit. Downstage, lower level, a rehearsal space, chairs, a table, scripts, coffee cups etc.

ACTOR 2 (youngish), ACTRESS 1 (older) and ACTRESS 2 (same as ACTOR 2) stroll on for rehearsal.

ACTOR 2 But why Pirandello?

ACTRESS 2 You mean why do a Pirandello play?

ACTOR 2 Yeah.

ACTRESS 1 He's a modern classic, dear. Tradition — You have heard of tradition?

ACTOR 2 Tradition! Give me a break!

ACTRESS 2 Oh, what's the fuss? You do what's in front of you. You do it as well as you can. That's theatre.

ACTOR 2 Oh no it's not theatre! That's just the point. Nowadays theatre has to prove its right to exist. Why are we here? Eh? Now? In this place? Because we believe, that's why! We believe that theatre can prove itself! Right?

ACTRESS 1 My dear. Listen to me. Theatre doesn't have to prove anything. Never has. Never will.

ACTOR 2 Wrong again, I'm afraid! The days when theatre could take things for granted are long gone. (*Ironic!*) Alas, alack. The days of elitist, smug, class-ridden, sexist —

ACTRESS 1 Oh, dear God —

ACTOR 2 — self-satisfied theatre are long gone. Like everything else, nowadays, theatre has to earn its right to speak —

ACTRESS 2 Do you mean sell tickets?

ACTOR 2 I mean *reach* people where they really are! In their real lives, that's what I mean —

ACTRESS 1 I hate it when people use that word 'real' in the theatre. It always leads to dreadful costumes. Anyway, Pirandello reaches real people —

ACTOR 2 How?

ACTRESS 1 In what he writes about — the human imagination!

ACTRESS 2 And power. The way he writes about power —

ACTRESS 1 — the strange, bizarre ways the imagination works —

ACTRESS 2 — and family life, yes, indeed, don't forget family life —

ACTOR 2 Not in what we're working on here, he doesn't. It's not even half there —

ACTRESS 2 But that's the whole point of it! It's meant to be only half there. It's meant to be incomplete. Just like everyday life, as a matter of fact —

ACTRESS 1 I'll take half finished Pirandello any day to —
Though, mind you, I have to say, I do have

some problems with the text —

ACTOR 1 *arrives, a little breathlessly. Older generation.*

ACTOR 2 Bet *he* doesn't have any problems with the text —

ACTOR 1 What, what? Director's not here, is he? Not late, am I? Dreadful traffic — if there's one thing I can't stand it's being late for rehearsal. It's simply not on, as far as I'm concerned.

ACTRESS 1 (*To* ACTOR 1) Pay no attention to him, come and sit down.

ACTOR 1 Sounding off again, is he?

ACTOR 2 Last thing I'll say is that we're going to have to discover more than we have so far in this (*script*), if we're to go on —

ACTOR 1 Couldn't agree with you more, there. Do you think I should bring that up?

ACTRESS 2 Maybe we will discover something more? That's what we're here for, isn't — ?

DIRECTOR *and* ASM *enter, he in his early thirties, she somewhat older.*

DIRECTOR Did I hear the sound of discord? Great, great! Just what we need to get us moving! Morning all, mind if we start right in? Without the usual confab? That OK with everyone? Got to move a bit faster today, I'm afraid. Pick up the problems as we go along.

ACTOR 2 We were talking about Pirandello. Whether it's even worthwhile doing him in this day and age.

DIRECTOR Heard that. Let's just see whether it is or not?

ACTOR 2 Fine with me. Only questioning, that's all.

ASM From the top, is it?

DIRECTOR From the top it is. Right? Thank you —

HENRY

after HENRY IV

Characters

HENRY, *a former film star and now the mad king*

The Four Young Actors

LANDOLF (BOBBY)

HAROLD (NICK)

ORDULF (JOCK)

BERTOLD (JOE)

The Five Visitors

MARGARET, *Henry's former lover*

FRIEDA, *her daughter*

THOMAS, *Margaret's current lover*

CARL, *Henry's nephew*

THE DOCTOR, *an experimental therapist*

Time and Place

The present. A remote house, a house of images, maintained as a retreat, an asylum, for Henry.

Henry was commissioned by Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre (PICT), Inc, and first presented at the Charity Randall Theatre in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on September 3, 2005, with the following cast:

HENRY	Richard McMillan
LANDOLF	Joe Schulz
ORDULPH	Martin Giles
HAROLD	Patrick Jordan
BERTOLD	Ben Hersey
CARL	Joel Ripka
FRIEDA	Erin Keom
MARGARET	Robin Walsh
DOCTOR	Larry John Meyers
THOMAS	Sam Tsoutsouvas

<i>Direction</i>	Andrew S. Paul
<i>Set design</i>	Frank Conway
<i>Costume design</i>	Cletus Anderson
<i>Lighting design</i>	Cindy Limauro
<i>Sound design</i>	Elizabeth Atkinson
<i>Video design</i>	Ciara Moore and Buzz Miller

ACT ONE

Piercing sound/music throughout the opening.

The space is dominated by large, distorting mirrors facing audience and a magnificent, elaborate throne on a dais. On the throne is a splendid gold crown.

Enter BERTOLD, casual contemporary clothes, a bag slung over one shoulder, examining this strange environment, half intrigued, half scared. He starts suddenly and tries to hide as HENRY enters in a stylish business suit, the only thing about him that is normal. For instance, his make-up is garish. He wears a paper crown, a party hat, the kind that comes from a Christmas cracker or children's party. BERTOLD becomes a second 'audience' of what follows, watching HENRY from a hiding place.

HENRY stands before the mirrors, back to audience, and examines his face, eyes, nose, and neck, a distraught, anguished figure. Multiple images in the mirrors. He turns slowly, comes forward and peers into the audience, a prisoner looking for escape. Behind him, the mirrors become giant video screens. BERTOLD doesn't see the screens; his eyes are only on HENRY.

On the screens appears Henry's memory: a cavalcade of heavily costumed horsemen, larger than life-size, led by the crowned figures of the younger Henry and Margaret, playing the parts of Emperor Henry IV and the Marchesa of Tuscany. The effect is of a dark, brutal, stylized group galloping toward us (like a group of Kurosawa warriors). HENRY is gripped by this apparition behind him, as if knowing what is to come.

The sound/music rises to a high pitch and suddenly, on screen, Henry's horse rears, Henry is thrown, and the screens go blank. HENRY reacts as if he has been thrown, falling forward onto the stage, losing his paper crown. His hair is streaked with dye.

BERTOLD examines the throne and crown while HENRY is still prostrate. HENRY staggers to his feet and BERTOLD hides behind the throne. HENRY walks back, goes and lifts the crown, turns to audience

and crowns himself. The effect is transformative. Trumpets! Suddenly, he is truly a king as BERTOLD peeps at him in amazement.

BERTOLD jumps once more as ORDULF appears carrying penitential robes. ORDULF is in full period costume as an eleventh-century courtier. BERTOLD watches, transfixed, as HENRY gravely nods to ORDULF. ORDULF gently removes HENRY's crown. HENRY bows as ORDULF drapes a penitential robe over his shoulders. HENRY sinks to his knees. ORDULF scatters ashes over his head.

Very rapid, halfhearted performance now follows of the scene at Canossa with HENRY as Henry IV, prostrate in the snow before his enemies, Pope Gregory and the Marchesa of Tuscany, who look down at him from a lighted window: first, LANDOLF and HAROLD on, black T-shirts and jeans, pulling on costumes, LANDOLF as the Marchesa, HAROLD as Pope Gregory. ORDULF pushes the throne to one side and then helps LANDOLF to set up a 'window' above the kneeling HENRY. HAROLD spots the gaping BERTOLD and quickly pulls him off stage, still carrying his bag, rapidly bringing him back on again, without the shoulder bag but now pulling on makeshift period court costuming, perhaps just a cloak and hat. BERTOLD is signalled to stand and be quiet, which he does.

HAROLD and LANDOLF, with suitable, haughty, papal and aristocratic poses, take their places in the 'window' looking down on HENRY, still on his knees. Lighting on HENRY and the figures in the 'window'. ORDULF produces a CD player and we hear monks chanting the Dies Irae, together with mounting storm effects. HENRY throws up his arms before the figures in the 'window', grovels on his knees, hands up again, several times. Then, very quickly, the whole scene is struck once more. ORDULF hurries HENRY off. The 'window' is dismantled, LANDOLF and HAROLD remove their costumes. Heavy breathing after a 'good' performance! BERTOLD stands there, mouth open.

BERTOLD What the fuck was that all about?

LANDOLF You can get your gear off now, sugar pie! Time out!

HAROLD You're the new guy, right?

ORDULF comes back on, removing his costume.

ORDULF OK, folks. He's back in his room. He's quiet.

BERTOLD (*Pointing off*) That's him, right? That old film star guy who's crazy? Thinks he's a king or something, right? Jeez, I don't know where I am!

HAROLD You're an actor as well, aren't you? You'll get used to it.

ORDULF You'll be OK, brother. Just go with it.

LANDOLF (*Speech*) We are all four of us actors, dear heart — playing our roles, our daily performance, with our mad star out there, our Henry.

HAROLD And we're well paid for it. Beats sitting around waiting for a call from the lousy agent.

BERTOLD But, just now? What were you all doing with him? All that stuff, bowing and so forth. (*To LANDOLF*) Drag, right?

LANDOLF (*Pose*) Pretty, no?

HAROLD Ever hear of Canossa?

BERTOLD Canossa, Canossa, yeah, that's the game that Jewish ladies play, right?

General hilarity at this. 'Not a card game, darling!' 'Hey! He thinks he's in Miami!' 'Maybe the Catskills!' 'Card game! Wow!'

HAROLD It's a place, bud. Canossa. Italy. History, man!

As LANDOLF speaks, a shutter opens high above the throne, not seen by the others, and HENRY appears there. He wears his tattered cloak and crown, observing all below him but without the slightest reaction, a voyeur with his own secret observation point, an audience of what is happening below him.

LANDOLF (*Totally gripped by the image he is creating*) Just imagine! Canossa! An emperor, a king! For three whole days forced to kneel in the snow before the lighted window. And in the window, Pope Gregory, watching — and beside him the grand Marchesa of Tuscany, both of them — deadly enemies of the emperor! That's the Canossa scene.