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Directing Luigi Pirandello's Right you are (if you think you are)

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DIRECTING LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S
RIGHT YOU ARE (IF YOU THINK YOU ARE)

By
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B.S., General Beadle State College, 1969

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
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Approved by:

[Signatures]
Chairman, Board of Examiners
Dean, Graduate School
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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses certain aspects of the production of Luigi Pirandello's play, Right You Are (If You Think You Are) which was presented in the Masquer Theater at the University of Montana, May 10-14, after a four week rehearsal period. It deals with the director's preparation before the rehearsal period, the methods used in rehearsal, and presents an evaluation of the production.

The second chapter outlines the influences on the playwright prior to his writing the play. This section includes: (1) a brief biography of Pirandello, (2) a discussion of the development of the teatro del grottesco, (3) a discussion of the Pirandellian philosophy, (4) a description of Pirandello's characters and (5) a plot synopsis. Chapter III deals with the design concept of the production including set, costumes and make-up. Chapter IV contains the director's analysis of the problems presented in the script. Chapter V discusses the methods used in rehearsals. Chapter VI is an evaluation of the rehearsal process. Chapter VII is a conclusion of the production.

An appendix follows the text of the paper and includes a program of the production and a floor plan of the set.

This paper does not include the following: (1) the complete process of the design and technical areas, (2) the business or publicity areas.
Chapter II
DIRECTOR'S CONCEPT

Luigi Pirandello was born in Girgenti, Sicily, on June 28, 1867. His father, Stefano, had been a soldier under Garibaldi and was a rich mining contractor. Pirandello studied philology at Bonn University in Germany and received his PhD in 1895. He published various collections of poetry and scholarly articles until 1901 when his first novel, L'Esclusa (The Outcast) appeared. In 1904 his father went bankrupt which meant financial ruin for the entire Pirandello family. Luigi Pirandello's wife, Antonietta Portulano, daughter of his father's business partner, also bankrupt, suffered a mental collapse from which she never recovered. Pirandello was forced to accept a teaching position at the Istituto Feminile di Magistero, a girls' college in Rome, in order to support himself. During the same year his third novel Il fu Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal) was published in Rome and received world recognition.

In 1911 Il dovere del medico (The Doctor's Duty), Pirandello's first play was performed. Also during this year Suo marito (Her Husband), was published; the main character in this novel is based on Pirandello's wife and her mental illness. In 1917 Cosi e (se vi pare) [Right You Are (If You Think You Are)]\(^1\) was first performed in Rome.

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\(^1\)The literal English translation of Pirandello's play, Cosi e (se vi pare) is It Is So, If You Think So. However, the most widely used English title for this play is Right You Are (If You Think You Are). My production was presented under the latter title which will, for the sake of brevity, be referred to in this manuscript as Right You Are.
There were several major forces in Pirandello's life, preceding the production of Right You Are, that particularly influenced his writing. Among the most important were: (1) his Sicilian background, (2) his studies in Germany, (3) his wife's mental collapse, (4) the effects of the War on the nature of Italian Theatre, and the rise of the teatro del grottesco. All of these lead directly to Pirandello's philosophical statement in Right You Are.

The importance of Pirandello's Sicilian background on his writing is pointed out by Gauco Cambon in his introduction to a collection of essays titled Pirandello. Cambon describes Sicily as "emphatically an island turned inward upon itself". He describes the people as "skeptical and superstitious". "Sicilians tend to be, unlike most continental Italians, rather taciturn and introverted, with a fierce pride as their addiction." This attitude is certainly expressed throughout Pirandello's writing and especially in Right You Are where he makes an impassioned plea for an individual's right of privacy.

The core of Pirandello's formal philosophical concern can be traced to the writings of Bergson, with which he came in contact while a student in Germany. Pirandello's concept of mankind is clearly Bergsonian, says Robert Brustein in his book, The Theatre of Revolt.

...briefly stated, it is this. Life (or reality or time) is fluid, mobile, evanescent, and indeterminate. It lies beyond the reach of reason, and is reflected only through spontaneous action, or instinct. Yet man, endowed with

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reason, cannot live instinctually like the beasts, nor can he accept an existence which constantly changes. In consequence, he uses reason to fix life through ordering definitions. Since life is indefinable, such concepts are illusions. Man is occasionally aware of the illusionary nature of his concepts; but to be human is to desire form; anything formless fills man with dread and uncertainty. 'Humankind cannot bear very much reality', T.S. Eliot's perception in Burnt Norton (and in Murder in the Cathedral) is the spine of Pirandello's philosophy.3

Pirandello believed that man's attempt to "fix life" through "illusion" must be examined and judged even though the reality is all but impossible to bear. He insisted that the theater offered

...what might properly be called a public trial of human actions as they truly are. In that pure and everlasting reality, which the imagination of the poet creates as an example and warning for our commonplace and confused natural life—a trial both free and human, which spurs the consciences of the judges themselves to an ever loftier and more rigorous moral life. That, in my judgment, is the value of the theatre.4

The dramatic world in which Pirandello chose to present his trial of human reality took its form from a popular contemporary movement in the Italian Theater known as the teatro del grottesco. The teatro del grottesco paralleled the Futurist movement in art. The initiator of


the teatro del grottesco was Luigi Chiarelli who, in 1916, produced a play called The Mask and the Face. Instead of calling his play a comedy or a tragedy, he labeled it, a grotesque. The name appealed to the public and was widely applied to all new works of the movement.5

The term, grotesque, applies not only to the titles and form of these plays but also to their spirit and humor. The exaggerated vein of burlesque makes the plays a playground for grotesque humor. In a speech delivered at the Teatro Argentina in Rome, Chiarelli stated his reason for writing The Mask and the Face.

It was written just before the outbreak of the war. At that time Italian drama slumbered on amid worn out models, especially those set out by foreign authors. It was impossible to go to the theater without meeting languid, loquacious granddaughters of Marguerite Gautier or Rosa Bernd, or some tardy follower of Oswald or Cyrano. The public dropped sentimental tears and left the theater weighed down in spirit.6

The "worn out models" against which Chiarelli revolted can be illustrated by outlining a typical plot from one of the plays of the time. Paolo Ferrari, a writer of Italian comedies, examined the marriage problem in his play, Cause de effetti. A high-born girl, Duchessina Castellieri Estensi is married to Marquis Olivaria Gonzaga, and is unjustly suspected of infidelity while her profligate husband dallies with Countess Eulalia. In the fourth act Eulalia's illegitimate

6Ibid., p. 10.
child dies on the stage. Guilty Eulalia also dies, and an illogical reconciliation between husband and wife concludes the story. Chiarelli admitted that such pseudo-romantic drama made him laugh, and from his laughter sprang The Mask and the Face.

The title of Chiarelli's work became the theme for all future teatro del grottesco plays. The mask represented external forms of society and social laws. The face revealed the suffering individual in all his complexity. The individual beset by instinct, is ruled by the demands of society; he is forced to wear a mask. The basic conflict is that of instinct versus social order; the face versus the mask. Caught in the uncertainty of his identity, man usually accepts the identity given him by others -- his mask. Sometimes he accepts the mask willingly; sometimes he is forced into acceptance. The wearing of the mask is man's attempt to stop the flow of life; to fix time like a camera.

This dilemma is the conflict, the chief ingredient of the "public trial of human actions" that Pirandello brought to the theater. Brustein has this to say about the basic conflict in Pirandellian thought:

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The typical Pirandellian drama is a drama of frustration which has as its core an irreconcilable conflict between time and timelessness or life and form; and whether the author is reflecting on human identity or (his other major subject) the identity of art, the terms of conflict remain essentially the same.  

The conflict takes place on two levels simultaneously. On an existential level, Pirandello explores the roles men play trying to escape from life, a revolt inwards against the elusiveness of human existence. On a social level, Pirandello attacks the busybodies, gossips and scaldalmongers who think they can understand the unknowable mystery of man -- a revolt turned outwards against the intruding social world.  

Eric Bentley finds a "spatial design" in Pirandello's plays, an allusion to the pattern of a Sicilian village: "...a center of suffering within a periphery of busybodies."  

Pirandello expanded the revolt of the teatro del grottesco from an attack on the form of prevailing drama to include an attack on current acting styles, styles "...that still adhered to the tenets of pseudo-classicism or to those of the now old romantic school, and viewed with hostility all forms other than the traditional ones."  

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11Ibid., p. 292.  
12Ibid., p. 292.  
characters, characters that have few distinctive traits and speak a rhetoric which requires the most subtle attention. Pirandello founded an art theater in Rome and trained his actors in the style of the commedia dell'arte. The actors were so well versed in improvisation that they could develop the theme of a play from the barest scenario printed on a sheet of paper in the wings.  

The characters that inhabit Pirandello's plays are precisely described through a set of literary terms first used by F. L. Cornford in his book, The Origins of Attic Comedy, and by Northrup Frye in The Anatomy of Criticism: alazones, eirones and pharmakos. Brustein applies these terms specifically to Pirandello's characters. The alazone is typified as an agent of organized society, and is usually identified with one of its institutions: science, bureaucracy or the state. "He is sometimes a doctor, sometimes a petty official, sometimes a magistrate, sometimes a policeman -- always a pretender, whose pretense lies in thinking himself a wise man when he is really a fool." The eiron is typified as a suffering individual who has hidden some private secret under a mask of appearances. When he is unaware he is wearing a mask he is called a pharmakos or scapegoat. Most often the

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14 Walter Starkie, Luigi Pirandello, p. 36.


eirone is a man of superior wisdom because he knows he knows nothing.\textsuperscript{17}

Conflict arises when the alazones try to unmask the eirones. This action always has both tragic and comic consequences. The comedy arises in the futile attempt of the alazones to discover the eirones's secret self -- an attempt which is ludicrously impossible since the face behind the mask cannot be known. The comedy progresses as the alazones are frustrated in their attempts to unmask the eirones; as they move from a certainty of knowledge to a condition of ignorance. Tragedy is inherent in the brutal invasion of the eirones's private selves since these masks are necessary illusions to life.

Pirandello makes no attempt to hide where his sympathies lie; he is clearly an eirone. Unlike Shaw, who was capable of presenting an objective, intellectual argument to both sides of the conflicts that his plays present, Pirandello's drama is a drama of ideas based on a single, underlying concept, consistent throughout his career and enjoying the author's wholehearted endorsement. In his own words, Pirandello outlines his basic feeling for society and the role of his drama with regard for it.

Society is necessarily formed, and in this sense, I am antisocial, but only in the sense that I am opposed to social hypocracies and conventions. My art teaches each individual to accept his lot with candor and humility, and with full consciousness of the imperfections that are inherent in it.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17}Robert Brustein, "Luigi Pirandello", p. 292.

\textsuperscript{18}Robert Brustein, "Pirandello's Drama of Revolt", p. 109.
Critics have stated that Pirandello's most artful presentation of the conflict between the mask and the face -- the eirones and the alazones -- is *Right You Are (If You Think You Are)*. The plot revolves around the attempt of the alazones, led by Commendatore Agazzi and his family, to strip off the mask of the Ponzas, the pharmakoi, who are being defended by Agazzi's brother-in-law, Laudisi, the wise eiron in the play. The unusual behavior of the Ponsa family arouses the curiosity of the Agazzis and their cohorts. Their curiosity centers around the fact that Signora Frola, Ponsa's mother-in-law, is not permitted to visit her daughter even though she is living in the same city. To compound this mystery, Ponsa has rented a house next door to the Agazzi family, in a fashionable part of town, while he and his wife live in a rather grubby apartment in the slums. To make matters even worse, Ponsa will not allow his mother-in-law to receive visitors or to make calls.

When the play opens Signora Agazzi and her daughter, Dina, are complaining to Laudisi about the Ponzas's behavior. Laudisi is strongly defending the Ponzas's right to privacy. Signor Sirelli, his wife and Signora Cini arrive on the scene to glean what information they can from the Agazzis about the curious situation. A few moments later Commendatore Agazzi arrives announcing that Signora Frola is soon to arrive. During her brief visit, Signora Frola attempts to explain her family's living situation and fend off the prying examination by the group. She leaves, having skillfully told them nothing.

Immediately after her exit, Ponsa arrives and maintains that he isolates his mother-in-law to protect her peace of mind. Ponsa tells
the group that Frola's daughter was killed in an earthquake and that he has married a second time. Signora Frola, he says, became deranged over the death of her daughter and refused to believe the facts; he humors her by allowing her to believe that his alleged second wife is her daughter. Ponza exits with the gossips believing that Signora Frola is mad.

Signora Frola re-enters quickly and informs the group that it is Signor Ponza who is mad. He is convinced, says Frola, that his first wife is dead and she has humored him by allowing him to marry her daughter twice. To add to the general confusion is the realization that both Ponza and Signora Frola are aware of the other's version of the story but compassionately labor to preserve the illusion in the other. The first act ends with the Agazzis and their friends in utter confusion, being taunted by Laudisi's mocking laughter.

In the second act the gossips decide that the way to the truth is to bring Ponza and Signora Frola together, thereby ascertaining the correct version of the story. This is accomplished but, in a rage, Ponza drives Signora Frola from the Agazzi residence, only to return and claim that his rage was feigned to protect his mother-in-law's illusion. The act again ends with Laudisi's mocking laughter.

In the third act, after all efforts of finding documented proof from Ponza's old village are thwarted, the Agazzis, with the aid of the Police Commissioner and the Governor, decide to question the only person who will definitely know the truth, Ponza's wife. Signora Ponza arrives and, just as she is about to speak, Signora Frola throws
herself on the newcomer and Ponza runs into the room, screaming at
the assembled alazones, "Cowards! Liars!"\textsuperscript{19} Signora Ponza quietly
instructs Ponza to take Signora Frola home. After they have left, she
is questioned as to her identity. She says, "Tell you what? The
truth? Simply this: I am the daughter of Signora Frola...and the
second wife of Signor Ponza...and, for myself, I am nobody!...I am
she whom you believe me to be.\textsuperscript{20} The play ends with Laudisi's final
taunt: "And there, my friends, you have the truth! Are you satisfied?\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19}Luigi Pirandello, \textit{It Is So! (If You Think So)}, Eric Bentley, ed.,

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 138.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 138.
Chapter III

DESIGN CONCEPT

There were two main factors that contributed to the design concept of this production: (1) the influence of the Futurist painters on the teatro del grottesco and (2) the limited stage facility.

There did not seem to be any reason to place the play in an historical setting: Italy in the early 1900's. On the other hand there was a necessity to achieve a visual statement that would contribute to Pirandello's special world rather than to merely "update" an historical piece. To this end I joined with the designer in an investigation of the Futurist painters, a movement, as previously stated, closely associated with the teatro del grottesco.

Francesco Flora, an Italian critic, states that "Futurism is to a certain degree the apex of all decadence, the final expression of Romanticism gone to seed."¹ He goes on to state that these moderns wish to complete the disruption of the edifice of Romanticism, and from its ashes raise a new will to live, a new scheme of things. The Futurists attacked anything that appealed to the senses.

Marinetti, the leader of the movement, exclaimed one day to his excited followers: 'Burn the gondolas, those swings for fools, and erect up to the sky the rigid geometry to large metallic bridges and factories with waving trains of smoke; abolish everywhere the languishing curve of the old architecture.'²

¹Walter Starkie, Luigi Pirandello, p. 3.
²Ibid., p. 4.
These sentiments agreed precisely with Pirandello's dislike for romantic drama and his insistence on presenting the passion of the intellect. Furthermore, the preoccupation of the Futurists with "rigid geometry" lent itself to the clean lines of modern furniture. The Parsons Table was chosen as the central concept, an austere cube with the lip of the top surface the same width as the legs. Every piece of furniture on the stage proper was executed after this model.

The most dramatic scenic element was a sculpture of mirrors that rose from three places on the set -- from behind the desk, from behind the bar, and from behind a planter -- and converged above the down center stage floor. This sculpture was basically cubist. According to the designer, it served to centralize the design and gave the set a definite forward thrust. The 'mirrors' were accomplished by covering the sculpture with Mylar, a plastic fabric which reflects an unfocussed image. The fact that the mirror was in three sections, and that the images it reflected were blurred, visually demonstrated Pirandello's belief that appearances change, depending on the point of reference.

Another strong scenic element reinforcing the theme of truth as relative came from two very large paintings, geometric in design, which changed perspective depending on the angle from which they were viewed.

Limitation of stage space and virtually no wing space necessitated one practical design decision. Pirandello's stage directions call for Act I to be set in the parlor of the Agazzi residence, with Acts II and III to take place in the study. We quickly decided to incorporate
the two rooms into one family room, including a desk for Agazzi, a card table and chairs, a bar and other occasional furniture.

For the second and third acts Pirandello calls for the use of the offstage parlor which contains a piano important to the action. The use of this piano provides the climax to Act II. The designer and I chose to place this room in the inner lobby of the Masquer Theatre. The audience passed through this room through a door that was unfinished flat on one side and finished doorframe on the other. When scenes were played in this room we attempted to split the focus of the audience, which also reinforced the Pirandellian theme.

Clean lines and very little color -- the set was virtually white -- produced a set design that the designer felt provided a cool physical appearance, a cold aesthetic projection upon a neutral background.

Costumes gave most of the color to the design. They were contemporary in cut and very individualized, emphasizing physical characteristics of the actors in order to comment on the characterizations. Signora Sirelli, played by a large and rather sensuous woman, was given a ruffled dress of a sheer, orange flowered material, very low cut. The two neighbors, Signora Cini and Signora Nenni, were played by women of contrasting physical shapes: one tall and thin, the other short and stocky. The first was costumed in a vertically striped outfit topped by a pillbox hat; the second in a dumpy pleated skirt, a blouse with a large circular print and a big hat of red flowers. All of the alazones were given very warm colors utilizing geometric patterns.
and stripes. The Ponza family, all in deep mourning, were dressed completely in black; Signora Ponza was veiled. Laudisi, the cool, detached spokesman for the playwright, was costumed in light blues with a dark blue sweater.

Make-up for the alazones was stylized in the same manner as the costumes. Each actor emphasized a prominent feature. The actor playing Agazzi stressed his already prominent eyebrows, arching them far past their natural line. The actor playing Signora Menni played up her already prominent nose to achieve a beak-like appearance. Likewise the actor playing Signora Cini lengthened her thin bone structure, exaggerating the hollows in her cheeks to give her a hollow, hungry look. The pharmakos, the Ponza family, used basically straight make-up although the young actor playing Signora Frola used a light age make-up and wore a gray wig. Laudisi wore straight make-up.
Chapter IV
SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Directing Right You Are presented me with three major problems that I recognized and outlined before the rehearsal period began.

(1) I believed that the dramatic structure of the script was flawed; that the argument of the play was seriously out of balance. (2) Pirandello employs his characters as tools to serve his plot and theme and I knew that the two-dimensional appearance of the characters would present problems to the actors. (3) Pirandello insists on a rhetorical precision that translates poorly into English and, if poorly handled, the language could sound stagey and stilted. The degree to which I feel each of these problems was solved will be dealt with in the final section of this paper.

(1) At first glance Right You Are seems to fit perfectly into the demands of the teatro del grottesco and to be a precise example of Pirandello's desire to use the stage for a "trial of human actions."\(^1\) This trial takes place on two levels: the grotesque exposure of the alazones as they attempt to discover what no one can ever understand, the truthful inner identity of another human being; the recognition of the serious disruption inflicted on the lives of the eirones since whatever they conceal is a wholly necessary illusion. Within the course of the trial the alazones persist in their attempts to unmask the eirones while the eirones steadfastly defend their right of privacy,

\(^1\)Luigi Pirandello, "Introduction to the Italian Theater", p. 14.
their right to remain masked.

In Right You Are the eirone position is split. The Ponzas (eirones/pharmakoi) are suffering the prying of the Agazzis but are unable to defend themselves against this invasion of their privacy. Laudisi (eirone) defends the Ponza's right to privacy, tells the alazones that their quest is futile, warns them that the eirones might suffer tragic consequences, but he himself is disengaged and in no way threatened by the Agazzi's vicious attack. The resulting split in the eirone position serves to unbalance the play. The first level of the trial, the social investigation, the exposure of the alazones, is complete and powerful. The plight of the eirones, because of the split, is incomplete and lacks power.

Any real suggestion of tragedy is averted finally by the equivocal nature of Signora Ponza's reply to the question of her true identity. At the end of the play the pharmakoi (the Ponzas) depart with their secret intact. By avoiding any real unmasking of the eirones, the potential for tragedy is virtually absent and wholly outweighed by the complete and brutal exposure of the alazones. What emerges in Right You Are is an exposure of the pettiness of society while the personal plight of the eirones is divided between silent suffering scapegoats and their defender, a detached spokesman for the ideal.

The split in the eirone position also causes problems in characterization. The Ponzas, on the one hand, are unable to defend themselves against the attack of the Agazzis and can only plead to be left alone. Laudisi, on the other hand, can beautifully articulate the
philosophical position of the playwright, but he is not directly involved in or threatened by the conflict. What we are faced with are mute, suffering individuals defended by an uninvolved, dispassionate observer. Walter Starkie has stated that the modern dramatist "must create men possessed of brain as well as muscle, and kick them on to the stage to struggle there by themselves." In Right You Are Pirandello has created characters who are either all 'muscle', the Ponzas, or all 'brain', Laudisi.

In his later work, Enrico IV (1922), Pirandello created a character who is both "pharmakos and eirone, both a living person and an articulate personification, both the mechanism of the action and the source of the ideas." This play presents Pirandello's two-level trial perfectly balanced and the tragic elements realized through the sufferings of a knowing and articulate eirone.

(2) Stark Young in his review of the Group Theatre production of Right You Are on February 21, 1917, had this to say about Pirandello's characters: "Indeed the people in this play are hardly people at all; they are figures in the game that Pirandello is playing. They are human traits, situations, mental aspects." Walter Starkie has this

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2Walter Starkie, Luigi Pirandello, p. 9.
to add: "Unlike the characters of other authors, those of Pirandello have but few distinctive traits; they are always the same poor puppets worked by wires who obey their author's fancy..." Indeed, as stated earlier, the characters of Right You Are fit neatly into two categories, the alazon and the eiron, and are manipulated by the playwright solely to serve his philosophical end.

The nature of the characters in Right You Are brought up two problems. The first was to help the actors discover the reality of their characters in terms of the style of the play. The second problem was to realize Pirandello's characters through the influence that the Italian commedia dell'arte had on them. This play is peopled with stock characters instantly recognizable to an Italian audience. They are not merely representations of Harlequin, Dottore or Punchinello but have emerged through these traditional types into the contemporary world as "...Mental Habits, Characteristic Human Emotions, Thematic Ideas." Whereas Pirandello's characters are deepened by their roots in the commedia, the translation of these characters into an American equivalent stock type was certainly in danger of making light of a serious dramatic attempt and was no solution to the problem. As a matter of fact, there did not seem, in the preparatory stage, any ongoing solution possible to this problem and the question remained merely stated.

However, the first part of the characterization problem, although

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5 Walter Starkie, Luigi Pirandello, p. 36.
6 Stark Young, "Pirandello's Commedia", p. 78.
to add: "Unlike the characters of other authors, those of Pirandello have but few distinctive traits; they are always the same poor puppets worked by wires who obey their author's fancy..."\(^5\) Indeed, as stated earlier, the characters of *Right You Are* fit neatly into two categories, the *alazones* and the *eirones*, and are manipulated by the playwright solely to serve his philosophical end.

The nature of the characters in *Right You Are* brought up two problems. The first was to help the actors discover the reality of their characters in terms of the style of the play. The second problem was to realize Pirandello's characters through the influence that the Italian *commedia dell' arte* had on them. This play is peopled with stock characters instantly recognizable to an Italian audience. They are not merely representations of Harlequin, Dottore or Punchinello but have emerged through these traditional types into the contemporary world as "...Mental Habits, Characteristic Human Emotions, Thematic Ideas."\(^6\) Whereas Pirandello's characters are deepened by their roots in the *commedia*, the translation of these characters into an American equivalent stock type was certainly in danger of making light of a serious dramatic attempt and was no solution to the problem. As a matter of fact, there did not seem, in the preparatory stage, any ongoing solution possible to this problem and the question remained merely stated.

However, the first part of the characterization problem, although

\(^5\)Walter Starkie, *Luigi Pirandello*, p. 36.

\(^6\)Stark Young, "Pirandello's Commedia", p. 78.
challenging, seemed solvable. Walter Starkie summarizes the acting problems in a Pirandello play:

The modern actor for the Pirandello plays must not be an actor by instinct or impulse; he must be ready to analyze coldly his own feelings. He must be ever ready to see the character he is representing from without, as it were, in a mirror. In the plays there is fluidity, and the actor's performance must be plastic. And this plasticity, the result of complete self-control. Not only the actions, the facial expression must be reasoned out, but also the diction.  

It must be remembered that Mr. Starkie is a critic, not a director, and that he is speaking of a polished performance by an actor, not his search for characterization during rehearsals. I felt that the best way to achieve the plasticity mentioned by Starkie was through individual discovery by the actors. I wanted the actions of the characters to come from within each actor rather than be applied by the director, and then, later, to expand these actions to fit the demands of the playwright. The difficulty of dealing with, for the most part, inexperienced actors in such a demanding style will be discussed later along with an account of the exercises with which I tried to overcome specific acting problems.

3. The precision of the rhetoric, and at times the length of the speeches, provided a special problem for actors. Stark Young states this problem in his review of Right You Are.

7Walter Starkie, Luigi Pirandello, pp. 35-6.
Technically, too, we may observe that the point is not so much that the speech is long. The point is that the very length itself of a speech should become dramatic, that there should be also a dramatic progression in the thought, and that, when it is delivered, the stress should fall accurately and with a just degree of that resistant flexibility by which the spoken language becomes expressive and exciting. The length of a speech can be made as dramatic and exciting as anything about it.8

A precise example of Mr. Young's concern is Signora Frola's final speech in Act I. In this speech there are twenty-one changes of thought in as many lines; a difficult problem for even an advanced actor. My attempts to solve the problems caused by Pirandellian rhetoric will be discussed as we move into a consideration of the rehearsal process.
Chapter V

ACTING EXERCISES

The first acting exercises I employed, after the initial blocking was complete and the actors were off book, involved the actors playing Signora Agazzi, Dina and Laudisi. These exercises were chosen to accomplish two purposes: to help the actors take their newly learned words out of their heads as a self-conscious flow of memorized material, and to get these particular actors involved in the game-like struggle between Laudisi and his sister and niece.

The initial activity was merely a version of "musical chairs". The actors began speaking the dialogue while they walked in a circle around two chairs. Each time I clapped my hands the actors sat down as quickly as possible, keeping the dialogue flowing. Since there was one less chair than actors, someone was always left standing. This very simple activity gave the actors something to focus on other than their lines and the small element of competition -- to be not left standing -- began to spark a spirit of competitiveness.

As soon as the actors were relaxed and participating fully in the musical chairs activity, I set up another. The actors were instructed to begin the dialogue again, this time playing 'keep-away'. Amelia and Dina started playing catch with a ball (actually a crumpled styro-foam cup) while Laudisi tried to intercept it. When he did capture the 'ball', the actor who had allowed him to take it replaced him as 'it'.

I was somewhat astounded by the immediate result of these simple exercises. The actors were indeed quickly able to get the lines out of
their heads and the dialogue began to flow. The scene also achieved both an amusing, and useful, punch as a result of the competition. Several totally missing builds began to take shape and the actors became aware of the rhythms of the scene.

By the time this game session was over the three actors were exhausted. Competition had become very fierce, due in large part to the abandon with which the games were attacked by the actor playing Laudisi. He appeared very competitive, in an extremely useful way, and his excitement forced the others to keep up with him. What really took place, it seemed to me, was a physicalization of the intellectual acrobatics of the character, Laudisi.

While the actors were resting, we discussed the exercises and how the game-playing had forced a necessity to communicate. The lines took on a natural urgency. We discussed the relationships of the characters at this point and things were discovered that might only have otherwise been realized by the actors if I had resorted to direct lecture, and then without the same impact. The two actors playing Amalia and Dina began to understand the difference in the sources of their curiosity about the Ponzas. Amalia's curiosity stems purely and simply from the fact that she had been snubbed by a person whose son-in-law is her husband's subordinate -- a fact she mentions no less than five times in her first six lines! Dina, on the other hand, hints continually that there might be something untoward happening between Ponza and Signora Frola. She slips in insinuating remarks like: "The
problem is not between the mother-in-law and the son-in-law, but between the mother and the daughter." She sums up her suspicions by stating: "And that is not the worst of it! Sometimes he comes during the daytime, once or twice!"

Although this exercise brought initial success, it was necessary to periodically repeat a version of it. As rehearsals progressed the actors slipped into ponderous and unchanging line readings. This was particularly true of the actor playing Dina. It was necessary to constantly reinforce for her the urgency inherent in and the competitive aspects of the scene in order to combat a very measured, cold delivery of her lines -- a delivery compounded to some degree by a slight frontal lisp.

The next problem I attacked was Signora Frola's first scene. The actor playing this character had very little stage experience and was having a great deal of difficulty handling the rhetorical structure of the lines. In order to give the scene more direction, and to help Signora Frola feel her own need to escape the cross-examination and overbearing curiosity of her neighbors, the actors playing the alazones were instructed to touch Signora Frola each time before they spoke, in a manner consistent with their characters and in such a way that each touch would intensify the painful prying in their questioning. I instructed the actor playing Signora Frola to seek out physical contact

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1Luigi Pirandello, *It Is So! (If You Think So)*, p. 65.
with the questioners in her attempt to plead with them to believe her story.

The exercise was successful to the extent that it helped the alazones realize that they were indeed on the attack and gave the attack some physical reinforcement. It also loosened up the actor playing Signora Frola and enabled her to appeal directly, and physically, to her questioners. Her speeches became more than mere exposition, she was finding dramatic punctuation—however, something was still missing.

After discussions with my assistant director, I decided that the scene lacked a sense of a definite relationship between Signora Frola and Ponza. It seemed necessary that whenever any of the eirones/pharmokoi were on stage the family ties must accompany them, that each one should actually carry the spiritual presence of the rest of the family. In other words, when Signora Frola was onstage alone, she should bear with her, spiritually, both her daughter and her son-in-law. Ponza's presence was certainly necessary to the success of Signora Frola's first scene; she has just left him, he has sent her to the Agazzi house and has told her exactly what to say.

In order that the actor playing Signora Frola might feel the presence of Ponza during her first scene, I instructed the actor playing Ponza to enter the scene with her (he was totally ignored by the Agazzi family) and to instruct her as she told her story; particularly to stop her when she was saying too much. He constantly cautioned her with phrases such as: "You don't have to say that." "Why did you tell them that?" "That's not true." "You better go home now."
Rehearsing the scene in this manner helped tremendously. Signora Fröla's lines did become more active, took on new meanings, were saved from being mere exposition. The scene, however, was still lacking.

These same two exercises were used, in the same order, for the scenes in which Ponza is on stage without Signora Fröla, the touch exercise followed by the physical presence of Signora Fröla. The result was somewhat different in that Ponza found he had to work harder to dispel the impression his mother-in-law had made on the alazones. The exercises were useful but something was missing here also.

The main exercise I used to begin to have the actors come to grips intellectually with the script is outlined by Viola Spolin in her book, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, and is called "verbalizing the where". The exercise involves the actors in a process of stating aloud precisely what they are doing and where they are doing it. A continuation of the exercise, verbalizing the motivation for each action, is designed to come into the rehearsal after the what and where are firmly established. This exercise pushes the actors to take a "cerebral" (Starkie's term!) point of view toward their work.

The first action the actor takes is to state literally what he is doing: "I am walking up to the door." "I am reaching for the door knob with my right hand." "I am turning the knob to the right." This is the 'what'. The 'where' portion has the actor verbalize exactly

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what he sees and has him add this verbalization to the 'what'. "I walk into the room. I see a brown bar with two bottles sitting on top of it. I see Laudisi standing beside the bar with a glass in his hand...", etc. Finally the 'why' is added. "I walk into the room. I see a brown bar with two bottles sitting on top of it. I see Laudisi standing beside the bar with a glass in his hand. I have something urgent to say to Laudisi, therefore I walk to him."

The purposes of the exercise are both to make the actor aware of the importance of each of his individual actions and also to point out to him those places where he is unsure of his actions. I have seen the exercise work splendidly. Unfortunately, it did not catch on with this particular cast. They did not seem able to sufficiently detach themselves from their own personalities to freely attack the problem. Perhaps I should have repeated the exercise until it caught fire; however, at the time it seemed futile to pursue it since our rehearsal period was necessarily limited. The result was that many of the actors spent much time on stage not knowing what they were doing. The "cerebral" actor appears to me to be definitely lacking in our student body.

From my point of view, the most important exercise we attempted was chosen in order to inject some of that elusive "spirit of the commedia" into the cast. Although the commedia tradition was important to Pirandello's work, Robert Corrigan points to an interesting contradiction between Pirandello's precise rhetoric and the non-verbal level on which much of the commedia performance was based. Corrigan remarks that the commedia actually questioned the validity of words to express life's most significant realities, that it was purely popular and non-
literary in its antecedents rather than having sprung from any classical or written form. This presents an interesting problem because Pirandello's plays call for the free-wheeling spirit that we attribute to the commedia influence while they, at the same time, are written in a most complex stage rhetoric. The shape of this exercise seems questionable because it attempts to achieve a height of emotion and an animated attack directly related to the rhetoric while the exercise itself is carried out without the use of language.

The actors were instructed to run through their dialogue substituting gibberish, or non-word sounds, for the lines. This exercise is also presented in Improvisation for the Theatre. I introduced the exercise after the third week of rehearsal to insure that the actors would be thoroughly familiar with their words and actions. I chose a short scene simply to familiarize the actors with the demands of the exercise. Fortunately, many of them had used the exercise previously, either in acting classes or in other rehearsals. This first experiment was brief and inconclusive.

During the next three rehearsals I planned to tackle an act a night with the gibberish exercise. The first evening we began with Act I. From the first few moments of the rehearsal the actors became enormously caught up in the problem; they began to communicate the ideas contained in the dialogue with their faces, hands and entire

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bodies. The actors, when they were not speaking, were forced, because of the vague nature of the gibberish sounds, to listen actively so they would not lose their way in the scene. Amazingly enough there were very few missed cues. The act had a life and a dynamic quality that had been entirely lacking up to this point.

The actors were so excited with the success of the exercise that they asked if they could continue using gibberish for the remainder of the rehearsal and run through the entire three acts that night. As the second and third acts progressed the actors became more and more involved in what they were doing and they achieved both physical freedom and the expansion of expression that I felt so necessary.

The specific results of the exercise, when we returned, the following evening, to the actual script, were very spotty. Some of the actors managed to retain the concentration and physical freedom they had experienced within the confines of the exercise; others reverted to their pre-gibberish line readings, hiding themselves, as it were, behind Pirandello's rhetoric. We continued to use this exercise from time to time right up to the final dress rehearsal. When a scene began to lag I would stop the actors and ask them to recall the feeling they had when rehearsing the scene in gibberish. Then we would begin the scene again, using gibberish for a short time before returning to the dialogue. This practice proved very beneficial for some of the actors. Others maintained the spirit of the gibberish in some scenes of the play and lost it in others. A few were totally unable to incorporate any of the benefits of the exercise into their performances.
In performances the level of intensity and animation varied greatly from scene to scene and from individual to individual. There is a correlation between the final performance of each actor and his particular susceptibility to achieve a freedom with the gibberish exercise and to carry this freedom over into using the playwright's own words. The actors with the most experience were able to incorporate the results of the exercise into their performances more consistently than the less experienced actors. The actors with less experience used the exercise in those moments where they felt the most comfortable and lost the benefits in the places where they had failed to come to grips with the script. A few showed no benefit whatsoever from the exercise. The overall result for me was that the performances throughout the play appeared inconsistent both within individual performances and between performances.

Along with choosing specific exercises that would contribute to the production of Right You Are, I found myself involved in teaching basic acting fundamentals to two of the actors. This naturally took a great deal of time away from the other people in rehearsals. I finally found it necessary to call special rehearsals, or rather teaching sessions. What we accomplished in these sessions amounted to actor homework: analysis of roles, analysis of specific lines, isolating of key plot points and ideas to stress. Many hours were spent with these two actors so they could achieve the necessary relaxation to proceed with rehearsals.
Due to the lack of time and the developmental level of these actors, this work produced, at best, limited results. At times they were involved in scenes and at other times they were completely absent emotionally. This work was done with the actors playing Signor Sirelli and the Governor; in both cases these were the first roles of any length either of them had undertaken. The parts were more than they could be expected to handle and their performances were decidedly weaker than any others in the production.
Chapter VI

EVALUATION OF EXERCISES

By the time dress-rehearsals were upon us, there was one actor who was clearly approaching the acting style I wanted: the actor playing the Police Commissioner who appears only in the third act. From the moment of his entrance he was able to grab hold of the broadness, the grotesqueness, the spirit of the commedia dell'arte, which all the actors needed to have. He was the only one physically and emotionally free enough to abandon himself to the bigness.

It was not so much that he was doing physical "bits" (which he certainly was) but that these "bits" were accomplished on a broad scale and yet remained totally within his character. His sense of himself as the character was very expanded and very large. His facial expressions were extended and his movement was consistently broad. There was a sense of importance in everything that he did. He walked on stage and his presence said: look at me; I'm important. This actor had grabbed onto this expansion from the beginning of the rehearsal period; whereas none of the other actors had found a similar approach for themselves.

There is a great difference between this expanded reality and so-called "hammy" acting. The Police Commissioner was not merely showing off as an actor; the extended style belonged to the character. Early in the rehearsal period I had given him an instruction to find in the Police Commissioner the belief that this character was, to himself, the most important person in the town. (In fact, I gave this same suggestion to the entire group of actors playing the alasones:
that each was to think himself the most dynamic and outstanding person on that stage at any given time.) The actor playing the Police Commissioner translated this advice into a central physical approach -- a posture very much puffed up with an over-expanded chest and rigidly held head -- and all kinds of allied physical activity. The same advice, given to the other actors produced frustratingly small reactions. They continued to attempt to play their characters in a standard realistic sense and could not justify the necessary expansion to themselves. I do not mean to say that the character of the Police Commissioner was not based in reality but that it was a specific reality, extended and played upon.

One of my main goals during the rehearsal period was to attempt to propel the actors into a broad acting style without imposing an artificial set of outside mannerisms on them. I believe that all acting must be based in reality and that what we call "style" must spring from the particular reality provided by the particular world of the particular play being produced. That is, that every play, no matter how foreign it is to the theatrical style we call "realistic", does have a reality within itself, carefully built and peopled by the playwright. The reality of the town and people created by Pirandello in this particular play was what I was continually striving to realize. With the exception of the character of the Police Commissioner (and to a slightly less satisfying extent with the character of Signora Sirelli), I was not succeeding.

On the night of the first dress rehearsal, while giving notes,
I singled out the work of the actor playing the Police Commissioner as most nearly approaching the desired style. The reaction of the cast to this remark was very surprising; they had never once taken my suggestions for a broad playing style to mean this degree of exaggeration. I pointed to the use of the gibberish exercise, begun a week before the first dress rehearsal and reminded them that I had specifically commented on the extended gestures, the keen communication of hands and body that resulted from the need to relate to each other without words. I thought I had made the point of the exercise very clear but it was obvious that I had not. One actor remarked that he felt the exercise was only an attempt to give them an underlying feeling of the excitement and the desire to communicate rather than realizing that what I expected from them was that they actually use the gestures and expanded action that they discovered through the gibberish rehearsals. The most depressing realization for me was that the actors had no idea what sort of world Pirandello had created in Right You Are, much less any notion of the play's theme.

From the beginning of the rehearsal period I had made the decision not to impose long speeches about Pirandello's philosophy and particular writing style on the actors. It had seemed to me that the necessary elements were so inherent in the script that Pirandello's world might emerge through directorial suggestion while dealing with the actual dynamics of the play rather than through lecture. The one exception I made to this decision was to talk briefly about the influence of the Italian commedia dell'arte on the play, to comment specifically
about the spirit that infused the commedia companies, the sharpness of their satire, and the broadness of their physical style. I had also remarked that the old commedia types of characters were easily recognizable in Pirandello's plays to an Italian audience and that we would probably be attempting to find American types that might suggest Pirandello's original intent.

Certainly I could not repair all of my failures to articulate the necessary background to the play (which still might not have been necessary if all the actors had brought the imagination and suggestibility to rehearsal with them that characterized the work of the actor playing the Police Commissioner!) but it seemed necessary to settle on a few pieces of information that I might have presented. Perhaps the simplest thing I neglected to say was that Right You Are if not a realistic play. Unfortunately that seemed very apparent to me but two of the actors remarked on the night of the first dress rehearsal that they had never thought they were dealing with anything but a realistic play! I put down the desire to punch both of them and tried to think about how such a mistake of basic interpretation could be made.

Although we place Pirandello within the ranks of the contemporary playwrights it is basically with new themes we find him concerned, not with new forms. Throughout his career -- with the possible exception of three plays—Pirandello was thoroughly grounded in the well-made play, in which actions are justified dramatically no matter how creaky the machinery sometimes has to be. To alter the appearance of Right

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1Six Characters in Search of an Author, Tonight We Improvise, and Each In His Own Way are all experiments with basic dramatic form.
You are as being a realistic play I could have certainly quoted things that the playwright said about his plays, such as his comment in an interview with Vittorini: "My art has no basis in realism. My art is not based in naturalism or realism. It is beyond that. It's a world of the imagination that is created." My own personal view of Pirandello's "world of imagination" is that its basic reality is extended and larger -- a dream perhaps in which Pirandello's vision is that all people are characters from the commedia rather than real live people. Therefore the acting problem becomes the outward extension of characterization rather than the inward deepening of characterization, a problem particular to presenting satire, farce or the grotesque on the stage. Proceeding from this point of view, the statement that Pirandello's characters serve Pirandello's plot and theme begins to make sense, as it had not made sense to my cast in their dealings with the play. I might say here that very few members of my cast had much experience in reading plays, nor were any of them inspired to read anything about this particular play during the course of the rehearsal.

After the first dress rehearsal, when it became clear to the cast that I was pleased with -- for whatever reason! -- the style of performance taken by the actor playing the Police Commissioner, there was a noticeable change in everyone's playing style. Even though it was far too late for the new understanding to prevail, at least there

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was a sense that everyone was attempting to go for it. There were certain characters who achieved a sense of the expanded reality and others who seemed hopelessly stuck in an Ibsen drama. This confusion of purpose made the production much less cohesive than it might have been. Perhaps it will be most helpful now to comment on the individual success of specific performances to realize the playwright's intention.

**Laudisi**

Although Laudisi technically belongs to the eirone group, he seems to stand somewhere in the middle of, or outside, the other two groups. Chiefly lacking through all the performances (with the possible exception of opening night) was his spirit of fun, his playing with the alazones. He also never quite achieved the strain of bitterness, important if his character is to represent, as most authorities believe it does, the embodiment of Pirandello. Laudisi is upset with what the alazones are doing, he is upset with the course of gossip and prying, yet there must be a delight that springs from his intellectual superiority that feeds on and plays with everyone. He is the best actor on stage; he is really much better at what the alazones do than they are, and he is aware of it. He sees them for what they are and can use what they are and program how they act simply to score a point off them. There should be continual delight bubbling from Laudisi as he puts down the alazones. I did not see, in the actor, the clean decision to attack the alazones, nor did he project that mischievous intellectual relish that should illustrate with what pleasure he shows them how silly and small they actually are.
This actor was very experienced with a background of training that is typical of American theatre education. It was not because he was dull, nor because he lacked training at all that he could not catch the full measure of intellectual play necessary to Laudisi. I came to believe that it was the type of actor training he had received that worked against him in the role. He had actually been trained against the kind of expanded reality I was trying to give his performance. He was continually concerned about what he was feeling, about his own inner thing, about not being able to make emotional transitions from one moment in the play to another. The fact of the matter is that these transitions in Right You Are are not internalized at all. We were able to communicate verbally about this problem but he was never comfortable with an external approach. He wanted somehow to make Laudisi a totally full-blown dramatic character in the sense of, let's say, an O'Neill character, whereas all of Laudisi's subtext is grounded in the intellect -- which governs his outward appearance and actions -- rather than in his emotions. Interestingly enough, this actor was the first to take off with every acting exercise we set up, showing enormous physical freedom, and sparking reactions from the other actors again and again in rehearsal. I'm sure that he knew, in his head, what I wanted from Laudisi, but he never trusted Pirandello's character enough to fire up his total performance past the safe, secure, polished state.

There was one exception to the above: a scene in the second act with Signora Cini and Signora Nenni. In this scene he was able to
find that degree of fierce and mischievous play that should have been present during all of his encounters with the alazones. I believe that the success of this scene resulted because the specific content of the scene touched on the subject of the right of privacy in a way that particularly spoke to this actor's own intellect; he found the machinations of the two female characters particularly distasteful, personally, and he reacted with an automatic sharpness that was very true to his character.

Perhaps this is a hint that the actors working on a Pirandello play need to be pushed somehow to find in themselves that same intellectual passion that made Pirandello go after his themes. The organic reality that comes easier to the ordinary American actor does not really apply to the Pirandellian world. As director, I felt that Pirandello's themes were terribly important, relevant and worthy of restatement. We all certainly have a right to our own privacy. Most of us have suffered invasions of our privacy. It is a useful afterthought that an intellectual approach to emotional recall might indeed have reached this particular actor and helped him past the very cool, very well-reasoned, but passionless, performance that he gave.

Signor Ponza and Signora Frola

It is the world of these two characters that is being invaded; they are the victims of the play yet they exhibit opposite needs for maintaining their privacy. Ponza yells and screams a lot, demands his privacy in no uncertain terms and antagonizes the alazones continually. Signora Frola suffers quietly, admits that she is merely resigned to
the way she must live and presents an enormously sympathetic character
to both the audience and to the gossips, who are almost totally on her
side except for a brief period in the first act when they think she is
mad. However opposite these needs appear on the surface both Ponza
and Signora Frola seek to protect a single thing between them: the
relationship each shares with Signora Ponza -- whatever that relation­
ship might truly be. The reality of their individual relationships
with this enigmatic woman who appears on stage for only the final
moments of the play, was the chief missing ingredient in their charac­
terizations and served to lessen the whole impact of their plight. As
a brilliant afterthought, while dictating notes the day after the end
of the production run, I suddenly realized I should have brought the
actor playing Signora Ponza onstage in rehearsal whenever Ponza and
Signora Frola were playing a scene, as a constant reminder of the chief
emotional tie that both sought to protect.

During the rehearsal period I spent a great deal of time trying
to build images of Signora Ponza in the character imagination of the
actor playing Signora Frola. I realized from the beginning that the
only way to combat the potentially hokey ending of the play was to place
the spirit of the absent woman square before everyone's mind's eye,
audience and characters alike. I talked and talked to the actor playing
Frola, tried to explore the importance of the relationship, the danger
of having the limited bit of contact she was allowed taken away from
her. This is a situation when I am afraid I said too much and did too
little; I am certain that an exercise much like the one I felt bore some
success between Frola and Ponza might have worked wonders in establishing what is certainly the most important relationship, and perhaps the most difficult to get across, in the play.

There was a certain problem in having a very young, both in experience and in years, actor playing Signora Frola. In a theater as small as The Masquer it is impossible to do realistic age make-up so we decided to merely suggest age with light make-up and a gray wig and rely on her natural plaintive quality to fill the character physically. Her lack of experience was something of a hardship, both to her and to me, in the early rehearsals. She was frightened: afraid of the heavy line load, afraid to give herself up to the rehearsal process, just plain afraid. I had cast her because of a lovely intense quality, the plaintive face and an innate manner that kept me watching her despite her lack of acting skills. The most serious hardship that her fear presented was that she continued to tighten up her throat and speak too softly to be heard, even in that small theatre. By the final dress rehearsal I was resorting to notes that read: "Consider shouting." I was pleased throughout the performances, however, to watch the audience respond to Signora Frola, particularly older women, who listened intently even when the actor was difficult to hear.

The performance of the actor playing Ponza suffered most from the same missing relationship, that with Signora Ponza. He also had a great deal of trouble with the rhetoric, either going so completely with the emotion of the moment that he became incoherent, or concentrating on the words so much that the emotional depth was lacking.
This was an older actor with a great deal of stage experience and this role gave him a problem in some ways akin to that of the actor who played Laudisi. The two roles bear no similarity on the surface: cool, passionately detached Laudisi and the ranting, explosive Ponza. However, both characters were conceived by Pirandello and both exist to serve his plot. Ponza is deceptively 'emotional'; the actor must approach this emotion with great objectivity, must make it serve the author's theme. It must never be forgotten that these characters are not conventionally well-rounded; their outer life remains more important to the play than their inner life. By the end of the rehearsal period I was recalling that probably the best rendition of the highly 'emotional' scene Ponza plays in the second act with Signora Frola was given by the actor the night of auditions.

The Gossips

It is impossible to generalize on the character interpretations within this group; they ranged from excellent to poor. I would like to comment on an example or two in some detail.

The actor who played Dina, the Agazzi daughter, progressed much further than I expected she would after the first week of rehearsal. I cast her because of her poise and self-control in auditions, because she was physically right for the role and projected a pleasant charm. I knew she had very little experience but I had no idea how difficult it would be to inject energy into her performance. I have already talked about the musical chairs and keep-away games that helped this actor find an urge to communicate, the excitement beneath her curiosity. Certainly
her slight speech problem was a difficulty she had to overcome to cope with her speeches. Most of the time she sounded as though she was simply delivering reasonable rhetoric rather than projecting an intense young woman dying to find out what was going on with the mysterious Ponza family, demanding that her uncle, Laudisi, listen to her. She responded beautifully to the gibberish rehearsal, became physically animated and very excited. But when we returned to the lines of the play, the measured vocal delivery returned. There was progress certainly but not nearly so much as I hoped for.

Her breakthrough in dealing with her character came in a later rehearsal when I instructed the actor playing Laudisi to begin to taunt her vocally during their first scene together. It was necessary that she force Laudisi to listen to her. The person began to grow angry when the actor made fun of her. We began the scene again and instructed the actor playing Laudisi to continue the taunting; she was then told to touch him in character before each of her lines to him and he was told to try and stay away from her, within the confines of the set. Her deep seated need to remain poised, in control, calm, gave way to irritation and she pursued the actor playing her uncle. The scene sprang to life, finally. Not all of the progress made in this rehearsal carried over into the performance but a gratifying amount did. She continued to be alive and into the show in those sections in which she was comfortable and emotionally absent in the sections she had not solved.

The other performance that came closest to realizing my concept of the style that I have been calling extended reality, was the actor
playing Signora Sirelli. She has had a great deal of experience playing comedy and I knew when I cast her that she would have no difficulty with a broad and open approach. She was occasionally fearful of going too far with her characterization but only needed to be reassured that her expansion was a joy to watch.

The actor playing Signor Sirelli, whom I mentioned earlier in this section, was certainly never up to the role. However, it might be interesting, as a final comment, to remark on his two biggest helps: a costume and a prop. He is a stocky young man, rather awkward. His costume consisted of a bright red knit shirt, plaid bermuda shorts, high socks and golf shoes. His prop was a box of small black Italian cigars. The night he first used his prop and wore his costume was certainly the night of his best performance. For a time he was taken out of himself, forgot about his words, and threw himself into his character. The good results got watered down when his natural self-consciousness returned, but without the costume and the prop his performance would have been far less successful than it ended up being.
Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Pirandello is a difficult playwright to produce with inexperienced actors. The problems encountered included the flawed dramatic structure, the problems of characterization and the complexity of the rhetoric. These problems were dealt with during the rehearsal period and, in part, solved.

The split between the eironic/salazonic position was solved to a certain degree by working with Laudisi in order to help him become directly involved in the action of the play. To a great extent this was accomplished through the early game playing. The problems with the Ponzas were not handled as successfully, but could have been avoided by having Signora Ponza onstage with the family during rehearsals.

The most difficult problem, and the least successfully solved, involved the characterization of the gossips. The exercises that involved the gossips during the rehearsals could have been more successful had the actors been trained in these techniques. The growth of an actor is a slow process and is a process of familiarization and then assimilation. Within the short rehearsal period the actors did not have time to become familiar enough with the exercises to assimilate them into their characterizations. It was like asking someone to be an accomplished gymnast after merely showing them diagrams of various maneuvers.

The problem of the rhetoric is aligned with the problem of characterization. In order to overcome these problems it would be necessary to train actors in improvisation for some time before rehearsals. Pirandello found it necessary to train his actors to perform in his plays
and I think this would also be necessary preparation for a college production.

If I direct a Pirandello play again, I would want to work with a group of actors for at least a year. This would be sufficient time to acquaint the actors with the improvisational techniques necessary to produce Pirandello. It would also be beneficial to have the cast familiarize themselves with the other works of the playwright. This familiarization process would serve to eliminate the confusion of Pirandello's themes and his style of presentation. This process of actor education would, I believe, eliminate many of the problems faced in rehearsal and serve to bring about a more intelligent, cohesive production.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Daily News.

MAJOR THEATER WORK OPENING!

Nobel Prize winner, Luigi Pirandello's

Right You Are (If You Think You Are)

MAY 10-14, 1972
MASQUER THEATER
8:15 P.M.
PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant Director .................................................. Rosemary Ingham
Scene Shop Manager ............................................... John Bradford
Scenery ..................................................................... Mike Lyngholm, Bill Wells, Greg Wright, Steve Childers, Gerald Hagen, Tim Paul, Tom Simitzes, Barb Rieger, F. Paul Crowe
Properties ................................................................. Don Lovett (Head), Buzz Reichert, Janeva Chase, Jackie McMaster, Herb Bartle, Sally Dugan
Lights ................................................................. Tom Valach (Head), Paul Fleming, Rich Kees, Bess Snyder
Make-up ................................................................... Advanced Make-up Class, Members of Cast
Costume Shop Manager ........................................... Pat Bidwell
Costumes ................................................................. Peggy Dodson, Holly Olsen, Gere Hafer, Jeanine Streber, Sally Steward, Jeri Chelini, Renee Han, Carla Hanson, Nichole Peterson, Jackie-Ann Robinson
Publicity ................................................................. Dale Raoul (Head), Arlynn Fishbaugh, Kathleen White, John Sheffner, Tom Valach
Photographer .............................................................. Gordon Lemon
Graphic Artist ........................................................... Ted Bailey
Box Office ................................................................. Michael Leib (Head), Patrick R. Neils, Cathy Larish
Secretaries ................................................................. Donette Wylder (Head), Randi Hood, Cindy Holshue

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Paintings furnished by Michael Wheatly

COMING ATTRACTIONS!

"Albert Herring," a comic opera
8:15 p.m. May 25 - 28 University Theater
Produced by the School of Fine Arts