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James Troiano

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**LIFE AS THEATER IN ALOISI'S
NADA DE PIRANDELLO, POR FAVOR**

James Troiano
University of Maine

Critics often refer to Aloisi's ironically titled *Nada de Pirandello, por favor* (1937) to demonstrate the enormous influence of Pirandello's appearances in Argentina in 1927 and 1933 and of the staging of his play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, in Buenos Aires. There were many Pirandello imitators of varying abilities and Aloisi's play's title captures the extent of Pirandello's influence and seems to make a plea for no more.

The title of the play actually comes from the impresario in *Nada de Pirandello, por favor*, who orders the playwright in the play to avoid Pirandello's influence in the inner play which he creates. The manager believes that people want to see the only authentic Pirandello: "para el público únicamente es Pirandello, cuando es Pirandello" (17)¹. Ironically, Pirandellism is indeed strongly evident in Aloisi's perplexing play which intermingles reality and fantasy. The author within the play, his adulterous wife, as well as multitude of fictional characters blend together, as all distinctions between levels of reality are eradicated. The play, however, is no mere perfunctory imitation of Pirandellian themes and technique. The author-character analyzes and gains insight in himself when he creates an inner drama mirroring his own tragic life.² There is continuous interplay between the character's life and the play he creates; the drama is enhanced also by a startling conclusion in which the real and fictive collide head-on. Influences for Pirandello's plays are certainly evident, but the drama is original and insightful, worthy of being studied for its own merit. The major part of the play portrays the author-character attempting to create a new play as he futilely attempts to follow the stage manager's instructions to avoid Pirandello.

The entire creative process is indeed reminiscent of Pirandello's *Six Characters*, as the protagonist author interacts with characters who act out roles which, in this case, actually are artistic reflections of the author's own life. In

Pirandello's play, the characters attempt to reconstruct their own lives in roles which are without texts as they recreate spontaneous reproductions of their lives. The creative process in art parallels the exchanges between people in real life. Pirandello insists that the characters in his most famous play react with the spontaneity of real life.

In the same way the Pirandello presents different spheres of reality in *Ciascuno a suo modo* and *Sei personaggi*, Aloisi distinguishes between the levels of reality by listing "real characters," such as the author, the young author, the other woman, and "imaginary characters," such as the woman, the husband, and the witnesses. Then, in precisely the same way as Pirandello, Aloisi eradicates these same barriers between the real and imaginary characters by having the latter interact with the author and other real life figures.

Aloisi's characters demonstrate these same characteristics as they interact with the author and other real-life figures. In *Nada de Pirandello, por favor* the author's imaginary characters reproduce the author's deepest fears and concerns as they act out the situations which he suggests to them.

There is constant tension between the author and the imaginary characters, which parallels the conflicts between the manager, characters and actors in *Six Characters*. The character referred to by Aloisi as "mujer" is perhaps the most remarkable of all. She is the phantasmagorical double of a woman that the author was attracted to while he was taking a walk, but was too timid to approach. "La mujer" belittles the author for his real life failure to speak to the woman and also reproaches him for his passive acceptance of his wife's affair with the manager. The tenacious "mujer" refers to the author's deceitful wife as "esa manzana de mármol" (23). The allusion is not only in reference to the author's wife, but also to a beautiful and somewhat disturbed aunt whom the author, as a boy, once happened to see while she was naked. The aunt informed the youth's father of the incident; she enjoyed the fact that he had been punished, while she also seemed to be tantalized by the episode. The author apparently is attracted to cruel, deceitful women such as the temptress aunt and the deceptive wife. "La mujer" will incite the author to recall this episode from his past which is the catalyst for his self-understanding and ultimate ability to rebel against his wife and her betrayal. The author is so enraged by his rebellious character that he futilely attempts to be rid of her: "¿Para eso te he traído aquí? ¡Vete al demonio! ... ¡Déjame trabajar" (25). "La mujer," however, proves to be fundamental to the play which he wished to create, as she is to his own life, as the play and life intertwine. The author resents and denies the painful yet therapeutic purging of his feelings, and struggles against the characters and the resulting play as it develops. Aloisi's author is plagued and pursued by his characters who vibrate with as much life as do Pirandello's phantoms. Starkie describes the vitality and humanity of Pirandello's characters:

There they were, so alive that one could touch them, so alive that one could hear them breathe — each of them with his secret torment, but bound to others by birth and by the tie of events experienced together (230).

Aloisi's living phantoms will continue to plague the unfortunate author until he comes to admit his intolerable domestic situation and has the courage to break from it.

In addition, "La mujer" attempts to allure the other characters into acquiring more human characteristics. In order to achieve this objective, she belittles their slight interest in their creator's life. They are reproached for their general indifference, and she labels them: "Sin curiosidad, sin interés. Qué vergüenza... Seis hombres... ¡Qué hombres... Seis muñecos!" (40).

Her intense desire to be a genuine person continues in the second act. She tells the imaginary character who plays her husband in the play being created that "aun siendo esto que somos... ((personajes)), entes de ficción... podemos vivir... como hombres." (43). He rejects the idea, with certain reluctance and hesitation: "no... lo... creo." (43); but she further provokes the character by belittling his lack of humanity: "Te faltan vicios y pasiones, ansias y deseos, contradicciones e incertidumbres.." and later "porque tú eres ya una cosa bien hecha, bien terminada, y por lo tanto, estática incommovible" (46). The tenacious "mujer" prompts the initially reluctant 'marido' to admit with pride and confidence: "Soy un hombre" (46). Aloisi once again presents phantoms with such human qualities as assertiveness and self-esteem. Aloisi's characters reveal human characteristics which are similar to those demonstrated by Pirandello's six characters. Starkie comments on Pirandello's creations: "His characters justify, condemn, criticize themselves, and think of themselves in the act of living, suffering, and tormenting themselves." (42). Pirandello's seis personaggi... are caught in an uncertain realm which lies in a limbo somewhere between fantasy and reality. The Italian's tragic figures dwell in worlds which are as real and tormented as anything one might encounter in everyday life, but yet they are seen by the director and actors as merely fictive. The woman character in Aloisi's play rejects the idea that she lives a fantasy, as does the persistent father in *Sei personaggi...* Aloisi's "mujer" utters ¡Fantasía! ¡¡Fantasía!! (44) as she vehemently discards the idea that she is nothing more than a fantasy while Pirandello's father states rebelliously: "Pretence? Reality, sir, reality! (276). He knows full well that his tragic situation and that of his family is as real as anything one might encounter outside the confines of the theater.

"La mujer" has an even closer relationship to reality than the other characters for she is the symbol of the real woman who ultimately unleashes the forces which free the author from his debased and humiliating domestic situation. Until the author is able to untie himself from his wife's deceit, he cannot write the play, and thus liberate himself. Foster describes how the author "is unable to deal coherently with the drama of his own life, unable to rise above

being a two-bit actor in the cheap drama of his wife's transparent machinations" (108).

In addition, the phantom woman perceives herself to be superior to her real life counterpart because she is an idealized version of the author's past lover. The character comments that "Yo soy como él cree que ella es. Por lo que he sido en su pensamiento yo ya soy indestructible" (47). The woman claims the immortality of Pirandello's six characters or the timelessness of Quijote of Dante's Paola and Francesca while the real woman is a mere mortal.

Not only does Aloisi blend the world of the phantom figures with that of the author, but there is also considerable intermingling of the creatures of the imagination with the manager and the author's wife, plus a young would-be author. These symbols of the same world we walk in blend indiscriminately together with the oneiric world, effectively presented by Aloisi. The intermingling of disparate realms is particularly significant since the author initially separates them, and then consequently brings them in contact with each other. Aloisi creates the fictive realm in such an ambiguous fashion as to make us all wonder if there are indeed any differences between being inhabitants of the real world or characters playing a role.

The frustrated author seems unable to control these strong-willed phantoms of his imagination, in particular the tenacious "mujer". In one instance, she enters and makes veiled references to the author's deceitful wife. She then claims that she can easily play the role of an apparently model wife, while still deceiving her husband. Her provocations become so strident that the author futilely attempts to send her away: "Calla, maldita, calla..." (25). The phantom "marido" reluctantly enters, looking toward the author and "mujer," who are engaged in an animated dispute. The author's inability to control the female character is further demonstrated when the "marido" extols the concept of the ideal virtuous wife only to be mocked by the hysterical "mujer". Once again the enraged author tries to expel the rebellious character from the premises.

Many Pirandellian concerns are evident, including public reaction to the play and the author, as well as the author's reaction toward the spectators. One phantom in search of a role in the author's inner play suggests a plot similar to an Argentinean movie and confides to the author that the audience is not generally inclined to think very profoundly. Pirandello presents the same kind of satire in *Ciascuno a suo modo* where actors playing spectators debate the merits of Pirandello's plays.

In Aloisi's play phantasmagorical characters walk in and out of the author's home, constantly surprising and sometimes angering the bewildered and frustrated author. Aloisi in this way makes the fantasy appear as if it were the very real and commonplace occurrence of out of work actors seeking employment. For example, "Los testigos" enter reluctantly and with "paso automático y solemne" while the supposed creator ponders: ¿Y éstos quiénes son?" (30). The surprise phantom visitors then try to convince the author of their

importance and their ability to figure in the plot line if there is a duel for honor. They leave only upon being promised that they might actually be used in the play. The roles of the witnesses and other “fantasmas” are their lives. They live in the same ambiguous realm as do Pirandello’s plagued six characters who live fixed in their parts for eternity.

Another character simply armed “gaucho” enters, and he is even more perplexing to the author than the others: ¿Pero, a quién viene esto? (31). The gaucho insists on the need for his presence in the work as a “símbolo del alma nacional” (31). He urges the author to include him since the play lacks local color. After attempting to interrupt a love scene, the gaucho leaves grumbling. The disgruntled phantom repeatedly interrupts the work of the author and his creations. The harsh encounters between the author and the gaucho become increasingly hostile. Through episodes of this nature the supposedly disparate realms of reality and fantasy come crashing together. The author cannot control these characters any more than he can the situation with his wife. The symbolic importance of this inner conflict is demonstrated in the way that the author is unable to create a drama which does not reconstruct his own life situation.

There is indeed clear Pirandellian influence in *Nada de Pirandello, por favor* and yet this is no mere mechanical reproduction of the play. The play includes the same tensions between the real and the fantastic with the fundamental idea that the living room and the theater are one and the same. In both authors, the creative process is used to prove this, although in Aloisi there is an apparent struggle to deny the collision of the supposedly opposite realms. The manager gives strict instructions to the author not to create a Pirandellian play. The woman phantom, who longs to be human, insists on her ties to Pirandello’s six characters:

No te olvidas que eso le ocurre precisamente a los autores que ponen más alma en sus personajes. Y éstos viven, después, su propia vida... o no pueden vivirla como en *Seis Personajes*. de Pirandello (35).

Pirandello and Aloisi separate the real and fantastic characters and then proceed to break the same artificial barriers which they have created. In *Ciascuno a suo modo*, spectators invade the play, claiming the reproduction of their lives scandalously false, but then proceed to recreate the precise reality which they have furiously denied. There are several examples of the intermingling of different realms of reality in Aloisi. Phantoms and representatives of reality clash when: a new author enters asking for recognition by the author protagonist of *Nada de Pirandello, por favor*; the imaginary phantoms are very much in evidence in scenes with the author’s adulterous wife and manager; the real life counterpart of “la mujer” enters and is appraised by the other phantoms; and finally, there is interplay between the phantom “mujer” and the spectators.

Although the young author is listed by Aloisi as a real character, as

opposed to the imaginary phantoms, both realms unite when he appear to request that the protagonist author read the play which was submitted for a literary contest. Interestingly, the phantasmagorical figures react to the young man's entrance and demeanor with a combination of sarcasm and superiority. As he reads part of his work, some characters are stirred by the drama, and a critical appraisal of what they heard follows. This interaction amongst the characters is the same type of intermingling of spectator and character which Pirandello presents in *Ciascuno a suo modo* as supposed critics, representatives of the real world, comment mostly in deprecating fashion on the merits of Pirandello's plays. Here the phantoms discuss the worth of the play as if they were literary critics instead of imaginary creatures, as conflicting worlds unite. Aloisi makes imaginary characters literary critics, as the differences between the real and imaginary are made even more ambiguous. When the young author's play treats the themes of betrayal and frustrated love, the 'mujer' enthusiastically applauds saying: ¡Bien, Bien! (52) On the other hand, the "gaucho" rejects the whole idea of the play: "Ah hijana: A pesar del Froi, ése que me huele a cosa e gringo"... (56) Other characters comment on the work in criticism which ranges from real admiration to self-serving ways to enhance their own roles in the protagonist author's play, as Aloisi satirizes criticism and public reaction to theater.

In the beginning of the last act the author reads his play to his wife and the stage manager. The characters act out the author's words while the manager and wife provide a running commentary on the rehearsed play. Pirandello's influence is indeed very evident here, as the scene recalls *Sei Personaggi...* in which the actors attempt to reproduce the life of the six characters who in turn mock the falsified reproduction of their lives. There is also the kind of tension evident in *Tonight We Improvise* as the actors' hostility toward the manager lead them to physically eject him from the rehearsal. All levels of reality blend together in *Nada de Pirandello, por favor*, as Aloisi reminds us in his own unique way that the world is really a stage and each of us enacts inescapably fixed roles. The blending of worlds becomes even more explicit as the author's autobiographical inner play describing a man plagued by his unfaithful wife, creates a tension in the unique audience composed of the real life adulteress and her lover, who nervously react toward the sordid tale. After the bizarre recreation of the drama in which the author's words blend with the phantom's reproduction of the drama, the wife asks the manager to pay an advance to the dramatist. The manager nearly delivers the money to the wife, rather than the author. After her lover's departure, the wife complains of the mere five hundred pesos presented to her husband. What is most significant is that the phantoms react strongly to the unfolding of the author's real life drama. He desperately wishes to confront his wife with regard to her betrayal, but his timidity forces him to withdraw. The ghostly characters go so far as to provoke their hapless creator: "Díselo". ¡Es tu liberación!" (76) They gaze at the plagued author with

disapproval: "Mientras cruzadas de brazos clavaron en el autor miradas severas de reprobación" (76). The author's own fictive creations will attempt to force their own maker to abandon his deceitful and farcical marriage and start anew.

All barriers between the real and the fantastic come clashing together dramatically when the real-life version of the "la mujer" enters and the author finally finds the means to depart from his desperate domestic situation. Significantly, the phantom "mujer" refuses to meet with her flesh and blood counterpart. The other characters notice the tension apparent in their usually outspoken fellow phantom and one jokingly remarks: "Ven. No te vayas. Es la otra... la que es como tú. No huyas (riendo) ¡Tienes celos? (77).

There is indeed tension as the phantom feels that the real woman is her competitor. Aloisi presents the illusion of reality in yet another way reminiscent of *Sei personaggi...* as actors futilely attempt to play the roles of the six characters or *Ciascuno a suo modo*, as characters actually invade the stage to terminate the reconstruction of their real life story, only to recreate on stage what they violently proclaimed to be a complete fabrication. Aloisi's phantoms even go so far as to compare the two women. The real-life woman "tiene un encanto y una dulzura en los ojos que la hacen distinta de ti" (77). The two are thus presented on equal levels of reality, each autonomous and unique.

The obvious jealousy, the taunting by the other characters, and the difference between the character and her real-life counterpart, combine to illustrate the absolute independence of the woman and the other phantom characters. Although Aloisi calls them imaginary, these creations are not puppets manipulated by the author, as they demonstrate the same fierce autonomy as Pirandello's six characters. Life and the theater are so closely interwoven that they are made indistinguishable.

The real woman actually becomes the author's savior. His play and her fictive double provide him the courage and motivation to be liberated from his humiliating existence. The woman is the author's first love and she represents a purity and innocence which have been eliminated by his tainted life style. When the woman expresses interest in a career in the theater, the author comments ostensibly on the stage, but in actuality expresses his true feelings toward life: "El teatro es una senda engañosa — llena de espinas, de acechanzas, de sorpresas..." (80). When the author finally recognizes his lost love, he wishes to accompany her and start a new life. The passive writer is catapulted into action by the presence of his former lover and also her phantom counterpart who provoked him into rebellion and steered his play in the direction of his own tragic existence. Although the woman is initially dubious of his intentions, she is won over by the author's stirring declaration of love and they leave together. Significantly, the phantoms once again assume very human characteristics as they ponder what effects the author's new life will have on them. Putnam's commentary on Pirandello's characters reflects the situation of Aloisi's:

Everything lives... by the very fact of life, is endowed with form, and for that reason must die — except the work of art, which lives on forever in so far as it is possessed of form. But then there is the tragic and immanent conflict between life which is constantly in motion and constantly changing, and form which is fixed and immutable (8).

Aloisi's phantoms, in the same way as Pirandello's, are trapped in roles created by character, and if abandoned by authors, must be forced to roam randomly in a limbo which is neither fiction nor reality.

Aloisi utilizes the remarkable phantom 'mujer' to unite the fantastic realm with the audience. Büdel remarks on Pirandello's forging together these two disparate realms: "He does not intend merely to show how a play is put together, but to insinuate the internal play in such way as fuse in some measure stage and audience" (82). "La mujer" is no longer merely a phantom representing an oneiric world imagined by the author, but seems to inhabit the same world as the spectators themselves. The Aloisi character exhibits an autonomy matched by Pirandello's six characters. Starkie comments on the Italian's creations:

When a character is born, he says it acquires such individuality, such independence that it can release itself entirely from subservience to its author and appear in situations and conflicts for which it was never intended (212).

In this spirit of Pirandello, Aloisi's "mujer" goes beyond rebuking her fellow phantoms and proceeds to reprimand the manager Colombo as she claims the author's play was a success without being the commonplace romantic piece he had demanded. She explains that: "con un poco de emoción y un poco de buen humor llevados por esa curiosidad y esa iniquidad que el hombre se asoma a las almas..." (86) a play can indeed be a triumph. She continues to criticize the stage manager whose sole interest in theater is financial. "La mujer", on the other hand, is proud of the therapeutic value of the play in the author's life and of the characters' role in it: "como personajes hemos ayudado a nuestro autor salirse de su drama." (860). She expresses once again her desire to be as effective and sensitive as any real person. "La mujer" wished to alter the life of the author and succeeded in this objective. This remarkable character even speaks to the audience on the immortality of art. As in Pirandello's *Sei Personaggi*, the phantoms exist after the author's departure, remaining frozen in immortality and outlasting their creators.

In conclusion, this play with a satirical title does indeed have something of Pirandello as do many of the dramas inspired by Pirandello's visits to Argentina. Yet this is clearly no mere imitation, but a serious study of an author's confrontation with his own weakness. Foster comments:

...dramatists like Aloisi were able to understand that the fundamental contribution of the Italian writer was to go beyond the idea of the theater as an

illusion of life — a hypothesis predicated on the assumption that the later was a stable knowable and that the former was simply a matter of representational technique — and to see how the stage is a reduplication of the theater of life wherein we are actors in our own dramatic texts (106).

Aloisi's drama is a serious study of an author's confrontation with his own weakness. He is enlightened and escapes, provoked into action by his own creation. His characters are part of himself and Aloisi demonstrates them to be as real and sensitive as the author himself. Life and art blend together and the real and the stage are one and the same. The author effectively uses the devices of the theater to combine various elements of the real and fictive. Negliá rightfully insists that Aloisi's work is serious, despite the farcical title and tone (104). It is essential that *Nada de Pirandello* be studied in detail for its theatrical value, not merely quoted in passing to indicated Pirandello's overwhelming influence in Argentina.

NOTES

1 All quotations from the play are from: Enzo Aloisi, *Nada de Pirandello por favor. Farsa sin violencias en más de dos actos con algo de prólogo y un epílogo probable*. Estrenada en BA 15 de Abril, 1937.

2 The author in the inner play parallels Pirandello's own situation in real life. The Italian dramatist confided: "I wrote the *Six Characters* to get rid of a nightmare." Putnam, p. 11.

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