

**Pirandello's Unrealized Film, *Treatment for Six Characters*: An Interview with Film Director and Artist Anne-Marie Creamer**

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Throughout the last ten years of his life, Pirandello wrote multiple treatments for the filming of his great work, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. None were ever realized. We are left with only paper trails, leading to dropped contracts, and the nostalgia for a film that could have realized Pirandello's cinematic ideals: film has a unique ability to show the birth of artistic creation.

The *Treatment for Six Characters* is not a film version of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*; it is a work all its own. It depicts Pirandello's creative process: not just the writing, but the very birth of the Characters in the mind of the Author. And the Author is Pirandello himself, named. This makes the *Treatment* even more interesting, as Pirandello himself becomes one of his Characters, asking to live in us. For 90 years, this film has waited.

In her 2014 film of the *Treatment*, Anne-Marie Creamer, artist and art film director, walks right into a strongly marked absence of representation, but her work does more than produce Pirandello's unrealized film. Among other things, Creamer participates in the wider life of the *Treatment* itself. She respects what we might call the person of the *Treatment*: conceived and aged and eternally unborn. Her work reveals the *Treatment* itself as one of Pirandello's Characters, asking, like the Father in Pirandello's original play, "to live, just for a moment, in you." Creamer understands the great weight of that call—"We want to live!"—which weighed on Pirandello and weighs on the occupiers of the Teatro Valle Bene Comune; and her film allows us to feel that urgency as well.

The absence of Pirandello's unrealized film is at the center of Creamer's *Treatment*; it is born from this absence. It is, therefore, a pregnant absence. Creamer's film—whose every shot quivers expectantly—both delivers and stays heavy with that pregnant space which invites creation beyond her own.

It is an act of humility. Through her disciplined withholding, Creamer is participating in the *mise en abyme* that she mentions: she maintains the pregnant absence that gave life to her project so that the audience, too, can give life. In this way, we—herself included—participate in Pirandello’s creative process, giving life to characters beyond us. It touches on perhaps the greatest human calling, to allow something to live through you that has life beyond you. Giving birth to something eternal: the ultimate *mise en abyme*. And isn’t this, after all, Pirandello’s call to us as well?

Here I offer the edited transcript of my interview with Anne-Marie Creamer on her motivations, approaches, and insights into Pirandello’s unrealized *Treatment*. In our exchange we discussed everything from her own interest in this piece to questions about how re-envisioning it as a contemporary film both translates and also amplifies Pirandello’s own preoccupations and ideas. What emerges is also a testament to the ways in which adaptation can bring new life to Pirandello’s works and serve as both a faithful reproduction as well as an insightful commentary on his vision—nearly a century after the premiere of his epoch-making play.

**LS:** *What drew you to Pirandello in the first place?*

**AMC:** My interest in Pirandello comes from the perspective of my being a visual artist, and it started long ago while I was a painting student at the Royal College of Arts in London. At that time, in the late 1980’s, I sometimes painted images of people in rooms loosely based on my interest in Samuel Beckett, trying to capture the fact of a person standing in a room.

During a tutorial one of my tutors remarked that a recent painting reminded him of Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. I was in my early twenties and had absolutely no idea who Pirandello was or what *Six Characters* was but on researching Pirandello was delighted at the connection my tutor had made to the ambiguous kind of presence I was trying to achieve as a painter. Since that point I have always been intrigued by *Six Characters*; its “meta” qualities and the sheer innovation of Pirandello’s premise have always stayed with me.

**LS:** *What drew you to this particular film of the unrealized "Treatment" specifically?*

**AMC:** In more recent years the possibility of going to Rome arose through the work of the British School at Rome, and in preparing research about the city I found out that Pirandello lived there. Shortly afterwards I came across the book *Pirandello and Film*, by Nina da Vinci Nichols and Jana O'Keefe Bazzoni, which, in addition to exploring Pirandello's wider interest in the early history of film, also outlined his plan to make a film, not of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* directly but instead to represent a fictional version of the creative process leading to his famous play. Of course the real event of the premiere of *Six Characters* at Teatro Valle in Rome was a disaster for Pirandello—he had to flee the theater having coins thrown at him—and it is interesting that the final part of *Treatment for Six Characters* also concludes with a fictionalized version of the historical event of the premiere of the play at that same theater. The link between the two works forms a curious temporal loop, connected by the stage at Teatro Valle, which Pirandello seems to have conceived on several levels as a space of becoming. This relationship to site and re-enactment, especially where a historical site is also a place of fiction, speaks to contemporary visual art where similar ideas have gained currency in recent years.

**LS:** *What motivates this short film?*

**AMC:** Reading *Treatment for Six Characters* it became apparent that as well as the under-lying formal aspects of the work it is also an exploration of the ethics of the creative process. The major plot of the work is the inability of the famous Author, clearly modeled on Pirandello himself, to see how he has projected his own creative fantasy onto a real, struggling, Roman family, resulting in a tragedy largely of his own making. The subject of the ethical responsibility of the author or artist within wider economies of production of their work remains prescient, if not more urgent now. I also enjoy that Pirandello created one work as a form of fictional documentary from the basis of another. Within the context of contemporary art, which is my own area, that is incredibly current and ambitious. *Treatment for Six Characters* is a kind of *mise en abyme*.

**LS:** *What would you say your goals are with this short film?*

**AMC:** I came to this work interested in how it might be possible to make cinema without using film in conventional ways. Previously I had made a prologue to one of my own works, *Meeting the Pied Piper in Brasov*, focusing on a journey to Transylvania where I encountered a group of dancing Sekely children in the town of Brasov. Although I had described this journey many times there is no film footage or photographs of the journey or the moments leading up-to the encounter with the children. Instead, with reference to silent movies, I tried to tell the tale via 52 black and white drawings, which have become the film I can no longer make. As well as narrative images I also painted the film's opening and closing title sequences, film directions to fade up or down. Of course this helped me recognize a way to approach *Treatment for Six Characters*, which to begin with I was also going to draw out.

**LS:** *What were the key steps in developing your approach?*

**AMC:** As in *Meeting the Pied Piper in Brasov, a prologue*, I was keen to maintain the essential elements of story while also maintaining a sense in which Pirandello's film remained a kind of phantom. This is true even though I would use all the objects and many of the places of Pirandello's *Treatment for Six Characters*: the rooms and objects of Pirandello's home in Rome feature strongly, the pen and type-writer he might have used to write the work, his bed, his books, his personal objects. There are pictures of Marta Abba, who was an obvious muse for him, for this work and others. I also got access to a real fashion atelier in Rome, the Micol Fontana Fondazione, which becomes the rooms of Madame Melloni's fashion atelier. Crucially I got access to Teatro Valle, which was under political occupation at the time. Being able to use footage from these sites gives the work, and Pirandello's plot, indexical authority even as Pirandello's work remains a conceptual, virtual proposition: I compel the audience to "make" Pirandello's film in their mind as they watch my film unfold. As in my earlier work I have tried to wrap one film around Pirandello's absent, unrealized film.

Trying to pull this off was always going to be very complex and it became clear to me that I would have to carefully

calibrate the relationship between the imagery, the use of sound, and the voice of the Narrator. I worked hard to develop the interrelationship between the visual, textural, and aural story-world of the film, and also found a great actor, Norman Mozzato, a veteran Italian actor who had previously worked with Andrei Tarkovsky, who performed as my Narrator. Norman gives a wonderfully resonant narration of the plot of Pirandello's film. I asked him to animate and fully possess the characters and plot of the work so that his voice also conjures up the absent film for the audience. It took me some time to edit the work, as the timing of the relationship of image, sound, voice and subtitle have to be precisely calibrated so that there is just enough time for the audience to also see their imagined version of Pirandello's film while also seeing my film unfold. It was a difficult balancing act. The goal for the work was to see if I could pull all of this off, as it would mark a formal innovation for me if it could be achieved.

**LS:** *Congratulations, then! Do you have a specific audience in mind?*

**AMC:** In terms of audience I come from the art world and so my first intention is to see if the work can have a life within galleries and museums. As the work is so recently finished plans for this are taking shape at the moment. The response by curators and artists who have seen it has been incredibly positive. The best I have ever experienced. I must say the British School at Rome have also been incredibly supportive and are at this time working towards a larger screening event. Once the circulation of the work in the art world has gathered momentum, I have also been encouraged to consider film festivals, which I will do at a later date. That will be a new industry for me. I have also been delighted and surprised that the response by Pirandello scholars seems to have been so positive. I was not sure if my attempt to make *Treatment for Six Characters* would be regarded with skepticism, especially as I am not from the world of literary criticism and as I have adapted some of the original text, but in fact people appear to have been very engaged.

**LS:** *In fact, in some respects the film seems to be a close realization of Pirandello's Treatment, and in others it seems that you have taken liberties and made your own adaptation.*

**AMC:** While I was in Rome and working at the British School at Rome I used to joke with the archeologists that Pirandello's text was every bit as much of a ruin as the remains of the buildings they were working with, which is to say that any transcription of a work from an older time is always an act of interpretation, made according to the conditions of the time you are working in. Pirandello was aware that the theatrical production of his plays was always to some extent a re-interpretation, necessary for the medium and the work to come alive in a new situation. I view the act of transcription as an ethical, creative act.

**LS:** *How did you go about determining the balance of these elements?*

**AMC:** One must always draw out elements of an historical work that are prescient to the contemporary moment while also being careful not to put words in a dead author's mouth. In terms of the adaptation of the text *Treatment for Six Characters* is exactly what it sounds like: a film treatment, which is really a series of prose paragraphs outlining the plot that are used in negotiations with film studios and producers in order to proceed to realization. So, *Treatment for Six Characters* as a text was intended as a point of negotiation rather than being a final, published literary work. As you know, Pirandello wrote three such treatments between 1925 and 1935: and the last version, written in 1935, is the one I have worked with. It was used to facilitate a conversation between Pirandello, film studios in Los Angeles, and the Austrian theater director, Max Reinhardt, and the German film director, Josef von Sternberg.

As you know it does look as if the project would have finally proceeded, but negotiations were stopped on the event of Pirandello's death in 1936. Nina da Vinci Nichols and Jana O'Keefe Bazzoni's book includes a copy of a letter sent to Pirandello's assistant after his death; there Reinhardt and von Sternberg were still trying to proceed with the project and were rather despairing at the slow progress. They outlined about 6-8 points of criticism about Pirandello's *Treatment*, suggesting revisions. These included advising a less harsh approach to the "real" daughter of the family, who may or may not have been a prostitute; but they also encourage a more visual, less repetitive approach.

Many of these points appear to have been made to Pirandello before his death. He had conceded that the text was a “work in progress.” Many of Reinhardt/von Sternberg’s revisions have made it into my adaptation. I have made the question of the girl’s being a prostitute more ambiguous, and this also serves the wider project of making it clear that the projective imagination of the Author is feverishly at work throughout the film—in turn making the ethics of the Author/Pirandello’s creative process more stark, as it seems was Pirandello’s intention. It was also clear that a number of repeated plot points and motifs were present in the work, but Pirandello may not have realized that these could also be handled visually, that the integrity of his project could also be maintained through textual, visual and sonic approaches.

**LS:** *What was behind your decision to use shots of contemporary elements (modern cars, the Teatro Valle Bene Comune flag, and so on)?*

**AMC:** The revisions I made helped me distill the work while also remaining faithful to his original premise. I added a prologue to the work. This is made very clear, the credits for Pirandello’s work start after the prologue ends. Given the fact I had worked so extensively in Teatro Valle and that the theater was at that point under a political occupation I wanted to find a way to link Pirandello’s characters—proposed as still present, if hidden, at Valle 92 years later—with the contemporary occupiers of the theatre, the group Teatro Valle Bene Comune. Taking my cue from Pirandello’s implicit aspiration to link *Treatment for Six Characters* with the historical fate of his play at Valle, I thought to take this further and to place the urgency of Pirandello’s characters’ need to live, to be heard, within the political intensities and urgencies of the occupation. Both Pirandello’s *Treatment for Six Characters* and Teatro Valle Bene Comune have moral, ethical concerns at their center; the moral dilemmas and obfuscations of the individual creator measured here against the wider, moral context of the arts in relationship to society, which is offered by Teatro Valle Bene Comune. Teatro Valle Bene Comune’s creed is “Like water, like air, let’s reclaim culture,” and of course Pirandello’s characters want to make an act of reclamation too, of the trajectory of a more

fully realized life. Both are ways of saying: "We want to live!" The prologue features footage that was originally out-takes from filming the sequence of the Mother's confrontation with Pirandello at Valle, which was interrupted several times. We filmed that sequence at 9am, and the actress Simona Senzacqua had to run screaming through the theater. This woke up people sleeping on the upper floors of the theater, to comical effect. Against these sequences I put the imagined voices of Pirandello's characters, who are proposed as witnessing the production of my film. The form of the Greek chorus seemed apt. Using rhythmic speech and the sounds of the body hitting drums, the floor or clapping (in fact my characters stomp and hit the floor throughout the film), the chorus directly address the audience about the social and political significance of the work they are about to see, as is typical of the form.

**LS:** *Can you say more, for example, about the decision not to use actors?*

**AMC:** As I have already stated the decision not to use actors throughout the work, apart from one crucial sequence when the character of the 'real' Mother confronts Pirandello/ the Author, reflects my concern, particular to my practice, about maintaining Pirandello's *Treatment for Six Characters*, as a phantom object and in getting the audience to imagine Pirandello's work while watching my film. In effect viewing my work is to watch two films simultaneously: my film—some say it is a kind of documentary, some have remarked it is a horror film—which is at the same time wrapped around Pirandello's still absent film.

**LS:** *Do you think of the departure from Pirandello's expressionist aesthetic as a modernization of the piece, or is that motivated by other factors?*

**AMC:** In fact I feel the expressionist aesthetic is present, the work does feature the use of shadow, and weather is used to expressive effect throughout the work. I also use clouds, the moon, the relationship between light and dark, the pulsing light of streetlights, together with large dark trees swaying under the moon throughout the work. Of course because the original



German expressionist cinema of the 1920's and 30's, developed from visual reuses of the Gothic, has its own clichés, I was careful not to use that aesthetic wholesale. The work is predicated on keeping a little distance from Pirandello's *Treatment*, so that some elements of it are given over to the imagination of the audience, as I mentioned earlier. There is a level of abstraction in my approach to the work, and in leaving some elements to the audience it is important to also respect the intelligent engagement of the audience to see the film in their terms. My use of sound is also important in this respect.

**LS:** *The use of sound in the film is very striking. To some extent the sounds seem to do a large bit of the work that Pirandello's treatment had originally ascribed to visual effects like mist, superimposition, and so on.*

**AMC:** Thank-you! There was as much work put into the soundtrack as the visuals in fact. Rather than artificially creating mist or fog I was keen to document the sites of the film but to heighten the sense of fiction through sound, using sound in effect to help create a "story-world".

This entailed a counterintuitive combination of a documentary approach to the visuals, (even though the overall visual aesthetic of the film has been developed so that the visual surfaces, colors and textures are quite lush), which were combined with a use of sound that suggested that such locations have a fictive dimension. For instance, added to voice is location sound, by which I mean the sound of objects and straight-forward cause and effect, i.e. if a car passes or some-one walks into the frame, or a flash of lightening is seen in the sky, you will also hear them. But added to this are layers of audio that lend atmosphere, including minimal music, plus layers of low frequency sounds.

**LS:** *How would you describe the film's sounds?*

**AMC:** In terms of how I organized the soundtrack I conceived of a sound map for the whole work in which firstly I divided the film into two connecting but separate story-worlds. In the first are Pirandello's characters, present from the prologue at the beginning of the work and then signaled by the aggressive

sound of stomping the floor. This bodily sound, as I said earlier, seemed to me to be redolent of the call to the body, a form that the Greek chorus is known to use. Maintaining the sound of the stomping feet throughout the film also allowed me to suggest that the characters perpetually hover just outside the story-world of Pirandello's film. The aggression of the stomp also punctuates the wider work, giving it further rhythm and structure but also signaling the characters' sense of urgency, the desire to break through the world of the story in order to live. The second story-world is the world of the plot of Pirandello's *Treatment for Six Characters* and for this I conceived of a structure of inter-related sounds and music.

**LS:** *How did you conceive of them and execute them?*

**AMC:** Firstly, there are low frequency sounds, which with the right sub-woofer speakers have a real physical force you can literally feel in your body as you watch the film and which are intended to suggest a hidden force or pressure trying to break through the façade of the visuals. These low sounds are present from the beginning but disappear after the appearance of the character of the Mother, after which the dominant sounds change to much thinner, metallic and glass sounds, such as the glass violin. These are intended to reflect the more fragile, melancholy, and fatalistic state of mind of the author as he realizes the damage he has created.

I also make use of musical instruments throughout. I was clear that there should be no melody in the work; instead I wanted a more abstract use of music, fitting with the latent abstraction in the wider film, in for example my use of visual detail, weather and the overall relation of sound to image throughout the film. In fact I did not employ a musician but instead bought the rights to sounds of single cello, violin or piano notes, plus one or two cello sequences that were more staccato in character. I then placed these single notes into the film-score one note at a time, looking to build rhythm and tension at key points. As you can imagine using this method it took some time to develop the sound world of the film. When this was done I worked with an Italian sound engineer, based in London, who helped me "sweeten" the sound, really just making the sound as clean as possible. He also helped

me balance the overall elements of the soundtrack.

**LS:** *I found the vibrations of the cello sounds particularly moving.*

**AMC:** Some sequences have already generated a strong reaction from the audience, such as the point when the Author/Pirandello begins to imagine overtly his fictional version of the Roman family for the first time. Rather than use superimposition, which I would view as unnecessary, I show a large tree blowing in the wind on a dark night against the moon. Against this is played a staccato cello together with Norman's evocative voice. I believe this combination invites the viewer to use their imagination to see this transformation taking place. In effect handling the representation this way invites the audience to mirror the imaginative action of Pirandello's text so that rather than seeing the transformation literally the audience also imagine, as the Author/ Pirandello does, the fictional family emerging. Two simultaneous projective imaginations are at work at that moment, which is why I think the audience seems to like that point so much. Learning what to leave out is also crucial in the construction of any art-work, a point I believe Pirandello would have appreciated.

**LS:** *What kind of interplay do you envision between the personal and the creative in Pirandello's Treatment?*

**AMC:** When I introduced my film for a screening at the Italian Cultural Institute in London, I stated that although Pirandello's text does not consistently name the Author—mainly he is the "famous Author"—it is clear this is Pirandello. The Author is cited as being the writer of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* so there is no mistaking this point. I have also read that in the negotiations with Max Rheinhardt, who knew him well, Pirandello had agreed that he would play the character of the Author in the film they were intending to make. Of course this never happened as Pirandello died soon after, but given the nature of the story—that the author wields such a destructive force in the plot of an examination of the ethics of the creative process—I view it as fascinating that Pirandello was willing to implicate himself within the questions he had chosen to explore. There is a level of risk-taking in this work that is laudable on his part. Given the potential of this

I viewed it as essential to site Pirandello's unmade film within the locations and objects of his life. I do point out though that as plausible as the plot of *Treatment for Six Characters* is, it is a fictional representation of his creative process.

**LS:** *What about the fact that Pirandello himself and then his heirs never succeeded in making Six Characters into a film?*

**AMC:** The fact the work was never made in Pirandello's life-time made it more attractive for me and was one of my motivations. The missing object of Pirandello's film is something I have tried to preserve in the structure I gave to my film. It is also interesting, tantalizing even, to consider what might have been had Pirandello succeeded; it seems that at each key point in time in 1925, 1928 and 1935 it would have been a completely different film, as the context around Pirandello changed with time as well.

**LS:** *Does that affect you as a director and your choices for this short film?*

**AMC:** I, too, would have loved to have seen what Josef von Sternberg and Max Reinhardt might have achieved with Pirandello. However, I am clear I have not made their film. That would be a foolish under-taking. I could never be them, have their precise configuration of talents. I live in an entirely different moment, am a different gender, nationality, and bring to the project differing possibilities as well as restrictions.

**LS:** *Lastly, in what ways has your view of Pirandello, Six Characters, and/or the Treatment changed over the course of your project?*

**AMC:** Of course over time my relationship to Pirandello's *Treatment for Six Characters* has deepened and become more nuanced as my insight into the work and its structure developed. Initially I was aware of the ways the text paralleled concerns within contemporary art, especially the texts meta qualities, but in grappling with the *Treatment* and seeing ways to make it again I gained increasingly awareness of the works structure, this includes its weaknesses as well as its strengths. After noticing its "meta"

qualities I enjoyed understanding the ways the work examined the ethics of the creative process and the ways Pirandello seemed willing to implicate himself within this. I'm also drawn to, and not yet finished with, the ways *Treatment* unites with the event of the historical premier of *Six Characters*, using the theatrical stage of Teatro Valle as a site for acts of 'becoming' on a number of competing levels - the characters need for life, the sudden moral insight and empathy of the Author, the self-possession of the Mother: the act of creativity and the site this takes place at are placed at the nexus of competing emotions; the desire for a coming into being, of an art work, of the characters, is set against acute grief at the losses that this is predicated on for the subjects of the work, and for the ways the artist/ writer and audience is implicated within this. The ways those strands are inter-woven are Pirandello's achievement, I have tried to recognize this and tried to materialize it within the work I have made.

Making the work at the time I did, in late 2012 with postproduction over 2013/14, coincided with a specific time in Rome in which by a combination of luck and tenacity I managed to gain access to many of the key historical sites of the work, namely Pirandello's home, a famous fashion atelier, and crucially Teatro Valle. The chance to work at Valle during the situation of a political occupation did force me into re-think the potential of the work within a context of political intensity. It is an interesting thought that if that had not happened I may not have considered the political dimensions of the work. It is not lost on me that it turns out that there was only a brief period in time when it was possible to make this work. In Autumn 2014 the Teatro Valle Bene Comune were forced out of the theater by the new major of Rome. Although there are plans to sustain the organization its true to say it now hangs in the balance. So, if I had gone to Rome earlier or was arriving now it would not have been possible to make this work.

*LS: What's next?*

**AMC:** While researching the *Treatment for Six Characters* I also began to study the later stagings of *Six Characters* and have now come to the conclusion that *Treatment for Six Characters* will now be part of a larger project for me. As I said I originally went out to

Rome to draw Pirandello's film, which has been happening, but I will now also make a final work which takes another evening and another staging of *Six Characters* as its subject; just after its Rome premiere *Six Characters* went onto premiere in the UK, in a theatre in Holborn, London in the hands of an avant-garde Russian director fresh from the Russian Revolution. This Russian Director, Fyodor Kommissarzhevky was also a colleague of Stanislavski, he was at this time an important advocate of Stanislavski 's ideas, namely the invention of what would later become Method Acting, when the line between actor and character took on new implications. That theatre no longer exists, although the site does. So eventually I intend that my version of *Treatment for Six Characters*, the drawn version, & that final Holborn work will form a kind of triptych.

**LS:** *Thank you for your thoughtfulness, I look forward to your upcoming projects.*



through a dimly lit street and by  
a lamp notices a young Girl...

*Treatment for Six Characters*  
Photo courtesy of Anne-Marie Creamer  
Special thanks to the Teatro Valle Bene Comune



*Treatment for Six Characters*  
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