Alley thinks it is

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Luigi Pirandello is the latest playwright to be produced at the Alley Theater. He appropriately stands in the company of such influential playwrights as O'Neill and Shaw, who have also been performed this season by Nina Vance's company.

Pirandello, who won the Nobel Prize in 1934, has exerted considerable influence on the modern theater. As one of the forerunners of the Theater of the Absurd, a genre which has been eminently popular in recent years, he assumes special significance for the modern theater devotee.

Development Study

Not that Pirandello need be regarded only as an interesting developmental study. 'Right You Are (If You Think You Are)' stands on its own dramatic merit. Written in 1917, it is a highly dramatic tragedy of man's failure to consider the impact of their actions, and play in sympathetic terms. More superficially, the play is a satire on the mediocrity of middle-class; and in drawing satire and tragedy together, Pirandello concludes truth is relative.

'Right You Are (If You Think You Are)' takes place in a small Italian town, capital of a province, in the home of Councillor Agazzi. Agazzi's wife, daughter, and neighbors for a sort of perpetually noisy "chorus" that is antagonistic to a new government secretary Ponza. Subordinate of the Councillor, Ponza is an upstart man who minds his own business. His crime, in the eyes of this "chorus," is that he is a young, mother-in-law, Signora Frola, lives in a separate house from his own; and Agazzi's wife is never allowed to be with her mother.

Question of Sanity

This private family quirk leads to extensive speculation on the part of the town's insensitive inhabitants. The question finally becomes one of sanity; either Ponza or his mother-in-law is insane. Agazzi uses his nous and force to bring the case to Signora Frola to reveal the true nature of the situation. The result is disastrous — Ponza, his wife, and Signora Frola leave town, emotionally scarred and rightfully bitter about the useless and selfish interference into their lives by the local gentry. Fittingly, then, the problem of sanity is never resolved into elements of "truth" and "falsehood."

The most important character in the production has little significance in the development of the plot: Lambertu Laudici is Agazzi's brother-in-law, and the normative character in the play. He constantly reminds Agazzi, his sister, and their friends that they are dealing in trivial matters. As the household takes sides about the sanity issue, Laudici points out that each person is right, and speculation if he really believes in his decision; hence, the play's title. This is Pirandello's philosophy; it is rooted in relativism. Because the objective truth does not exist for Laudici, the situation seems trivial but attacks this meddlesome group of people from philosophical grounds. These characters destroy people in the course of their speculation. Herein lies the true danger in accepting an absolute truth. The role is didactic in the extreme; Joseph Ruskin, playing it in a Mephisto-like manner, turns in one of the finest acting jobs of the performance.

Against Chorus

Perhaps the most critical role in the play, from a dramatic standpoint, is that of Signora Frola. Both old and a recluse, she takes the brunt of the abuse. Virginia Payne, noted nationally for her interpretation of the part, is compelling in the role, turning the observer irrevocably against the narrow Agazzi "chorus."

The other roles are also well acted. The Agazzis and their coteries of self-righteous speculations; they dissect Ponza and Signora Frola without remorse. The striking contrast of this group with the helpless victims of their conjectures, and also with Laudici, is the essence of the play's satire. The appearance of the voice of Signora Frola at the climactic moment: enforces the image of useless cruelty and provides the final condemnation of the "chorus."

Blantly Didactic

The Alley has been advertising the play as a comedy and "drama." The title, however, and the physical overtones, a policy which is naive, as well as misleading. It should, rather, be regarded as a serious attempt on the playwright's part to Viet Nam and sociology will social credo. If the Agazzi "chorus" is ludicrous, it is for its narrowness rather than its wit. And if Pirandello has created a mystery, it is one that is never solved.