The Brick Taken Out in Six Characters in Search of an Author

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Abstract

Deconstruction is no unified body of principles or methods applied neatly to text, rather a number of slightly different points of view and modes of practice take shelter under the paradoxical title 'deconstruction. So it sometimes even seems more appropriate to use it in the plural form 'deconstructions', nevertheless Bressler suggests a convenient step – by – step procedure in a deconstructive reading: discover the binary operations that govern a text, comment on the values , concepts and ideas behind these operations, reverse these present binary operations, dismantle previously held world views, accept the possibility of various levels of a text based on the new binary inversions, and allow the meaning of the text to be undecidable. Bressler's, although nothing more than a convenient method haunted by oversimplification proves to be useful when reading a text. We will use it in this paper to help us trace the course of the text to find the loose brick in Millerian terms which ruins the whole building if it is taken out.

Introduction

Binary oppositions seem to be as old as man and as universal as thinking itself. Human beings seem to have had a dual system of categorizing things from the dawn of history. Primitive man was aware of what threatened him, his family and his health as opposed to what was beneficial and could protect him against the threats, a binary opposition. What could be eaten was an opposite of what could not. The animal that rendered him were the opposite of those that did not. Darkness of the night often limited man and invited him to sleep, while in the light of the day he could manage his affairs. The position of fruits located high on tall trees was not the same as those he could easily reach. The enemy who injured and limited him was simply the opposite of the friend who cared for him. Warm/cold, up/down, day/night, wild/domestic, high/low, the sky/the earth and an infinite number of other binary oppositions were as natural for man to make as the difference he felt between what he liked and what he did not.

Among the systems of thought man has created himself, the Manechean and its dual basis is well known. Everything has an opposite in this system and each binary opposition thus established is directly related to one major binary opposition: good/bad, because the establishing of each binary opposition is associated with a value judgment. This is, therefore, nothing new in the history of human thought, but the rise of structuralism once more brought it into the fore and threw new light on it. Ferdinand de Saussure built his Structuralist Linguistics on the basis of difference[1]. Difference, inevitably contains opposition. A word in Saussurian system of thought signifies because it is different from any other word within the linguistic system. Even on a lower level binary oppositions are at work, v is not f because the former is voiced, the latter voiceless, the p found in spot is not the same as the one in pole because one is unaspirated, the other aspirated. Jonathan Culler another influential structuralist who looked for a finite number of rules that enabled the reader to make sense of an infinite number of literary works had to appeal to binary oppositions[1]. The knowledge of rules underlying literary works and internalized consciously or unconsciously by the reader, Culler dubs literary competence[1]. It helps the reader organize his new experience of the new text on the basis of his experience of previous texts. A major rule that helps the reader with his organization the new data as well as his former experience is the classification of textual elements in pairs of two opposing items. Taking side with one and treating the second as the other, the unwanted and the one to be kept at a distance, the reader now knows how to handle the textual material put at his disposal.

Derrida[2], the founding father of deconstruction begets his unique way of approaching texts exactly by a rethinking of binary oppositions. His novelty and greatness lies in his rejection of the opposition claimed to exist between each pair of binary opposition. Things are not opposed to one another as we have always supposed. Night is not the opposite of day, or Satan that of neither God, nor bad adversaries of good. They are rather, complementary and supplementary. The existence of one always presupposes that of the other. There would no day, if there was not a night. Good is desperately in need of bad. It has to produce, reproduce and maintain a concept of bad if it is itself to exist as good. There is no absolute good, no absolute bad either. Good has the semen of bad with it. It carries bad as a mother carries a child, so is bad, even worse than that. They are mingled, contaminated with each other. That is true of all other binary oppositions. Before Derrida everything had an opposite.

They were separated from one another by a fixed distance, engaged always in an incessant war, having nothing to do with one another. Derrida argued forcefully against this. He showed that good as a pure homogeneous concept is a myth, so is bad, so is any other concept held, from Plato, as distinct from its opposite: man, animal, essence, God, beginning, end, origin, stability, crisis, etc. We should give up our old way of thinking about things[2].

Luigi Pirandello's _Six Characters in Search of on Author_ like any other text has to be received through language into which opposition and numerous binary oppositions have woven themselves[3]. Since there is no way out of textuality and language, even those who wish to avoid such distinctions have no choice. Pirandello also has woven countless binary opposition into his play: author/text, author/character, actor/character, husband/ wife, father/daughter, real/imaginary, objective/ subjective, life/art, pure/impure, legitimate/ illegitimate, etc. are a few examples. As a true humorist sketched in his own _On Humor_, Pirandello was able to see things from two contradictory points of view. To him truth was necessarily of a paradoxical nature[4]. This is a partial restatement of what Derrida and other deconstructionists[5] sought. Therefore, Pirandello consciously questions the stability and validity of many of the binary oppositions, so that his play seems to be in De Manian phraseology, a text conscious of its own deconstruction[6]. In the section to follow we examine the play from a deconstructionist point of view. For the sake of conveniency, Bressler's procedure[7] is followed. The objective is to take out the loose brick in the structure of the text to see its sudden collapse, to use a metaphor of J.Hillis Miller's[8].

Discussion

What is an author? An author creates a text. A text creates an author. A creator is created by what he creates. A work does not begin from the beginning. A work does not end when it ends. What is static is dynamic and what is real is imaginary. What is central is peripheral and what is marginal stands at the center. What is a center? Can a father be a lover and can a daughter stand for a mistress? Does moral healthiness lead to incest? Unimaginable "harm comes from good we are doing"[3].

Questions asked above may seem strange and the statements are certainly paradoxical. But this study is trying to show how they are reconciled (or denied?) in _Six Characters in Search of an Author_ by Luigi Pirandello by that play's removal of any center. In fact, according to deconstructionists a text creates (a) center(s) by utilizing binary oppositions to abandon the free play of meaning and to avoid the surplus of meaning which is resulted from a process of difference and deference, while at the same time dismantling itself so that finally the text is unreadable, undecidable, every reading of it being a misreading[9].

In addition to the binary oppositions such as author/text, real/imaginary, central/marginal and good/bad mentioned

above, this section is going to deal with others, for instance, author/character, actor/character, actor/audience, objective/subjective, I/i, art/life, major play/minor play, director/author, character in the script/script in the character, widow/wife, legitimate/ illegitimate, pure/impure, compassion/cruelty, reality/illusion and other binary oppositions found in _Six Characters_ and show how they are already deconstructed by the play, how the boundaries are blurred, how fair can be foul, and foul/fair as Shakespeare puts it in his _Macbeth_ and finally, how the play renders itself unreadable, undecidable by decentring itself. Briefly, the question of center, how it is made in and dismantled by the play is the major question we try to tackle here.

From the very title _"Six Characters in Search of an Author"_ a binary opposition establishes itself: character/author and the question arises: which comes first? The character or the author? It may remind us of the question of the hen and egg which is given up as irresolvable, insoluble leading to no answer. But here more is at stake than a question that leads to no answer since it is integrated with the set of other binary oppositions responsible for creation of the center in the play.

Interesting enough to notice, the characters are in search of an author, thus they suppose a life of their own, independent of the author. They are present, imposing themselves on the director and the actors; therefore, they are associated with presence, in search of an author that is absent, this leading to another binary opposition: presence/absence. Furthermore, they are insistent and compelling, they urge the director to write their unwritten half, they impress the actors and in short, they do what they can to achieve their goal, namely, find an author. So it is truly legitimate to suppose that they are active which needs its opposite, passive, to signify. Passivity is, on the one hand, characteristic of the director and the actors whose rehearsal is stopped by the characters' entrance and who have to obey them, on the other, associated with the author who because of his/her absence is more than passive. Again, active/ passive, form another binary opposition woven into the texture of the play. In fact, the characters go so far in their activeness that they "step out of [their] part ...proposing things, explaining things" that is exactly what paves the way for their fall from the status of a character to that of an author[3].

A character thus assumes the status of more than a character. A character turns into an author and that is the starting point for the fabric of the binary opposition to crack, especially when the author is depicted as a character in the hands of the characters he himself created. What is a passive agent in the mercy of the forces exercised on the part of creatures that tell him what to do, how to write, what to include and what to exclude if he is not a character in the sense of a puppet? After all, is not the author sought by the characters in _Six Characters_ another character? Certainly s/he is a character, even less active and less important than the rest of characters because of his/her absence.

An author, thus, is not the source of creativity, originality or inspiration as expected from authors. Neither is a character a passive puppet ready to take the role that an author would offer him/ her. They simply change their roles. An author is a character and a character an author. A possible objection to our claim could be that however active the characters may be in play and however passive and puppet-like the author may seem, they are all-character and author- the product of an author's labor, namely, they are created by Luigi Pirandello, therefore, an author is the active creator of the characters. On the face of it, it may seem reasonable, but the things are not that simple when it comes to creation.

Creation and originality as aspects of authorship pose further questions how legitimate the claim of an author to originality could be? With regard to the character an author creates, is it possible to distinguish the creator from the created? In other words, is creator/created a solid binary opposition? A literary work, no doubt, dwells on language the building blocks of it being the words and grammatical relations into which the author is born, that is, when the author is born they already exist, therefore, any given author rather than creating them accepts and imitates them. An author cannot invent a language and if he does he will not be understood unless he would create his addressee too, that is he should teach it to a number of people. Still even if he does that, he will not escape imitation, he will not be quite original since he has had language as a model at his disposal. Further, a writer is born into a set of literary conventions and devices as part of the literary heritage he inherits, so that the work he creates, as Barthes remarks is "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture"[1]. In this case, one might say, plays were written and characters created before Pirandello, serving him as models for his *Six Characters,* not to mention the real - life people who might have been copied by him when writing the play. More important still are the iron rules of cause and effect, life-likeness and motivations of the characters working as the force driving them to their end. If a writer, then, follows the motivations he endows the characters and observes the situations he puts them in, what share of the creation is the writer's and what the characters? Is not the boundary between the creator and the created blurred?

The question is of special importance when we pose it in connection with another binary opposition, that of author/text. Which one creates the other? Which one manipulates the other one? How the binary opposition objective/subjective is related to author/text? If character as part of a text, a play, can take hold of the author and even go so far as a reversal of roles with the author, do not we have the right to ponder the question of text as author and author as text? Is it then plausible to suppose the text as creator and the author as created?

It may prove helpful to begin with basic questions: first, how an author becomes an author? When he creates a work, when he writes at least a text? The concept of author would be impossible to imagine without that of a text. An author would not be created unless a text comes to being. The creation of a text, thus, creates an author. Second, it may seem at the beginning that it is a writer who chooses certain elements, excludes others and puts the selected ones in a certain order so as to convey the message he wants. But it is also possible to think of an author as a text constituted of elements coming together from different directions, from educational, religious, social, etc. institutions. Specially from literary canons which are then either excluded or included at least in part by the demands of a text that puts them together and conveys an image of the author as skillful, literate, well- versed, intelligent, creative, dull, clumsy, narrow- minded, etc.

A discussion of objective versus subjective can also prove illuminating: while according to Derrida the Western culture and philosophy associates writing with absence, lack of authenticity and subjectivity, the history of literary criticism illustrates varying outlooks and frequent shifts[5]. Especially with the rise of New Criticism the perspective changed in favor of writing. Objective criticism as the New Critics propagated it, privileged the writing, that is, the words found on the page over the intention of the writer, even if the writer delivered a speech on his work, interpreting it and clarifying the ambiguities. Therefore, writing was associated with objectivity. What Derrida does is an attempt to restore writing to its lost status or at least to deconstruct the subjectivity and lack of authenticity which he claims is imposed on writing by centuries of thought and philosophy in the West. In brief, objectivity of writing versus the subjectivity of author is argued both for and against so that neither is stable, fixed or clear-cut. Since it is the work of an author that gives us an image of the author", we can think of the creation of the author by the work. In other words, the image of the author is pieced together as a presence behind the textual elements, the slightest change in which produces a different image, a different author. Is Shakespeare as author, for instance, any more than the image we construct of reading his plays and is not that if he had written works different from what we know nowadays as Shakespeare, we would have a quite different image of Shakespeare, the author? Therefore, objective/ subjective as a binary opposition, is as problematic and unstable as creator/created. The *Six Characters* as an objective text consisting of words can create a subjective image of its author, Luigi Pirandello, just as Pirandello can be viewed as the disputable, questionable creator of the play, the question of privilege and precedence remaining unresolved in the same way that in the play the question of the precedence of author to character or character to author can never be decided[3].

It is not merely the blurred boundary between character and author that makes decision impossible, rather, character merges and melts away into many other domains much to the complication of the whole affair, First and foremost, characters are bestowed with much more life, energy and capability in *Six Characters* than one would find in other plays so that they are no characters at all, "step [ing] out of [their] part ... explaining

things"[3]. They philosophize, comment on truth and fact, urge others to do things for them, think of themselves as more real than the others, make arguments and persuade others, all this leading to the rising of another question: the merging of imaginary into real and vice-versa. From the beginning of the play every attempt is made to give the actors and the play an air of reality, "the curtain is already up and the stage is just as it would be during the day. There is no set; it is empty, in almost total darkness. This is so that from the beginning the audience will have the feeling of being present, not at a performance of a properly rehearsed play" and "the actors of the company come in through the door" the same through which the audience enters[6]. They talk about familiar contemporary issues such as Pirandello, the plays he writes and how other plays are to be preferred to those of him. Furthermore, the actors- 'really' actors in the play- assume the role of actors going to rehearse another play *The Rules of the Game.* In other words, we have a producer and his team, a team of actors and actresses together with the stage manager, prompter, etc. preparing to rehears a play while they are all actors in the *Six Characters* and the inclusion of one play within another gives one of them a sense of reality, authenticity and life- likeness not found in the other. All these steps are taken to impose the actors as real on the audience, while when the characters enter, the situation changes. First their heavy presence bothers the actors and interrupts the rehearsal, and then they take the upper hand, drive the actors to a state of passivity and staging their part passionately, spontaneously and actively turn the producer and his team into audience deeply impressed. Later they make them recess further back by introducing themselves as each one "a miracle of reality with more right to be alive here than you have. Perhaps [each] has more truth than you have yourselves[3] ". Still, they progress further when the father interrogates the director and says: "I am going to ask you again in all seriousness, who are you?" the annoyance the director feels may be viewed as the first symptom of penetration of doubt into his belief in his own reality although he tries to save his face and growls "of all the bloody nerve! A fellow who claims he is only a character comes and asks me who I am[3]!" But he finally submits when the father reminds him of the changing illusions he has had so far about his identity and how at the time he had them, he thought of them as sheer reality while now he can clearly recognize them as illusion. The father seems to strike hardest not only on the director's, but also the reader and the audience's illusion of fixed, reliable identity when he compares characters and actors, imaginary and 'real' people:

I only want to make you see that if we [characters] have no other reality outside our own illusion, perhaps you ought to distrust your own sense of reality: because whatever is a reality today, whatever you touch and believe in and that seems real for you today, is going to be- like the reality of yesterday- an illusion tomorrow[3].

Thus, character and actor, real and imaginary as well as reality and illusion are inseparable, that's why the director confused

and unable to make a decision reaches a point of indifference. *"(Not caring any more)"* the director cries "Make- believe? Reality? Oh, go to hell the lot of you[3]!"

Character is treated richly in the play, serving as one side of various binary oppositions such as character/ actor, character/ audience, character/ producer, etc. and we will turn to it later. Now that the question of identity was raised, however, we will relate it to another problematic binary opposition, namely that of *I/i* in which "I" stands for a true, fixed, coherent and never-changing self-consciousness that we long for and we suppose we find inside our breathing self, while "i" signifies the more flexible, temporary and fluctuating masks we wear as our "selves", which undergo drastically change from time to time, from place to place and from one situation to another. The play seems to undertake the dismantling and disruption of our illusion of permanent, eternal "self" as its main object. At least this is one of the major points that attracts the attention of the audience and makes them hold their breath for a moment. In a rather long monologue the father poses the breath- taking question:

FATHER: This is the real drama for me; the belief that we all, you see, think of ourselves as one single person: but it's not true: each of us is several different people, and all these people live inside us. With one person we seem like this and with another we seem very different. But we always have the illusion of being the same person for everybody and of always being the same person in everything we do. But it's not true! It's not true! We find this out for ourselves very clearly when by some terrible chance we're suddenly stopped in the middle of doing something and we're left dangling there, Suspended. We realize then, that every part of us was not involved in what we'd been doing[3].

Identity is nothing like a unified coherent kernel; rather it is an exhibition of shifting colors or even a battlefield of dispersed and diverse opposite forces. The self is divided inside and keeping in mind the illusions of self that are first taken for reality and then discarded. We notice how slippery and illusive the ground is.

Finding no solid ground to walk on in regard with identity and self, we can once more take character as an example and study how problematic and slippery a concept it is. We talked earlier about character as author and author as character. As far as a character- because of his/her motivation, the whole environment he/she is put in and the network of relations connecting him/her to other characters and also to events and incidents that take place in a work - can demand a certain tract and make the author follow a certain direction and make certain choices, the character holds a share of authorship, turning the author into a character in return. It was also mentioned that the author of the six characters are after in the play is another character, absent and passive. In the play, however, the boundary between actor and character is blurred as well. Characters act out their roles

and actors assume the part of characters. More significant to notice perhaps, is the way character and director change role. In many cases the stepdaughter gives direction to the character/actors specially in Act Two she seems to turn into a fully - fledged director. "Go on, Mme. Pace" She says and when she finds her resentful, she gives further comments on the scene:" You see, this next scene has got to be played out - we must do it now. (To Mm. Pace.) Oh, you can go[3]!" but the reversal of roles reaches its peak when she turns to the father:

STEPDAUGHTER (to the FAHTHER). Now you come on! No, you don't need to go off again! Come back! Pretend you've just come in! Look, I'm standing here with my eyes on the ground, modestly - well, come on, speak up! Use that special sort of voice, like somebody who has just come in Six Characters in Search of an Author[3].

And she moves on so far that she enrages the director. The director who is both literally and figuratively off the stage by now "Shouts: look here, who's the director here, you or me[6]?" Even he has to follow her against his own will: "Go on, do as she says: go upstage[6]." Therefore, along with authorship, character can also presume directorship, demanding and forcing the director to follow. Indeed, we should not forget that the director or the so-called producer is himself one of the characters: a character in the *Six Characters* who because of his role, that is being a director, demanded Pirandello to follow a certain course, to make certain choices to give him authority over the other characters and the power to decide who should do what, for instance. To see several other examples, the reader can refer to page 28 of the play where the director consults stepdaughter in numerous cases asking her what to do, what to include and what to exclude[3].

Another fascinating point regarding characters which helps decentralize the play is whether character is in the script or script in the character. It is legitimate to suppose that when you open the script and look in, you will find characters in it, named and given roles and functions. The list of the personae or the cast put usually at the beginning of the script may serve as further proof. Thus, in a way it is the script that determines the roles and gives direction to the characters. On the other hand, it is as credible to assume that the script is in the characters. Since the life given to the characters, their relations and cause and effect dictate a great part of the play and determine its future course in any given moment. When asked by the director "where is the script?" the father answers" It's in us, sir... The play is in us: we are the play and we are impatient to show it to you: the passion inside us is driving us on[3]."

Where and how the *Six Characters* begins is also problematic. In general, the beginning usually is. "When will we have begun? Where or when - does a literary text begin? This question raises a series of fundamental problems in literary criticism and theory[10]." The *Six Characters* (1979) is planned to begin not as "a properly rehearsed play[6]." "When the audience enters, the curtain is already up... There is no set; it is empty, in almost total darkness. This is so that from the beginning the audience will have the feeling of being present not at a performance of a properly rehearsed play, but at a performance of a play that happens spontaneously[6]." Then the producer, the stage manager, the prompter and actors and actresses are preparing for the second act of *The Rules of the Game.* After a good deal of actions and dialogues the leading actress arriving late and faced with the complaints of the director, remark in a sense properly as" you haven't started yet[3]."

The beginning is, therefore, not a beginning, because in one sense the play has started, while in another they have not yet started to rehearse their play. After a while, the characters enter and interrupting the rehearsal make another beginning, the beginning of the major play, one might say as opposed to the minor play, *The Rules of the Game.* If this is the beginning, it would be one that appears much later than the beginning of the first scene. Much displacement occurs as a result of having at least two plays within one play. The actors and actresses are stopped and suspended by the arrival of the characters, so that they are no longer actors or actresses but the audience. "Look at this. What a show!" says the leading actor. "And we're the audience" remarks the leading actress. The producer is asked to serve as an author and he will undergo the task of writing a play. He even decides where to finish the scenes and the acts. He would finish the first act of his play exactly when the second act of the *Six Characters* ends, that is, the two ends coincide leading to further displacement: the end of the first act is the end of the second act, raising the question of ending and problematizing it[3].

Ending of a literary work, too, as Bennett and Royle observe cannot be pinned down with certainty[10]. In the *Six Characters* question is tactfully dealt with. The arrival of the characters marks the beginning of what we call the major play, while at the same time it puts an end to the rehearsal of *The Rules of the Game,* the minor play. However, the arrival of the characters is not a starting point, in the sense that they came to being as the creation of the mind of an author much earlier and their arrival - in a sense a beginning - declares their separation from and disappointment with their author - the end of their relation to their author. We should not forget that the end of the play is the time when the director is supposed to begin his own play as an author. Thus, in addition to the fact that the beginning refers us back to what happened before it whereby it deconstructs itself as beginning and that the end always leads to something after it - again decentralizing itself as ending - we come to the conclusion that more often than not the beginning is the end and the end, the beginning.

The question of center and decentralization does not stop at this point. The father is not a father, for example. While he is the son's real father, he has little to do with the stepdaughter, the little boy and the little girl who are another man's children. The mother is a widow while her husband is still alive, beside her. "How is she a widow, then, if you're still alive?" the director

asks the father. In response he explains how "She had another man[6]." The so-called father by trying to make love to the stepdaughter loses his place as a father and turns into a lover of the daughter who, by now, changes into a mistress. Except for the son, the other children are considered as illegitimate because they are not children of the father; on the other hand they are legitimate children of their own father. The father's sad retrospection is exemplary. In this regard when he explains how with the best of intentions he paved the way for their tragic fall: "If only we could see in advance all the harm that can come from the good we are doing." He was only thinking of his wife and son's welfare and specially his "dreadful longing for a kind of sound moral healthiness", but they brought him nothing more than wickedness, immorality and lust[6]. They dragged him even so far as the verge of incest. So, harm comes from good and moral healthiness leads to the worst of crimes, incest. Nor is compassion viewed as such. "Look!" says the father "All my pity, all my compassion for this woman *(pointing to the* mother) she sees as ferocious cruelty[3]." This is the beginning of a different course in the shifting of center: the center is not a center or rather we have too many centers because each point of view produces its own center and since a point of view belongs to a person or a group and people or groups are different from one another, different outlooks will result leading to the creation of various centers or the shifting of the center in many directions. Each of the six characters together with the producer and a few of the actors seem to function as a center, interpreting the events in their own way. In short, the center in the *Six Characters* is shifting continuously, producing contradictory meanings and oppositional interpretations[3].

Conclusion

What we did was to follow the traces of the text itself. The text seemed to be consciously aware of the arbitrary nature of the opposition in each of these binary sets and to question the value of it as well as the process through which a special status is claimed for one in each binary set. The text problematized the binary opposition to the extent to reverse it, in other words to turn it upon its head and then leaves it unsolved, unresolved, suspended, undecided. As a result, we found binary oppositions embedded in the text, commented on them, reversed the binary opposition, that is, showed how the text on many occasions goes far beyond its own logic and turns its binary oppositions upside down and then reached an aporia, the impossible path where it is impossible to move, to decide[11]. The meaning of the play therefore remains undecidable, indeterminable. The text simply does not mean anything because it means too many contradictory things.

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