A Deconstructive Reading on Luigi Pirandello`s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

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Abstract

This paper is a deconstructive reading of Luigi Pirandello`s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The pivotal maxim of deconstruction is the paradoxical nature of language and the unwanted contradictory statements. According to deconstructionists, such contradictory statements are produced in all situations that use language as the medium of communication. Any deconstructive reading will focus on dissenting voices, contradictions, oppositions, and paradoxes. This study also concentrates on the paradoxes embedded in the *Six Characters* in terms of first, discovering the binary oppositions on which the text tries to build itself, second, challenging and questioning the reliability of such oppositions, third, trying to turn them upside down and, finally, holding them in suspense to reach to an impossible path or an 'aporia' where it is impossible to decide. So, the text remains finally unreadable and undecidable, any reading being necessarily a misreading. Since deconstruction is not a method or strategy outside the text to be imposed on it but a way to trace the labyrinth of the text to reveal how it has already dismantled and deconstructed itself, this study is no parasitic means of reading the text brought upon it from outside. Rather, it is a careful trial to follow the twists of the *Six Characters* and to show how it asserts contradictory opinions concerning identity, the concept of author, text, actor, etc. to prove finally that the text affirms paradoxical assertion and therefore, it affirms nothing. It tries to prove that the *Six Characters* as an extended stretch of language is "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

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1. Introduction

When Pirandello`s *Six Characters* was performed in 1921 for the first time, although according to John Linstrum in the introduction to his 1979 translation of the play "it was far ahead of its time"(Linstrum, 1979, p.1) not even Pirandello himself, probably, could imagine how far ahead of its time it would look like to the generations to come or how readily it would give in to a postmodernist study such as deconstruction. Perhaps, not even Pirandello himself could predict how far-reaching his indirect scrutiny of character, author, actor, audience, good, bad, etc. Would be. Indeed, deconstruction is so inclusive that it aims at nothing less than the whole western civilization, including among other elements its philosophy and literature. And therefore, any literary work, because of its reliance on a set of binary oppositions will be subject to a deconstructive reading. No surprise, then, if Pirandello`s
Six Characters like any other literary work can show how it dismantles itself in the process of its construction. However, it cannot be denied either that in some works the dismantling can be traced with an ease and readiness not comparable to others. Six Characters is one of such works and although reading it in a deconstructionist light will not proceed smoothly, sometimes requiring more care and energy, the obviousness of the blurring of the boundaries, the reversal of roles and the instability of the binary oppositions in it make it the more suitable for a deconstructionist reading.

Any examination of center in a literary work has inevitably to do with the work itself, the way it tries to form in a centripetal movement around a point, the binary oppositions that impose themselves, and intervene in the process and finally, the centrifugal forces that resist the formation of a center. Dealing with the question of center in Pirandello's Six Characters, therefore, presupposes a study of the work from a deconstructive point of view, for it is deconstruction more than any other approach that is concerned with center and decentralization. The present study, therefore concentrates on the one hand, on deconstruction, on the other on Pirandello’s Six Characters.

Since the question of center has never been dealt with before in Six Characters, this study cannot directly dwell on any source for its argument. The play itself and the works of those with whom deconstruction is inherently associated, such as Jacques Derrida, J.Hillis Miller and Paul de Man will be the main sources to rely on and it is an unmediated convergence of deconstruction and the play in question that is celebrated here. Authoritative critical works of those who are not progenitors of deconstruction but whose work, nevertheless, has been influential in its understanding and reception will also be referred to.

Derrida has written abundantly on deconstruction but it is in his Of Grammatology and Writing and Difference where he basically presents his views. J.Hillis Miller, once a Geneva School critic is now one of the most outstanding deconstructionists who has produced both theoretical works on the subject such as "What is Deconstruction" and practical applications of deconstruction to works like his "The Critic as Host". Paul de Man, the other influential deconstruction discusses in full details the warring forces that struggle to dominate in a text in his famous work, Allegories of Reading. His article "The Resistance to Theory" has been equally seminal and influential. M.H. Abram's The Deconstructive Angel has served as a lucid scholarly on the subject. His concise and compact article entitled "Deconstruction" in A Glossary of Literary Terms is an economic masterpiece that gives a brief but remarkable insight to the reader. Julian Wolfreys concentrates specially on the marginalized Voices in a text in an article entitled "Deconstruction, What Remains Unread". Terry Eagleton in his famous book Literary Theory: An Introduction devotes some pages to a concise discussion of Derrida and his views. Raman Selden also discusses deconstruction in his Practicing Theory and Reading Literature under poststructuralism. Most important of all, however, are Nicholas Royle's deep insight in What Is Deconstruction? Published with an excellent set of other article in a collection called Deconstructions and specially Christopher Norris’ comprehensive study of the subject under the name of Deconstruction: Theory and Practice.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study is going to read Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters from a deconstructionist point of view. To do so it has to forget about extrinsic data and to focus, instead, on the text itself to find out the binary oppositions at work in the text to establish a center. By analyzing the bases on which such binary oppositions are formed and by demystifying the prejudices that are taken for granted as the axiomatic truth, this research, then, will problematize the binary opposition and will turn it on its head. The next step is to leave the binary opposition suspended, undecidable and unreadable. This will finally lead to decentralizing, the unraveling of the whole texture of the text. So, the major question this study is going to answer will be in what ways Priandello’s play struggles to establish a center and how a decentralizing process is simultaneously at work to dismantle the work.

1.3 Significance of the Problem

The significance of the study lies in the convergence of deconstruction and drama and it can therefore contribute both to deconstruction and to Pirandello studies. Although deconstruction is now a fully – fledged critical current and has been applied to different kinds of texts from political to social to cultural to literary texts, it is of a certain
attraction when it is applied to a play, because its potentates can display untrodden roads. On the other hand, the Six
Characters though a famous, influential play, criticized and debated very much, has never been subject to a
deconstructive questions to the play and to explore the unexplored corners which yield themselves only to such
questions. The study, thus, can doubly benefit literature and criticism.

1. 4 Research Questions

The main questions which are tried to be tackled in this research include: How to find binary oppositions in the
Six Characters? Are the binary oppositions in the six characters stable or they can be problematized like the binary
oppositions found in the other texts? What are the implications of problematizing the binary oppositions in the six
characters? How is the text finally going to be read? Is it possible to impose one meaning in the play? Is the play
capable of suggesting multiple meanings? Briefly, the major question of this study is going to answer will be in what
ways Pirandello's play struggles to establish a center and how a decentralizing process is simultaneously at work to
dismantle the work.

1. 5 Research Hypothesis

A text, according to deconstructionists is not an integrated, unified whole and does not need to be one. This
study is going to examine the Six Characters from a deconstructionist point of view, in order, to show whether the
deconstructionists claim to the lack of coherence and integrity in this text has got any basis or is merely a baseless
claim. As the fundamental hypothesis, however, this research presupposes the multiplicity of meaning in the play
and consequently, the impossibility of reading it since each reading will be a misreading.

2. Method

Deconstruction and New Criticism share some features, among them turning one's attention from extrinsic data
to the text under criticism and a close reading of the text. Deconstructionists, however, have often criticized New
Critics for not being close enough in their 'close readings' of the works so as to reveal the contradictions,
disparagements and dispersals. The slightest fraction of a text such as an 'of', 'and' or 'for' often turns out to be of the
highest importance in the decentralizing process. Here, data will be collected from articles and books written on
deconstruction or Pirandello's Six Characters. The work will be investigated in a detailed search for prejudices,
presupposition taken for granted, binary oppositions, contradictions, paradoxical statements and in brief, whatever
may go to the establishment of a center or be of a counterbalancing effect to disrupt the work of its center.
Contamination is the key word here. No binary oppositions are really opposite. They are rather, complementary and
supplementary to each other. Each is contaminated with the other and needs the other for its sustenance.
Furthermore, no side of a binary opposition is privileged over the other. Reading this point will inevitably weave
and at the same time unravel the texture of the text.

3. Results & Discussion

Reading one coherent meaning in a text has always been possible through our will to read one coherent
meaning which has always exerted itself through our suppression of the surplus of meaning which is produced by
any stretch of language. We have also, always repressed the multiplicity of meaning resulting from the contradiction
or simply difference between literal language and figurative implications. We achieve a sense of integration and
unity in a text only when we ignore the various occasions that rhetoric undermines logic and reason.

Our readings have always been and still are misreading, but before the advent of deconstruction they have
always been incorrect misreadings, to use a De Manian term. To have a correct misreading, we have to allow
language express itself in its full multiplicity, taking as many possible significations as it can and as many various
contradictory direction that it heads toward. To do this we should let ourselves free from prejudices as old as the
human history. We should open ourselves to the demands of the text and let it take us where it does. This will soon
leave us motionless heading toward no direction, deconstructionists assert, because a text is in this case a battlefield
of warring forces, each trying to take the reader in a direction opposed to that of another. None of these forces are stronger than the rest to determine the course of battle because none is given the privilege of authority. There is no authoritative, authentic voice in a text. Each is as helpless and baseless as any other. The text dismantles itself. It annihilates the ground on which it stands.

To reach an authoritative fixed meaning, you have to choose among contradictory questions. It is as if you have a collection of numerous questions packed in pairs, each pair consisting of a question and its opposite one. You choose one and discarded the opposite. You go with this through the whole set of the pairs, one by one, in each case making a choice, always careful lest it should not match your previous and following choices. You build your edifice of chosen questions at the cost of the discarded ones; each choice inevitably is a dismissal. Each choice is necessarily closing one's eyes, wide shut, to a possibility. You lose many things then, but you gain something instead: one meaning which in spite of the blanks it carries -for the choices not made leave their mark on your interpretation forever - and the tensions controlled at great pains, seems wholistic, coherent and unified.

What if you visit the pairs one by one and make no choice at all by choosing both? This will lead you to a deconstructive reading. You reply both 'yes' and 'no' to each question. In other words, you affirm a statement when it is positive, but you still confirm it when it is negativized, when its opposite is offered. For instance, an author creates a text. True. An author does not create a text. Again true. Is compassion the same as cruelty? Yes and no. both 'yes' and 'no'. Is objective the same as subjective? Yes and no at the same time. What is imaginary is not real while at the same time what is imaginary is real. A character is more 'real' than a person, but a 'real' person is more 'real' than a character in a play. An actor is different from a spectator, but there is no difference between an actor and a spectator. So on and so forth. You can go through your examination forever in the play, choose the pairs, in the 'real' than a character in a play. An actor is different from a spectator, but there is no difference between an actor and

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