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The Absentee Author and the Plane of Understanding in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

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Abstract

The study explores how the characters in Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of An Author* expose the limiting and conventional frames of understanding that fetter the imaginations of both theatrical actors and their audience. In general, when watching a play on a stage, conventional theatre-goers are usually rigid conformists who seek the validation of preconceived notions nurtured by their subjective planes of understanding. When such notions are challenged by modern dramatists like Pirandello, who dissolve the division between theatrical action and the audience, the audience feels displaced from their secure planes of understanding. Pirandello's metatheatre evokes a poignant conscious response from his audience who had to become participants in stage action due to the authorial absence. Subsequently, rather than rejecting a play that shifts their secure coordinates of existence, the audience must construct meaning based on their varied versions of understanding. In a self-reflective stance induced by the play, the modern audience realizes that identities, meanings, and representations are not absolute. Hence, the aforementioned realization highlights the limitation of conventional frames of understanding, which not only hinders the performance of actors but also limits the understanding of the play itself.

Keywords: actors; author; characters; understanding; reality; theatre

Introduction

Usually, when we consider a text, a narrative, or a play, it is governed by certain rules, conventions, and constraints, maintaining the decorum of the artistic piece. We often forget that meaning of a text is produced during the act of reading, interpreting, or directing a script itself. The audience or the reader may appear passive, but the moment they observe/read a spectacle or narrative, meaning starts processing in the reader's mind. As a result, the reader creates their own version of understanding. In such a case, the author

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dies, and the passive receiver comes alive. To associate a meaning of a text with authorial intent alone limits the possibilities that might emerge in a reader's mind. In this regard, Roland Barthes declared in "The Death of the Author", "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Lodge&Wood, 2003).

Modern texts invite readers to participate actively in the process of production of meaning. The stress is on the plurality of meaning, rather than production of a single meaning. Writing becomes a space where identity and history are lost, and a motley of meanings emerge. If writings are seen as works divested of didactic intent, the literary work develops its own reality. Language reverberates with a life of its own since the author is no longer a primary source of meaning. Modern texts are more open-ended, often leading to an 'aporia' like condition where it is difficult to decide upon the basic understanding and linear structure of a text. The text appears to be 'fragmented', which makes the author's intent impossible to trace in the text. The multiple possibilities and approaches of reading the text put the reader in a position of power. When a text begins to decentralize, it alienates the reader from the primary interpretation and sequence, allowing him to produce his own understanding of the text.

Objectives

To explore:

- The characters in Luigi Pirandello's plays, their complicated situation, and their search for a satisfying dénouement, which is the dilemma of most modern individuals.
- The movement of the theatre-goers, transitioning from being passive audience to metatheatrical audience to dispel the commercial illusion of conventional theatre.
- The existential choice made by characters, who have been liberated from authorial conventions and omniscience.
- The significance of the shift from authorial intention to reader/spectator response.
- The artifice and pretension of social illusion in the microcosm of conventional theatre.

Research Questions

1. What does Pirandello hope to achieve when he demolishes the wall between illusion and reality in his metatheatrical play?
2. How does identity become problematic when viewed from multiple vantage points?
3. A pivotal figure like an author confers identity upon the characters that are depicted in his works. Why does the absence of this authentication create an existential dilemma?
4. How is the traditional concept of 'catharsis' inverted in Pirandello's theatre? Does imbuing the theatrical self-consciousness enable the spectators to unwittingly participate in stage action?

Methodology and Theatrical Framework

The study investigated the inversion of conventional classic theatre by exploring Pirandello's modern age innovations in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The reader/audience response takes center stage in the absence of an author who denies conventional closure and security to the plot and characters of the play. An immature audience would rebel against such a turn of events, but Pirandello's metatheatre exposes the artificial schema of representation adopted by theatre and media to satisfy the audience's quest for closure.

Audience/Reader Response in Today's World

For example, in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello, the audience feels painfully aware of the metatheatrical quality of the play. The spectator is unwillingly driven into a reality existing in the very set-up and exhibitive quality of the stage. For instance, Pirandello composes metatheatrical plays that remind "the audience that the drama they are witnessing is a structure put together from a variety of disparate elements, including props, costumes, music, the architectural environment which are part of the total experience, and the service of personnel to enact the fable" (Rosenmeyer, 2002, p.103). The audience becomes reluctant participants in the metatheatrical chaos of Pirandello's texts. Hence, it is of no surprise that the initial defamiliarization of an audience accustomed to conventional theatre results in an unfavorable response from the audience, resulting in a negative reception of the play (the play was initially staged in 1921, inciting an audience riot). The audience is denied the therapeutic expectations of catharsis with which they enter the

theatre. Nevertheless, Pirandello would have expected such a response to his subversive plays from his target audience as, "In the 1920s, the writer even tried to substitute "movement" for the term "life", meaning action" (Argenteri, 1996, p. 131).The passive audience was successfully provoked into action, rather than snugly absorbing stage action with cathartic lethargy like conventional theatre-goers.

Inconclusive Characters/Elusive Author

Further investigations revealed how the six characters in Pirandello's play represent six vantage points of a doomed plot without any hope of a conventional resolution. In this regard, Tapan Babu (2008) points out that the fate of the characters appears to "end up in a limbo wherein the audience is unable to see any dénouement" (p. 32). Unlike conventional plays, where spectators can identify with the characters, this play does not offer any such respite. The plot fails to observe the unities; instead, acts and scenes seem to be stumbling after one another. The stage is stripped of illusory scenery to make the spectators participants in a slice of everyday life itself.

The characters in the play expect the stage director to assume the role of the author, even though he does not feel secure in a dramatic situation where socially acceptable conventions are flouted. He chooses to stick to the closure of the 'book' or text that they are supposed to present on stage. The modern play baffles him since the author is absent. The absent author's intent becomes ever-evasive as he "plays the fool with us all" (Pirandello, 1921). The spectator is forced to become the author of the presented play which is twice removed from the original play that the author had in mind. For instance, the director decides that the concluding scene should be limited to the setting of the garden only; however, in reality, the dark nooks and corners of the father's house play a poignant psychological role in the little boy's mind (a truth sacrificed for stage impact). The characters are also dissatisfied with the way the actors handle their roles since the characters believe they only "represent the shell of the eggs" (Pirandello, 1921), not the substance itself that the author has originally invented. The author has presented a "demon of experiment" (Pirandello, 1921), which perplexes stage direction and action. The director, the actors, and even the spectators give different reactions to the textual version of the characters. They adopt the position of readers due to their plural interpretations of the texts which become mere subjective illusions. The characters are denied the security of the ultimate author, who might claim them and provide them with a resolute

framework of stage representation with unities and conformist imitations of life where the characters are depicted without fear of rejection.

The stage manager is not an ideal candidate for a "no-strings-attached" author that they wanted; rather, his vision is limited by the vision with which he made his drama subservient to the public taste. For him, actors and scripts are commodities required for a commercially successful play. Truth and essence hold secondary importance in his framework of limited reality. His actors remain spectators as long as they follow the manager's stage directions. On the other hand, the characters object to any anomalies they find in the stage direction and repeatedly request the director to keep it as authentic to their version of reality as possible. The characters represent the original Platonic form, while the actors are imitations. The characters are a part of an eternal work of art, while the actors are passive readers of it. Resultantly, the fleeting performance of the actors on stage can never match the original tragedy of the characters. The actors seek applause, while the characters seek recognition. The characters also seem to be clinging to each other, as if finding solace in each other's proximity, despite the situation being saturated with conflict. As declared in the article, "Characters in Search of a Conflict", "this is the dilemma at the core of Pirandello's vision. We live in separate worlds; incomprehension breeds conflict; nevertheless, what identity we have is entirely relational. Hence to abandon conflict is to destroy oneself" (Parks, 2021).

Pirandello's Meta-Theatre

Pirandello, like a true avant-garde playwright, questions the formal conventions of modern popular theatre. When the truth is sacrificed for commercial effect, Pirandello's play is "the voice that cried out for light" (Herman, 1966). Often, the artistic potential of characters is sacrificed to meet the demands of the theatre and the expectations of the theatre-goers. The father in *Six Characters* is rightly furious when the actors and manager refused to take him seriously. He cries out, "The man, the writer, the instrument of creation will die, but his creation does not die" (Pirandello, 1921). The restless characters need to reaffirm their existence in vivid stage performance. They are the embodiments of the drama of life itself, while the actors are mere imitators. It was noted that the characters of the father and the step-daughter were given undue importance, while characters such as the little boy and the little girl suffered in silence. However, at the end of the play, both the silent characters face the most tragic end. Any hope of

redemption is effaced in this tragic dénouement. The text of their lives becomes an interesting study which in the words of Barthes, reflects, "a skein of different voices and multiple codes which are at once interwoven and unfinished" (Lodge&Wood, 2003). The personalities of the characters are fragmented and frayed, and the author's ownership could give them the artistic security that is denied to them in a commoditized modern existence. No linear narration can absolve the characters from the prisons of their personal hells. Due to an incestuous encounter (father and step-daughter), the cultural code has been violated. The characters' consciousness urges them to exonerate their troubled state of mind. The father is the "base of that Oedipal triangle on which the family story rests" (Bentley, 1968). While the father philosophizes and presents his defense with cerebral schematization, the step-daughter recounts their encounter through symbolic details she cannot forget, such as those pertaining to the blue envelope and the yellow sofa. The spectators feel indeterminacy and undecidability as they fluctuate between different versions of the truth and are lost about which version deserves priority. These different perspectives and biased renderings make both the father and the step-daughter 'unreliable narrators' (Antczak, 1995). In this regard, Wolfgang Iser reports, "Reading reflects the structure of experience to the extent that we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text" (Lodge & Wood, 2003). Human beings, in general, deny any association with incestuous situations because such an affinity is likely to incriminate them in a taboo act. However, since the spectator is not spared the intensity of the characters' dilemma, he must become the subject who is forced to think of a way out. The only way a reader can avoid feeling alienated is when he is on the same page as the author. Their thinking must coincide. Thus, the book becomes an author conversing through its characters trying to find a common plane of understanding and negotiation. D.W. Harding (1962) says, "It seems nearer the truth… to say that fictions contribute to defining the reader's or spectator's values, and perhaps stimulating his desires, rather than to suppose that they gratify desire by some mechanism of vicarious experience" (p. 313). The common plane of negotiation is achieved when the reader's or the spectator's desires or values are stimulated and defined. The conventional reader or spectator would feel secure with a unified sense of self; they would approach a play's text with the surety of knowing that a comfortable aesthetic distance is maintained. However, Pirandello's play

disrupts this false sense of security when the audience is exposed to "the masochistic thrills of feeling that self-shattered and dispersed through the tangled webs of the work itself" (Eagleton, 1983). This reflects the tenacious position of any identity. Pirandello's plays were often accused of defining values in a taboo or unconventional way, but like D.H. Lawrence and Manto, he just holds up a mirror to human beings who couldn't come to terms with their ugly, instinctual side. Pirandello's creativity emerges from a "fascinated recoil from life" (Hughes, 1927). Values that elude our sanctioned consciousness are often spelled out by disillusioned authors. We must let them reformulate our known world to evolve a deeper understanding of complexity of identities that is inspiring rather than intimidating.

At the time of the play's staging in 1921, the spectators were quick to condemn the incestuous theme of the play and failed to analyze the unwitting nature of the crime presented on the stage. The theatre presented a state of chaos, "a battle threatening to erupt between defenders of the playwright's daring vision and detractors, who, faced with absurdity, saw only incomprehensibility" (Caesar, 2021). The characters reveal this aspect gradually. It is human nature to jump to conclusions when one is unaware of the authentic version of reality. The spectator feels a puerile sense of revulsion at the bastardized state of the step-daughter and her siblings. The audience would rather disown them like the absentee author himself. The text presented by the characters becomes a riddle that needs to be solved into a structured narration, but the literary orphan is sidelined by a society ruled by their moral perceptions. The spectator is expected to become the dispenser of priorities to the characters. The original author assumes a lost or dead role, and intense theatrical dilemma ensues. Michel Foucault says in his essay, "What is an Author?", "we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" (Lodge & Wood, 2003). Just like God is sought in the unseen, the author's essence is dispersed in these gaps. The characters must receive the status of characters, which can only be accomplished by the absentee author. The author, on the other hand, appears to be hiding from punishment and judgment since he has profaned the sanctity of marriage through incestuous motifs. He has denied the markers of identity to the characters, which Foucault conventionally analyzes as marks of "demonstrated truth" (Lodge & Wood, 2003), rather than actual, verifiable realities. The author, who could be

considered a constant measure of value against the characters' capriciousness, surreptitiously avoids rediscovery. Thus, the conceptual and theoretical coherence of the plot is implicitly whisked away by the author's disappearance. He, who could have provided authorial testimony about the extent of each character's truth, is no more. Sogliuzzo (1966) elaborated this dilemma, "the unseen protagonist is the author himself, who has refused to realize his characters into an artistic entity, forcing them to find their own author, and so complete the purpose for which they were intended" (p. 226).Thus, incompatibilities and contradictions become the fate of the characters' fecundating matrix. The characters become pluralities of the author's self that he chose to express in the work. They have discursive and philosophical possibilities, but they still desperately seek realization. They want an accurate dictation of their drama; what they get is a mere transcription. This transcription causes them to become estranged from the depiction on stage. The unsatisfied characters want to rectify estrangement by performing on the stage themselves. This is one of the gaps where the authorial intention lies latent and out of reach. The characters yearn for resolution which is evident through their restlessness. Since the characters are doomed to be a part of the infinite art world, their coordinates of reality are inevitably linked to the axis of their author. The unitary structure of the play must be restored for meaningful appreciation. The taciturn elder son, if not the two younger siblings, tries to disentangle the mesh of perspectives created by the characters. Unfortunately, when he does speak, his account is another biased rendering of his problematic childhood in the countryside and how he was deserted by his mother. However, his human sympathy is provoked by the drowning of his younger step-sister in a pond, and his existential dread is stimulated by the tragic jolt of his step-brother committing suicide. His aloofness is a sham to cover his guilt (feeling responsible for younger siblings). This guilt is difficult to present on stage since it is an abstract phenomenon, felt but never exhibited with aesthetic perfection. Thus, these are multiple characters with diverse consciences. The father feels pained by the unsuspecting sexual encounter with his step-daughter and narrates that it is human nature to be judgmental. He declares that "all our existence is summed up in that one deed" (Pirandello, 1921), performed arbitrarily and unwittingly. We as readers are ever-ready to pass judgments. Iser says that the mind of every individual reader has "its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook" (Lodge and Wood, 2003). However, the mind of a reader has a literary

sensibility only when it has the capacity to accept representations out of the ordinary. Consistent patterns are welcome for an average mind, but for a literary mind, the characters in the play represent an exotic challenge. The frustrated characters in the play are important literary stimuli. Ritchie (1965) describes this tendency as, "Frustration blocks or checks activity. It necessitates new orientation for our activity, if we are to escape the cul de sac" (p. 230). If expectations are frustrated by surprises, it is a wondrous opportunity for the imagination to come alive.

Stage Direction and its Limitations

When the stage director offers to be the author and resolver of the characters' issues, he can only act like a hopeless improviser, since the directed scenes border on mimicked comedy when executed by the actors. He takes liberties and freely manipulates the execution of scenes. The changes appear vulgar and deliberately contrived to the finicky characters. The stage director lacks literary sensibility, which is why his one-track pragmatic perception of commercial success prevents him from deciphering the essence of the characters. Due to his superficial and materialistic nature, the director bemoans the loss of rehearsal time towards the end of the play, rather than granting the characters with the license of high seriousness that they are so frantically seeking. He is obsessed with the play's workings at the expense of the invested sentiments of the characters. He uses his reasoning to ceaselessly defend his own illusions about conventional theatre. He is, in fact, the biggest fool of all because he fails to acknowledge that the characters are superlatively more real than 'body and flesh' human beings. He chooses to feel secure with his illusion of objective certainty. He overlooks the fact that life comprises unpredictabilities, incongruities, and various dynamics, which produces new theories and demolishes the old ones. He never considers the relativity of truth, which posits that each person has his own version of the truth. Furthermore, identity is not an absolute construct since it keeps evolving with experience. In like manner, there is a thin line between sanity and madness (for instance, what is considered normal in one culture is unthinkable and taboo in another). Such fine distinctions and labels are doomed to failure because the only certain thing is change. The father says that he cannot be defined by the weakest moment of his life, just as the step-daughter cannot be branded as a prostitute if she was fighting a battle for survival. These aspects are a part of a larger picture of life.

The capacity for being an author is latent in all, since judging and manipulating are inherent to human beings. In this regard, the father declares to the manager, "Then why not turn an author now? Everybody does it. You don't want any special qualities" (Pirandello, 1921). The only prerequisite of being an author is the acceptance of possibilities (the six characters must be believed in order to be realized). The cynical son also points out (while jeering at the father's philosophizing) that everyone believes in their version of reality and consider it the only truth. In this regard, he states, "He thinks he has got at the meaning of it all. Just as if each one of us in every circumstance of life couldn't find his own explanation of it" (Pirandello, 1921). Meaning cannot be produced; it must be discovered through experience. Totalizing stereotypes must be avoided to resolve the characters' dilemma. The stage manager does allow flexibility at some points, for instance, he asks one of the stage-hands to write down spontaneous dialogues in shorthand as the drama unfolds. However, his unwillingness to depart from commercial effect makes him an unsuitable candidate for the sought author. The stage director and the actors cannot capture the uniqueness of the original situation of the characters, as is rightly exclaimed by the father at one point, "Already, I begin to hear my own words ring false, as if they had another sound…" (Pirandello, 1921).

The Artistic Dilemma of the Characters

The characters feel misplaced and face defamiliarization when the scene is rendered through someone else's imagination. It becomes important that the original author of the play might somehow, miraculously, be summoned into existence just like Madame Pace. The characters seek stability and closure through the enactment of the play. They wish to withdraw into the cocoon of conventional art. However, they fail to embrace this emancipating reality, "freedom of choice for these partially constructed characters is comprised in their independence from their author" (Clark, 1966). They also fail to grasp a major pitfall of the artistic world, where "Art may illuminate and console, but it does not absolve, it imprisons" (Mazzaro, 1996. In seeking a satisfying, conventional ending, they just want to exchange one artistic prison for another. In the article "Reaction in Metatheatre", the author draws attention to the fact that "when the conventions are drawn attention to, the line between art and life is made conscious, the life that the art represents is at risk of being shattered"(Brennan, 2019).That is why the actors on stage demonstrate

limited planes of understanding when an unconventional theatrical situation confronts them. The actors and the stage manager feel that the play would be commercially threatened if the original script is realized on stage.

On the other hand, when the characters demand authenticity of expression from the theatre actors, they present a picture of "characters who are obsessed by the agony of losing any sense of self-determination and becoming as marionettes guided by blind destiny" (Calendoli & Applin, 1978). Hence, characters, such as the step-daughter, resist the narratives of both the father and the stage director in order to hold on to their integral uniqueness. Mary Witt (1995) praises this characteristic of the step-daughter in these words, "None of Pirandello's other actress figures so effectively challenge the surrogates of authority".

When the author's function disappears, the characters desire to be authentically presented on stage. They believe that just like Madame Pace, the author might be compelled to transcendentally appear as well. Every one of the characters, except the little girl, tries to assume the authorial intention to justify their respective stance of existence. The father rightly utters at one point that humans tend to be "mentally deaf" (Pirandello, 1921) since they tend to react emotionally to every wrongdoing. They fail to reach the wavelength of empathy that comprehends individual intentions. On the whole, the characters share a common predicament and are all outcasts in one way or another, uncomfortable with their situations and the notion of home. They inevitably develop an egotistical obsession with their respective plights; thus, each character experiences "a tragedy of which he is the center"(Fiskin, 1948). Their versions of truth are relative, as Eagleton (1983) declares, "We can certainly never articulate the truth in some 'pure', unmediated way" (p. 169). Even if the transcendental authorial position could somehow be retrieved, there is no guarantee of closure that the characters are so keen to realize.

An example of estrangement can be seen in the little boy from the second husband of the mother. He commits suicide because his predicament is never resolved by the author. It is in certain fragments of the text that we discover the reason behind the suicide. For instance, the father remarks about the little boy, "The poor little chap feels mortified, humiliated at being brought into a home out of charity as it were" (Pirandello, 1921). He slips into dark nooks and crevices in his newfound father's house. He is often in mental pain because his elder step-brother reminds him of his bastard status

and subjects him to humiliation. He decides to shoot himself when he sees his fellow sufferer, his younger sister, drown in the pond. He decides to make an existential choice of annihilation since he has no courage to endure the family torment. Hence, all characters have faced rejection at one time or another in their lives, but the biggest rejection is that of the author, who has denied them a well-defined conventional plot (self-referentially Pirandello himself). These characters, however, daringly engage in an existential interrogation since they refuse to wallow in a dilemma that is not of their own making. What ensues is an endless struggle for poetic justice.

The stepdaughter and the father are two of the most tormented characters of the play. They demonstrate contradicting perspectives and a variation in meaning that forces the readers/the spectators to come to a conclusion themselves. By doing so, they become participant in the character's tragedy. They get involved in the process of disentanglement to make the situation more linear and poised towards resolution. The step-daughter's body language is often coquettish and debauched, it belies her accusation against the father, who is said to have lascivious intent towards her when she was just a school-going girl. The reader finds it difficult to sympathize with her predicament when she says that her father tried to commodify her by buying her human dignity for just a hundred lire (when ironically, her argument against the father can be used against her own actions as well). The father's sublime incantations on moral exoneration cannot be taken at face value either. There are no fixed meaning and interpretation in both the father and the stepdaughter's narrative since there is no absoluteness of truth. The father philosophizes about how his life turned into an empty shell with the departure of his family. His son contemptuously calls life mere 'literature' to which the father retorts, "Literature indeed! This is life, this is passion!" (Pirandello, 1921). The step-daughter and the father with their respective thesis soon make us realize that they have a didactic purpose of seducing the audience, persuading them to adopt their particular points of view.

The Spectator's Vantage Point

The spectator is dragged into a virtual reality conjured due to the discrepancy between text and imagination, between pragmatism and the world of art. The spectator's expectations of catharsis are not met since he must become an active agent of catharsis for the characters. He feels overwhelmed by the spectrum of connections and gaps that the stage throws

at him. For this reason, choosing sides becomes a painful ordeal. The familiar world is stripped away, and the fragmentary world demands explanation. The original author, in other words, successfully realizes the intentions of his abandoned text by activating the passive reader's/spectator's imagination. The fourth wall of the theatre crumbles, and we, as spectators, need to relate with the suspended understanding of the characters. As is made evident in the article, "The Concept of Metatheatre: A Functional Approach, "The appeal to the audience is usually made through the laying bare of the artistic devices, an operation that breaks the illusion of reality and demands a critical involvement on the part of spectators who are not treated as simple voyeurs" (Pérez-Simón, 2011).The father in Pirandello's play accurately observes that the characters are more 'real' than the actors because the latter merely focuses on the exhibitory aspects of the text. Due to the director, the actor's self-image and commercial cravings overshadow the real potential of a character. The personality of the actors pollutes the personality of the carefully created characters. Antonio Illiano (1967) answers the question "are the actors more real than characters" in his article, "Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author: A Comedy in the Making", "We answer with an affirmative in the sense that the actors refer to people endowed with physical consistency; and we answer in the negative because people are changeable and perishable" (p. 4). When physical and creative consistencies are at odds with each other, the actors performing on stage will not conform to the original author's vision. Due to the inconsistencies, multiple frames of reference are created, such as that of the actors, the original characters as they were meant to be, the director, and the audience. These individually viewed rhetorical narrations and their subjective, lumpy interpretations create what Walter Jost calls, "a crisis of coherence for the rhetorician" (Antczak, 1995). In this case, the person who assumes the role of the sought-after author tries to neutralize the discrepancies inherent in the play. Any director in the world (who actively replaces the position of the author) would subjectively interpret a script to present it on stage, bringing about a major artistic compromise on coherence between idea and its presentation. This tends to have a misrepresenting and mind-boggling impact on the audience due to an imperfect representation on stage.

The milliner Madame Pace's entry triggers climactic action of revelation of past trauma. She bears a socially acceptable title and has an apparently respectable job, which is in reality a hub of prostitution. The

step-daughter and her mother unwittingly get ensnared into Pace's sinister trade. Resultantly, social and personal realities become entangled and undependable constructs, such as the narrative, become more convoluted. The spectators are forced to emancipate themselves from conventional prejudices regarding immorality and in the process, they become painfully conscious of the action on stage. The spectators are compelled to confront their condemnatory reality as critics. The characters are caught in a cycle of "shame and abasement" (Pirandello, 1921) and need to evolve psychologically and dramatically in order to escape their nerve-racking dilemma. They need a liberating aesthetic to achieve catharsis. In this regard, Wolfgang Iser says in his article, "The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach", "the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader" (Lodge & Wood, 2003). The characters need 'absolution' from their social 'shame', which can be achieved by developing a correct artistic/aesthetic bond. In their restless search, the characters demolish the fourth wall of the theatre and force the spectator to respond like a reader. In this regard, Iser says, "If the reader were given the whole story, and there were [was] nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us" (Lodge & Wood, 2003). The spectator needs to be shaken out of their reverie as passive recipients in order to draw out a response, which would enable them to constructively enact the human tragedy where all expectations have collapsed. The characters' dimension is eternal and is not subject to time, so the spectators must leave their own finite, fleeting world behind to understand the character's demand. The actors are caught in the world of illusions and masks, and are subject to public scrutiny.

Conclusion

The characters of the play have to face social stigma as well as come in terms with the fact that their author has abandoned them. In this regard, the father says, "One gives way to the temptation, only to rise from it again, afterwards, with a great eagerness to re-establish one's dignity, as if it were a tombstone to place on the grave of one's shame, and a monument to hide and sign the memory of our weaknesses" (Pirandello, 1921). The author must take ownership of the character's vulnerable state, he must also acknowledge his complicity in designing the shameful frame, capturing

their artistic figures. An author defines a book's history, which is why his intentions must be considered to properly understand the creations that stand before us as characters. Luckily, Pirandello (1925) has explained his intentions behind such a metatheatrical play. He stated that " 'Why not' thought I, 'represent this unique situation—an author refusing to accept certain characters born of his imagination, while the characters themselves obstinately refused to be shut out from the world of art, once they have received this gift of life?'" (p. 40). It is not a play to be superficially scrutinized, commercially applauded, and then stacked up like a lifeless thing on a shelf. Rather, it is as Brecht would declare in his essay, "From Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", "Everyday things are therefore raised above the level of the obvious and the automatic" (Drain, 1995). The spectator is brought out of his cozy and monotonous cocoon and made to question his absolute stance on reality. Identities ultimately prove to be nothing more than oscillations between illusion and reality. The division between the two must be eradicated to acknowledge the flimsiness and artificiality of human social order and its conventions, including traditional theatre. As modern readers, we must be aware that, "Truth is an illusion by which we have beguiled ourselves that it exists in order to have an excuse for survival" (Sepehrmanesh, 2014). Pirandello's theatre asserts its significance among contemporary interpretive communities, who are well-aware of the artificial schema of representation, by assertingthat traditional conventionsare nothing more than superficial veneers hiding the complexity and shiftiness of identities in an ever-fragmented world.

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