

An Analysis of the Play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in the Context of the Author-Work Relationship

Altı Şahıs Yazarını Arıyor Adlı Oyunun Yazar-Eser İlişkisi Bağlamında İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how the relationship between fiction and reality is questioned in the work of Luigi Pirandello, one of the important Italian playwrights of the 20th century, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The metafictional and postmodern features in the play were tried to be explained through Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?". In this postmodern work, in which the play-within-a-play narrative is explored in all its aspects, the adventures of fictional heroes in search of an author are emphasized. Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is evaluated as a work that is open to different interpretations as well as giving the opportunity to read / watch on stage Roland Barthes' philosophical thoughts on an author, reader and text as a play.

Keywords: Theater, Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Roland Barthes, Death of the Author

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada 20. yüzyılın önemli İtalyan oyun yazarlarından Luigi Pirandello'nun *Altı Şahıs Yazarını Arıyor* adlı eserinde kurmaca ve gerçeklik ilişkisinin nasıl sorgulandığı üzerinde durulmuştur. Oyunda yer alan üstkurmaca ve postmodern özellikler Roland Barthes'in "Yazarın Ölümü" ve Michel Foucault'un "Yazar Nedir?" başlıklı yazıları aracılığıyla açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Oyun içinde oyun izleğinin tüm yönleriyle işlendiği bu postmodern özellikler gösteren eserde, kendilerine bir yazar arayan kurmaca kahramanların maceraları üzerinde durulmuştur. Luigi Pirandello'nun *Altı Şahıs Yazarını Arıyor* adlı eseri, Roland Barthes'in yazar, okuyucu ve metin üzerine felsefi düşüncelerinin bir oyun olarak kurgulanmış şeklini okuma / sahnede izleme imkânı vermekle birlikte farklı yorumlamalara açık bir yapıtı olarak değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tiyatro, Luigi Pirandello, *Altı Şahıs Yazarını Arıyor*, Roland Barthes, Yazarın Ölümü

Introduction

The concept of the author has become a central concept since the end of the nineteenth century. Literature has always been considered together with the figure that produced it. In this respect, information about the author's life has come to be seen as equally valuable. It is seen that biography and criticism are evaluated together due to the presupposition that the better the biography of the author is known, the better the literary works produced will be understood. In the 1940s and early 1950s, there were some debates on the relationship between the author and the work. "Much more radical changes questioning the author's authority over the text, challenging traditional assumptions about the author as the organizer and producer of the literary work, emerged after the 1960s. The best example of this debate is Roland Barthes' essay 'The Death of the Author', published in 1968" (Webster, 2016, p. 16).

While Barthes begins his essay "The Death of the Author" (1968) by asking "Who is speaking thus?", Michel Foucault, in his paper "What is an Author?" (1969), begins his speech by asking, in reference to Beckett, "What matter who's speaking?". In these two debates in which the position of the 'author' is questioned, Barthes argues that the death of the author is necessary for the birth of the reader, while Foucault focuses more on the importance of the author by asking what will happen to the gaps created by the absence of the author in terms of the functions he carries. The author, who is the producer of the literary work, has also been at the center of literary criticism for a long time. Therefore, it is thought that there is an implicit equivalence between the work and its author.

Barthes advocates the exclusion of the author-centered point of view in the interpretation / reception of the work and the symbolic death of the 'author', which he thinks constitutes an obstacle to the achievement of polysemy. Accordingly, "to treat a text with an Author, to set a forced stopping point in that text, to give it a definite and final signifier, is to close writing" (Barthes, 2013, p. 66). According to Barthes, the writer is a person produced by modern society. Stating that in primitive societies the narrative does not belong to a single person, Barthes says that the narrator is evaluated more in terms

Received/Geliş Tarihi: 22.01.2023

Accepted/Kabul Tarihi: 02.03.2023

Publication Date/Yayın Tarihi: 30.03.2023

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Cite this article: Solak N. D. (2023).
An analysis of the play six characters
in search of an author in the context of
the author-work relationship. *Art Time*,
4(1):15-20.



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of presentation performance (Barthes, 2013, p. 62). By evaluating the work as an element independent of the author, it is seen that the reader is placed at the center and in this way, the door is opened to the polysemy that will be formed by the number of readers. With this, “the author ceases to be an authority with a centralized and holistic consciousness that has dominion over the text. He begins to be evaluated as “a decentered and fragmented figure established by different discursive practices, who has experienced dissociation in the depths of the unconscious” (Demirtaş, 2016, p. 50).

According to Barthes, “With the withdrawal of the author from the text, the text is transformed again. The author is not involved in the ways of reproducing and reading the text. A text is not a series of words that reveal a single meaning. The text is a whole made up of quotations extracted from thousands of sources of culture” (Barthes, 2013, pp. 64-65). We can consider the expression text as a ‘text / weaving’ with the meaning of the word textile, which is also used in daily life. It is possible to interpret that this weaving is the product of a long-term work and solidarity from the past to the present, rather than the labor of a single person, and that although the weavers have changed over the years, the weaving is present and this is what is important.

Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) wrote forty-four plays, most of which were inspired by his stories (Özgül, 1970, p. 157). Sevda Şener states that Pirandello writes plays that “show that reality changes according to who perceives it, that there is no such thing as an objective reality that everyone can agree on” (Şener, 2010, p. 89).

Peter Szondi calls the most successful examples of the changes that occurred in the art of drama in terms of form and content towards the end of the 19th century as “epic”. This term, which is mostly used for Brecht’s theater, points to a wider range of uses in Szondi, of which Brecht is only one of the examples. According to Szondi, “such works point to themselves, presenting ‘a microcosm representing a macrocosm’ that is explained and asserted by the ‘epic I’, the creative being who recognizes that there is an audience to whom the spectacle is directed.” Szondi thinks that this process also works in Pirandello’s plays (Carlson, 2008, p. 449). In his writings dealing with the tension between text and performance, Pirandello writes: “He treats the written text as the completed artistic form; what is seen in the theater is only a ‘staged translation’ of it: ‘More or less faithful, few or many all actors, all translations like all translations of any kind, are always and necessarily inferior to the original’ (Carlson, 2008, p. 384). In terms of the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the text is noteworthy not only for its play-within-a-play characterization but also for its use of the staging-within-staging technique.

In this study, Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is tried to be analyzed as a play in which the text itself discusses the position of the author. In an unusual way, we are told the story of the search for the author of the characters who are, of course, produced by an author but then left by the author because the author does not want the text, or perhaps does not like it. In this respect, the theater text, which can be considered as metafiction, is discussed in line with the views of Barthes and Foucault, two important thinkers who discuss the subject of “Author” in various aspects.

Six Characters in Search of an Author

The play Six Characters in Search of an Author begins when six characters come in and say that they are looking for an author

while Pirandello’s play Each In His Own Way is being rehearsed on a theater stage. In order to become immortal, these six fictitious characters need an author to record them. Unwilling to believe this surprising situation, the play develops as the actors and actresses, especially the director, become interested in the story of the six characters. These imaginary people, consisting of The Mother, The Father, The Step-Daughter, The Son, The Boy, The Child, have a story. According to this, The Father, thinking that his wife is having an affair with someone else, allows her to leave and even paves the way for it. She remarries, but after three children are born, her husband dies. During this period, the father, who succumbed to his curiosity, occasionally spies on them to find out about her condition. The father, who also follows the children, meets the step-daughter several times. When her husband dies, the mother returns to her old neighborhood and starts working as a tailor to support her household. Her boss, Madame Pace, is also a woman with a number of private clients, and even though she is not satisfied with the mother’s tailoring, she does not say anything to her because she uses her daughter for this private work. One day, however, it turns out that one of the private clients who come to Madame Pace’s house is the first husband of the mother. The Mother tries to prevent the Father from appearing in the same scene with The Step-daughter. The father then convinces the mother and gathers the whole family at his house, but as a result of this incompatible gathering, the little girl drowns in the garden pool and dies. The boy shoots himself with a rifle. Under the leadership of the manager who likes this story, the story of the family is rehearsed on stage by the actors. The family intervenes in the representation on the grounds that the reenactments do not reflect reality and they live their own stories on stage. At the end of the play, after disagreements between the manager, the actors and the six characters about the representation, the little girl drowns in the pool set up as a prop and the boy shoots himself to death with a rifle. Whether or not these deaths occur at the end of the play is real for some, while for others they are a part of the act. As can be understood from the stories of the six characters in the play, the idea that there is no single reality and no single truth is dealt with, while this relativist understanding removes the boundaries between dream and reality in terms of intertwining and establishes parallels between theater and life.

The play deals with the inclusion of imaginative people in real life. When considered holistically, the play constitutes a good example of metafiction in the sense that the real life they are involved in is also a fiction of the author. For this work, in which the play-within-a-play technique is used, Hasan Erkek finds the function of the technique important in that it “mediates the discussion and questioning of multiple concepts related to life, art and theater” (Erkek, 1999, p. 101).

Sevda Şener asserts that this work is the most innovative and striking play of Pirandello’s plays in terms of play fiction and states: “According to the author, it is useless to rely on the creative and enlightening power of the author in order to see to what extent the artificial reality, whose boundaries are drawn by laws and rules, contradicts with the realities experienced and the roles assigned to individuals. The author whose personality is shaped by the same rules should not be expected to solve this problematic situation” (Şener, 2010, p. 89-90).

1. An Author Wanted

Six Characters in Search of an Author is a pioneering work in which formal experiments specific to the modern period were realized,

such as including the stages of the work's formation in the text and involving the actor and even the reader in the work along with the author. The play comes to the fore with the problem of searching for an author to complete the work, where the characters and the story are left unfinished.

In this study, in the intertwined fiction of the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the characters searching for their author will be called "The Story of Six Characters" and the actors rehearsing on stage will be called "The Theater Company". Accordingly, it will be tried to examine how the story of six characters, as a draft work without an author, is interpreted by the theater company, which is in the position of the audience.

The first encounter of the reader with the work represented by the theater company is reflected in these words:

"MANAGER: ... Who are you? What do you want?
THE FATHER: We are looking for a reporter... (p.12)
(...)
STAGE MANAGER Come on, get out!
THE FATHER: Are you doing this because there is no draft that includes us?" (p.15)

In the play, the characters of the play, which is a sketch from the author, are speaking, not the author. In this respect, we can consider them - to borrow a phrase from Barthes - as a text whose author is dead. This draft text, whose author is unknown, is first approached with prejudice. Playwrights searching for their author is an unusual situation, but this situation creates a distrust towards the environment. Foucault states that unlike literary texts such as stories, tales, epics, tragedies, which were circulated in the Middle Ages without the author being known, the acceptance of scientific texts on the condition that their authors' names were known was a sign of trust (2014, p. 232). Therefore, these people who say that they have come from a text of unknown authorship do not inspire confidence. This approach in the play can be understood from the fact that the theater company, which is one degree more real (!) than the six characters, does not find what is said believable.

"The Father: As I said, the play is not written; (to the Manager) if you and your Actors wish, we can tune it between us!
MANAGER: (bored) What a tune! This is not an orchestra. Dramas and comedies are represented here!
THE FATHER: That's better! That's why we are applying to you for!
MANAGER: Where's the play manuscript?
THE FATHER: We have our own, sir. (Actors laugh.) The drama is in ourselves; we are the drama; the passion boiling inside us keeps pressing us to represent the drama as soon as possible! (p.16-17)
(...)
THE MOTHER: (in infinite anguish, to the Manager): Have pity on these two innocent babies... (she seems to pass out, staggering) Oh my God...
THE FATHER: (Running to hold the mother along with the actors who are astonished and horrified) For God's sake, give this poor widow a chair!
ACTORS: (running): Is she really doing it? Did she really faint?
MANAGER: Quick, a chair! (p.19)

(...)
MANAGER: (surprised, stunned): I don't know where we are, what's going on anymore!" (p.20)

In the story of the six characters, the confidence given by the author's name is lacking, but, again drawing on Foucault, two elements prevent the author from being completely ignored. One of these is the work and the other is the writing. The natural reactions and behaviors of the characters that are appropriate to their stories - the mother's staggering and fainting, unable to bear her situation - establish trust. In a sense, the credibility created by their presence there legitimizes them. In the story of the *Six Characters*, the aim is to find an 'author' for these imaginative characters and their stories. For this reason, the relationship of the draft text, which is abandoned by the author, with the author is also a subject open to discussion. Foucault cites Nietzsche's manuscripts and the notes in his notebooks as an example and asks "How can we define a work among the millions of traces left behind after someone's death?" by saying "Is this a work or not? Why not?" for an appointment or an address, a note left for the cleaning lady (2014, p. 230). From this point of view, the existence of these six characters, albeit in manuscript form, points to the existence of an author in the context of the notion of work. Therefore, this can be considered another factor that has facilitated the acceptance of the six characters and their story.

Although the search for an author is considered strange by the theater company, they are convinced by the believability of the six characters' speeches and their behavior towards each other and are drawn into the story. But they still continue to question the conversations. The dialogues between the company's cast reflect this:

"LEADING MAN (to his friends): What a spectacle!
LEADING LADY: (They're acting us instead of us acting them!)
JUVENILE LEAD: Is it too much for us to watch a play once in a blue moon?" (p. 22)

We can think of this scene, in which those in the theater company become readers in a sense, as the initial dismissal of a text without an author. In the rest of the play, it is emphasized that the story told is more important than the author, and this text, which has no author, is rehearsed.

2. An Author Is Found (?)

Since the author of the six characters is unknown, we are freed from the limitations of considering the meaning of the text together with its author. However, this situation, which points to a modern approach, creates a perception of incompleteness in the play. The necessity of an author is emphasized by looking for an author. It is significant that the manager, who found the idea of bringing this unknown tragedy to the stage appealing because the author's empire was very powerful and in order to take advantage of this power, accepts this offer, thinking that he would also receive the title of "author" (Barthes, 2013, p. 62). Yet what is authorship? Is the author to put into writing a draft that has its characters, story and even dialogues ready through -stenography?

"MANAGER: ... An author is required... I can send you to an author...
THE FATHER: Come, you be our author!
MANAGER: Me? What are you saying?
THE FATHER: Yes, yes, you be our author! What's

not to like?

MANAGER: I've never worked as an author!

THE FATHER: If you hadn't done it, do it now! It's not hard work! It's something everyone does... It will make your job easier if you have the characters alive in front of you.

MANAGER: But that's not enough!

THE FATHER: Isn't that enough? You will see that we have had our catastrophe in front of you.

MANAGER: Yes, but after all, it needs an author to write the play!

THE FATHER: No, he doesn't. We represent the drama in front of you and you write it down. We draw a short script and immediately start rehearsing.

MANAGER: (wants to try it, goes on stage) I feel like it makes sense... What's the point of giving it a try just for the sake of it..." (p. 37-38)

The Manager, who wants to benefit from the prestige of 'authorship', starts working by convincing the actors of the Company. In the second act, we see the interventions of the theater company that will rehearse the play of six characters. This situation is also important in terms of revealing the relationship between author and director in theater and the problems that develop. In the modernist understanding, it is assumed that the director's task is to "faithfully transfer the author's text from the page to the stage" (Brockett, 2018, pp. 255). "The director can determine the playwright's intention through a rigorous analysis of the text" (Brockett, 2018, p. 255). However, while a text is a starting point for the director, it always reaches the audience by carrying a meaning that is woven with the indicators of its own interpretation. In this respect, it would not be wrong to say that staging is an indirect expression or interpretation of the text. According to Benedetto Croce's thought, the staging of a play is the translation of the text into the language of staging. Therefore, the text may also carry the negative characteristics that a work in translation may face while being staged (Carlson, 2008, p. 384). The negative feature Croce points out manifests itself as the loss of reality on the stage, and six characters defend it.

Although the author rejects them, the characters are part of a text that belongs to the author. In this sense, what the manager or the actor-actresses do is to interpret them. As a matter of fact, when the manager intervenes in the story, the six characters, whom we can characterize as the text itself, do not allow it. They are very realistic and oppose to any change and the slightest interpretation. They do not allow them to be represented. The text is fixed, unchanging, whether the author is alive or dead, whether the author dies or not. Every attempt to change implies an interpretation. In this regard, the father may represent the author figure who defends the frame story and does not allow change. Another person who does not allow intervention is the stepdaughter. Although she criticizes the actors who portray her and the poorly organized decor, her constant laughter seems important in terms of differentiating her reaction. This stepdaughter, who exists in the author's imagination, laughs at the decor, which is unlike the one in the author's universe, and at those who imitate her. It can also be said that this laughter is caused by the difference in meaning between the original meaning of the text and the new interpretation.

"MANAGER: Let's not drag this out! You can't go on stage as you! On the stage, the actors act out,

that's it!

THE FATHER: I got it. We were living persons, yet the author did not want to turn us into the protagonists of the play. Now I understand why. I do not say this to insult your actors. God forbid! But seeing someone I don't know, someone I don't recognize, representing me...

Leading Man: If you'll excuse me, I'll represent you.

THE FATHER: Nice to meet you, sir. (Bends over.) Here, I think that no matter how much you try to adopt me using your will and art... (Surprised)

Leading Man: Yeah.

THE FATHER: Even if you try to resemble me with the knack, the person you will represent with your tall stature will not be me in reality. Or rather - your face aside - you will represent me as you understand me, as you hear me, and it is doubtful that you will hear me, anyway. But you will not hear me the way I hear myself. Those who judge us should not lose sight of this point." (p.46-47)

The fact that the director, with the means at his disposal, arranges a setting in accordance with the narratives of the six characters and that this is found to be incomplete can be interpreted as an indication that what occurs in the author's imagination while producing his work and what is visualized in the reader's mind are different. As the reader enters the world of the text, just as the director does, he or she furnishes a setting for the story with materials from his or her own mental world, reflecting the limitations of his or her own imagination. Comparing between the two or arguing about which is more valuable is a rather unnecessary discussion in terms of postmodern literature. Postmodernism has brought an understanding that demonstrates the futility of this debate. Indeed, "postmoderns argue that there cannot be a single 'correct' interpretation of a text because words do not mean exactly the same thing to everyone", in other words, "once a work is completed, the creator's interpretation of the meaning of the text is no longer superior to anyone else's interpretation because the text, not the author, elicits reactions and interpretations" (Brockett, 2018, p. 255).

The father's words on the subject are very interesting for the play. "BABA: ... When a character is born, he/she immediately separates from his/her author and becomes an independent being. Everyone can imagine that character in many situations that the author did not want to put him in, and sometimes he can even take on a meaning that the author did not even think of giving him!" (p. 76). Here, we can say that it is not the author but an imaginatively created character claiming the meaning that he or she carries.

An important issue that draws attention in the play is that the director considers the children among the six characters as off-stage elements because they are not suitable for the stage and it is difficult to rehearse and work with children. At the beginning of the play, it is signaled by the director that the little girl and the boy can be removed from the play. After these scenes, which suggest that the fate of someone being removed from the script while the play continues is tantamount to death, it is understood that the children are dead at the end of the play.

"MANAGER: It is not nice for children to act on stage! You can't imagine how much trouble children make on stage.

THE FATHER: Don't worry, you can get rid of it at any time! Even that little girl is ready to leave at any moment..." (p. 26)

Even though the manager treats the story as a dramatic disaster with a definite beginning and end and 'closes' the text in his own way, there are places where the draft text does not allow this. The mother's reactions and the words she utters as the scene draws to a close reflect this.

"MANAGER: What's done is done! I don't understand!

The Mother: It hasn't happened, it's happening now, it's always happening! My tears are not fake, Mr Director! My anguish is never exhausted, it is constantly renewed, constantly flaring up. I am confronted with my anguish every moment." (p. 67)

This story, which 'happens again', 'happens now', 'is always happening' in every staging, also coincides with the idea that a work can have as many interpretations as there are readers and that the work will be rewritten every time it meets a different reader. "The person who writes in the modern age is born at the same time as his text," Barthes says, adding that every text is forever written in the here and now" (Barthes, 2013, p. 65).

There is no clear epilogue both in the play as a whole and in the story of the 6 characters who find a place for themselves in the play-within-a-play fiction. It is not clear what happened in the aftermath of the deaths or what ideas were promoted. This is reflected in the following words of the director, which we can say reflect the reactions of a reader in the classical sense:

"MANAGER: Is he hurt? Is he really hurt?

LEADING LADY: He's dead! Poor child! What a marvelous thing!

Leading Man: No, he's not dead! This is a trick! Don't believe it!

OTHER ACTORS ENTERING FROM THE RIGHT: A trick? Truth! The child is dead!

OTHER ACTORS ENTERING FROM THE LEFT: No, he's not dead! Trick! Trick!

THE FATHER: What a trick, man? Truth, truth, masters! Truth!

MANAGER: Trick! Truth! Go to hell, all of you! Turn on the lights! Turn on the lights! Ah! Ah! This has never happened to me before! They made me lose a whole day!" (p. 88)

The manager thinks that he is wasting his time because he is interested in this story, which is unknown who wrote it, what it is for, where it ends up. Like the reader who says 'what have I read now' in the face of a work with an ambiguous ending, the director returns to his real life, unable to find what he hopes from this story / dream that is left open-ended. Based on Barthes' statement "The moment the author is found, the text is explained.", it can be said that the director's authorial experience in the play ended in failure and the director is experiencing the frustration of this (2013, p. 66). Because the parts that were not clarified in the text were rewritten to be completed in the viewer's mind. The six characters who came from the imagination went to the imagination, but they existed for a moment in minds just as they wanted, they wanted to be known for a moment, they were known. In a sense, they were rewritten on stage.

"THE FATHER:: The human being may die, the writer may die, but what he creates does not die! Nor does he need to possess such extraordinary virtues or perform miracles to live forever. Who was Sancho Panza? Who was Don Abbondio? They live forever

MANAGER: There is nothing to all this talk! But what do you want here?

THE FATHER: We want to live!

MANAGER (with a sneer): Forever?

THE FATHER: No, not forever, just a moment in your person is enough for us." (p. 16)

Barthes concludes his "The Death of the Author" by saying "The price of the birth of the reader will be the death of the author" (2013: 68). In this play where the author dies for free, all the six characters want is to give birth to the reader. Because they have compromised their reality (!) as a price for being staged as a play and have agreed to become different from what they are according to the interpretation of the manager. In return, they existed.

Conclusion

Roland Barthes and M. Foucault are important names that contribute to the ideas produced in the context of author-work-text. In this study, based on Barthes, who argues that the way to realize the importance of the text and thus the reader is through the symbolic death of the author, and Foucault, who produces ideas on what the gaps that will emerge with this death will be, Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is analyzed. In this play, in which the play-within-a-play technique is used, the draft in search of its author, which we call "The Story of Six Characters" in our article, is called the text, and the actors who communicate with the text and interpret them are called the "Theater Company" and tried to be handled in a position representing the reader. This play, which gives the opportunity to read/watch Barthes's thoughts on stage as a play, has been evaluated as a work open to different readings and these thoughts have been decisive in the interpretation of the work.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Declaration of Interests: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Funding: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazarlar çıkar çatışması bildirmemişlerdir.

Finansal Destek: Yazarlar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadıklarını beyan etmişlerdir.

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