



Investigating the idea of legitimacy in the moves by the main characters in the Sacha Guitry's play, *Villa for sale*

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Abstract

The main focus of the research paper is on the questions-What are the grounds for deciding that the moves of the characters in a play are legitimate or illegitimate and is it possible to interpret their behavior in the light of the ideas, by Leotard and Alessandro Giovannelli. The moves of the chief characters, Gaston and Mrs. Smith appear to be legitimate in the postmodern environment, where people can neither expected to be serious about sophistications of specified traditional behaviour nor having 'respect' towards the 'differences and specificities' of their culture. In the Lyotard's opinion this a practice of the 'irreverence towards established ways of behaving, an installation of 'unexpected' 'cultural' interrogations about the iconic traditional patterns of behaviour. According to M H Abrams puts, "In drama, the narrative is not told but evolves by means of the direct presentation on stage of the actions and speeches of the characters." Therefore according to Giovannelli's sense, work of art can be judged according to mode of its production, their effect on the opponents and their mode of perception. Therefore even common resistances, like that of children refusing to go to schools, frustrations of people, like Juliette, and tricks of clever minds, like that of Gaston originating in the day today routine life due to moves, attitudes, and conducts, contrary to the accepted ethical norms might be evaluated or judged in terms of legitimacy. To conclude the moves of the characters are legitimate, even they are in contrast to the accepted or prescribed legitimate patterns.

Keywords: Giovannelli, Alessandro, ethical norms, legitimacy

Introduction

It is a common experience that parents often compel their children to go to schools and colleges for education. Frequently, the children resist but the parents remain adamant on sending their wards to the educational institutions. If the children ask their parents the reasons for sending them (the wards) to school for studies, the invariable response happens to be that studies would make the life better and worth living. Although, to a child's mind, the answer is hard to accept and absorb, but the insistence by the parents is undoubtedly 'legitimate'. The children, in the later life accept and respect 'legitimacy' of the acts by the parents. This idea of accepting legitimacy has compelled the author to interpret the play in hand, but before that it important to define the idea of legitimacy in the background of the postmodern insights by Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Craig Owens and Stuart Hall; and ethical perceptions of Alessandro Giovannelli about art. The main focus of the research paper is on the questions- What are the grounds for deciding that the moves of the characters in a play are legitimate or illegitimate and is it possible to interpret their behavior in the light of the ideas, stated above?

The Idea of Legitimacy

The idea of legitimacy in the attire of postmodernism adopts a tone of irreverence towards established icon, installs unexpected figures as cultural icons and interrogates traditions and canons. According to Lyotard, it celebrates plurality, heterogeneity, and the small, local innovative, marginalized and unfinished narratives that respect differences and

specificities of cultures, individuals and regions. There are deliberate references to earlier texts in the form of parody, explicit borrowings indirect references, quotes. The everyday, the body and its "permanent flux" of desire and the ordinary become subjects for "serious" art, philosophy and criticism. All knowledge, truths, experience and pleasure are only of immediate value and relevance. The narrator continually undermines his own apparently "reliable" narrative thus drawing our attention to the essentially contingent, representational and linguistic nature of reality.

Alessandro Giovannelli opines that "Quite obviously, works of art can be ethically judged in a number of different ways: most notably, for the way they are produced (say, Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* for the injuries suffered by crew members during the film's production), 2 for their consequences on their perceivers (H. B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its role in the American Civil War, or, say, a novel hurting someone's feelings by reporting details of her private life),3 or for the point of view or perspective they embody (The *Triumph of the Will* for its celebration of Nazism). Defenders and opponents of ethical criticism must specify the ethical dimension – i.e., the specific sort of ethical judgment – they consider to be relevant or irrelevant to artistic value" (*Philosophia*, 2007)^[3].

The Play-*Villa for sale*

The play, *Villa for sale* is a hilarious comedy. The plot of the play revolves around the sale of a villa by Ms Juliette. She is frustrated because she has not been able to find a customer for

almost a month. She has put the sign board, 'For Sale' a month before. She has now decided to lower its price to two lakh francs. Although she is pleased that Jeanne and Gaston have arrived to see the villa yet she is not sure about the completion of the deal. When Juliette begins to point at the merits of the villa, she finds that Gaston has no intentions of buying it. He hardly seems interested about the purchase. This gets obvious Juliette, when she takes Jeanne upstairs to her the upper floor, Gaston stays back. In the meantime, Mrs Al Smith comes in. Mrs. Smith is associated with films and commercial cinema and she is there in connection with the shooting of her film. She wants to buy the villa to build a bungalow in its place. She takes Gaston to be the owner and asks for the price. Gaston plays the trick and quotes three lakh francs as its price. He not only negotiates the terms of sale but he also accepts a cheque from her. Having attained the firm grounds now, he agrees to buy it from Juliette at the price of two lakh francs. In this way, he earns one lakh francs from the entire venture.

Applying the Postmodern Ideas of the Legitimacy

A close observation of the following dialogues between Gaston and Mrs. Al Smith reveals the idea that representation in universal terms often proves a misadventure. Gaston deliberately acts, in a manner, which strengthens Mrs. Smith's apprehension about him as the owner of the villa. This situation create a scene, that appears to be a non-serious parody of the people and their socio-ethnic or socio-cultural peculiarities. Thus the postmodern stance of 'plurality, heterogeneity, and the small, local... and specificities of cultures, individuals and regions' seems to be celebrated. Gaston's master stroke 'We are learning now. We are practising' provides his move (acting as owner) the legitimacy because "All knowledge, truths, experience and pleasure are only of immediate value and relevance".

MRS. AL. Smith. To start off with, why isn't the price marked on the signboard?

You French people have a cute way of doing business! You go and tell your boss that if he doesn't right away I'm going. I haven't any time to waste.... Oh, you're the husband, I suppose. Good afternoon. Do you speak American?

Gaston: Copies are not always good. We could only imitate you and imitations are no better than parodies. We are so different. Think of it... Europeans go to America to earn money and Americans come to Europe to spend it.

MRS. AL. Smith. Just the same you ought to learn how to do business.

Gaston. We are learning now. We are practising.

In spite of Gaston's previous satirical attitudes towards Juliette and his wife Jeanne, he manages to win their trust and gets the villa from the real owner (Juliette) in just two lakh francs. This a practice of the 'irreverence towards established ways of behaving, an installation of 'unexpected' 'cultural' interrogations about the iconic traditional patterns of behaviour. Thus moves of the chief characters, Gaston and Mrs. Smith appear to be legitimate in the postmodern environment, where people can neither expected to be serious about sophistications of specified traditional behaviour nor having 'respect' towards the 'differences and specificities' of

their culture.

Gaston. It's all very important. A bathroom with a bath in it. Bedrooms. Two large and one small, two servants' rooms and a garde. It's really possible. While you were upstairs, I have been thinking a lot about your papa and mamma. You see, I am really unselfish, and then the rooms for your sister's children... Also, my dear, I've been thinking... and this is serious... about our old age... it's bound to come sooner or later and the natural desire of old age is a quiet country life... (To JULIETTE) You said two hundred thousand, didn't you?

Applying Alessandro Giovannelli's Ethical Ideas of the Legitimacy

In the play, Gaston yawns one narrative and successfully exploits in two different contexts. The reference to the first context happens to be in the quarrelsome situation between him and his wife, Jeanne. There he exploits the information of the architectural conditions about the villa, which he neither intends nor desires to purchase.

Gaston. And they call that garden! Why, it's a yard with a patch of grass' in the middle.

Gaston. Twenty five-yards of cretonne and a dash of paint... you can get anywhere.

Gaston. Why should I? I don't want to see the kitchen to know that the garden is a myth and the salon is impossible.

Gaston. I told you before we cross the road that I didn't want it. As soon as you see a sign 'Villa for sale', you have to go inside and be shown to over it. It's perfect mania with you.

Gaston. You women are so curious... you can't resist the pleasure of sticking your noses into another woman's bathroom... Especially if you don't know her. The truth is you are eternally hoping to ferret out some cold cream which is better than the one you use yourself.

Gaston. It's not for us... it's for your parents. You are simply trying to make buy a villa so that you can put your father and mother in it.... If you got what you want, do you realise what would happen? We would spend the month of August in the villa, but your parents would take the possession of it every year from the beginning of April until the end of September. What's more they would bring the whole tribe of your sister's children with them. No! I am very fond of your family, but not quite so fond as that.

Gaston's above speeches reveal the harsh reality of his intensions and his expectations of escaping from the unmotivated moves to aimlessly exploring the houses bearing 'For Sale' signs. He appears to be taking firm stands and extreme critical remarks on behavioural patterns of women in general, while refereeing them in connection to his wife, Jeanne.

MH Abrams puts in, "In drama, the narrative is not told but evolves by means of the direct presentation on stage of the actions and speeches of the characters." Therefore the context of the second reference is evolved when Gaston re-exploits the information of the architectural conditions about the villa, (which he neither intends nor desires to purchase) only to pamper Juliette. So that she may not have any idea about actual fact that Gaston has already sold the villa to Mrs. Smith.

It is a mode of fiction which has been developed by Sacha Guitry in accordance with a particular philosophical thesis of

'move'. As there are different contextual and lexical implications of the term. Move, the term (noun) is entered in *Oxford Dictionary of Advanced Learner's Dictionary* as "Action: an action that you do or need to achieve sth: *a change of place or position*. Change of Ideas/Behaviour: *a change in ideas, attitudes or behaviour*. Change of House/Job: *an act of changing the place where you live or work*. Make a, your etc. 'move' to do the action that you intend to do in order to achieve sth."

Juliette: The garden is not very large... it's not long and it's not wide, but...

Gaston: But my word, it is high!

Juliette: Well, you see, I must admit, quite frankly, that I don't want to sell it any more.

Gaston: (*rising*). Then there's nothing further to be said about it.

MRS. AL. Smith: See here now, I tell you I'm in a hurry, How much do they want for this house?

Gaston: Now let's see... In that case, entirely furnished, with the exception of that little picture by an unknown artist... it belonged to my grandfather and I want to keep it...

Gaston: Delighted to hear it Madame... it's very good thing in business when everyone is delighted!

Gaston: Here is my card Good-bye, Madame. Oh, by the way, you will be kind enough to leave tomorrow morning, won't you?

Conclusion

This thesis, a product of post-Darwinian biology in the 19th century, held that a human being exists entirely in order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond the natural world.; and therefore such a being is merely a higher order animal whose character and behaviour are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment." The idea may push us in some unknown realms of philosophy and science but does the idea make any appeal to Alessandro. in the authour's estimation and according to Giovannelli's sense, "works of art can be "ethically judged in a number of different ways: most notably, for the way they are produced for their consequences on their perceivers for the point of view or perspective they embody". Therefore even common resistances, like that of children refusing to go to schools, frustrations of people, like Juliette, and tricks of clever minds, like that of Gaston originating in the day today routine life due to moves, attitudes, and conducts, contrary to the accepted ethical norms might be evaluated or judged in terms of legitimacy. To conclude the moves of the characters are legitimate, even they are in contrast to the accepted or prescribed legitimate patterns.

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