

**QUESTIONS OF REALITY AND METADRAMA IN
LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S *SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH
OF AN AUTHOR* AND CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S
*INCEPTION***

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in

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by

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For my dear family

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATIONS

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.
2. The advanced study in the English Language and Literature graduate program of which this thesis is part has consisted of:
 - i) The analysis of metatheatre and the question of reality in theatre and cinema.
 - ii) Application of this analysis to the works *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello and *Inception* by Christopher Nolan.

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January, 2012

ABSTRACT

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QUESTIONS OF REALITY AND METADRAMA IN LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR AND CHRISTOPHER

NOLAN'S INCEPTION

Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1922) and Christopher Nolan's movie *Inception* (2010) are two works that I will analyze for my thesis according to perception of reality. The target of the study is to reveal that these two works employ metafictional techniques to explore the constructed nature of reality. The question of whether life is real or life is just a dream to wake up for a real world is the outcome of these two works. My thesis will focus on the idea that these works cause this questioning with their usage of metafiction for their narrative structure. Pirandello uses a play within a play structure, as actors prepare for the rehearsal on the stage, while Nolan's movie has a fantastic plot and narrative structure in which characters fall into a sleep and wake up in a world that they create with their unconscious. In this way, Nolan produces a "dream within a dream" style, which resembles the play within the play structure of metadrama. Both drama and movie depict conflicts between reality and illusion, which intertwine so that the audience cannot separate them from each other. Pirandello has valuable contributions to film area. The subject of "Pirandellian tradition" on cinema as "a play within a play within a film" structure is held through the movie *Inception*, so the movie is a modern type of Pirandellian style with both its narrative structure and questioning of reality that are common features for both works.

Key Words:

Metadrama, metafiction, contemporary cinema, Pirandellian tradition, question of reality.

KISA ÖZET

Ayla YAĞMUROĞLU

Ocak 2012

LUIGI PIRANDELLO’NUN *ALTI ŞAHIS YAZARINI ARIYOR* VE CHRISTOPHER NOLAN’ IN *BAŞLANGIÇ* ESERLERİNDE GERÇEKLİK VE METADRAMA

Luigi Pirandello’nun *Altı Şahıs Yazarını Arıyor* (1922) oyunu ve Christopher Nolan’ın *Başlangıç* (2010) filmi, tezimde gerçeklik algısına göre inceleyeceğim iki eserdir. Çalışmamın amacı bu iki eserin gerçeklik duygusunu ortaya koymak için metadramsal teknikler kullanmasıdır. Hayatın gerçek mi yoksa gerçek hayata uyanacağımız bir rüya mı sorgulaması bu eserlerin sonuçlarıdır. Tezimde, eserlerin anlatım tekniği olan metadramayı kullanarak bu sorgulamaya sebebi olduğu fikrine odaklanacağım. Pirandello, aktörlerin sahnede bir başka tiyatro oyunu için prova yaptığı eserinde oyun içinde oyun yapısını kullanırken, Nolan’ın filmi karakterlerin rüyaya daldıkları ve uyandıklarında bilinçaltı tarafından kurgulanmış dünyalarda kendilerini buldukları fantastik olaylar dizisi ve anlatım yapısına sahip. Bu şekilde Nolan metadramanın oyun içinde oyun yapısına benzeyen rüya içinde rüya stilini üretir. Hem drama hem de film, seyircilerin birbirinden ayırt edemediği iç içe geçmiş gerçeklik ve yanılsama çatışmasını tasvir eder. Pirandello’nun film alanına da birçok katkısı bulunmaktadır. Sinemadaki “film içinde oyun içinde oyun” yapısı şeklinde oluşan “Pirandello geleneği”, *Inception* filmi açısından incelenir. Bu sebeple film, bu iki eser için ortak özellikler olan anlatım yapısı ve gerçekliği sorgulaması ile modern bir Pirandello stilindedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Metadrama, günümüz sineması, Pirandello geleneği, gerçeklik sorunu.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF METADRAMA IN DRAMA AND CINEMA

“Metadrama can be defined as drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself” (Hornby 31). It is also called metatheatre or metafiction. Richard Hornby divides metadrama into six varieties: “the play within the play”, “the ceremony within the play”, “the role playing within the role”, “literary and real-life reference within the play” and “self reference”. In this study, I will focus on “the play within the play”. Patrice Pavis describes metadrama as “a play whose subject is the performance of a play” in which “the external audience watches a performance within which an audience of actors is also watching a performance” (Pavis 270). Hornby mentions two kinds of the play within the play: inset type and framed type. While the inner play is primary in the framed type, it is secondary in the inset type. Until modern theatre, it was easy to classify plays according to these two types because it was easy to decide whether the inner or the outer play was primary (Hornby 33). In modern metatheatre, however, these types are intertwined and there is no certain distinction between them. Therefore, this dual structure blurs the line between perception and reality. Hornby explains that the experience of metadrama for the audience is a dislocation of perception and alienation, so he defines “seeing double” as a source of metadrama (32). In the section “The Naturalistic Vision” of *Drama and Reality*, Ronald Gaskell mentions the representation of the world on stage. He states, “Central to the naturalistic vision is the belief that nature, the material world in which we change and die, is the real

world and that there is no other” (24). On the contrary, metatheatre offers multiple realities by questioning whether the world is real or not.

Metadrama cannot be limited to some plays or playwrights or periods in theatre history although a “full-fledged play within play never occurred in the classical Greek and Roman period” (Hornby 36). Metadrama occurs in sixteenth century Shakespearean drama to modern drama. Shakespeare is assumed as the touchstone. *Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, for example, use this structure. Also, the play within the play sequence is introduced by Shakespeare in *Henry IV* (Abel 66). *Hamlet* is also one of the earliest examples of this form. Hamlet’s *Mousetrap* is an inner play in which the other characters are the audience. The inner play functions as a turning point by exposing that Claudius murdered Hamlet’s father. Lionel Abel asserts that “Shakespeare experimented throughout his career with the play-within-a-play, sometimes introducing play-within-a-play sequences in his tragedies, almost always introducing such sequences in his comedies” (66). These plays demonstrate Shakespeare’s idea that “All the world is a stage,” which compares life to a play.

Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (ca. 1584-89) has both framed and inset types of the play within the play, which has a “Pirandellian quality” and foreshadows *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (Hornby 37). The Spanish playwright Pedro Calderon de la Barca wrote *Life is a Dream* (1636), which contains the inner play of a dream (Hornby 38). After the Renaissance in which the play within play was very popular, this device appears only occasionally from the mid-seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, but then in the romantic era it occurs more frequently. However, after realism succeeded romanticism, the play within the play was depicted less

frequently. Gaskell claims that toward the end of the nineteenth century, drama took a positivist conception of reality. To positivist drama, “reality is the world of science in which everything, in principle, can be verified by observation” (Gaskell 23). At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century there was an influential change exemplified by Anton Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull* (1896) and August Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* (1902). According to Hornby, “A Dream Play and The Sea Gull can be seen as prototypes for much of twentieth-century metadrama” (Hornby 41). In the twentieth century, reality becomes indefinite and ambiguous and cannot be restricted by any single definition.

In the theatre of the absurd, the inner play is not clearly defined, so the boundary between inner and outer play is fluid (Hornby 41). Luigi Pirandello is “the most strikingly metadramatic playwright” of the absurd theatre. He had a considerable influence on other playwrights such as Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard. They use multiple layering, performing within performing, characters moving across boundaries, and the outer and the inner play which echo each other. Genet’s *The Balcony* and *The Blacks*, Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*, and Stoppard’s *The Real Inspector Hound* and *The Real Thing* are some examples of this influence (Hornby 43). *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is unquestionably Pirandello’s best-known play and the one that has had the widest influence on the course of the contemporary theatre (Gilman 172). He is not the first playwright who breaks the boundary between inner and outer play, but he is original for combining the framed and inset types of metadrama, so that is not possible to decide whether the main play is the inner one or the outer. The inner play can be both primary and secondary (Hornby 43). Martin Esslin states that Pirandello was the first to create “a meta-

theatrical theatre, a theatre within the theatre, a theatre openly proclaiming its theatricality, its unreality. [...] Pirandello more than his predecessors, made this meta-theatricality one of the major metaphors of modern drama” (Esslin 267). As well as the structure, the idea that life is a dream is used by the authors in different centuries. “The type of play Brecht wrote—it is the same type of play that Shaw and Pirandello developed and is now being done by Beckett and Genet— implies the notion that life is a dream, and that the spectator will either form this notion or feel its suggestiveness as a result of the play’s effect” (Abel 106).

Whether metadrama has been widely or barely used, the play within the play has existed throughout the centuries. However, the usage of the play within the play has changed and improved by means of society’s perception of life. It has been used as a metaphor to question reality:

Whenever the play within the play is used, it is both reflective and expressive of its society’s deep cynicism about life. When the prevalent view is that the world is in some way illusory or false, then the play within the play becomes a metaphor for life itself. The fact that the inner play is an obvious illusion (since we see other characters watching it), reminds us that the play we are watching is also an illusion, despite its vividness and excitement; by extension, the world in which we live, which also seems to be vivid, is in the end a sham. We watch a play, within which there is another play-ultimately, all is a play. In other words, the play within the play is projected onto life itself, and becomes a means for gauging it. (Hornby 45)

The structure of the twentieth century's play within the play, in which the borders between inner and outer play disappear, leads the audience to think of life as a kind of a play itself, which enlarges or destroys the borders of perception of life and reality. Furthermore, observing the characters who watch the inner play evokes the idea that we ourselves are performers on the stage of the world. To put us in a character's shoes means that we are watched too. Thus, the confusion of reality leads us to question our stage and performance. "The play within the play calls both theatre and life itself into question" (Hornby 46).

In cinema, metafictional films use the same structure as the play within the play—as the film within the film. Movies have the same effect on the audience as metatheatre, but in different ways. A movie can bring one into a story by representing real life perfectly as it happens in dreams, on the other hand it can stress the unreliability of life's reality by questioning it. In "Reality is Bleeding: A Brief History of Film from the Sixteenth Century," William Egginton goes back to the sixteenth century in order to find out the roots of the concept of "bleeding realities" in cinema. He argues that there have been a number of movies questioning the nature of reality represented within the dialectic borders of the screen. He claims that this theme is not new. It goes back to the invention of the theatre in the sixteenth century (207). Egginton gives the example of Pirandello, who uses this technique effectively, to compare the technique which both literature and cinema use to blur reality: "In literary circles, one simply calls a work in which reality is bleeding 'Pirandellian'" (Egginton 220). His works have basic and unique characteristics that bring Pirandello's tradition to the theatre. In this way, Egginton bases cinema on theatre as a founder of representing multiple realities.

The French Lieutenant's Woman (1981) by Karel Reisz is an example of this structure. The film consists of another film within it, and the name of the main film is taken by the inner one. The first scene opens with the rehearsal of film in itself. The actors Mike and Anna play the characters of Charles and Sarah from the nineteenth century England. The outer film is about Mike and Anna, who are actors rehearsing for a movie which is the inner film, and who are secret lovers. The viewer is allowed to watch them rehearsing, and the other actors and actresses are seen in the setting—a studio in the forest—while they are having their lunch. The scenes come and go between inner and outer film, so it is hard to understand what is going on and to decide which one is the main one. The inner film is shown much more than the outer film, so it becomes the main film. Sarah and Charles Smithson come together at the end of the inner film, while Anna leaves Mike in the outer one. The viewer is made to realize that “Everything does not happen as it does in films,” but he immediately recognizes that he is already watching a movie.

The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985) by Woody Allen is another example of a film within a film. Again the name of the film is taken by the inner film. Cecilia, whose husband Monk does not pay attention to her so that her marriage is hopeless, is stuck in the movie which he watches in the theatre. The movie relaxes her, so she watches it again and again. She admires the life in Manhattan and the boy in the movie. During her fifth time watching the movie, Tom Baxter, the explorer, jumps from the screen in the real world. Other characters on the screen talk to the manager in panic. The conversation is between the real and the fantasy world; however, it is as if we forgot that we are watching a movie and it is already a fantasy world. The character on the screen says, “What if all this is merely semantics? Let’s just readjust our

definitions. Let's redefine ourselves as the real world and them as the world of illusion and shadow. We are reality and they are a dream." The actor, Gil Shepherd, is informed that his character has just jumped from the screen and he tries to save his career and he wants Tom to get back to the movie. Therefore, Cecilia deals with both "real" Gil and fictional Tom. She is confused which one is real. Cecilia gets into the screen and takes part in the movie. She is now a part of the fiction. She has to make a decision between reality and fiction, between Tom and Gil, and she chooses Gil—which means the real world. However, Gil leaves town as soon as Tom returns to the screen. Disappointed and hopeless, Cecilia again finds herself in the theatre watching a different movie with bewilderment. As one of the managers says in movie "The real ones want a life of fiction, and fictional ones want a real life."

The Truman Show (1998) by Peter Weir reminds us of the idea that "All the world's a stage" and plays with the spectators' perception of reality. The movie opens with the interview of the actors and their interpretation of how real the Truman show is. They are not like characters in the movie but real actors commenting on the show. Truman is adopted by a corporation and it is hard to find out that he is in a film setting and world around him is fake. He is discovering that the entire city is built for a TV show. There is nothing real: everything is a fiction created by the actors in the show. The city is called "the world within a world" which the director controls from a fake moon. The director is in a God-like position and creates storms and changes the season, decides whether the sun will rise or not and controls all cameras, music, and even the people in the city. He thinks that "we accept the reality of the world [...] we are presented." However, Truman's suffering from this fictional world comes to the boil in the scene where he touches the fake sky that he has looked

at for years as real. Similarly, in *Pleasantville*, (1998) Gary Ross questions TV's world of fantasy. David and Jennifer are stuck in "Pleasantville," a 1950's black-and-white TV show, and they change this world of fantasy into a real world. Unhappiness, failure, lust and desire bring to Pleasantville, a kind of a paradise, color and real life. The show becomes the movie itself.

David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999) questions the reality of the world by comparing it to a game. The movie is set in a game called "eXistenZ," and the game players awaken in a real world. However, they cannot be sure about the reality. It comes out that they are playing a game-within-a-game called "transCendenZ". Now the world is "the most pathetic level of reality" for them. Yvgent, the game designer, is killed by Ted and Allegra as a punishment for their effective deforming of reality. The movie ends with an open-ended finale when a game player asks, "Tell me the truth. Are we still in a game?" In a similar manner, David Fincher's *The Game* (1997) presents a game-within-a-game structure that compares the perception of reality to a game. Nicholas is given a birthday gift by his brother, and his life is changed by CRS Company. Strange things start to happen in his life. He loses all his money and possessions. He is even buried and wakes up in Spain, where he becomes a beggar in an effort to return to California. Then he finds all his belongings have been sold. In a trauma he shoots his brother Conrad while Christine is trying to convince him that it is all a game and this is his birthday party. He commits suicide by jumping from the tower, but he falls on the target in the middle of the saloon organized for his birthday party. He finds out Conrad is not dead and everybody whom he has met for a year is ready for his party, and "all has been a game" a gift from Conrad.

Andy and Lana Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999) questions the perception and true nature of reality. The movie defines "reality" in a different way by comparing the real world captured by machines to the Matrix, a computer-generated dream world. Morpheus makes Neo question reality by asking, "Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?" It is claimed that the world Neo lives in is part of a neural-interactive simulation called the Matrix and "real" is simply electrical signals interpreted by his brain. In this way, the movie arouses the question of "is our world a kind of Matrix?" These movies are examples to show how cinema raises both the question of reality and meta-theatrical quality. They demonstrate the transition between theatre and cinema by means of representing multiple realities.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

I will analyze Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1922) and Christopher Nolan's movie *Inception* (2010) in order to explore our perception of reality. Both works employ metafictional techniques to explore the constructed nature of reality and question whether life is real or merely a dream from which we will awake to a real world. Both works use metafiction for their narrative structure to explore this question.

Luigi Pirandello is one of the most important playwrights known for well constructed plays with metadramatic features. His most famous play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, uses a play-within-a-play structure that creates uncertainty and ambivalence about reality, so that becomes difficult to decide which of the plays

is real. In a somewhat different manner, Christopher Nolan's movie *Inception* uses a fantastic plot and narrative structure to explore the human unconscious and to get in touch with it via dreams. The characters fall into a sleep and enter in a world that they create with their unconscious. They can travel among the dreams according to the levels of their unconscious. This fantastic plot produces a "dream-within-a-dream" structure, so that the movie resembles a play-within-a-play structure of metadrama. As in the drama, this cinematic structure creates conflicts about the perception of reality and illusion. The "real" and the "illusory" become intertwined so that the audience cannot separate one from the other.

Pirandello has made valuable contributions to film. Frank Nulf in his article "Pirandello and Cinema" explains how he is concerned with the cinema in addition to the theatre. The "Pirandellian tradition" is explored by Nulf as "a play within a play within a film" structure (42). This is the effect of Pirandello on cinema. Also, "Pirandello saw the future of film in illusion and in fantasy" (47). In reply to a question of how he saw the future of the cinema, he stated, "without limitation" (47). Following Pirandello's lead, I will explore his dramatic tradition through the movie *Inception*, which is Pirandellian in its narrative structure and its questioning of reality—common features of both the play and the movie.

To accomplish this study, I begin with study of metatheatre and its influence on cinema. Chapter I includes a literature review of Luigi Pirandello and Christopher Nolan. Chapter II focuses on Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, especially the way in which the play questions reality by using a play-within-a-play structure. In Chapter III, I study Christopher Nolan's *Inception* and point out

how the film is built on the structure of metatheatre, which it uses to question reality in the style of metatheatre. In the Conclusion, I summarize my study.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Luigi Pirandello and His Works

Luigi Pirandello was born in Sicily in 1867. As an obedient Sicilian child, Pirandello married the woman whom his father had chosen for him. The bride was the daughter of his father's business partner. She unfortunately became insane and was hospitalized in a mental asylum. The illness of his wife, Antonietta Portulano, and his experience with her insanity affected his works (DiGaetani, xx). Martin Esslin asserts that his extreme creation of reality originated from his experiences with his wife: "Living with a person who suffers from intense delusions obviously is a prime example of the coexistence of multiple 'realities,' different world systems, within the same household" (Esslin 263). Also, his pessimism led him to focus his theatrical and literary art on the dark side, the strange, and the avant-garde, to the point that he produced great literature in several genres. He was sent to Bonn, Germany to study philosophy (DiGaetani, xx).

When he became an outstanding playwright, he thought that he was much more appreciated in Germany than in Italy. His significant plays were staged in Berlin, Frankfurt, Dresden, Vienna, Hamburg, and Bonn. Italian theatre and government paid little attention to his art, so he chose to stay in Germany where the state theatres were staging Pirandello festivals (DiGaetani, xxiii). His search for new forms in theatre, new meanings in life, and the theme of the search for identity are portrayed in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and in many other plays (DiGaetani, xxvi). Pirandello wrote seven novels, and many short stories—later collected in *Novelle per*

un anno (1922) [Stories for a Year]. He also wrote several volumes of lyric and narrative poetry, besides the major translations of Goethe's *Roman Elegies*, more than forty plays, collected in *Maschere Nude* [Naked Masks], and numerous essays, reviews, and articles. Almost all of his productions have been translated into different languages (Bassanese, 136). He composed the lyrics of *Mal giocondo* (1889) [Joyful Pain] during his adolescence and school years in Palermo. It is his first lyric collection. While at university in Germany, he composed *Pasqua di Gea* (1891) [Earth's Easter] and *Elegie renane* (1895) [Rhenish Elegies]. His final poetry volume was *Fuori di chiave* (1921) [Off Key] (Bassanese, 137).

Pirandello had a life-long fascination with the short story genre that began in adolescence and continued during his maturation as a novelist and playwright. At first, he periodically published his single stories, and then collected them in volumes—more than fifteen in total. *Novelle per un anno* was a collection that included twenty-four volumes with fifteen stories in each. It consisted of previously published and revised stories, as well as new stories and tales especially written for the project. The major motifs of his short stories are death and defeat (Bassanese, 138).

1.1.1. Luigi Pirandello's Plays and Metadrama

Pirandello was the author of more than two hundred and fifty short stories and seven novels when he started to write plays. With his experience of literary narration, he became a “man of the theatre” (Paolucci 142). *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Each in His Own Way*, and *Tonight We Improvise* are grouped together by Pirandello as “theatre” plays (Paolucci, *Pirandello's Theatre* 12). These plays are

also called a “trilogy of meta-plays.” The “theatre plays” are proof of the symbiosis achieved by Pirandello between the illusion of life and the reality of the stage (Paolucci 51):

The trilogy plays assert that the reality of theatre is illusion, while explicitly and effectively constructing and collapsing that illusion before our eyes as well as revealing the element of pretense while concurrently creating it. These three plays invite the onlooker to suspend any and all disbelief. Inevitably these works also examine the rapport uniting life on the stage to life in the world, as the two intersect, copenetrating. In these plays theatrical and existential illusions and realities join in a self-consciously provocative manner. (Bassanesse 99)

Pirandello wants his audience not to passively wait to be entertained, but to be active like an actor. He breaks down the barriers between the stage and the audience. This is especially true in his theatre plays, where the play is interrupted, actors and directors directly address the audience, and actors both move in and out of their roles. These plays are open-ended. They do not have a conventional ending. The plays end unexpectedly, and the action is cut in the middle of things (Paolucci 5).

1.1.2. Analysis of *Tonight We Improvise* and *Each in His Own Way*

The trilogy of theater plays of Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and its companion pieces *Each in His Own Way* and *Tonight We Improvise*, are written in a format of a play within a play. They “expose the nature of theatre itself to scrutiny, disrupting and recreating its illusions, showing its devices and

innermost workings, such as the plays used to involve the audience and foster a participatory experience” (Bassanese 17). The trilogy of theatre plays demonstrates Pirandello’s approach to the theatre. Based on metatheatre and exploring the nature of illusion and reality, *Each in His Own Way* and *Tonight We Improvise* are examples of Pirandellian tradition that will help us to analyze Pirandello’s metatheatre in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and to observe his style as a whole.

Tonight We Improvise [*Questa sera si recita a soggetto*] is the third in the trilogy of meta-plays. “Like its companion pieces in the trilogy, *Tonight We Improvise* opens up theatrical space beyond the stage to create the dramatic illusions of the play” (Bassanese 112). The play presents the issue of director-led theatre in terms of a power struggle between directors and actors. On this occasion the author is knocked out in the first round (Caesar 195). In the prologue there is a poster that announces the play and indicates the audience will witness a theatre play on the stage. It describes a theater salon filled with people who are curious about the improvised play. It is the first moment that the play-within-a-play comes out. “There is a continuous flow of events involving both the characters and the audience: the “real” audience in the play and the really real audience watching the performance of the play in the theatre” (Ragusa 249). The play of the theatre on the stage which is being improvised begins with sudden darkness. Because there is no bell which is the signal of opening the curtain, the spectators begin to fidget. The voice of the director, Doctor Hinkfuss, cries, “The bell! The bell! Who said to ring the bell? I am the one to say when it’s time to ring the bell!” (Pirandello 33). Then he turns to the spectators to apologize, “I am sorry about the moment of confusion you probably noticed

behind the curtains. I beg your pardon” (34). The Director has contact with the spectators, and the audience witnesses the conversation between him and the internal audience on stage. After it is declared that the author of the play is Luigi Pirandello, Doctor Hinkfuss says,

You remember what he did to a couple of my colleagues? First he sent one of them six lost characters looking for an author: they turned the stage upside down and drove everyone crazy; then another time, some people in the audience recognized themselves in the characters on stage: the audience was all up in arms and the performance was ruined. (35)

The Director refers to Pirandello’s other works of the trilogy: *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Each in His own Way*. He points out the significant actions of the plays that create the illusion of metatheatre.

Throughout the play, the scenes are interrupted by Doctor Hinkfuss as a director. He interrupts the performances of actors to make comments and change acting style he does not like. In this way, the continuity of the play is disturbed. It becomes hard for the audience to follow the play. Moreover, Doctor Hinkfuss and the actors directly address the audience. “The barrier between the stage and the audience is completely gone” (Paolucci 17). The inner story is revealed in pieces because of the Director’s interruptions. During the arguments of the actors and the director, the reader tries to understand the story being improvised.

The inner play is about a young woman called Mommina and her sisters Totina, Norina, Nene whose parents are Signor Palmiro and Signora Ignazia. “The inner play, a Sicilian tragedy, is somewhat blurred, confused, stopped, and started, being regularly interrupted by the cast, director, and “audience” (Bannase 112). In one

scene, while performing, the actress in the role of Mommina suddenly falls on the stage. As the audience watches, the other actors abandon their roles to help their friends on stage.

The Character Actress, the Old Comic Actor, the Leading Actor, and the Leading Actress not only play the roles assigned to them, but they have become those roles: they are Signora Ignazia, Sampognetta, Rico Verri, Mommina. This fusion between actor and character for the duration of a performance is usual in the accepted illusion of reality on stage. (Ragusa 247)

Although these roles are part of the script, they blur the perception of reality for the audience. It becomes hard to distinguish between the real actors and the scripted performance of the characters.

There are three levels of reality in the play. The real audience in the theatre see the spectators on stage who are watching the inner play. Both stage audience and theatre audience watch, and the Director calls the actors by their real names, not their fictional characters' names. However, the Leading Actor does not want to be introduced by his real name on stage. He wants to be called Rico Verri, the character he performs. "Whereas in a conventional play we might have expected to speak of characters with names and fully rounded make-believe identities and personalities, we have instead been speaking of actors designated only by their roles" (Ragusa 249). While this style supports the possibility of the rehearsal's reality, it also puts forward the play as fiction. In this way, Pirandello creates multiple perceptions of reality or double seeing. Moreover, this style becomes a problem for the actors in the play. While actors and actresses argue about this problem, the Director urges them by saying "Please, please, there's an audience out there!" (43). Thus, metatheatre creates

the audience-within-the-audience while constructing the play within the play at the same time.

In the inner play, the characters go to the theatre. Signora Ignazia and her daughters sit in the seat of the box on the stage. While they are talking to each other, they are urged by the complaining Voices in the Hall: “Quiet, Is this the way to come into a theatre? [...] People who cause a disturbance should be kicked out!” (57). “Instantly the various audiences—the make believe audience at the opera, the “real” audience in the theatre, and the really real audience watching *Tonight We Improvise*—are no longer separate” (Ragusa 249). In this way, the play-within-a-play-within-a-play comes true.

At the end of the play, Mommina suddenly dies and her death confuses the actors. They don’t know whether she is dead or performing for the girls. While Doctor Hinkfuss praises her performance—“A fantastic scene! You’ve done just what I told you to! This wasn’t in the story” (109), —she still lies on the floor. The Comic Actor, The Leading Actor, and the Character Actress step out of their roles to call and shake her. When they think she has fainted and decide to lift her up, she raises herself to say, “No, thank you. It really was my heart” (109). In this scene, her falling brings confusion to both the actors on the stage and the real audience in the theatre. The other actors’ hesitate at her death, which is also a part of the script, but the scene briefly shocks the audience. These scenes which lie inside one another are well-made parts of the play-within-a-play structure.

Each in His Own Way [Ciascuno a suo modo] reflects Pirandellian tradition with its two acts and two interludes intertwined with each other. The interludes begin right after each act ends. They are not conventional interludes but they take place on the

stage. The spectators, scripted in the play, watch the performance and comment on the play. Their interpretations and the comments of theatre critics are watched by the real audience during intermission. “In the interludes Pirandello depicts reasonable spectator reaction to the unfolding drama. His purpose is to question the differences between art and life, illusion and reality” (Bassanese 108).

The subject of the play is based on the “real” love affair between Amelia Moreno and Baron Nuti who are characterized under the names of Delia Morello and Michele Rocca. The first act is about the scandal of Doro and Delia Morello’s affair, about which Donna Livia questions Diego to determine if it is true or not. As soon as the first act ends and the curtain falls, it immediately rises again. The scene shows the lobby of the theatre and the spectators come out of the theatre. Moreno and Nuti are located in the audience. The spectators make a critique of the first act. They try to understand what is going on in the play. They also talk about what the drama means and what it should be. It becomes a play about a play. One of the spectators says, “This comedy is based on the Moreno affair! Almost word for word! The author has taken it from real life!” (Pirandello, *Naked Masks* 322). Another questions, “Is Pirandello getting so low that he makes comedies on society gossip?” (322). In the first interlude, Morello comes on stage with anger and is forced to become part of the play. She wants to prevent herself from being insulted, but she decides to see the whole play to learn what else they say about her affair. Moreno rebels against the fictional characterization of herself on the stage. Her arrival feels like a real woman’s interruption of the play.

At the end of the second act the curtain falls, but as in the first act it again rises quickly. It shows the theatre lobby and entrances. Delia Moreno invades the stage,

and the sound coming from inside grows louder and louder. The conversation among ticket takers and usher is remarkable:

One of the Ticket Takers: What the devil is the matter in there?

Another Ticket Taker: Isn't it Pirandello tonight? What else can you expect?

An Usher: No, the audience is applauding, but the actors refuse to come out.

(Pirandello 353)

The play comes to criticize itself and its author. It makes the audience closer to the real world that they are in the theatre salon. They hear a critique of the author and the play they watch. There exists an interesting ambiance as if one of the real audiences takes to the stage and starts to interpret the play.

In the second interlude, there is great confusion between the actors and the “real” people. The spectators are shocked with the entry of the real Morello. They wait for the third act, but the actors who are disturbed by the “real” people refuse to perform any more. The third act is called off. It gives a sense of undetermined reality. This calling off confuses the perception of reality as audiences assume the previous acts and the story is really “real”. Actually, nobody understands what is going on behind the scenes. Moreno slaps the leading lady's face who she is a fictionalized character of herself. It is like a battle between the fictional characters and real people.

Baron Nuti questions the ethic of whether theatre has the right to expose reality or not: “They have the right to take me and expose me on the stage in public? Show me off, and all my sorrows, in the presence of a crowd? Make me say things that I never thought of saying and do things that I never thought of doing?” (Pirandello

358). Here Pirandello questions the theatre and his own play through the speech of Nuti. Moreno also opposes the idea that she is acted on the stage: “She mimicked my voice... She was imitating me... It was so terrible to see myself there on the stage acting that way!” (359). While she complains about stage acting, she becomes aware of Nuti’s presence. Then the scene, which the spectators witness at the end of the second act, starts to happen now in front of them. The same scene that Rocca and Moreno performed recurs with Nuti and Moreno whom the scripted spectators on the stage assume are real. The voices of the spectators are heard “Oh! Look! Look! There they are! Oh! In real life! Both of them! The same scene over again!” (359). They act the same as previously on the stage:

The play’s dual structure sharply focuses on the doubling of reality and illusion, life and art, through the representation of “real” versus “fictional” characters and “real” versus “fictional” responses to the dramatic action. Illusion regularly intrudes upon reality and reality upon illusion since the action of the play within the play is immediately reflected and answered in the interludes. (Bassanese 109)

If we divide the acts and interludes according to levels of reality, the acts will be the third-level of reality. The audiences know that they are watching a work of fiction on the stage. The interludes, especially the second one, will be the second level. The lobby scenes in which Delia Moreno and Baron Nuti appear as real people and complain about the play and their fictionalized characters Morello and Rocca, lead the characters to understand reality. The characters and spectators come face to face with the real Moreno. They find reality while the audience is confused by the levels of reality. In this way, the interludes have a dual function— to bring reality to the

spectators on stage but illusion to the audience in the theatre. In addition, the first level of reality will be the audience that tries to solve the confusion of fragmented realities.

1.2. Christopher Nolan and His Works

In contemporary cinema, the question of reality is still demanded as it has been in theatre for centuries. Christopher Nolan is one of the directors who demonstrate this questioning in his works. Nolan began making movies at an early age with his father's Super-8mm camera. He studied English Literature at University College London, and at the same time learned the guerilla film techniques that he used to make his first feature, *Following* (1998). He is the director of *Memento* (2000), *Insomnia* (2002), *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Prestige* (2006), and *The Dark Knight* (2008). He has been honored with a Producer's Guild Nomination and a Writer's Guild Nomination for *The Dark Knight*, and two Director's Guild Nominations for *Memento* and *The Dark Knight*. Nolan was awarded an Oscar and Golden Globe for Best Screenplay for *Memento* (Nolan 240). *Inception* (2010), was Nolan's last movie, awarded an Oscar for Best Achievement in Cinematography, Best Achievement in Sound Editing, Best Achievement in Sound Mixing, and Best Achievement in Visual Effects.

1.2.1. Christopher Nolan and *Inception*

In the "Preface: Dreaming/ Creating/ Perceiving/ Filmmaking" interview by Jonathan Nolan, Christopher Nolan states that he worked on the script of *Inception* for ten years (7). Nolan describes his movie as a heist movie. However, instead of

stealing money or something else, what is stolen is much more important: the movie turns to implanting (10). He explains that his interest in dreams comes from the notion of realizing that when you dream, you create the world that you perceive and therefore you can control the dream when sleep is fragmented and discombobulated. When you create a world and have a conversation with someone in a dream, you put all the words into that person's mouth. He compares it to playing chess against yourself (8).

When you look at the world that the film suggests, your subconscious is going to start literally fortifying your secrets in the dreams. If you were in a dream-share and understand the rules of it, once your subconscious knows that it can create structures to defend itself or to protect information, then it's going to fortify naturally. (Nolan 10)

According to Nolan, "*Inception* is about a more everyday experience with dreaming. It's about a more relatable human experience. It doesn't question an actual reality. It's just saying, "Okay, we all dream every night. What if you could share your dream with someone else? And it becomes an alternate reality simply because the dream becomes a form of communication" (9). Although Nolan says the film does not question actual reality, its creating an alternative reality causes a dual perception of realities. In this way, the movie leads the spectator to question which reality is real or more real. The finalé is open ended, since the spinning top, the totem of Cobb to understand whether he is in reality or dream, does not stop and fall. Therefore, It is uncertain whether the scene where he comes together with his children at the end is real or just another dream of Cobb. While describing the process of his film project, Nolan says he never quite knew how to finish the movie

until he found out that the antagonist should be the guy's wife. In order to make a movie not esoteric but universal, he chose Mal as Cobb's wife to address universal experience of the audience (Nolan 11).

1.2.2. Analysis of *Memento* and *The Prestige*

If we take into account that Nolan worked on the script of *Inception* for ten years, we inevitably see reflections of its techniques in his other movies. While improving his script, he fed his other work. Hence, Nolan's previous movies *Memento* and *The Prestige*, which deal with questions of reality and perception, can be analyzed to understand *Inception*. The earlier movies depict the idea that the world is what you believe. They do not present certain reality, so they provide background for *Inception*.

Memento presents a life of uncertainty, between perception and reality. Leonard, who is determined to take revenge on his wife, has short-term memory loss. Therefore, he has to take notes and pictures to remember the people around him. He even tattoos important facts on his body. His aim is to find the murderer and kill him. At the end of the movie, we understand that his world consists of mind-created realities. He thinks Teddy is the murderer, and then he decides that his new tattoo fact is Teddy's license number. He talks to himself "You think I just want another puzzle to solve? Another John G to look for? You're a John G. so you can be my John G. Do I lie to myself to be happy? In your case, Teddy... Yes I will." He takes a photo of another car and wants to remember it as his car. He suddenly stops the car and forgets where he is. In an interview by Ami Taubin in *Film Comment*, Nolan asserts that *Memento* is a part of subgenre –*The Matrix* is one of them– that suggests

that the world around you is not real (30). Leonard's life confirms that the world around him is just the creation of his mind.

The Prestige, based on a novel by Christopher Priest, raises the question of "which one is real?" by exploring the rivalry between two magicians: Alfred Borden and Robert Angier. The magicians are obsessed with the idea of disclosing their secrets. They sabotage the performance of each other. Angier spends all his life in search of the best stage illusion. Angier, to reveal Borden's trick of "The Transported Man," has Nicola Tesla invent a machine to copy him. Borden, who witnesses the drowning of Angier's copied double in a tank, is accused of murdering Angier and is sentenced to death. But Borden's secret is his twin, Fallon, who participated in his tricks in his show, and even in his life. At the end, he shoots Angier; however, it is an open-ended finalé since it is uncertain whether Borden kills the real Angier or a copy of him. We are shown other drowned Angiers in tanks. This "prestige" part of the movie ends with the words: "Now you're looking for the secret. But you won't find it, because, of course, you're not really looking. You don't really want to work it out. You want to be fooled." The perception of the spectator is blurred by the magic of Nolan.

CHAPTER II

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

2.1. Evaluation of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

In the Preface of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Luigi Pirandello describes the inspiration for the play in detail, in which he aims to deal with distortions and misreadings (Gilman 172). The preface was first published in *Comoedia* (Milan) under the title “Come è perchè ho scritto i Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore” [How and why I wrote *Six Characters in Search of an Author*]. The preface was then added to the 1925 edition of the play (Caesar 48). He focuses on “fantasy” in the process of his writing. Fantasy is described by Pirandello as “a nimble little maidservant [who] entered the service of his art” (viii). His novels, stories, and plays are derived from Fantasy, whose inspiration gave him the subject of his magnificent play. He explains the process of six characters’ growing in his mind by the help of Fantasy:

I found before me a man about fifty years old, in a dark jacket and light trousers, with a frowning air and ill-natured mortified eyes; a poor woman in widow's weeds leading by one hand a little girl of four and by the other a boy of rather more than ten; a cheeky and "sexy" girl, also clad in black but with an equivocal and brazen pomp, all atremble with a lively, biting contempt for the mortified old man and for a young fellow of twenty who stood on one side closed in on himself as if he despised them all. In short, the six characters who are seen coming on stage at the beginning of the play. Now one of them and now another—often beating down one another—embarked on

the sad story of their adventures, each shouting his own reasons, and projecting in my face his disordered passions, more or less as they do in the play to the unhappy Manager. (viii)

Pirandello illustrates his moment of inspiration as if the characters came to his home. The characters are gifts from Fantasy to enhance his own inspiration and creativity. However, as in all works of fiction these six characters become independent from their author. "Creatures of my spirit, these six were already living a life which was their own and not mine any more, a life which it was not in my power any more to deny them" (Pirandello, xx). He is not opposed to their being free. After he gives birth to them, he just "let them go where dramatic characters do go to have life: on a stage. And let us see what will happen" (xxi). Pirandello also introduces his play and gives us a chance to learn his point of view with his original description of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.

A mixture of tragic and comic, fantastic and realistic, in a humorous situation that was quite new and infinitely complex, a drama which is conveyed by means of the characters, who carry it within them and suffer it, a drama, breathing, speaking, self-propelled, which seeks at all costs to find the means of its own presentation; and the comedy of the vain attempt at an improvised realization of the drama on stage. (xxi)

He also tells the process of Six Characters' sudden coming. It is like an explanation for the first scene of actor-character controversy in which it is not possible to distinguish fiction from reality.

First, the surprise of the poor actors in a theatrical company rehearsing a play by day on a bare stage (no scenery, no flats). Surprise and incredulity at the

sight of the six characters announcing themselves as such in search of an author [...] And here is the universal meaning at first vainly sought in the six characters, now that, going on stage of their own accord, they succeed in finding it within themselves in the excitement of the desperate struggle which each wages against the other and all wage against the Manager and the actors, who do not understand them. (xxi)

He also comments on the inner play and the characters' constructing another level of reality within the play. "They are all six at the same point of artistic realization and on the same level of reality, which is the fantastic level of the whole play" (xxii). The level of reality of the six characters is the same. However, to consider the play as a whole, they are in fantastic level, not in the same level of the actors' and the audience's reality.

This Preface can be a preview to analyze the world of "fantasy" in the play. It guides us to understand the creative process of the six characters and their place in Pirandello's mind. By means of the six characters, we can understand how a work of fiction can be independent of its author. These independent characters interfere in his play because Pirandello cannot limit his fantasy world. He stresses that six the characters have the power of freedom. These creations of an infinite fantasy world construct the play-within-the-play and thereby make a structural change in his play. Thus, Pirandello implies that he did not change the structure consciously, but rather it was unavoidable in his mind.

2.2. Analysis of the Play within the Play Structure in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

Pirandello writes *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in a play-within-a-play structure. Emanuele Licastro asserts that all analysis and studies on Pirandello agree that the foundation of *Six Characters* is the play-within-a-play (Licastro 213). Lionel Abel thinks it is “the most original play-within-a-play written in this century, the remark is made that certain dramatic characters cannot be contained in the works they first appeared in and have had to venture far from their creators into other works by other authors” (Abel 62). This original structure with dramatic characters free from their author presents three theatre plays in one: the first play is Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* that we watch in the theatre; the second play is *The Rules of the Game* being rehearsed on the stage; and the third play is the story of the Six Characters performed within the play. In this way, there is a play-within-a-play-within-a-play structure.

Six Characters in Search of an Author is the main play that consists of three different plays. From the first moment, the play explores its second play on stage. In Act One, the characters are the Director, the Leading Lady, the Leading Man, a Young Actor, a Young Actress, a Third Actor, a Fourth Actor, a Fifth Actor, other actors and actresses, the Prompter, the Stage Manager, the Property Man, the Technician, the Director’s Secretary, Usher, and Stage Hands. There is a rehearsal of *The Play of Parts* by Pirandello. In some other versions, it is translated as *The Rules of the Game*. The technician and the stage manager try to prepare the stage for the second act before the director comes. Then the actors and actresses come and wait for the rehearsal to start. There is a living theatre in front of the audience as we

witness the background of a theatre play. Furthermore, Pirandello comments on his work of art during the rehearsal. The rehearsal starts with the Prompter's reading the script. Meanwhile, the Leading Man complains about the silly hat he must wear while performing. The Director silences him:

Silly? What can I do if France can't produce any good theatre and we are reduced to putting on Pirandello plays which you have to be lucky to understand and which are written in a way never to please either critics or actors or public. (8)

The performance turns into a play about theatre in which Pirandello criticizes his own works. He interprets his art in the play-within-a-play structure of metadrama.

After the first presentation of the play-within-a-play, Pirandello brings the second story on stage as he constructs a play-within-a-play-within-a-play. The Usher enters the hall and goes down the aisle between the rows of seats. He announces the arrival of Six Characters who enter the theatre by following him. They are the Father, the Stepdaughter, the Son, the Mother, a Young Boy, and a Child. The Father explains that they are here in search of an author. Although the Director says there is no author there and they are not rehearsing a new play, the Stepdaughter asks him to be their new play. They one by one climb the steps to the stage. The Father insists that he brings a serious and painful play. He questions the Director, "Isn't your job to give life on stage to characters by one's fantasy?" (12). His speech amazes the actors as he tries to convince them that they are real characters. The Father claims that inside them they carry a drama full of pain and script. The Characters want to live among the Actors and to stage their own drama. Six Characters bring a family story with them. Ronald Gaskell states, "The real plot lies in the interaction of the

Characters with the Actors, and to make this possible the story of the Characters, the play within play, had to be fragmented” (Gaskell 121). The rehearsal of the Actors is fragmented by the coming of the Six Characters. Therefore, the third play starts with the story of the family.

The drama of the family is revealed as they try to convince the Director to stage their story. While telling their story, they also act it, so their life story turns into an inner play. The Actors and Actresses watch Six Characters perform as if they themselves are the audience of the theatre. We learn that the Mother leaves the family to be with the secretary of the Father, and their drama starts. She gives birth to three children from him: the Stepdaughter, A Young Boy, and A Child. After the secretary dies, years pass and the illegitimate family has to return to the city because of poverty. The Mother works as a dressmaker in Madame Pace’s shop to support her children. However, Madame Pace uses the Stepdaughter for her own benefit and secretly seduces her into prostitution. Then the story rises to its climax, which is called “despicable” by the Son, when the Stepdaughter claims that the Father was about to offer money for her. The Father meets the Stepdaughter at Madame Pace’s shop as an old client. He does not recognize her until the Mother comes and a scandal develops. As a lonely man, the Father is “led by the wretched needs of the flesh” (24). He describes himself as “not yet old enough to do without a woman and no longer young enough comfortably to look for one without shame” (24). Actually, the Stepdaughter pays for the life of the family while the Mother believes she sacrifices herself for them by sewing even at night for Madame Pace. The actors are horrified when it is revealed that the Father was about to pay for his daughter in law

in Madame Pace's shop. The Actors and actresses find the story so interesting that even if they wanted to rehearse, they cannot desist from watching them.

In the years of the Mother's absence, the Father sends the Son to the country to grow up healthy and strong. That's why the Son is unfamiliar to the members of the family and even to his own mother. He grows up alone, with no emotional or intellectual relationship with his family. The Son does not want to be a part of this story. He is not aware of the Mother and her family's existence until one day when they come to his home. While they are explaining this drama, the Director comes and gets down from the stage in order to get an impression of the scene. The family memoirs become a play for him. With these actions, the inner play of the Six Characters' life story becomes the outstanding part of the main play. The play-within-the-play-within-the-play structure is constructed by the drama of the family. The Six Characters act their roles so successfully that the Actors and the Director watch them as if they are the audience. Therefore, the play-within-the-play-within-the-play supplies the concept of audience-within-the-audience in the same theatre.

The play ends with the inner play's unexpected finalé. The Director, who at first ignores the Six Characters, likes their story and wants it acted on the stage by his own actors. At the end of the play, the Characters perform their own story. The stage is prepared for the garden scene. Suddenly, A Young Boy dies by gunshot and A Child drowns in the pool accidentally. The Stepdaughter leaves the theatre, and the legitimate family of the Father, the Mother, and the Son remain. While the Actors try to understand what happens, the Director gives an end to the play. In this way, the inner play ends the Director's play, which brings Pirandello's main play to its final

end. As the play-within-the-play-within-the-play builds itself, so it destroys its structure with the intertwined ending.

2.3. The Question of Reality in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

There are three different layers of reality in the play. With several different layers of reality, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is “one of the most brilliant pieces of deviltry in modern literature” (Illiano 1). All these realities are the results of the play-within-the-play structure. The first one is the real world in which the audience watches the play of Pirandello. The play starts with the rehearsal of another Pirandello play, *The Rules of the Game*. It becomes a second level of reality that the actors improvise. Suddenly, they are interrupted by Six Characters who want their life story to be staged. The coming of the Six Characters coming is the second confusion for the audience, whose sense of reality is blurred by the rehearsal on the stage. In each level of the play-within-the-play, the question of reality becomes inextricable. The structure of the play heightens the confusion of reality.

The first level of reality is Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. It is the real world in which the audience enjoy the play. The levels of reality follow the structure of the play-within-the-play. The structure divides reality into different levels. I will follow each of the intertwined plays to find out how the perception of reality becomes blurred step by step. The first thing to pay attention to is that in the beginning of the play the curtain is already raised and the audience directly sees an impromptu performance on the stage. Anne Paolucci says,

The stage itself becomes a living character in this extraordinary confrontation, and the actors move in and of “real” and “stage” roles in a telescopic oscillation that forever destroyed the notion of stage and audience as distinct and mutually exclusive realities. (Paolucci 43)

The curtain is supposed to separate the stage from the audience and real life.

However, Pirandello ignores the curtain deliberately in order to give the sense that the stage and real life are whole. This beginning affects the audience’s perception of reality, because the fiction becomes inseparable from their reality.

The second level of reality in the play-within-the-play structure starts with the rehearsal of *The Rules of the Game*. With no curtains, the audience witnesses the improvisation, but it is actually part of the play. Actors try to follow the instructions of the Director. To see the Prompter, the Stage Manager, the Property Man, the Technician, the Director, and Actors on the stage confuses the audience: Are real actors improvising for Pirandello’s play, or are they characters acting in the play? Therefore, it becomes hard to distinguish fiction and reality. The Leading Lady, who is about to miss the rehearsal, appears from the back of the theatre. She runs down the aisle between the seats and reaches the stage. Her entry through the audience gives an impression that the performance has not started yet. It supports the idea that it is not a fiction but a real rehearsal. Also, the first moments that Pirandello starts to question reality is supported by the empty stage. There is no indication to recall daily life on the stage as a representation of the real world. There is no prop to make the scene look realistic. In that sense, the bare stage signifies the emptiness of life. If drama is a reflection of human understanding of life and world, the bare stage refers

to the space that we live in. Pirandello's representation of the world does not imply any reality to the human mind.

The third level of reality starts when the rehearsal is interrupted by Six Characters' sudden entry, and the play-within-the-play-within-the-play comes true. The Usher guides them down the aisle between the rows of seats. It is so important that they are not already on stage, but come from among the audience. It becomes hard to decide whether they are the part of the fiction or real people. The audience's minds already blurred by the rehearsal are again confused by the Six Characters. It is written in the description that "The Characters, in fact, should not appear to be unreal figures but rather created reality, the creations of immutable fantasy" (10). Their physical entrance and representation as products of an author's fantasy result in duality. Martin Esslin states,

[...] there are three layers of "reality" involved: the author's fantasy, the theatre as a real entity, and the fantasy's demand to be "realized" as a play, which remains fiction but requires translation into performance by "real," flesh-and-blood actors. The constant undercutting of theatrical reality by the reality of our everyday life, and vice-versa, the showing up of everyday reality as another form of theatre, role-playing, and pretense, is today the most obvious hallmark of the "Pirandellian." (Esslin 261)

Everyday reality is put into the theatrical reality, and these realities are mixed in the play. Pirandello presents a section of life in the play by adding a feeling of the reality of real life. By mixing fiction with reality, Pirandello makes the audience discover that nothing is real. In this way the play destroys the perception of reality, which is Pirandello's tradition.

The Six Characters' trouble not being taken seriously, and their effort to make the Actors and the Director believe that they are real characters, confuse the mind. Their intent is to stage their drama by introducing themselves as rejected characters of an incomplete fiction. The Father says, "One is born to life in many ways and in many forms: as a tree, or as a stone, as water, as butterfly...or as a human. And one can also be born as a character" (12-13). The Stepdaughter tries to convince the Director; "Believe me, sir, we are really six characters, and very interesting ones, even though we are lost" (13). Esslin states,

The Six Characters that have been created by an author's daydreaming, as long as his consciousness is haunted by them, are his puppets. They have a greater reality than any of the humdrum actors trying to embody them. (Esslin 263)

Six Characters not only challenge the Actors on the stage but also the audience or the reader. Their tending to believe that they are not fictitious but real characters affects the audience too. During the conversations, the Actors watch the Characters as if they are real spectators.

The inner play of the Six Characters' drama brings the question of reality to its peak. Their life story is revealed while they are arguing. From the speech of the Stepdaughter, we understand that there is something wrong between her and the Father, the Son is a legitimate son, and she, a Young Boy, and a Child were born out of wedlock. The Father believes that the drama starts with the Mother's leaving for the Father's secretary. The Mother opposes him by claiming that he is the one who forced her to go away. The Stepdaughter thinks that the Mother blames the Father for

fear that the Son understands his being abandoned by her. This quarrel implies that the play to be acted is their drama. The Actors praise their performance,

Leading Lady [to his companions]: What a show this is!

Leading Lady: They are performing for us!

Young Actor: For once! (18)

This conversation among the actors reflects the drama of the family as if they are watching a play. The Young Actor's response is significant to understand their idea of the Characters. He means that it is a real life story which can be performed just "for once" in a real world. He assumes that the Characters do not perform like actors but live their real lives on stage. The levels of reality become intertwined here. From now on the Director is all ears for the life story of the family. "He goes down one of the staircases and remains standing in front of the stage as if, like a spectator, to capture the impression of the scene" (18). He wants to capture how the actions look from the audience. Gaskell interprets it as follows:

This disruption of the proscenium barrier has several purposes, but essentially it brings to vivid life the equation of the stage with the world which is basic to the play. It suggests, in other words, quietly but firmly, that we who watch *Six Characters* are no less actors than the people on the stage. (Gaskell 124)

The play is not isolated from the audience. That's why the Six Characters seem so vivid and real. Even the Actors express their bewilderment for their living performance. The Director's desire to turn this living story into a theatre play is perceived in different ways from the audience. His jumping down from the stage and sitting among the audience gives a feeling that he is a real director, not an actor of Pirandello's play. The border between fiction and reality is completely destroyed.

The audience is in the position of an observer who spies on the rehearsal. Therefore, the Director's approval of the inner story as real is also accepted by the audience. Actually, the fiction presents different layer of reality so that it is impossible to decide which one is more real. Chard Gilman argues, "Things are not either illusion or reality, but both, and to make this truth present on the stage is one driving purpose of Pirandello's complex dramatic art" (Gilman 159). There is a critique about exaggerated interpretations that put Pirandello's art in the center of reality-illusion concept. Gilman suggests that both "reality" and "illusion" give shape to his art.

In the chain of reality, the Six Characters are productions of fantasy, rejected characters of an author, and are important part of literature and drama. The reality of life and a work of art are being questioned. In the play, the Director calls the story of the Characters, "literature."

Director: But all this is narrative, dear sirs.

Son: [disdainfully]: Of course. It's literature, literature.

Father: What do you mean, "literature"! This is life, sir! Passion.

Director: It may well be. But it can't be played out!

Father: I agree sir. This is only the background that leads up. I am not saying that this should be staged [...] Now, sir, comes the drama: new and complex.

(23)

There is a mixture of real life and a work of art in this conversation. The story that is called narrative or literature by the Director and the Son is actually a life story of the Characters: they live it while they are telling it on the stage. The Father's sentence, "I am not saying that this should be staged," is tricky here for the real audience in the theatre, because it is already being staged.

In the play-within-the-play-within-the-play structure, the Six Characters raise the idea that life is acting. Lionel Abel defines metatheatre as based on two basic principles: “the world is a stage and life is a dream” (Abel 105). The inner play of the life story being performed on the stage demonstrates that life is a stage and we are the actors. The Father and Stepdaughter perform their near-incestuous relationship on the stage and infuriate the Mother, whose reaction causes further ambiguity about reality. The Stepdaughter acts to show the truth when she goes up to the Father and puts her head on his chest and her arms around his neck; she uses her talent and gestures to show real experience. Then she wants the Mother to cry out while she lets her head sink onto her Father’s chest. The Mother, who has witnessed all this sorrow before, bursts into tears:

Stepdaughter: [...] Cry out! The way you cried out then!

Mother: [moving forward to separate them] No, my daughter, oh my daughter! [And after pulling her away from him] Beast! You Beast! She’s my daughter! Can’t you see she is my daughter?

Director: [at the cry he backs up as far as the footlights amidst the bewilderment of the Actors] Excellent. Yes excellent! And then curtain. Curtain.

Father: [rushing towards him, exited] Yes, of course, because it truly happened that way, sir. (51-52)

The Mother’s reaction is so close to reality that it becomes hard to interpret it as acting. However, the Characters and the Director see her reaction as “excellent,” as if she does not really live the moment, but just acts, so fiction and reality are mixed. The scene gives the impression that she does not cry because the Stepdaughter wants

her to, but she cannot bear to see the event again. It is like a real grief presented on the stage. Therefore, her reaction is far from being a part of fiction. The scene pushes the mind into the ambiguity of multiple realities. The assumption of the world as a stage is described by Martin Esslin in terms of reality layers: “Our existence is essentially one of multiple realities that mutually undercut and relativize each other.” He calls it internal theatre within ourselves whereby we internalize roles toward others and ourselves in society (Esslin 264). Esslin defines reality as

a structure made up of innumerable layers of an onion, which when peeled away ultimately reveal a nothingness at its core. Or rather, each layer invalidates the next as well as the previous one. The sky we have taken for real is pierced to reveal another sky behind it, which in turn may well itself be pierced to reveal another, and so on. (Esslin 264)

Thus, reality is not stable but constantly changes within its layers. There may be other realities behind or beyond our perception. According to Esslin, “No reality, no fact, experienced by the human mind can ever be fixed and immutable” (Esslin 264). Hence the human perception of reality is unreliable. As in the example of the onion, the Mother’s cry, which occurs between the Characters’ fantasy and the Director’s reality, invalidates both sides. Her response reveals “another sky” behind the one we have taken for reality.

The Actor-character conflict reveals the dilemma between reality and illusion. Gaskell praises Pirandello since “By calmly putting actors and characters on the same stage he sets up a remarkable metaphysical tension” (Gaskell 120). The Director’s desire to produce a theatre play with the characters’ story arouses “metaphysical tension” by creating duality: “I assure you that all this interests me, it

really interests me. I sense there is a material here to put together a good play” (29). His new play project brings the question of who will act it. The Characters’ effort to convince him that they are the real characters of the author’s fantasy is confusing:

Father: After all, sir, born as we are for the stage!

Director: Are you amateur actors?

Father: No, I say born for the stage because...

Director: Come on, you must have acted before.

Father: No, we have not, sir. The only acting we do is in that role for which each of us has been cast or which others have given us in life. (29)

Actually, their life is story created as fiction by its unknown author, experienced by the Characters, and considered as a theatre play by the Director. These different approaches toward the story blur the division between reality and illusion. As the Characters manage to convince the Director that they are real, they lose their reality on the side of the audience. The Father says, “All of us are already here, alive, right in front of you... What do you mean it’s not enough? When you can actually see us living out our drama” (29). It is like the Characters, who are part of a fiction, are alive on the stage.

In Act II, the Director has decided to stage the drama of the Characters, and arrives with actors, Stage Manager, Technician, Prompter, Property Man, and the Six Characters to prepare for the performance. The Director declares that the Characters will rehearse for the actors, but the Father opposes him because they are the real characters so there is no need to improvise. The Director says, “All right then ‘the characters.’ But here, my dear sir, the characters do not act. Here the actors act. The characters stay there in the script [points to the Prompter’s box]—when there is no

script!” (34). Then the Father replies, “Exactly! Since there is none and you people have the good fortune to have here in front of you, alive, the characters” (34). In this actor-character controversy the actors will act the play as a fiction while the Characters, who are the actual drama, stay in the script:

Director: Oh, After all, here you cannot exist as your real self? Here it is the actor that presents you. And that’s the end of it!

Father: I understand, sir. But now I think I also see why our author, who conceived of us so alive, no longer wanted to put us on stage... It will be difficult to play me as I really am. (36)

There is a contradiction between reality and representation. Antonio Illiano explains that the question of “Are the characters more real than the actors?” has a variety of answers depending on what we call “real.” If the reality is understood as physical, the answer will be negative because the actors also have physical existence, bodies. If it is understood in a philosophical sense as substantial and everlasting, the answer will be affirmative since the characters are more real than the actors (Illiano 4). In this ambiguity, the Father is always in a position to explain their existence to the Actors who try to understand them:

Excuse me, but why would you want to ruin, in the name of a commonplace sense of truth, this miracle of a reality that is born, evoked, attracted and formed by the stage itself and which has more right to live here than all of you, because it is much truer than you? (39)

Again there is a situation of actor versus character, reality versus fiction. Bassanesse says, “*Six Characters* directly explores the multiple constructions of illusion in a place where illusions are repeatedly manufactured. But theatre is also the space

where reality is re-created, where art imitates life” (Bassanesse 99). In the clash of realities, the Six Characters produce an alternate reality. This function of the characters creates multiple illusions and reality. Gaskell argues that we do not accept the Characters as real as we accept the Director and his actors: “The Characters, then, have a reality of their own: one which is radically different (though they move and speak on the same stage) from that of the Producer and his Actors whom we take to be people like ourselves” (Gaskell 125).

The Characters start to improvise their life story, in which both the third level of the play and reality confuse the Actors and the audience. While the Stepdaughter speaks in a lower tone, the Director finds the scene attractive and urges, “Just beautiful! But here you’ve got to make yourself heard, my dear. We can’t hear you and we are on the stage! You can imagine what it would be like for a theatre audience!” (40). It is as if they are not being watched by the audience at that time. However, the Characters are so much affected by the theatre that they start to play on their own:

Stepdaughter: Make your entrance. You don’t have to walk around. Come straight here. Make believe you’ve already come in. There we are: I stand here with my head bent—modest like. And now, come on speak up! [...]

Director: [already off the stage] Will you look at that! Do you mind telling me, are you directing or am I? (42)

The Stepdaughter and the Father start to act their own life experience on the stage for the actors whom the Director wants to watch and learn how they will perform the Characters’ story. They improvise the same event that happened in Madame Pace’s

shop. Then the Director and the Characters lead the actors to improvise again what they learn. However, the Father and Stepdaughter dislike the acting:

Father: I admire, sir, admire your actors: that gentlemen there [he points to the Leading Lady], but certainly... you see, they are not us!

Director: Of course they're not! How could they possibly be "you," if "they" are the actors?

Father: Exactly, they're actors. And both of them act our parts very well.

But, believe me, for us it's a different thing—something that would like to be the same, but at the same time is not!

Director: What do you mean "is not"? What is it, then?

Father: Something that ... becomes part of them, and is no longer ours. (47)

It means that it is no longer the reality of the Characters but it becomes the fiction of the actors. We witness the creation of a fiction-within-a-fiction. We observe the Six Characters' rebellion and objection as the owners of their inner fiction. The Director as an authority and representer of outer fiction resists them. This reciprocal controversy leads to a dislocation of perception and an alienation for the audience.

Traditional theatre is supposed to reflect real life on stage. In the article "Pirandello's Six Characters and Surrealism," Anna Balakin argues that "The primordial process of theatre was and always has been the representation of life, and the creation of illusion has been only a means of reinforcing that reality" (Balakin 190). The illusion functions to show the performance as more real. The theatre's illusion creates an aura as if there is a real event behind the curtains. In Pirandello's play, the Director thinks the illusion must be created for the audience and calls it "the illusion of reality" (54). However, The Father is completely opposed to the word

“illusion”: “What for you is an illusion that must be created, is for us, instead, our only reality” (54). In this way, their reality of life turns into an illusion for the actors and the audience. He continues to question the Director: “[...] with all the illusions that you had back then, with all those things in and around you as they seemed to you then—and which were actually real to you [...] all the reality of today, the way it is, is destined to seem as an illusion to you tomorrow?” (55). His words are like questions for the real spectator in the theatre who is confused by the different levels of reality throughout the play. The question of which one is real is also argued between the Father and the Director. The Director says, “You actually would go so far as to say that this play that you have come to act out here is more true and real than I am!” (56). According to the Father it is “immutable reality” (56) that they have. Pirandello does not create illusion to reinforce reality, but exposes it to destroy the notion of reality: “By exposing the illusion of theatre and opening it to public view, Pirandello, fulfilling his goal of capturing the instability of life and fixing it in dramatic form, redefined the nature of the dramatic work and broke the conventions of naturalism” (Bassanesse 120). In the absence of traditional conventions of theatre, he sets up his own rules. He raises the curtains of the illusion of reality between the audience and the play. However, he strews multiple realities by establishing unstable life in the play-within-the-play-within-the-play. “In so doing, he made the audience an active, as well as reactive, participant in the construction of drama” (Bassanesse 120).

The unexpected finalé of the play in which the Young Boy is wounded and a Child is drowned in the pool makes the audience completely lose its sense of reality, which is already blurred by multiple realities. The Characters perform their own

stories as an Act II prepared for the garden scene. At the time, the Son tells the real experience to be acted, in which the Young Boy looks on while his little sister drowns in the pool, followed by a sudden shot from a revolver. The Mother runs with a cry and wants help since the Young Boy is wounded and the Child is drowned. Shocked by their death, the actors start to question reality:

Director: Is he wounded? Is he really wounded?

Leading Lady: He's dead! Poor Boy! He's dead! Oh! How awful!

Leading Man: What, dead? It's make-believe. He is just pretending! Don't believe it.

Father: What make-believe! Reality, sir, reality!

Director: Make-believe! Reality! You can all go to Hell, every last one of you! Lights! (65)

The play ends here in uncertainty between reality and fiction. It is not possible to say whether they are acting or living it. Balakin states, “[...] at a certain junction reality intervenes to destroy illusion. Or in other words a real life event — the actual drowning of a little girl and the suicide of the boy — brings art and reality into collision, violating the created reality of the fixed characters” (Balakin 189). In this way, the illusion of created reality for the stage is destroyed by other realities. While the Six Characters are destroying the illusion of the play, they construct another reality. In this way, the inner play causes the Director's play to end and this ending brings the main play of Pirandello to its final end. The structure of the play-within-a-play-within-a-play is destroyed by the intertwined endings.

From the beginning to the end, the questions follow each other. Is the rehearsal a part of the play? Are the Director and the Actors of the play we came to watch? Are

the Six Characters part of a fiction? Which one is really real, actors or characters? Does the Young boy really die with a gunshot? Does the Child drown in the pool? Are the events real, or the illusion of a created reality? Is it acting or living that is occurring on the stage? These questions continue in one's mind after the play ends. As Anne Paolucci states, "The stage disappears from the scene; but its influence is never lost" (Paolucci 63). Thus, the influence of the play on the audience lasts forever. The three levels of reality pull the reader into an inescapable confusion of reality. Francis Fergusson indicates that "Instead of pretending that the stage is not the stage at all but a familiar parlor he pretends that the familiar parlor is not real, but a stage, containing many 'realities' (Fergusson 7). It is not Pirandello's style to give a sense that the play is not a play but a section of life. Instead of presenting a scene which allows the audience to give rein to a story as if it is an episode from real life, he insistently puts forward that the stage as stage is not real. However, he presents many interrelated realities in the play. These realities, built on different levels, confuse the audience so that they cannot decide which one is really real or which acting is a part of the play.

CHAPTER III

INCEPTION

3.1. Analysis of Dream within Dream Structure in *Inception*

Inception is built on a dream-within-a-dream structure consisting of three layers of dreams and a limbo within the main stage of reality. The level of reality is that Cobb, hired by Saito, makes a plan with his team to bring Fisher Jr. into a dream. In the first dream level, the team kidnaps Fisher Jr. and starts to plant the idea. Yusuf as a dreamer remains in this level to create a kick. In the second level, which is Arthur's dream, they make up an idea that Browning is a traitor. In the third level, Fisher Jr. is supposed to find his father in the fort and be convinced not to follow his steps. In the last state, limbo, Cobb and Ariadne rescue Fisher Jr. and Saito, who have died in the dream and fallen into limbo. All in all, these intertwined dreams are like spliced branches starting from the level of reality and extending to the limbo construct of the dream-within-the-dream structure.

Dom Cobb is an expert on breaking into people's dreams and stealing their secrets and valuable information as part of corporate espionage. Saito hires him and wants Cobb and his team to plant an idea. Cobb's team consists of Ariadne, a dream architect who creates worlds with a semblance of reality; Eames, a forger who embodies any person known to the dreamer; Yusuf, a chemist who drops subjects into deep layers of sleep with sedatives; and Arthur, the dream manager as coordinator. Cobb and his team are hired by Saito not to steal but to plant the idea "I will split up my father's empire" in the mind of Robert Fischer, who is the son of Saito's main competitor and who will inherit control of the corporation, Fischer-

Morrow energy conglomerate. On the condition that the team succeed, Saito arrange for Cobb's return home to America.

Five minutes in the real world is equal to one hour of a dream. In each level of the intertwined dreams, the team has extra time. When it reaches limbo, the deepest state of shared dreams, it takes years to leave there until one dies. The shared dreams are designed by the architect and the subject brought into the dream fills it with projections of his subconscious. If the subject's subconscious figures out that someone else created his dream world, the projections lead toward the dreamer. The more the dreamer changes things — places props in the dream — the quicker the projections start to attack the dreamer. Cobb compares it to white blood cells fighting an infection. He trains Ariadne to design dreams and warns her to create things and places that do not exist in the real world, since "Building a dream from your memory is the easiest way to lose your grasp on what's real and what is a dream." Actually, this is what Cobb experienced with Mal before. That's why they all use a totem, a small object to test reality and to be sure that one is not in someone else's dream.

The inception of planting the idea starts when the team is ready with Cobb, Arthur, Ariadne, Eames, Yusuf, and Saito, who joins the team to know whether they will do the job or not. Peter Browning, both friend of Maurice Fischer and the godfather of Fischer Jr., is the target of Eames to impersonate. He observes Browning to adopt his physical presence and to mimic his behavior. He also follows the relationship between father and son to find out clues for the idea they will plant. Ariadne tries to design labyrinths the each dream level. She builds a hospital on the bottom level where Fischer brings his father. The exact idea that the team will plant is that "I will split up my father's empire." As Cobb says, "the subconscious is

motivated by emotions not reason,” so they try to find an emotional concept for an idea that Fischer may reject at first sight. They use the relationship between the father and son Fischers and Eames finds a concept that Fischer Jr.’s mind will positively accept, “My father accepts that I want to create for myself, not follow in his footsteps.” In each level of dreams, the team will more strictly impose this idea on him.

Cobb and his team make a plan and arrange a place where they can dream for ten hours. Therefore, they get in the same plane with Robert Fischer from Sidney to Los Angeles. They dream together on the plane and the adventure of planting the idea begins. They kidnap Fisher. In the first level, they become aware that Fischer’s subconscious is militarized to defend itself and his projections are trained. Saito is shot by the projectors. He suffers so much that Eames wants to shoot him in order to wake him up in the real world. However, the team learns they will fall into a limbo of infinite subconscious if they die in a dream. They cannot wake up because they are all sedated heavily. Eames summarizes the problem, “now we are trapped in Fischer’s mind, battling his own private army. And if we get killed we will be lost in limbo till our brains turn to scrambled egg.” Then he disguises himself as Browning to learn the combination of the safe in which there is a will.

Yusuf remains awake in the first level to drive the van which will fall from the bridge. This free fall into the water will be a kick for the team to wake up from the second-level dream. They dream again into the second level where the dreamer is Arthur. Because they cannot find the combination to the safe that holds the will, they need to go deeper. They will destroy the relationship between Browning and Fischer Jr. while they repair the relationship between father and son. Cobb introduces

himself to Fisher as Mr. Charles. He explains that Fisher is dreaming and that he is there to protect him. Cobb tries to turn Fisher's attention to Uncle Peter in order to make him believe that Browning wants to steal the combination.

The third level is a dream of Eames. Fisher, deceived by Cobb, believes that they are here to learn what Browning hides in his subconscious. However, it is a trick of the team who step by step close in on Fisher's subconscious. While Fischer is in front of the huge safe of his subconscious, Mal shoots him and Fisher falls into limbo. Cobb and Ariadne follow him to find him in limbo.

In limbo, Ariadne finds Fischer Jr. and by falling from the building they create a kick to wake up in the third level. He finds his father, who tells him that he was not disappointed because his son could not be like him, but he was disappointed that Fischer Jr. tried to be like him. At this moment, the inception starts in his mind and the idea is planted safely that Fischer Jr. understands his father does not want his son to follow him. Synchronized kicks follow each other in each dream level. Except for Cobb, the team wakes up in the van which falls into the water in the first level of the dream. Fischer Jr. now thinks "the will means that Dad wanted me to be my own man not just to live for him." After the time is up, Cobb convinces his conscious mind that Mal is just a projection, finds Saito, wakes up in the plane with the other members, and returns home.

3.2. The Question of Reality in *Inception*

There are three layers of dreams that reveal multiple realities and introduce the question of reality. In each level, the notion of reality is blurred. It functions in the same way for both the characters and the audience. Both the characters and the audience are suspicious of reality. While the characters test reality with their totems, they make the audience test it too. The main story of Cobb's being hired by Saito and gathering his team is accepted as the foundation of reality. In each dream, the team goes far from the foundation of reality. Therefore, the intertwined dreams of Eames, Arthur, and Yusuf destroy the perception of reality gradually. When they reach limbo, the notion of reality is completely lost. The structure of the-dream-within-the-dream questions reality.

The movie starts with the explanation of how the real world becomes restricted for dreaming people. For the first experience of dreaming, Ariadne is both fascinated with the limitless creation of the world, and frightened of unexpected attacks on the subconscious. Being stabbed by the projection of Mal in Cobb's dream, she refuses to work with him. However, Cobb is sure that she will return: "Reality is not going to be enough for her now, and when she comes back, you are going to have her building mazes." As Cobb foresees, she returns as the architect of the team.

Cobb's motivation to endure his ambiguous life in dreams is his kids. When he goes to Paris to find an architect for dreams, he meets his father, who originally taught him to navigate people's minds. Cobb explains the job, but his father wants him to come back to reality and leave the fantasy world of dreams. The reality for Cobb is the reality of his kids, who wait for their father to come back home. If he rejects taking a journey via dreams, he will never be able to see his kids, because he

is accused of murdering his own wife. Therefore, in order to make his kids' reality come true, Cobb sacrifices his own reality and continues to do his job. He chooses to stay in the infinite dream world to preserve the reality of his kids.

The audience is gradually informed about dreaming while the team trains for the levels of reality, which destroys the cliché of the unreliability of dreams by giving the message that life is a dream. The movie stresses the idea that life is a dream by exposing how the real world becomes restricted for dreaming people. Yusuf brings the team to the place where twelve people are connected to each other in a shared dream, in order to show the effect of his powerful sedatives. These people come there every day to share dreams three to four hours each day, which is equal to forty hours in a dream. Saito asks whether the people come there every day to sleep, and the man who works with Yusuf says, "No, They come to be woken up. The dream has become their reality." Thus, reality is presented as a relative concept. The patients are so much stuck in their dreams that they have lost all perception of reality. Life becomes a shared dream, and the dreamers need to be woken up. Stephen LaBerge, the founder of The Lucidity Institute, expresses his ideas on shared dreams in an interview: "I am not saying it is not possible to share dreams. In fact, there is a case in which we do share dream worlds. In my view, what we are experiencing right now is a kind of a dream. In that it is all a dream. You know, it is the idea: Life is a dream." Life becomes a shared dream and the dreams are used to wake up. The question of reality starts by defining dreams as real.

In the first dream, reality is questioned by the memories of Cobb, who is a tragic hero suffering from previously-created realities in his mind. His married life becomes the inner story of the movie. His experience of dreaming with his wife Mal becomes

a sub-dream-plot of the movie and causes both him and the other characters to lose perception of reality. In a scene of Cobb's dreaming, Ariadne shares his dream without his awareness. In the dream, she witnesses that Cobb creates a multi-layered dream world for him and his dead wife Mal to live in together. He designs each level according to the real memories that he regrets. Ariadne calls this dream world that Mal locked in, the "prison of memory." Cobb tells Ariadne about his experience of dreaming with Mal while she was alive:

Cobb: We were working together. We were exploring the concept of a dream within a dream. I kept pushing things. I wanted to go deeper and deeper. I wanted to go further. I just did not understand the concept that hours could turn into years down there that we could get trapped so deep that when we wound up on the shore of our own subconscious we lost sight of what was real. We created. We built the world for ourselves. We did that for years. We built our own world.

Cobb and Mal become almost insane by questioning reality. This experience of intertwined dreams has already made him lose his sight of what is real. In this labyrinth of dreams, they are stuck for fifty years. Cobb says, "It was not so bad at first, feeling like gods. The problem was knowing that none of it was real. Eventually, it just became impossible for me to live like that." He cannot stand the created fantasy world anymore.

Even if Cobb is aware of the illusion of a dream's fantasy, Mal completely loses her perception of reality. Cobb tells her situation to Ariadne, "She had locked something away, something deep inside her. A truth that she once had known but chose to forget." While he is explaining, the scene shows Mal locking her spinning

top into a safe; a sign of reality, to lock up the top means to forget all the previously-experienced reality. She deliberately ignores what is real. As Cobb confesses, “Limbo became her reality.” She is so stuck in the reality of dreams that even after she is convinced by Cobb to wake up to the real world, she cannot be sure about reality. Cobb explains,

Well, to wake up from that after years, after decades to become old souls thrown back into youth like that? I knew something was wrong with her. She just would not admit it. Eventually, she told me the truth. She was possessed by an idea. This one very simple idea that changed everything. That our world was not real. That she needed to wake up to come back to reality that in order to get back home we had to kill ourselves.

A flashback shows the audience a scene of their anniversary. Going into a cluttered hotel room, Cobb finds Mal on the next building’s window ledge, waiting for him to jump together. Cobb tries to convince her to step back inside by saying she will not wake up but die. However, she jumps from the ledge with the hope that she will reach her real children, but it never happens. In the film narrative, the first dream level is interrupted by flashbacks of Cobb’s dreams with Mal. Their experiences become sub-dreams, which give depth to the main dreams of the team.

In the second dream, the team falls into a sleep that is two levels removed from reality. The notion of reality is questioned by means of Fischer. Cobb, under the name of Mr. Charles, confesses to Fischer that he is dreaming. He acts as if he is hired as a subconscious security agent to protect Fischer. As Arthur describes it, “it is a gambit designed to turn Fischer against his own subconscious.” Cobb makes him test the reality:

Cobb: Now, the easiest way for you to test yourself is to try and remember how you arrived at this hotel. Can you do that? [...] Accept the fact that you are in a dream, and I am here to protect you. Go on.

Fischer: You are not real?

Cobb: No. No. I am a projection of your subconscious.

In this way, Fischer is brought to question reality. He is persuaded that he is in a dream and someone is chasing him for extraction, so once again the question of reality is raised. However, for him it is the first level of the dream, but he is already in the second level. When Arthur finds the machine used for shared dreams, he is introduced to the dream-within-a-dream concept:

Cobb: They were trying to put you under.

Fischer: I am already under.

Cobb: Under again.

Fischer: What do you mean, a dream within a dream?

The trick of the team brings multiple perceptions toward different dream levels. It is the first time that Fisher hears about the concept of a dream-within-a-dream, although he experiences it unconsciously. Deceived by Cobb, Fischer assumes that he is entering Browning's subconscious in a dream-within-a-dream. However, it will be his own subconscious that the team seeks for inception in the third level of the dream-within-the-dream-within-the-dream.

In the third level of dreams, Cobb's struggling with his subconscious arouses the question of reality by means of Mal. As they go deeper into Fischer, they are also going deeper into Cobb's subconscious. Therefore, it becomes much more complicated for Cobb to find out what the reality is. In the scene where Fischer is in

the antechamber outside the strong room, Cobb becomes aware that Mal is behind Fisher and ready to shoot him. Even if Ariadne reminds him that she is not real but just a projection, Cobb hesitates to shoot her and questions it by saying, “How do you know that?” The projection of Mal confuses him; however, his totem—the spinning top that is used to test reality—makes him certain about reality. According to Mark Fisher, Mal and the totem are competing versions of reality:

For Cobb, the top stands in for the Anglo-Saxon empiricist tradition’s account of what reality is—something sensible, tangible. Mal, by contrast, represents a psychoanalytic Real—a trauma that disrupts any attempt to maintain a stable sense of reality; that which the subject cannot help bringing with him no matter where he goes. (Fisher 42)

The top represents the surface level of reality, while Mal represents limbo, the lowest level of rejected memories of Cobb. In between these two opposite levels are dreams. Cobb holds together his multi-level reality with both his totem and Mal.

Limbo, defined by Arthur as “unconstructed dream space” and “infinite subconscious,” is the bottom level of the dream-within-a-dream structure. Ariadne and Cobb follow Fisher in a dream: they drop into limbo by dreaming. They find Mal deep in Cobb’s subconscious. Cobb has previous experience of inception in which he planted in Mal’s mind the idea that the world is not real. The discussion between Mal and Cobb symbolizes the conflict between dream and reality. His rebellion against the projection of Mal and his rejecting her is like a declaration of war against the dream world:

Cobb: An idea is like a virus. Resilient. Highly contagious. And the smallest seed of an idea can grow. It can grow to define or destroy you.

Mal: The smallest idea, such as: “Your world is not real.” A simple little thought that changes everything. So certain of your world. Of what is real. Do you think he is? Or do you think he is as lost as I was?

Cobb: I know what is real, Mal.

Mal: No creeping doubts? Not feeling persecuted, Dom? Chased around the globe by anonymous corporations and police forces the way the projections persecute the dreamer? Admit it. You do not believe in one reality anymore. So choose. Choose to be here. Choose me.

Cobb fights against his subconscious through the projection of Mal. He resists her challenging speeches about multiple realities. He has to convince himself about what is real. Furthermore, he puts an end to the destruction of his subconscious and withstands the contradictions originated from Mal, who does not give up.

Mal: You are confused. Our children are here. And you would like to see their faces again, wouldn't you?

Cobb: Yes, but I am going to see them up above, Mal.

Mal: Up above? Listen to yourself. These are our children. Watch. James? Phillipa? [Cobb turns his face not to see the faces of the children]

Cobb: Don't do this Mal. Please, those are not my children.

Mal: You keep telling yourself that but you do not believe it.

Cobb: No, I know it.

Mal: What if you are wrong? What if I am what is real? You keep telling yourself what you know. But what do you believe? What do you feel?

Having battled against the question of reality, Cobb tries to remember the ambiguity and unreliability of the limbo state. He convinces himself that they are in a dream-

within-a-dream and the reality is up above. He tells Mal, “You are just a shade. You are just a shade of my real wife.” He distinguishes the real and the dream by rejecting Mal.

At the end of the film, the dream-within-a-dream structure collapses as a result of synchronized kicks on each level. Even on the level of reality, the questioning still continues. Cobb safely gets through Immigration at the airport and arrives home. He finally reunites with his children and hugs them. He turns his spinning top to be sure about the reality of that moment. In the excitement of his happiness he forgets to look to see if the top falls, but the audience witness that the spinning top rotating on the table does not fall, and the movie ends. Mark Fisher interprets,

This ending has more than a suggestion of wish-fulfillment fantasy about it, and the suspicion that Cobb might be marooned somewhere in a multilayered oneiric labyrinth, a psychotic who has mistaken dreams for reality, makes *Inception* deeply ambiguous. (Fisher 38)

The fall of the totem guiding him like a compass to find the reality is not shown. In this way, the film has an open-ended finalé: it is not obvious whether Cobb is in the real world or still in a dream. The confusion of dream and reality which creates ambiguity throughout the movie continues.

3.3. Metatheatre and *Inception*

Pirandello has made valuable contributions to film. Frank Nulf in his article “Pirandello and Cinema” explains how Pirandello was concerned with cinema as well as theatre. The subject of “Pirandellian tradition” as “a play-within-a-play-within-a-film” structure is explored as one of the contributions of Pirandello to cinema. Nulf interprets this structure as “a tangled web of the real and the illusory” (42). *Inception*, with its dream-within-a-dream structure has characteristics of Pirandellian tradition since its narrative structure mingles reality and illusion. Also, Nulf states that “Pirandello saw the future of film in illusion and in fantasy” (47). When asked how he saw the future of cinema, he said “without limitation” (47). In this way, *Inception* justifies his predictions that it is a modern type of Pirandellian style.

In comparison to Pirandello’s play, the movie presents the team: six characters in search of inception. In both works, six characters function in the same way. Their target, to stage their drama and to start inception, brings a change to structure, ambiguity, and seeing double. They produce the inner play and dreams which bring mingled chains of realities.

Metatheatre, a drama about drama, appears in the movie as a film about filmmaking. In the article “Never Wake Up: The Meaning and Secret of *Inception*,” Devin Faraci argues that the whole movie is a metaphor of a film production: Cobb is the director, Cobb’s partner Arthur is the producer, Ariadne is the screenwriter, Eames is the actor, Yusuf is the technical guy, Saito is the sponsor, and Fischer is the audience. Cobb directs and controls the team, Ariadne creates dream spaces like in film sets, Eames disguises like an actor does, Yusuf supplies what the team needs,

and Saito supports them financially. In this way, *Inception* presents a film about a film. Faraci points out the red carpet interview of Leonardo DiCaprio in which he compares the movie to *8 1/2* by Fellini. The autobiographical movie is based on Fellini's struggle to overcome troubles and make a movie. Faraci claims that "it's a film about filmmaking, and so is *Inception*." Faraci mentions the interview in *Film Comment* in which Nolan compares the team's behaviors with creating a Hollywood movie: "There are a lot of striking similarities. When for instance the team is out on the street they've created, surveying it, that's really identical with what we do on tech scouts before we shoot."

In comparison with tragedy, Lionel Abel puts forward the principles of metatheatre, whose principles are applicable to *Inception*. He states, "Metatheatre gives by far the stronger sense that the world is a projection of human consciousness" (Abel 113). In the movie, the dream world is populated by the human subconscious. The people are the projections of the human mind. The effect of the dream-within-the-dream is so strong that it becomes difficult to distinguish real people from their projections. For example, Mal, who wakes up after decades, still thinks that her real children are her projections. She is fixated on the idea that she has to kill herself to reach her children who are waiting in the real world. The final scene where Cobb comes back to his home, questions whether the grown-up children are projections or not. We need to see the spinning top stop in order to believe that Cobb is not still in a dream. In this way, the movie suggests that our real world could be a projection of our subconscious.

"Metatheatre glorifies the unwillingness of the imagination to regard any image of the world as ultimate" (Abel 113). The beginning of the movie has a strong and

sharp impact on the perception of the audience. The movie starts with the scene in which Saito and Cobb are very old men in limbo and then in the next scene they become young, smart men talking in the same salon. After a while, we understand that they are in a dream. After the dream collapses, they wake up in a place that it is perceived as the real world. However, they are in a dream-within-a-dream and need to wake up again. This structure of the movie never proves or assures the audience that the characters are in the real world. Hence the story always makes the audience question reality and makes them curious about the ultimate reality of our world.

“Metatheatre makes human existence more dreamlike by showing that fate can be overcome” (Abel 113). In dreams, the subject who can build cities through the infinite power of the imagination is in a God-like position. Cobb and Mal’s getting old in a dream and waking up young age in the real world is like a resistance to their fate. The open-ended final  of the movie raises unanswered questions by showing that human existence is dreamlike. Because it is not shown if the spinning top falls, Cobb and his children’s existence become dreamlike. Whether Cobb is in a dream or not, he overcomes his fate of separation from his family.

“Metatheatre assumes there is no world except that created by human striving, human imagination” (Abel 113). The movie with its dream-within-a-dream structure and open-ended final  constantly gives a message that the world of imagination is the ultimate world. The dream space of imagination is so centered throughout the film that it gives us a sense that the real world could be a created reality. In dreams, the space is filled by the human imagination and the subconscious. The message of the movie, “life is a dream,” infers that the world around us is created by the human imagination.

“For metatheatre, order is something continually improvised by men” (Abel 113). The order in dreams is created by Ariadne, the architect. The other dreamers improvise that order. As Cobb says, “We create and perceive our world simultaneously.” This creation is done so well that one cannot even recognize the process. There is no ultimate order, so it becomes easy to lose one’s grasp of what is real and what is a dream. The movie presents a continually-created dream spaces that restricts the idea of an ultimate world. Dreams are man-made spaces, and their being is indistinguishable from the real world, which leads the audience to question whether the real world is also manmade and continually improvised by man.

“Metatheatre makes us forget the opposition between optimism and pessimism by forcing us to wonder” (Abel 113). Inception is not a movie about the battle between good and evil or protagonist and antagonist. There is no exact rivalry side with, but a fantastic plot that focuses on how dreams work. The essence of the movie is to figure out what is going on and to wonder what will happen at the end.

The 5 Levels Of **INCEPTION**

LEVEL	WHO DREAMED IT?	WHO GOES THERE?	WHY ARE THEY THERE?	THE KICK
LEVEL 1 REALITY 	No one... We think	Cobb, Arthur, Ariadne, Eames, Saito, Yusuf and Robert Fischer Jr.	To drug Fischer Jr. and bring his subconscious into a dream.	There isn't one. The timer counts down and the machine shuts off.
LEVEL 2 VAN CHASE 	Yusuf "The Chemist"	Cobb, Arthur, Ariadne, Eames, Saito, Yusuf and Robert Fischer Jr.	Fischer Jr. is kidnapped. They force him to give them random numbers which are used later, and begin planting the idea in his head that his father wants him to break up the company.	Yusuf drives the van off a bridge. That fails. A second Kick occurs when the van hits the water.
LEVEL 3 THE HOTEL 	Arthur "The Point Man"	Cobb, Arthur, Ariadne, Eames, Saito and Robert Fischer Jr.	Fischer Jr. is tricked into believing Browning is a traitor. He joins the team for their next mission.	Arthur blows up an elevator, simulating freefall.
LEVEL 4 SNOW FORTRESS 	Eames "The Forger"	Cobb, Ariadne, Eames, Saito and Robert Fischer Jr.	Fischer Jr. must be taken to the fort, where the idea they wish to plant will finally take hold.	Eames blows up the supports of the fortress, dropping it and causing freefall.
LEVEL 5 LIMBO 	No one It's a shared state	Cobb, Ariadne, Saito, Robert Fischer Jr. and Mal's projection	To get Fischer Jr. and Saito out.	Ariadne and Fischer fall off a building. Cobb and Saito shoot themselves.

< <http://www.cinemablend.com/new/An-Illustrated-Guide-To-The-5-Levels-Of-Inception-19643.html> >

CONCLUSION

Six Characters in Search of an Author, a touchstone of metatheatre, and *Inception*, an innovative example of contemporary cinema, question reality with play-within-the-play and dream-within-the-dream narrative structures. *Inception* follows the patterns of Pirandellian tradition, which questions reality by means of metatheatre. Both the play and the movie evoke the idea that the world is a stage and life is a dream. They pull the audience into an inescapable confusion of reality by asking the question, “What is really real?” It is impossible to give a fixed answer to this question, because the multiple realities in the structure of the intertwined plays and dreams cause a dislocation of perception. The Pirandellian tradition of the play-within-the-play in *Inception* becomes the dream-within-the-dream. In this common narrative structure, both works converge in the idea that there is no fixed reality. The movie encourages the audience to claim that “If Pirandello were alive today, he would direct *Inception*.” Pirandello’s foreshadowing of the unlimited future of cinema in illusion and in fantasy is demonstrated by the movie *Inception*.

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