

Canon of Harold Bloom, Watzlawick and Laing

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ABSTRACT

Canon is a literary term which more widely refer to a derivation from an original literary source which shows the basic structure and transformation from original refers. This term shows how the literary works and terms have got some hints from their backward works and terms. It was Bloom who first discussed about it and all the following lines are based on Harold Bloom's theory of "literary influence". Thus, I felt that it is necessary to allot an essay to explain Bloom's theory of "literary influence". In other words, based on Harold Bloom's definition and theorization of "literary influence", all the following get credit to discuss similarities and differences between the playwrights or more exactly between the precursors and the successors. However, finally, the communication theory of Watzlawick and Laing is employed, so the basic principles of communication theory are also clarified in this essay.

KEYWORDS: bloom, influence, Watzlawick, text.

INTRODUCTION

The *Anxiety of Influence* (first published in 1973) and Harold Bloom's recently published book, *The Anatomy of Influence* are two crucial texts for the study of literary influence. Although these two books are about poetry, as he himself says, his theory has wider implications and can be applied to drama as well. In his view, influence stalks us all as influenza and we can suffer an anguish of contamination whether we are partakers of influence or victims of influenza (Bloom, 2011: 12)¹. However in *Anatomy of Influence*, he discusses about Shakespeare's plays and considers Shakespeare as the source of influence for all poets and generally speaking for all people. *The Anatomy of Influence* reflects on a wide range of influence relationships. For Harold Bloom, Shakespeare is the literary founder, so he starts with him and moves from Marlow's influence on Shakespeare to Shakespeare's influence on writers from John Milton to James Joyce. Harold Bloom believes that Shakespeare is a great poet encompassing all other writers who come after him. He asserts that Shakespeare has invented us and that without him we would not have seen ourselves as what we are. Harold Bloom, as he says, has followed Shelley's pattern of thinking about influence in *A Defence of Poetry* from *The Anxiety of Influence* through *The Anatomy of Influence*. He follows Shelley's sayings in *A Defence of Poetry*:

For the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the color of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results. (Shelley, qtd in Ibid, 12)²

In other words, Harold Bloom believes in the influence of great poets (or writers) on their descendants whether the succeeding poets are conscious about the influence or they are totally unconscious about what they have got from their precursors. Harold Bloom's theory declares that the great writers cannot start out fresh, without any past at their backs, since "in practice inspiration means influence" (Ibid, 10)³. In *The Anatomy of Influence*, he reasons that we all fear loneliness, madness, dying but they are the precursors like Shakespeare, Walt Whitman, Leopardi and Hart Crane who bring us fire and light without curing those fears. Thus if the inspiration is direct or indirect or if it is not admitted by the later poets, or even if the later poets hate their precursors and evade their influence intentionally, this inspiration is called influence based on Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence. Regarding precursors, based on Harold Bloom's theory, creative freedom can be evasion but not flight.

DISCUSSION

Harold Bloom proposes an etymology of the term, "influence". From the Scholastic Latin of Aquinas, the word had received the sense of having a power over another. But not for centuries was it to lose its root meaning of "inflow" and the "prime meaning of an emanation or force coming in upon mankind from the stars". Influence was first used as an ethereal fluid flowing in upon one from the stars, which affected one's character and destiny. Shakespeare used it in two different but related senses. The flowing from the stars upon our fates and our

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personalities is the prime meaning of “influence”, which was made personal between Shakespearean characters. Shakespeare also uses the word “influence” to mean “inspiration” both in his plays and his sonnets. Ben Jonson sees influence as imitation meaning: “to be able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use”. Ben Jonson has no anxiety to imitate, since to him art is *hard work*. But with the post-Enlightenment passion for Genius and the Sublime, there came anxiety too, for art was beyond hard work. Thus, literary influence has been part of the phenomenon of intellectual revisionism over the course of time and in our sense of literary influence, it is very late. Literary influence was never used in our sense by Pope or Dryden. In 1755, Samuel Johnson also defined influence as being either astral or moral. By moral he meant “ascendant power; power of directing or modifying” but the instances he cites are religious or personal and not literary. But for Coleridge the word has substantially our meaning in the context of literature (Bloom, 1997: 26-27)⁴.

Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* tries to clarify and enlarge the readers’ vision of the influence. The influence process always is at work in all the arts and sciences, as well as in the law, politics, popular culture, the media, and education. He maneuvers on Shakespeare and the anxiety Shakespeare has made on later poets but as he himself says, the anxiety of influence can be found in all poets who are under the influence of not only Shakespeare but their precursors. For him the structure of literary influence is labyrinthine, not linear. For instance, in *The Anatomy of Influence*, he refers to Jorge Luis Borges’ essay, “Kafka and His Precursors”, in which Borges evokes the uncanny process by which the novelist and essayist Franz Kafka seems to have influenced the poet Robert Browning, his precursor. What is most strange in such Borgesian moments, Bloom says, “is not that the prior poet appears to have written the new poem. It is that the new poet appears to have written the prior poet’s poem” (*Ibid.* 19)⁵.

The precursors invented us and continue to contain us. For Harold Bloom, today is the age of so-called “cultural criticism” which politicizes literary study, debases literary study and devalues imaginative literature, which consequently leads to not only the Death of God but also the death of the precursors, the great writers or as Harold Bloom exemplifies the Death of Shakespeare (xviii). Bloom is aware not to be the victim of this kind of deficient look at imaginative literature; he is aware not to deny that Shakespeare experienced anxiety of influence in regard to his prime precursor, Christopher Marlowe who was certainly crucial to Shakespeare’s art. However besides Marlowe, the *Bible*, Chaucer and Ovid taught Shakespeare some of the secrets for representation of human beings.

“The largest truth of literary influence is that it is an irresistible anxiety”, Bloom believes (*Anxiety* xviii)⁶. Great writers will not allow you to bury them, escape them, or replace them. Harold Bloom’s theory of influence is something unique when he suggests that “we have, almost all of us, thoroughly internalized the power of Shakespeare’s plays, frequently *without having attended them or read them*” (*Ibid.* xviii)⁷. In *The Anatomy of Influence*, Harold Bloom surmises that “it is possible that blind Milton and the near-blind Joyce, . . . relied upon auditory memories of reciting Shakespeare out loud to themselves, since both *Paradise Lost* and the *Wake* sometimes seem to be echo chambers alive with Shakespearean revelations” (*Ibid.*, 109)⁸. Thus influence is not limited to the conscious or admitted influence but it can be defined as writing much like some one in the past. The *Divine Comedy* and Shakespeare’s plays, for instance, are the Books and Schools of the Ages and inevitably the source of anxiety for the texts belatedly created (*Ibid.*, xviii)⁹. “No strong writer since Shakespeare can avoid his [Shakespeare’s] influence”, Harold Bloom says (*Ibid.*, xviii)¹⁰. All of us belatedly follow after Shakespeare’s creation of our minds and spirits.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, what Bloom means by “the anxiety of influence” is not at all a Freudian Oedipal rivalry. Instead of a Freudian reading of Shakespeare, he prefers a Shakespearian reading of Freud. Thus, the movement and inclination of this book is from the past to the present; how precursors inspired the later writers or generally speaking how they influenced later writers. Based on this theory, a Shakespearian reading of Freud reveals that Freud suffered from a Hamlet complex or suffered from the anxiety of Shakespeare’s influence .Historicizing, politicizing, even feminizing Shakespeare are redundant operations; Shakespeare is always before us. The influence-anxiety does not so much concern the precursors but rather is an anxiety achieved in and by the story, novel, play, poem, or essay. The influence-anxiety is not necessarily internalized by the later writers; instead the strong piece of art is the achieved anxiety. In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom insists that influence anxiety “comes out of a complex act of strong misreading, a creative interpretations” that he calls “poetic misprision”. So what later writers experience as influence anxiety and what their works ultimately manifest are “the consequences of poetic misprision, rather than the cause of it”, Harold Bloom stipulates (*Ibid.*, xxiii)¹¹.

Strong poems are “always omens of resurrection”, Bloom says (*Ibid.*, xxiv)¹². The dead may or may not return, but their voice comes alive. The resurrection of the dead is paradoxically never by “mere imitation but in the agonistic misprision performed upon powerful forerunners by the most gifted of their successors” (*Ibid.*, xxiv)¹³. Without Keats’s reading of Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth, we could not have Keats’s odes and sonnets. Without Tennyson’s reading of Keats, we would have almost no Tennyson. Even Wallace Stevens—who was hostile to all proclaims telling that he owed to his precursors and that the precursors were the source of influence on his work—would have left us nothing of value without Walt Whitman, whom Stevens almost never overtly imitated. But Whitman is uncannily resurrected in Stevens’ works. Harold Bloom believes that all writers coming after Shakespeare are in a way under the influence of Shakespeare even if they refuse to accept any kind of influence

from their precursors. Ibsen is one of these writers who loathed influence “more perhaps than anyone else”, but as Bloom believes, he was very much indebted to Shakespeare (*Ibid*, xxiv)¹⁴.

Influence-anxieties are embedded in the basis of literature to the extent that Plato’s contest with Homer is the central agon of Western Literature. “To say that Shakespeare and poetic influence are nearly identical is not very different from observing that Shakespeare is the western literary canon” Bloom reasons (*Ibid*, xxviii)¹⁵. The literary influence-anxiety appears not only in later works of art but also in the roles people play in their everyday lives. For instance as Bloom claims, it is an evasion to regard the roles Shakespeare wrote for a specific actor as roles only, since they have become “roles *for us*, whether we are players or not” (*Ibid*, xxviii)¹⁶.

Like Shakespeare’s influence which began almost immediately and has prevailed since he died, modern literature, or more specifically modern drama is replete with the conventions of the past and is the hair of the tradition of the past and the literary precursors. Each single writer, based on Bloom’s theory of literary influence, has been undeniably influential on his/her following literature. Harold Bloom starts from Shakespeare and examines his influence on various poets, who whether consciously or unconsciously has got influence from him. Harold Bloom even examines influence on those who hate Shakespeare and those who try to evade him; even those who, like Stevens, do not believe in any kind of influence. Harold Bloom applies his theory to Shakespeare’s influence on his following literature and examines different poets from different eras. In *The Anatomy of Influence*, he also examines Shakespeare’s influence upon himself.

Examining the influences upon Shakespeare, Harold Bloom gets to this point that some influences may inspire anxiety in the later writers and some may not, though both are considered influence. For instance, he exemplifies *Bible*, Ovid and Chaucer as the fecund influences on Shakespeare but he believes that it was Marlow who inspired in him influence-anxiety; in other words, it was Marlow who was a literary rival for Shakespeare. Or among Shakespeare’s plays, he considers *Hamlet* as the endless anxiety to the world, since the world has found an unsolved mystery in it. Thus, Harold Bloom in his books proposes a new theory for literary influence.

His aim of writing these books and proposing this new theory is corrective. He wants to correct the definition of influence, which is limited to conscious or admitted influence. He proposes a new theory of influence claiming that literary influence is a *literary love tempered by defense*. Thus, he includes both love and defense in his theory of literary influence. This love and defense, as he suggests, can be conscious or admitted influence or not. So, based on his theory, it is not necessary to examine the biography of writers to find the slight traces of the writer’s acknowledgment about the influence of (a) particular writer(s). Any work is under the influence of the precursors and one can find the similarities and differences between them, which originate from the later writer’s love towards or defense against the earlier literature. Harold Bloom proclaims:

This short book [*Anxiety of Influence*] offers a theory of poetry by way of a description of poetic influence, or the story of intra-poetic relationships. One aim of this theory is corrective: to de-idealize our accepted accounts of how one poet helps to form another. Another aim, also corrective, is to try to provide a poetics that will foster a more adequate practical criticism. (*Ibid*, 5)¹⁷

Influence anxiety is implicitly embedded in Longinus’ famous celebration of the sublime: “filled with delight and pride we believe we have created what we have heard” (qtd in *Anatomy* 20)¹⁸. So what is the writer’s creation and what is merely heard? Where do other voices end and the writer’s own voice begin? Thus sublime transports the writers beyond themselves, provoking the recognition that one is never fully the author of one’s work or one’s self (*Ibid*, 20)¹⁹.

Harold Bloom argues that strong poets persist to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death; for instance in *The Anatomy of Influence* he exemplifies Beckett’s *Endgame* wrestling with *Hamlet*. He adds that weaker talents idealize, and figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves. “Self-appropriation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness, for what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to create himself?”, Harold Bloom says (Bloom,2011: 5)²⁰. Oscar Wilde once remarks that “influence is simply a transference of personality, a mode of giving away what is most precious to one’s self, and its exercise produces a sense, and, it may be, a reality of loss. Every disciple takes away something from his master” (*Ibid*. 6)²¹. Bloom approves Wilde’s definition of influence and confirms that what Wilde says is truly the anxiety of influence, yet no reversal in this area is a true reversal. Later on Wilde refined his idea about influence and bitterly remarks it as something immoral:

Because to influence a person is to give him one’s own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else’s music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. (*Ibid*, 6)²².

Stevens, a stronger heir of Pater than even Wilde was, does not want to accept that he has been under the influence of any precursor. He claims: “while, of course, I come down from the past, the past is my own and not something marked Coleridge, Wordsworth etc. I know of no one who has been particularly important to me. My reality-imagination complex is entirely my own even though I see it in others” (*Ibid*, 6,7)²³. Stevens proclaims:

I am not conscious of having been influenced by anybody and have purposely held off from reading highly mannered people like Eliot and Pound so that I should not absorb anything, even unconsciously. But there is a kind of critic who spends his time dissecting what he reads for echoes, imitations, influences, as if no one was ever simply himself but is always compounded of a lot of other people. (qtd in Ibid.7)²⁴

But Harold Bloom's influence-anxiety is in sharp contrast with what Stevens claims. In other words, based on Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence, poetic influence is hardly a subject where Stevens' insight could center.

Contrary to what Stevens thinks of literary influence, it need not make writers less original. Harold Bloom believes that literary influence makes later writers "more original, though not therefore necessarily better" (Ibid. 7)²⁵. Based on his theory of influence, the profundities of literary influence cannot be reduced to source study, to the history of ideas, to the patterning of images. Instead literary influence is "necessarily the study of the life-cycle of the poet-as-poet" (Ibid. 7)²⁶. Shelley speculated that poets of all ages contributed to one Great Poem perpetually in progress. Borges remarks that poets create their precursors. If the dead poets, as Eliot insisted, constituted their successors' particular advance in knowledge, that knowledge is still their successors' creation, made by the living for the needs of the living.

Harold Bloom, in *The Anxiety of Influence*, proposes six forms of literary influence:

1. *Clinamen* is a poetic misreading or misprision. Harold Bloom takes the word from Lucretius, where it means a "swerve" of the atoms. A poet swerves away from his precursor at a certain point. He reads his precursor's poem and executes a *clinamen* relation to it. What he does is a corrective movement in his own poem. He follows the precursor's poem up to a certain point but then on he swerves in the direction that the new poem moves.

2. *Tesserameans* completion and antithesis. Bloom takes the word "not from mosaic-making, where it is still used, but from the ancient mystery cults, where it meant a token of recognition, the fragment say of a small pot which with the other fragments would re-constitute the vessel". In this kind of influence, a poet antithetically completes his precursor, by reading his precursor in his own terms, or in other words "as though the precursor had failed to go far enough" (14).

3. *Kenosis*, Harold Bloom says, "is a breaking-device similar to the defense mechanisms our psyches employ against repetition compulsions. *Kenosis* then is a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor". He takes the word from St. Paul, where it means "the humbling or emptying-out of Jesus by himself, when he accepts reduction from divine to human status". The later poet empties himself of his own "afflatus, his imaginative godhood" and performs it in relation to "a precursor's poem-of-ebbing" which ultimately leads to the emptiness of the precursor "so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems".

4. *Daemonization*, "or a movement towards a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime". He takes the term from "general Neo-Platonic usage, where an intermediary being, neither divine nor human, enters into the adept to aid him". The later poet employs what to him seems the source of power in the parent-poem. Though for the later poet this power originally belongs to a range of being just beyond that precursor. So by stationing his relation to the parent-poem, he generalizes away the uniqueness of the earlier work.

5. *Askesis*, is a movement of "self-purgation intending the attainment of a state of solitude". He takes the term from the practice of "pre-Socratic shamans like Empedocles". The later poet does undergo a revisionary movement of curtailing; he surrenders part of his own human and imaginative endowment, and separates himself from others, including the precursor, and he does this in his poem by "so stationing it in regard to the parent-poem as to make that poem undergo an *askesis*; the precursor's endowment is also truncated".

6. *Apophrades*, "or the return of the dead". He takes the word from "the Athenian dismal or unlucky days upon which the dead returned to reinhabit the houses in which they had lived". In this kind of influence, the later poet's work is very much like the precursor's characteristic work:

The later poet, in his own final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios. But the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work. (Ibid.14-15)²⁷

Literary influence, Harold Bloom says, always proceeds by a misreading of the prior writer especially when it involves two strong writers. In other words, for the later writer, influence anxiety is the anxiety for the creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. Thus, Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence is not a wearisome industry of source-hunting, of allusion-counting. It is not an industry that will soon be replaced by computers to find sources and to count allusions. Harold Bloom's theory has previously bequeathed us by Eliot suggesting that the good poet steals, while the poor poet betrays an influence and borrows a voice. Or on the other hand, it has bequeathed us by Emerson declaring himself free of precursors: "insist on yourself: never imitate" and "not possibly will the soul deign to repeat itself". Paradoxically insisting much on individuality and ignoring of the

specific sources, Harold Bloom's theory suggests that we never read a poet as poet, but only read "one poet in another poet, or even into another poet" (*Ibid.* 94)²⁸. Harold Bloom says "Negation of the precursor is never possible, since no ephebe [Bloom employs ephebe for the young deep reader who dwells in the solitude where he or she goes apart to encounter the precursors not to be influenced by them] can afford to yield even momentarily to the death instinct" (*Ibid.*102)²⁹.

In literary influence the mighty dead—the strong precursors—return, but they return in our colors, and speak in our voices. If they return wholly in their own strength, then the triumph is theirs and not ours. Harold Bloom, in *The Anatomy of Influence*, explicitly announces that for finding influence-anxiety in a writer one should search for precedents rather than the sources. The following quotation can appropriately summons up Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence:

By "poetic influence" I do not mean the transmission of ideas and images from earlier to later poets. This is indeed just "something that happens," and whether such transmission causes anxiety in the later poets is merely a matter of temperament and circumstances. These are fair materials for source-hunters and biographers, and have little to do with my concern. Ideas and images belong to discursiveness and to history, and are scarcely unique to poetry. Yet a poet's stance, his Word, his imaginative identity, his whole being, *must* be unique to him, and remain unique, or he will perish, as a poet, if ever even he has managed his re-birth into poetic incarnation. But this fundamental stance is as much also his precursor's as any man's fundamental nature is also his father's, however transformed, however turned about. (*Ibid.* 71)³⁰

In the last paragraph of the coda of *The Anatomy of Influence*, Harold Bloom states that "no poem is ever finished but merely abandoned". He believes: "there is no way out of the labyrinth of literary influence once you reach the point where it starts reading you more fully than you can encompass other imaginations. That labyrinth is life itself" (Bloom,2011:335)³¹.

Watzlawick and Laing's Communication Theory

Besides Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence, the rest of this chapter is allocated to the presentation of the principles of the communication theory of Watzlawick and Laing which are employed in the third chapter of this research. *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* is the study of pragmatic effects of human communication, in which disturbed behavior is seen as a communicative reaction to a particular situation rather than the evidence of the disease of an individual mind.

Communication theory is concerned with the reactions of an individual to the reactions of other individuals and is liable to alter from time to time, even without disturbance from outside. Gregory Bateson defines communication as "the study of the reactions of individuals to the reactions of other individuals" while we should observe "not only A's reactions to B's behavior, but we must go on to consider how these affect B's later behavior and the effect of this on A" (qtd in Watzlawick,1967: 153)³². In Watzlawick and Laing's communication theory different pathologies of interaction have been discussed among which the ones related to entrapment in relationships (or being drowned, being caught and dragged down into quicksand) or as Watzlawick states "games without end".

Based on Watzlawick's communication theory the following patterns of interaction are distinguishable among people: symmetrical, complementary and meta complementary, which can be described as relationships based on either equality or difference. In the first case the partners tend to mirror each other's behavior. "Weakness or strength, goodness or badness", Watzlawick says, "are not relevant' in this pattern of interaction, "for equality can be maintained in any of these areas" (*Ibid.* 68)³³. In the second case, one partner's behavior complements that of the other, "forming a different sort of behavioral Gestalt" (*Ibid.*68)³⁴. Thus, symmetrical interaction is characterized by equality and the minimization of difference, while complementary interaction is based on the maximization of difference. In the third case, which is also called "pseudosymmetry", A lets or forces B to be in charge of him. In other words, A lets or forces B to be symmetrical.

The pathology in symmetrical interaction may appear as an ever-present danger of competitiveness when one manages to be just a little "more equal" than others, to use Orwell's famous phrase. Thus losing of the stability in this kind of interaction is the cause of quarrels and fights between individuals or wars between nations. The pathologies of complementary relationships, on the other hand, tend to amount to disconfirmation rather than rejections of the other's self (*Ibid.* 108)³⁵. In this kind of interaction, one partner may occupy the position of the superior, primary or "one-up" position, and consequently the other occupies the inferior, the secondary or "one-down" position. A complementary relationship may be set by the social or cultural context, or it may be the idiosyncratic relationship style of a particular dyad (*Ibid.* 69)³⁶. In this kind of interaction, A is culturally labeled as an assertive and B is considered as a submissive character.

In Laing's view, in complementary relationships "collusion" is at the center and we observe a growing sense of frustration and despair in one or both partners. Delusion, as Laing says, implies total self-deception; illusion implies a capacity to deceive oneself under a strong wish, but does not involve as total as self-deception as delusion. So

collusion is a “game” played by two or more people whereby they deceive themselves. It is a game involving mutual self-deception. So collusion is necessarily a trans-personal or interpersonal process (Laing,2002: 98)³⁷. Complaints of increasingly frightening feelings of self-estrangement and depersonalization are very frequently voiced by the individuals entrapped in collusion. They are perfectly capable of functioning satisfactorily when they are considered on their own but this picture often changes dramatically when these individuals are put in each other’s company and when they are seen together with their “complements” (Watzlawick,1967: 109)³⁸. They can become such devils when they are put in each other’s company and the pathology of their relationship becomes patent.

Consequently, in a family entrapped in collusion any statement or gesture functions as something quite different from what it appears to be, since no action can be trusted to mean what it seems to. In this family one has little hope as an outsider of discovering what is really going on. There may be almost no clues in the manifest content of interaction and to an outsider, nothing may be going on. Thus the “folie a deux” or the “folie a plusieurs”—a group departure from reality—is the most remarkable pathology happens in these complementary relationships.

Sometimes, the partners want to communicate without accepting the commitment inherent in all communications. So among these interactions, sometimes some deficiencies may occur and consequently the relationship turns into a pathological communication. Schizophrenic interaction is one of them mentioned by Watzlawick. He calls the language of this pathological interaction “schizophrenese”. In this interaction it is up to the listener to take his choice from among many possible meanings which are not only different from but may even be incompatible with one another (Ibid. 73)³⁹. So, based on Laing’s theory, people engulfed in schizophrenic interactions are constantly puzzling over what is meant by any statement, for any statement can function in innumerable ways (Laing,158)³⁹.

Watzlawick suggests that the impossibility of not communicating is a phenomenon of more than theoretical interest. It is, for instance, part and parcel of the schizophrenic dilemma; “the schizophrenic tries *not to communicate*” (Watzlawick ,1967: 50)⁴⁰. The meeting of two airplane passengers sitting next to each other, one of whom wants to make conversation and the other does not is a good example, Watzlawick proposes, for better understanding of the situation. Passenger A who does not want to talk cannot do two things: he cannot physically leave the field, and he cannot *not* communicate but because of his reluctance to communicate with B, it is likely that a pathological interaction occurs by employing various tricky strategies by A (Ibid,75)⁴¹. Watzlawick persistently insists that crazy communications are not necessarily the manifestation of a sick mind, but may be the only possible reaction to an absurd or untenable communication context.

Another form of schizophrenic interaction may appear in the shape of “imperviousness”. The disconfirmation of self by the other can be the result of a peculiar unawareness of interpersonal perceptions, called imperviousness. As Laing persists, it arises from an inequality between A’s message of ‘this is how I see myself’ and B’s response of “this is how I see you”. In this case, A may conclude that B does not understand him while B, on the other hand, may assume that A feels understood by him. So B ignoring or misinterpreting A’s message does not disagree with A which is consistent with the definition of disconfirmation (qtd in Watzlawick,1967: 92)⁴².

Interpersonal life is conducted in a nexus of persons, in which each person is “guessing, assuming, inferring, believing, trusting or suspecting, generally, being happy or tormented by his phantasy of the others’ experience, motives and intentions” (Laing ,1961:171)⁴³. Laing argues that one has phantasies “not only about what the other himself experiences and intends, but about his phantasies about one’s own experience and intentions, and about his phantasies about one’s phantasies about his phantasies about one’s experience, etc” (Ibid.171)⁴⁴ and that these issues are not mere theoretical complexities but are of practical relevance. There are some people who conduct their lives at several phantasy steps away from their own real lives, experience and intentions. Laing in the appendix of *Self and Others* outlines the models (algorithm of spiral interaction) relating to the pathological interactions and the ways people wrongly interpret one another. Thus, in our everyday interactions, in all probability, reality is what we *make* it or in Hamlet’s words, “... there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (qtd in Watzlawick,1967: 95)⁴⁵.

Another form of pathological interaction leading to entrapment in relationships is the paradoxical communication. Watzlawick stipulates that there is something in the nature of paradox which makes it pragmatically and existentially crucial in the relationships. “Paradox not only can invade interaction and affect our behavior and our sanity, but also it challenges our belief in the consistency, and therefore the ultimate soundness of our universe” (Ibid. 187)⁴⁶. He divides paradox to three types: *antinomies*, *paradoxical definitions*, and *pragmatic paradoxes*. An antinomy is a logical contradiction which occurs in logical and mathematical systems. Paradoxical definitions arise out of some hidden inconsistencies in the level structure of thought and language. The third type is of the greatest interest for his study since pragmatic paradoxes arise in ongoing interactions. Pragmatic paradoxes are divided into *paradoxical injunction* (*double bind*) and *paradoxical predictions* of which the former leads to entrapment in relationships.

A person caught in paradoxical injunction or double bind—the first architect of the double-bind hypothesis was the anthropologist Gregory Bateson—is in *untenable position* from which his chance of stepping outside is very slim. Watzlawick suggests different examples to clarify this situation which ultimately leads to the untenable situation no one wants to be engulfed in. This situation is called untenable, since a person entrapped in it should

chose between “badness” and “madness” which seem to be the only explanation and whatever he chose is a failure for him. Thus, he gets befuddled and cannot solve this very complicated problem. Watzlawick describes the ingredients of a double bind situation as the following:

1. Two or more persons are involved in an intense relationship that has a high degree of physical and/or psychological survival value for one, several or all of them. Situations such as: family life, material dependence, friendship, and love.
2. In such a context, a message is given which is so structured that (a) it asserts something, (b) it asserts something about its own assertion and (c) these two assertions are mutually exclusive. Thus, if the message is an injunction, it must be disobeyed to be obeyed; if it is a definition of self or the other, the person thereby defined is this kind of person only if he is not, and is not if he is.
3. Finally, the recipient of the message is prevented from stepping outside the frame set by this message. Therefore, even though the message is logically meaningless, it is pragmatic reality. A person in a double bind situation is therefore likely to find himself punished for correct perceptions, and defined as “bad” or “mad” for even insinuating that there be a discrepancy between what he does see and what he “should” see.(Ibid. 212-213)⁴⁷

Thus, double binds are not simply contradictory injunctions, but true paradoxes. So, the most important distinction between contradictory and paradoxical injunctions is that in the face of a contradictory injunction, one chooses one and loses, or suffers the other alternative. The paradoxical injunction, on the other hand, *bankrupts choice itself*, and nothing is possible. In the case of Pathological systems, especially double binds, the complexity of the pattern is constraining and only a very few reactions are pragmatically possible. Besides, pathological systems and particularly double binds have a curiously self-perpetuating, vicious-circle quality; they are so-called “games without end” (Ibid. 214)⁴⁸. Watzlawick believes: “the blocking of any escape from the double-binding situation and the resulting impossibility of looking at it from the outside are an essential ingredient of the double bind” and “what all these patterns have in common is that no change can be generated from within and that any change can only come from stepping outside the pattern” (Ibid.232)⁴⁹.

Laing persists on the paradoxical situations driving a person crazy. According to Laing one person’s position may be rendered *untenable* by others. He agrees with Searles’ suggestion of the modes driving the other person crazy. He refers to six modes, calls them *schizogenesis* and gives an example for each of them. Each of the following techniques undermines the other person’s confidence in his own emotional reactions and his own perception of reality:

1. *P* repeatedly calls attention to areas of the personality of which *o* is dimly aware, areas quite at variance with the kind of person *o* considers himself or herself to be.
 2. *P* stimulates *o* sexually in a situation in which it would be disastrous for *o* to seek sexual gratification.
 3. *p* simultaneously exposes *o* to stimulation and frustration or to rapidly alternating stimulation and frustration.
 4. *p* relates to *o* at simultaneously unrelated levels.
 5. *p* switches from one emotional wave-length to another while on the same topic (being ‘serious’ and then being ‘funny’ about the same thing).
 6. *p* switches from one topic to the next while maintaining the same emotional wave-length (e.g. a matter of life and death is discussed in the same manner as the most trivial happening).
- (Laing,1960: 131-132)⁵⁰

Thus, the initiation of any kind of interpersonal reaction tending to foster confusion can drive the other crazy; in this case it is difficult for a person to know ‘who he is’ and ‘who the other is’.

As Laing says, in these double-bind situations two or more persons are involved, of whom one is regarded as the ‘victim’. The victim is thus in an untenable position and cannot make a single move without evoking a catastrophe. So what we can observe in virtually all these cases of pathological communication is that they are vicious circles and cannot be broken unless the communicants step outside the circle, which is not possible except by a “violent change” such as suicide, homicide and the like, as Watzlawick suggests. In the third chapter of this research, these pathological interactions in Strindberg and Pinter’s plays will be studied and it will be practically examined how in these pathological interactions the people are entrapped in their relationships and how peculiarly they are not able to step outside these vicious circles.(Watzlawick,1967: 235)⁵¹.

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