

Is Equality Enough to Face Others?

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In reading Munday's paper, I feel a passion that wants to unveil hidden hierarchies and bring equality or do justice to the suppressed one. This is embodied in the argument about the hierarchy implied by the distinction between Occidentalism and Orientalism in which the former assumes a dominant position in regards to the latter. This explains the inequitable position of Oriental Literature in the Curriculum. Munday attributes these issues to metaphysical assumptions about 'otherness' which assumes that otherness or difference is something that is just 'out there'. Instead he argues that otherness is an effect of language. In conclusion, he suggests that the educational establishment should 'undergo a rigorous form of theoretical laser eye surgery' which means that curricular change should embrace 'hauntology' and release itself from the grip of metaphysical truths beyond language.

I agree with Munday in that assumptions regarding a metaphysical truth beyond language always lead to the formation of a binary hierarchy which is not equitable. Equally, I agree that Derrida's discussion about 'hauntology' can provide us with another perspective which recognises that what is suppressed by metaphysics (such as words, and others) is no longer hidden or suppressed. But I think this approach is limited in its attempt to understand the experience of others. In other words, it is not enough to try and do justice to words/others.

To explain this complexity, let's start with Derrida's term 'haunt'. For example, Munday says: 'Consequently every word is "haunted" by what it is not—and must therefore in one sense be radically dislocated the "other" to itself'. And in the following paragraph this idea is expressed in a more concrete fashion using the same frame to explain 'race': 'We might therefore say that whatever whiteness 'is' is *dependant on* blackness. Blackness is "internal" to whiteness'. The mode of understanding seems structuralist in character. Structuralists argue that what anything is can be determined by its place in a structure. To understand what anything 'is' we must understand what it is not. Munday's thinking on this matter is apparent in what he has to say about Orientalism:

What the Orientalist fails to see is that the differences produced by difference are differences internal to the creation of the discourse of the West—what the Orient 'is' is what the Occident is not (Munday, 2009).

Derrida's 'hauntology' cannot be fully understood if the matter is only viewed from a structuralist perspective. Instead we must consider the matter from the perspective of 'de-construction'. As one might expect, this differs from structuralism in that deconstruction shows us that what makes structure impossible is what makes it possible. For example, iterability makes words possible or same to themselves, and simultaneously makes them different to themselves. This reveals an otherness internal

to language. As Munday says 'The iterability of language (the fact that language is not at one with itself) makes room for the unexpected—what Derrida calls the *arrivant*'. This otherness is due to what Derrida calls the '*arrivant*' which means something unexpected to come. From this point of view, I think when we say one is haunted by others, it's very important to pay close attention to the way others are treated. Like the ghost or spirit, the other cannot be identified and we cannot even speak of or recognize its existence before it comes. So, saying Blackness is 'internal' to whiteness is not completely wrong, but only recognizes one aspect of 'hauntology'.

In this respect, the binary structures of Occident/Orient or White/Black are not threatened, even if we can bring some equality to these pairs. If otherness cannot confuse the identity of something, then it is not truly internal to it. Munday refers to the way in which things are internally haunted, yet his understanding of haunting misses an important aspect of Derrida's thinking on this matter. This can be attributed to the way Munday approaches the term 'otherness'. In the introduction, he says otherness is an 'effect of language' or is 'performed through a language'. Though in this way he succeeds in resisting the idea that otherness is something metaphysical, Munday fails to give sufficient consideration to internal otherness. It is noteworthy that both the word 'effect' and 'perform' refer to external processes. So as long as we take otherness as an effect of language, it is something phenomenal 'out there'.

If otherness is taken in such a way that sees identity as secure, then we will be at a distant remove from justice. In the book *Force de Loi* (1994), Derrida refers to justice as the experience of impossibility, and he says that justice is something we cannot calculate. But all meanings of equality imply that it is a calculable principle. So highlighting the equality that pertains to Eastern and Western cultures is not enough for us to confront the problem because the notion of equality presupposes a general and homogeneous dimension in which we can judge it. Otherness will therefore be excluded or reduced to something we are familiar with. This exclusion/reduction is in danger of 'reiterating the power of colonization' which imposed some structure on each culture.

If we are to call for justice, we must undergo an experience of the impossible. In other words, we should change the way we treat otherness. Following Derrida, I think we should take it as something prior to phenomena, and recognize 'all the other' or '*tout autre*' which always escapes from our comprehension and has something to do with the secret. But this doesn't mean to keep it unknown. On the contrary, it means we should go beyond any structure which limits otherness or even excludes it.

In education, our experiences of such otherness often come from encounters with the texts of different cultures. I think this is the very reason why Munday put emphasis on this aspect of education. Such texts have a different mark, therefore a different value, grammar, perspective on the world and different form that is alien to us. But they are not so far from us that we can ignore them. These texts force us to engage some crisis of our common sense, value, even of ourselves. What we can do and should do is to be open to such experience rather than deny it, although it will make us uneasy and confused.

REFERENCES

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