

Author, Authority, and the Pedagogical Scene: *Elvire Jouvét 40*

Michael Vincent

"Jouvét, un maître de l'Art du théâtre classique où le texte fait figure de loi." (Brigitte Jaques)

"Moi je ne suis pas un 'professeur', cela n'a pas d'importance, mais je te le dis." (Louis Jouvét)

In 1986 a play bearing the enigmatic title *Elvire Jouvét 40* opened in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Athénée-Louis Jouvét not long after its creation at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg. This play, conceived and directed by Brigitte Jaques, is a literal re-enactment of a series of drama lessons given by actor and director Louis Jouvét at the Conservatoire National d'Art Dramatique in Paris between February 14, and September 21, 1940. Louis Jouvét's course was later published as *Molière et la comédie classique*. In the play, three young actors are working with Jouvét on Elvire's last scene in Molière's *Dom Juan* (Act IV, scene 6) in which Elvire returns to chasten Don Juan, to deliver the only lesson that can, perhaps, save him. Spectators see moments of this scene throughout the play as the actors rehearse their roles. The play concentrates particularly on "Claudia" in the role of Elvire. Elvire's remonstrance to the archetypal seducer offers a subtle counterpoint to the relationship of Claudia to Jouvét.

This play exemplifies many of the features brilliantly studied by Linda Hutcheon in her recent *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. While it is not my intention to risk engaging this extremely interesting play in the current polemic over the meaning, or non-meaning, of the term "postmodern," it does respond to the most neutral, least polemical, definition as ". . . art marked paradoxically by both history and an internalized, self-reflexive investigation of the nature, the limits, and the possibilities of the discourse of art" (Hutcheon 22). *Elvire*

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Jouvet 40 cannot be abstracted from its own textual history, nor for that matter, from the history of the theater itself, constantly evoked through the presence of Elvire's scene from Molière's *Dom Juan*, as interpreted by Louis Jouvet in 1940. As we will see, its status as theater depends on a blurring of natural categories of discourse and generic distinctions. The natural language of Jouvet and students in their classroom becomes Jouvet's monograph on Molière, and finally Jaques's play. *Elvire Jouvet 40* is an intensely political play, not only because the ending situates the action solidly within the events of 1940. It demands that the spectator consider the structures of authority inscribed in Western culture that made "1940" possible.

As I hope is already apparent, this play functions at high levels of self-reflexivity. It is a play about the transmission of meaning from Molière's *Dom Juan* through Jouvet's pedagogy to Jaques's *Elvire Jouvet 40*; it is a paean to the classical notion of text, deconstructed by the text that asserts it, all within a scene of teaching and learning, what I want to call the pedagogical scene. By pedagogical scene, I will mean somewhat more than a novel or play that casts teacher and student as characters, although these roles are indispensable. The peculiar relationship between teacher and student in our culture has assumed an almost mythic shape. A pedagogical scene results when this myth, or master narrative of compelling interpretive or determinative force, is actualized, usually in a fictionalized dialogue between teacher and student. The pedagogical scene is rehearsed in innumerable works of literary art, but also in philosophical texts, in the literature of psychoanalysis, and in what, for lack of a better name, is called "theory."¹

As the title of this paper indicates, I will be interested primarily in the display and disruption of modes of authority, whether textual, pedagogical, personal, sexual, institutional, political, cultural, historical, or social, within the pedagogical scene staged in this play. The concepts "authorship" and "authority" are, of course, indissolubly linked in our consciousness even when we note a certain instability in the notion "author" at this moment in Western culture.² The history of *Elvire Jouvet 40* as text, its "authorship," is curiously emblematic of the disruptions in other modes of authority within the play. The "authorship" of this play is perhaps more accurately discussed using Roland Barthes's rediscovered medieval categories: a *scriptor* who copies without adding, a *compiler* who assembles the text, a *commentator* who glosses the text in order to make it intelligible, an *auctor* who adds "original" ideas by referring to what has already been written (*S/Z*, back cover).

Scriptor. Louis Jouvet's acting lessons in 1940 were taken down stenographically. Brigitte Jaques notes "[l]e soin exceptionnel apporté à la sténographie, qui reproduit les humeurs, les silences, les mouvements, la respiration même des participants, des 'personnages'." The stenographer, unfortunately perhaps, is not a character in the play. A stenographer silently taking notes might have linked visually the levels of discourse on which the play depends, reminding the spectator of the play's textual status.

Compiler. Some anonymous editor employed by Gallimard then disassembled the stenographic version of Louis Jouvet's course, re-arranged the individual lessons according to the character and play under rehearsal. The transcription of the course thus became a book. An unsigned *avertissement* tells us that Jouvet himself did not touch the language of the text. He seems, however, to have underlined certain passages, which appear in italics in the version published in 1965 as *Molière et la comédie classique* by Louis Jouvet.

Commentator. The scenario of the *Elvire Jouvet 40*, with due acknowledgement to the Gallimard edition, was published in 1986 with a preface by Brigitte Jaques, and an appendix consisting of photographs of the actors and Jaques's commentary on their performance.³ In some of the more interesting passages, Jaques virtually rewrites the unspoken dialogue actors call the "sub-text." On another level, commentary is the subject of the play itself. Louis Jouvet's lessons themselves are in a sense commentaries on Molière's text, the establishment of the "sub-text," for a particular scene in *Dom Juan*, a scene we see rehearsed throughout the play.

Auctor. Jaques's decision to bring to the stage this chapter in Louis Jouvet's book is an example of what we might call art by framing: an *objet trouvé* becomes art through the artist's transformative gesture. The transposition of cultural artifacts of one kind or another into "art" is, of course, one of the essential strategies of modernism. One might think of Picasso's collages, or Andy Warhol's soup cans as prototypical examples of this strategy. To accomplish this transposition, the play relies on what Barbara Herrnstein Smith has called "category switching."⁴ Louis Jouvet's "natural" discourse, the discourse of his pedagogy, becomes Brigitte Jaques's "fictive" discourse. "Jouvet" is henceforth a character in a play rather than the speaking subject of his own discourse. By appropriating Jouvet's discourse, Brigitte Jaques becomes the "author" of this play even though she herself did not write a word of it. Jaques's appropriation of Jouvet's book seen from within the structure of authority elaborated in the play thus becomes highly problematic.

The characters in this play are a teacher and his students, particularly Claudia, the good student, always anxious to please, to get things right. The relationships of power which bind and separate teacher and pupil might well be discussed within Hegel's analysis of the master/slave dialectic.⁵ The two systems, teacher/student and master/slave, fault along the same axis, and everyone who has ever been a student knows on which side fall power, authority, legitimacy, and the law. The teacher/pupil couple is one example of an hierarchically structured pair that reliably recurs within Western thought and that "deconstruction" has made its business to re-examine. Teacher and pupil are coupled roles; neither is conceivable apart from the other, nor apart from certain relationships of power and dependency. Attempts to undo this couple for whatever ideological reasons, whether Rousseauvian, Marxist, or Freudian, have often resulted in the re-institution of the same structure in a

new regime. What happens in this play is different, exceptional. This play thus merits the attention of anyone interested in the theory of pedagogical practice. *Elvire Jouvét 40* is not about revolt; it takes place solidly within the Institution, inside what Adorno has called the "culture industry," and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, perhaps more accurately, the "consciousness industry."⁶

The teacher/student couple responds to the logic of the supplement, as elaborated by Jacques Derrida (*On Grammatology* 141-147). In French *supplément* from the verb *suppléer* has a double meaning, on which Derrida, as is his wont, plays. A *supplément* is added to what is already in some sense complete, and compensates for a lack; it also supplants, displaces and replaces. Teaching, we know, is by nature a supplementary, parasitic practice. The teacher's teaching adds to the matter of the course, makes it consumable, even palatable to students. The "real" matter is always, inevitably, elsewhere--in a text, in the world, in nature. The teacher alludes to, gestures to, this "elsewhere", and in so doing effectively replaces it with the secondary discourse of the teacher's own teaching. I need not elaborate on the other side of the coin, students' parasitic dependence on the word of the teacher and their often successful attempt to make "secondary" discourses (lectures, manuals, *Cliffs Notes*) pass for the matter of the course.

What does Jouvét have to teach Claudia? Literature, the classical repertory, canonical texts already three centuries old, and the means of their embodiment on stage in 1940. He is certainly the man for the job, as Brigitte Jaques characterizes him in her preface: "Jouvét, un maître de l'Art du théâtre classique où le texte fait figure de loi." Jouvét is a *maître* in all senses of the word--master of his own discourse, teacher, the authority, the speaking subject. Although, as Jaques has noted ("Etat" 141), Jouvét hated being called "Maître," Jaques refers to him by no other term. In the play, the relationship between Jouvét and Claudia, master and disciple, seems to be inscribed explicitly within a Hegelian dialectic of domination and submission. Jouvét embodies a heroic pedagogy that Jaques in her commentary expresses in almost Cornelian terms:

Mais avec un courage incroyable, il la combattait jusqu'au bout, allait la chercher tout au fond d'elle-même, qui se cachait d'elle-même, et la menait, malgré elle, malgré eux, malgré l'Institution--qui pouvait se contenter de la bonne élève qu'elle était--vers cet endroit d'elle-même si grave, si vrai, où elle rencontrerait l'actrice qu'elle devait devenir. Le Maître n'était pas cruel, il était courageux.

The *maître's* tenacity in his pursuit of Claudia may well be courageous; it does seem nonetheless cruel, as Jaques acknowledges by correcting what must be the spectator's perception. Indeed, there is an aspect to *Elvire Jouvét 40* that resembles theater of cruelty as Antonin Artaud, Louis Jouvét's contemporary

and sometime rival, might have staged it. My point is that the play does nothing to attenuate the power relationship between *maître* and student.

"Jouvet, un maître de l'Art du théâtre classique où le texte fait figure de loi" (my emphasis). In other words, the classical theater is already in a position of supplementarity with respect to its texts. Jouvet as *maître* reveals and asserts his mastery in obeying the law of the text and imposing that law on his students. The actress is charged with embodying the text, not once and for all of course, but here and now. The body of the actress, her voice, tone, rhythm, gesture, poise, movement, are supplements to Molière's text, but must in some curious, indefinable way replace it. What Jouvet asks, demands, of Claudia is that he hear Elvire's speech for the first time. This is his highest compliment when, near the end of the play, Claudia almost gets it right: "C'est la première fois que j'entends ce morceau, ou à peu près" (124). The *maître* waits patiently for the moment he will hear the text he has read a thousand times for the first time, the moment when the text and all his previous readings, auditions, repetitions, *répétitions*, are effaced.

In the next to the last lesson in the play, Jouvet states the paradoxical relation the actress must maintain with respect to her text: "Si tu te reposes sur le texte, si tu veux nous l'expliquer, tu trouves dans le texte des moyens d'émotions personnelles, et le texte est perdu." It is the teacher's role to offer *explications de texte*. The actress must assert her relationship to the text in other ways, all of which are necessarily wrong. One example will have to suffice. Elvire at a certain point implores her former lover: "Je vous le demande avec larmes." Jouvet, soon after having heard this text "for the first time, almost," notices something in the way Claudia has performed it: "Elle ne pleure pas quand elle dit qu'elle pleure. C'est après qu'elle pleure, c'est ce qui est étonnant. Quand un comédien dit qu'il pleure, il ne faut pas qu'il le fasse, ce serait trop simple" (125; Louis Jouvet's emphasis). In this case, the performance of the text is improved when the "body language" and intonation of the actress contradict the literal sense of the text. Claudia must not merely translate from one discourse into another. The relationship between the text and her performance is not simply literal enactment, nor facile contradiction. Either choice is wrong, as Jouvet makes abundantly clear. What is the actress to do? In the final lesson of the play, Jouvet returns to the moment of brilliance he saw in Claudia's performance: "Quand tu dis sans émotion 'Je vous le demande avec larmes,' C'est infiniment plus émouvant" (131). Claudia replies: "J'ai envie de pleurer maintenant" (131; Louis Jouvet's emphasis). Who is the *je* speaking here? Claudia or Elvire? The student who has finally succeeded in doing what the master has demanded? The actress, who has finally reproduced an emotion from a text, for which neither her personal experience nor her culture has prepared her? I will let you guess whether the spectator, or Jouvet, will see Claudia's tears. Jaques then gives the *maître* the final word in the play: "Tu vois si c'est difficile" (131). The stenographic version continues for some two pages.

What has taken place between Jovet and Claudia in this play? Bernard Pautrat in an article published in the GREPH collection points to where we might look for an answer: "le discours du maître n'est pas séparable de la mise en scène inconsciente du discours, de sa mise en corps ["embodiment"] dans le corps du maître. D'où la finesse du disciple, toujours, qui, sentant ici l'inséparable de la pensée et de sa gestuelle, ira jusqu'à assumer le tout sans crainte de ridicule" (Pautrat 271). It will surprise you to hear that Pautrat is speaking of the teaching of philosophy, presumably that least corporeal of disciplines. His point becomes more acute when applied to the teaching of acting, the embodiment of a text, especially when a man must teach a woman a woman's role. It is only too clear that for all his technical mastery, Jovet cannot do what he is demanding of Claudia. Nor can Claudia obey the master's law, the law of the text, by assuming the master's discourse or his *gestuelle*. Jovet cannot tell Claudia how to do her scene, nor, lacking the body for the part, show her. The radical impossibility of what Jovet must accomplish with Claudia is not lost on Jovet himself: "C'est une question de culture personnelle, d'effort personnel," says Jovet in one of his more sententious, professorial moments, and then in a rare personal aside, continues: "Mais je me ferais cistercienne pendant trois mois pour savoir ce que c'est que cette sérénité! pour en avoir le sentiment!"

What I find fascinating in this play is the manner in which the culturally established roles of teacher and student are redeployed in a new relationship that preserves the conceptual integrity of the original couple while subverting the authoritarian model and, more radically, the authoritarian logic that subtends it. Jovet remains the *maître*; Claudia, the student. But where a certain pedagogical model presumes a dialectic of mastery and submission, of supplementarity and parasitism, Jovet's teaching finally consists of his attempt to learn from Claudia his own lesson. The *maître* places himself in a position of waiting and expectation, with respect to the effects both of his teacherly discourse and its "sub-text," its unconscious *mise en scène*. The pedagogical scene is staged in such a way that the relationship of supplementarity dictated by the hierarchical nature of the structure is apparently inverted.

In her commentary on a photograph showing Jovet and two other students silently listening to Claudia's performance, Jaques effectively restages the pedagogical scene, recreating it in a way that shows what is taking place between *maître* and pupil:

Le fera-t-elle? Y arrivera-t-elle? Les trois regardent l'actrice, ils sont spectateurs; et tous trois se posent cette question. Mais elle n'est pas la même pour les deux garçons et pour le maître, car eux et lui n'attendent pas la même chose. Eux sont attentifs, inquiets de savoir si elle fera ce que le maître demande, si elle le fera bien. Ils tremblent pour elle. Ils tremblent pour eux-mêmes. Mais lui, le

maître, ce qu'il demande, ce qu'il attend, il ne l'a jamais vu d'aucune actrice. Il ne l'a donc jamais vu.

Les deux garçons: le rendra-t-elle enfin content?

Le maître: va-t-elle enfin me surprendre?

It is no wonder that Jaques expresses the paradoxes of Jovet's pedagogical practice by alluding to non-Western philosophy, specifically the Tao and Zen. In her preface for example, she contrasts Jovet, become for her the authentic teacher, with *professeurs* and *pédagogues*: "Car eux n'enseignent, selon la boutade du Tao, que 'les choses qu'on peut apprendre, les choses qu'on peut enseigner, c'est-à-dire les choses qui ne valent pas la peine d'être apprises.'" She has noticed a fault in the immutable structure "teacher/student," a fault in the geological sense, a rupture that opens up and folds back on itself. The only discourse she finds adequate to express what she sees happening comes from outside Western culture. What is remarkable is that what Jaques sees in this play occurs *within* Western culture. Bernard Pautrat has called for what he calls a paradoxical pedagogy which ". . . loin de lever le refoulement, en relève péniblement la saveur, et l'entretient" (275). *Elvire Jovet 40*, it seems to me, has already staged an extraordinary example of paradoxical pedagogy in practice.

Readers of the intertextual complex that constitutes the written record of this play are compelled to turn the play's interrogation of "mastery" back on this play itself. Jaques's re-authorship of Jovet's book as theater is itself an appropriation that bears the burden of "mastery," a paradoxical burden that is at once assumed and refused. It is characteristic that Jaques offers as subtitle to her short article on the play "18 esquisses pour un portrait de L. J. [sic] *en maître malgré lui*" ("Etat;" my emphasis). In her commentary on the play published with the scenario, she writes of her own experience of the theater in a way that reveals the complexity of the relationship. A particularly successful moment evokes this reaction:

La joie immédiate, surgie on ne sait d'où, qui nous submergea ensuite--car il faut que je parle aussi par expérience--eux la nommèrent théâtre, mais je m'y refusai, car c'est un mot qui me fait horreur. Je ne suis pas un homme.

Theater, classical representation, pedagogy, and gender are all implicated in the case for (and against) *maîtrise*, hence Jaques's unwillingness to assume a master discourse to subsume all others.

1940. By the end of the play, an unwary spectator might begin to believe that the play had succeeded in suspending time. The final moments of the play re-insert the spectacle into history. The final moments of the play link what the

spectators have witnessed to the Nazi occupation of 1940. In the final scene, Jovet gives Claudia the praise he has constantly withheld: "C'est bien, c'est bien. C'est bien supérieur à ce que tu as fait l'autre fois." Jovet and Claudia face each other so that the spectators see the Star of David traced on the back of Claudia's dress. The spectator knows what that sign will mean--difference, exclusion, finally death. Jovet in a sense remains blind to the incursion of history, of event and political context, into his classroom and into the theater. "J'ai envie de pleurer maintenant," says the actress in gratitude. "Tu vois si c'est difficile," replies the *maître*. The narratorial voice-off returns as Jovet and Claudia separate. We learn that Claudia received first prize for comedy and tragedy in the 1940 *concours*. The academic institution in which, at least for the moment, Jovet remains the *maître malgré lui*, has sanctioned Jovet's teaching and Claudia's craft, while the political regime will attempt to annihilate the conditions that have made this moment possible: "Elle fut dénoncée comme juive. L'accès à la scène lui fut interdit. Louis Jovet partit pour un exil volontaire qui dura toute la guerre."

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Notes

1. I cannot provide here the complete documentation this assertion merits, but only gesture to a considerable body of evidence. The briefest survey of European and American canonical literature would turn up an impressive list of teacher-student couples, the basic roles through which the pedagogical scene is represented. Let me begin the list with Vergil-Dante, Mentor-Télémaque, Mephistopheles-Faust, Polonius-Hamlet, Vautrin-Rastignac, Don Juan-Sganarelle.

Reminiscences about one's own role in a pedagogical scene form another branch: Montaigne as pedagogue and student in "De l'institution des enfans" and the author of *Emile* in his *Confessions*, for example.

The parallels between the Freudian psychoanalytic encounter and the pedagogical scene are worth examining in this context. Brigitte Jaques explicitly compares Louis Jovet's pedagogical approach to Jacques Lacan's seminars ("Etat" 142).

George Steiner finds the pedagogical scene at the core of Heidegger's work: "The questioning construct, the definitional repetitions, the tautologies which inform Heidegger's texts are, frequently, those of the lecture-note, of the intervention in the seminar or of the dialogue. *The fiction of such a dialogue, with a Japanese student*, is enacted in one of Heidegger's major essays on the nature of language" (Steiner 37; my emphasis).

The recent spate of books and articles situating contemporary *maîtres à penser* within their implied pedagogy are symptomatic of the importance of the pedagogical scene in critical theory: Derrida's brilliant reading in *De la grammatologie* of Lévi-Strauss's "Leçon d'écriture," itself a pedagogical scene par excellence; Steven Ungar's influential study of Roland Barthes as "professor of desire;" Gregory L. Ulmer's *Applied Grammatology. Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*, to name only a few.

Finally, the current public debate in the United States on all matters of education relies constantly and inevitably on the rehearsal of pedagogical scenes. An important recent article in the *New York Review of Books* by E. D. Hirsch, one of the leading protagonists in the debate, was entitled, significantly I think, "The Primal Scene of Education." The allusion is, of course, unmistakable.

2. See Molly Nesbit's "What was an author?" for a review of the "death of the author" phenomenon in legal texts, as well as in Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and others.
3. Unfortunately, the scenario, from which I will quote extensively, is not paginated. I hope that my internal references will be sufficient to orient the reader. For quotations from the play itself, I have provided page references to *Molière et le théâtre classique*.
4. This notion is developed throughout her *Margins of Discourse*, but see especially 49-55 for a discussion on how texts may be "re-authored."
5. See Doubrovsky 92-95 for a brief but compelling analysis of Hegel's thought on this subject.
6. The critical problem for academic Marxists has been how to find a position outside the "culture industry" from which to critique it. See Hutcheon, especially 207-208.

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