Postmodern people suffer from uncertainty, emptiness and absurdity in Harold Pinter’s play: The Care Taker

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Abstract: Harold Pinter (1930- 2008) is a renowned English playwright. His plays are marked by the striking elements of postmodernism. His play The Care Taker (1960) precisely mirrors uncertainty, anxiety, and absurdity of postmodern life. The play depicts the lack of communication between close relatives and emptiness of postmodern man. There are three characters is the play Aston, Mick, and Davies. Mick and Aston are brothers but they hardly speak to each others. Davies is an old man rescued by Aston from a quarrel. His identity is uncertain because he lies about his name and identity. The researcher will explore the elements of absurdity, uncertainty, lack of identity and emptiness of postmodern people. Moreover the elements of existentialism and isolation would also be unfolded in the play.

Keywords: Absurdity, Emptiness, Uncertainty, Isolation. Insecurity.

Introduction

Harold Pinter was born in London in 1930 and died in 2008. He is a renowned literary figure of English literature. He was awarded a Noble Prize and Tony Award for his excellent literary contributions. He was a screenwriter, playwright, actor and director. His career as a literary man spanned over 50 years. He is not only known for his plays, but also for his stance against the politics of war. He refuses the National Service in British military. Pinter never hesitates to express his standpoint about his society, through his literary works. He was a member of Nuclear Disarmament campaign, and he also supported the British Anti Apartheid movement 1959-1994. He always tried to expose the shortcomings of the political system of England. All of Pinter’s literary works reflects the austere aspect of his society.

Background

Harold Pinter is one of the eminent postmodern English playwrights. He is not only known for his literary contributions but also for his political activism. He dislikes the British militancy across the world. His plays are labeled as a comedy of menace or black comedy by many contemporary critics because he mirrors the bleak aspect of postmodern life under the surface of his comic scenes. Postmodern era is the time of disillusionment, bewilderment, and anxiety. What am I here for? Who am I? What is the motive of our life here? These are the questions which every postmodern common man has in his mind. After World War II people are alienated from one another. Pinter depicts that bewilderment, loneliness, and boredom in his plays. Saeid Rahimipoor and Henrik Edoyan state in their research article; Pinter has created characters who are psychologically threatened to death and at the exposure of social or higher system identity purification [5] In his play, The Care Taker he tries to echo postmodern life in a chaotic world. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society. People don’t know the purpose of their lives. The characters in The Care Taker represent the loss of identity, self and mental serenity in postmodern society.
existence of man in the modern world, who may live the life as mentally retarded person like Aston [11]. All of the characters in the play, are depicted exhausted with their empty and aimless lives. They have ideas and plans for future in their minds but they never bother to execute their plans in a practical way. They all are mentally perplexed and paralyzed due to the uncertain condition of the postmodern world. Samuel Beckett, who is one of the founders of the Theatre of absurd, also echoes the War shaken society in his play waiting for Godot 1953. In Waiting for Godot the characters wait aimlessly for someone who is suppose to take them out of their predicament but he never comes. After World War II people of England are victimized of absurdity and nothingness. They have no idea what to do with their lives. The Theatre of the Absurd is not a proper moment but some dramatists compose their play for the theatre, which exactly reflect the contemporary society. Albert Camus 1913- 196 . Samuel Beckett 1906- 1989, and Harold Pinter are the prominent absurdist playwrights. Chandra Shekar Tiwari rightly states; World War II was the catalyst that finally brought the Theatre of the Absurd to life [7].

Literature Review

After the war people lose their desires for better future. The calmness and serenity of mind are vanished peace of mind can be found nowhere in postmodern world. People are frustrated with their present situation. Pinter’s play, The Care Taker is a true picture of his contemporary society. The decline in the religious institutions is also one of the reasons of the uncertainty of people. Absurdist playwrights remind people their complacency by depicting the stark reality of their lives. Tiwari asserts in this regard; the Theatre of the Absurd also seems to have been a reaction to the disappearance of the religious dimension from contemporary life [7]. Pinter points out the existing absurdity and mechanical life in order to shake his contemporary people with the hope of a new start. The characters in The Care Taker are alone and exhausted with the sterile life. Aston brings Davies to his room without any interrogation shows his intention and desire for someone’s company. Davies also feel comfortable for a moment with the company, he says to Aston; “You been a good friend to me. You took me in. You took me in, didn’t ask me no questions, you gave me a bed, you been mate to me.” [2]. People live like robots in the postmodern world. They are isolated and detached from each others. Traditional values in relationships and religious creeds are declined. People look for the answer of their being in the empty world. The previous notions such as grand narrative, patriotism, loyalty and sincerity towards family and country, are rarely witnessed in Pinter’s contemporary society. People of postmodern era, are skeptical about every traditional institution, religious doctrine. Values and culture lose its roots in Pinter’s society. Patil comments on the play; all the three characters Aston, Mick and Davies do represent their isolation with more or less intensity. This play of Pinter opens the life in general and life in 1950s England in particular [11]. 20th century is the era of immense progress in every walk of life. Science, technology, industry, arts and literature are enriched with the new experiments and realms. The developments make people bewildered, and dislocated. Mankind in postmodern era is passive and everyone feels purposeless in the chaotic world. Nuclear energy causes the elimination of millions of people in split of the moment in World War II. People find no value of their life. Pinter’s play, The Care Taker reflects the same society which he lives in specifically. All the three characters in the play have no motive and precise direction in their lives. They are lost in their own country. Under the comic scenes in the play, the austere aspect of postmodern world is strikingly witnessed in the haphazard life style of the characters. Saeid Rahimipoor and Henrik Edoyan state in this regard; Philosophers, intellectuals and even ordinary people all encounter the bewilderment of simple questions: Who am I? What am I? Why am I here? [5]. The Care Taker begins and ends in a single room which indicates the suffocating environment of society. Mick and Aston don’t communicate properly, though they are brothers. Davies’s story about his name and job is doubtful, it depends upon his visit to Sidcup, but he never visits there, due to his lame excuses. Pinter depicts the aimless life in the most developed city of England. People in England, are unable to find happiness, satisfaction and mental serenity through the progress of science and technology. The irrational conversation of the characters in the play refers to the absurdity of life. Aston tries his best to be a part of the society but he is unable to do so. The society is indifferent to him, even his brother feels uncomfortable in his company due to his excessive questioning. He trusts Davies and gives him the key of his room but Davies also proves to be worthless and bad tempered. Patil states; Harold Pinter tries to say that the human beings are destined to be isolated and lonely. Therefore his characters prefer to live in isolation [11]. Psychologically, all the characters are restless; they have no concrete objectives in their lives. Aston wants to make a shed, where he lives. The shed represents salvation from his uncertain and anxious life, though he never puts his plan into
practice just like Astragon and Vladimir in Beckett’s play waiting for Godot. Being a realist Absurdist playwright, Pinter touches upon the real plight of his contemporary society. Pinter deals with aimlessness, absurdity and insecurity of postmodern people in all of his literary contributions. His play, The Room 1957 also carries the same theme before the readers and audience. Mona F. Hashish rightly points out the theme of absurdity in his play, The Room; Pinter discusses in The Room the existentialist issue of security and the importance of having a secure home—certain forces seem to plan to usurp Rose and Bert’s room [1]. After World War II people are silent due to the uneasy mental state, people hardly communicate to each others. Silence and loneliness play a major role in the modern drama. Middle class people are lost in the postmodern world. They don’t know the reason of their existence in the chaotic world. Hashish refers Heasley Cox notion in this regard, about the element of silence; Martha Heasley Cox argues that the generation of the 1920’s after World War II was called _lost,' [and] that of the 1950’s after World War II _silent [1]. Silence is one of the salient features of the modern plays, which exactly depicts the barreness and sterility of the people. Beckette’s 1906-1989 play, Waiting for Godot is a noteworthy literary contribution as for as the silence of post-modern generation is concern.

The theme of isolation and bewilderment in Pinter’s contributions is not only because of the Second War but also because of his religious doctrine. Being a Jewish dramatist he observes the discrimination on the basis of religion in his society. According to critics Jews don’t want to be a part of the society due to the constant fear of War. They are detached from the rest of the world intentionally. Holocaust leave theme mentally frustrated.

They always feel insecure and uncertain. Pinter unfolds his mind through his play, The Care Taker. Pernilla Bergfeldt refers Billington’s standpoint in this regard; Billington also emphasizes anti-Semitic experiences during and after the war as having influenced Pinter’s writing [9].

Two brothers and a tramp Davies, are brought together in the play. They are unable to adjust themselves with the culture and society. The world in now dominated by machines, therefore people in the modern world have lost their values and they behave like machines. Hatred, animosity, and wars have damaged human being and their values across the world. The Care Taker represents not only English society but also the modern world generally. All of the characters in the play lack Love, sympathy and emotional attachment to each other. Harlod Pinter grew up in the War affected society. He witnesses the migration of Jews to Eastern Europe on a large scale. Nazi’s concentration camps heavily affected the Jewish community in Germany. The absence of peace and prosperity lead human being to the verge of insanity. The characters in the play, reflect the abnormal and eccentric behavior of postmodern people. Bergfeldt asserts about Pinter’s inclination towards Jewish pathetic plight after World War II; some of Pinter's plays reflect the Jewish community of the East End prior to the 1970s [9].

Pinter expresses his stance over the political formation of the social integration in his literary works. Pinter wants politicians to make sure the unity between very different people. He dislikes the divisions and discrimination on the basis of religion, race, or community. Pinter is well aware of the after effects of War and hatred. He desires the world to be a place where people live together with love, sympathy, and unity despite the differences in their race and religion. In his play, Care Taker he makes English people realize about their situation, and he exposes his contemporary society to highlight the issue of disintegration. Pinter’s works are to amend the lapses of his people and to bring unity in diversity. Peter Raby states in this regard; Pinter’s initial hostility towards politics was largely hostility towards politics and politicians because of their tendency to indulge in reductive social analysis [6]. He feels the need of positions and program to earn the support of people in large number, who are different, socially and religiously. In The Care Taker all the three characters are unable to fulfill their responsibility which echoes Pinter’s contemporary society. Davies is unworthy to hold his position as care taker of the Mick’s room. Similarly Aston is unable to decorate the room and prove to be trustworthy character of the play. Pinter explores the vacuum between relationships in postmodern people through Mick and Aston. They hardly, communicate through out the play. They even don’t bother to talk about their parents and family ties. Pinter exposes the hollow and complacent nature of his people which lead them to more social disintegration. Pinter makes people realize about their predicament in delightful way. His plays are rightly called Comedy of Menace because of his depiction of the menace in his society in comic scenes. The characters playfully represent the harsh and realistic picture of society. Pause, silence, and irrational conversations of the characters in Pinter’s plays mirror the triviality of his contemporary society, the insecurity and uneasiness of 20th century British society is not only depicted in Pinter’s literary works but Beckett also echoes the
Pinter is too much of a Modern to define himself as a Jew and he has downplayed his Judaism many times in conversation, and has consciously ignored it in his characterizations [4].

**Conclusion**

Being a shrewd observer, Harold Pinter touches upon every aspect of his contemporary English society. Pinter questions the previous notions of reality. The play, gives his standpoint about human condition vividly. The characters in the play are unable to discriminate between true and false, they don’t even know what is real and what is unreal. People live the life of boredom and hopelessness. People in postmodern world are unable to fix their lives to specific direction and goal. Humans in the post-war world are delineated totally lost by Pinter’s contemporary playwrights. Common people are frustrated and disappointed due to the existing menace in their society. Pinter investigates the psyche of human being after the war. Besides the outward obstacles, postmodern man is also hindered from getting back to sanity by his own conflicting mentality. They are being deceived by the traditional norms and ideas, therefore postmodern men tend to live an idle life, and they live without motive and destination. Pinter masterly depicts the motiveless life of postmodern man, in delightful way to make it interesting to the reader and audience.

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