

Existentialism in Harold Pinter's the Room

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Harold Pinter is regarded as the most gifted playwright in England and Britain's most distinctive playwright since Bernard Shaw and he is highly considered as the spiritual son of Absurd Theatre and particularly to Samuel Beckett. In his book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin groups Pinter with the absurdists because he shares with them the presentation of the essential problems of existence, alienation ,death and the inadequacy of language as a means of communication. In an interview, Pinter said that: In many recent British plays I find myself put off by the specter of the author...telling the audience at every stage just what they are to think about them...I think my job as a dramatist is simply to present the situation, shaped in dramatic terms, and let the audience decide for themselves.[1]

Existentialism began with existentialist writers like Jean -Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and eventually included such as Eugene Ionesco, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Edward Albee and Harold Pinter. The goal of Existentialist is not solely to depress audience with negativity, but an attempt to bring them closer to reality and help them to understand their own meaning of life. Harold Pinter acknowledges the influence of Kafka on him as he himself confesses:

"When I read them it rang a bell, that's all, within me ,I thought something is going on in here which is going on in me too." [2]

The plays of Pinter contain common place situation that is gradually invested with menace, dread and mystery .In *The Room*, the blind Negro With the message from the father calling his daughter ,the

killing of this mysterious stranger by the jealous husband and Rose's own blinding ---all these are the melodramatic devices which intensify the atmosphere of fear, mystery and confusion among the readers.

Existentialism is a means for man to protect himself against those forces which bring about his annihilation in the world of nothingness, which is rooted in the absurd situation. Pinter in his play, The Room, shows the absurdity of man's situation through the mingling of reality and symbolism. He also intensifies the sense of existentialism by the creation of the atmosphere of menace.

As in his interview with Tynan, Pinter explains: Two people in a room. I am dealing a great deal of the time with this image of two people in a room. The curtain goes up on stage and I see it as a very potent question: What is going on between two people in the room? Is someone going to open the door and come in? --obviously they are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room there is a world bearing upon them which is frightening. I am sure it is frightening to you and me as well. [3]

The environment used by Pinter is always mysterious .the settings are always exotic and the place is also a lonely place. Even the tenants like Rose and Bert , don't know, who lives in the basement and floors. In Pinter's plays, the setting and the characters both have concrete reality and almost all his plays begin with a valid poetic image of the same situation- a character believes he is safe and secure in a room, and he is then terrified when an unknown, mysterious, and potentially dangerous intruder enters.A world in which character and audience are transported from realism to absurdism where no one ever is certain which exactly was taking place. In The Room (1957), for instance, the world of the play seems familiar, but soon the audience find themselves in an incomprehensible situation

Pinter chooses the room "as a microcosm of the world. In the room the people feel safe. Outside are only alien forces inside there is warmth and light". Therefore, it can be said that the room, where man should feel safe, but because of existential anxieties, he feels alienated both from the outer world and from himself. Rose, as an existential being, experiences this mood of safety within the room where she is: "this room's all right for me. I mean, you know where you are [4]." Though the room itself is entirely concrete and well shaped and surrounded by the void and the void is outside the room, beyond the solid walls and the universe in which the room is located seems to be unstructured too. There is no knowledge what floor the room is on or how many floors there are in the house. Rose is not certain of the location of her room as well as the landlord. Moreover, it is cold and dark outside; "It's murder" as Rose puts it.

The Room is Pinter's first one-act play in which he portrays the world of the unconscious along with the unknown forces. Pesta, in this context, says: The Room can also be understood as a psychodrama in which the room itself presents the island of conscious security afloat upon a dark sea of forgotten memories and vague wishes. Pinter renders the apartment building as Kafka might: impossibly large, so the landlord, if he is the landlord, no longer remembers how many floors it has. On this level of psychological symbolism, Riley's emergence from the basement may represent the rising of an unconscious impulse in Rose to return to heaven of truesecurity. [5]

The play functions as an image of the human condition and exemplifies the notion that life is not separated from death. The Being and Non-being are two facts of human existence, that everyone should ultimately face one's alienation of the self from the Other. The play communicates

the perplexity of the human situation and man's struggle for security is only one illusion. The universe which is dark, vast, and ambiguous does not allow anyone to deny the reality of un-being. The un-being is an image of the precarious and perplexing situation in which all living beings are stuck and trying to find out their identification in the name of the real self and it is a reality which has been suppressed by the force of the Other, which leaves man alone in the world of nothingness. In this context, Esslin (1968) says: that The room a precarious foothold, to which man pathetically clings, becomes, like Beckett's dustbins urns and sacks, a closure, an impasse, a sealed coffin into which man is born and where he dies, it is that small area of our consciousness, the fact that we exist opens up in the vast ocean of nothingness from which we gradually emerge after birth and into which we sink again when we die.

The Room ultimately conveyed is a complex existential situation full of helplessness and perplexity. It is caused by circumstance in the shape of the other selves that undermine the heroine's existence from moment to moment and finally crush her into a cipher of non-entity. The sense of the guilt comes out of the man's being; the first and basic fact is: the human being as a being is nothing. This nothingness and the non-existence are the controlling sources of the anxiety a human being faces every moment. Rose, the central figure in Pinter's The Room, experiences all very precisely.

The silence between Rose and Bert plays a very significant role. Bert is always silent but Rose tries to fill this silence through talking. Rose's insistence on the security of the room has a close relation to her sense of guilt. Later when the Negro calls Rose Sal and this significance comes to reality. She has lived with Bert under one assumed name but she has been a prostitute that she has no desire

to hear about. The fear of outside is a projection of Rose's inner guilt because she always has fear to get herself exposed. By repeating to herself about the security of the room, she has a desire to fill her emotional needs of being with her authentic self. The room itself is a fixture and guarantees one's selfhood. Unfortunately, rooms have doors. To be in a relationship, as existentialists say, is very dangerous, it represents an exposure. Thus, Rose has a hole in her side through which the other has ready access to her deepest being, through which the object as room itself and Rose's identity are liable to flow away. From the opening lines of the drama, this kind of feeling appears. Rose is in a state of total ignorance as she regards what is outside her room: "I've never seen who it is. Who lives down there". With the room, on the other hand, "you know where you are, "you stand a chance" The moment of exposure of being to the Other comes when someone is at the door, the source of uncertainty and uneasiness. It turns out to be the landlord. Again the sense of guilt is suggested by the lack of information about things. It is as if they are not able to verify what obtains in the strange house. Mr. Kidd's knowledge of things is as fragmentary as Rose's. The ambiguous past of Kidd is also remarkable. He doesn't know about his family and there may be possibility of his escaping for the guilt in life.

The play proceeds with the ambiguity of guilt and fear, until they are manifested in the figure of one Negro who is called Riley. This Negro has a message from Rose's past but she does not have any desire to accept him but at the end we can see that she lets him come. In this situation, one crisis is provoked by the entry of the other into the room. There is a clear suggestion that the crisis is one of identity. Is Rose, perhaps, Sal? The blind Negro may be regarded as an

aggressor, as the other who breaks into the room to rob her of her identity. It seems likely that his function is rather to recall Rose to her true self, guilt, to her past life, or to a confession of her sin.

The Negro is a symbol for some hidden guilt complex that brings her a message of un-being which is the main reason for her anxiety and makes her face the final break of her real self that appears to her in the shape of darkness and blindness. Rose, as a being, is inherently sinful and final incident also reminds us of the original sin, which is the root cause for man's all sins. Man is condemned because of the existence. He comes to this world with the burden of his father's sin without knowing why. Each being has a responsibility towards the other, in order to shape his being or fixate it but he has no power to do it. So he submits to what he is condemned to do. Man, like Rose, prefers to conceal his past, which is ambiguous for all mankind, in order to keep his being safe, but it is in vain. The world of un-being doesn't permit any being to operate independently. Finally, it comes and leads him/her to annihilation, as Rose experiences it at the end. This is the fate of all men in contact with the reality of the sin, accusation, and condemnation.

Conclusion -The life of Harold Pinter reveals a solemn man whose childhood was filled with the terror of war and there is certain uneasiness or imbalance prevails in the work of Harold Pinter. The Room is Pinter's first one-act play in which he portrays Existentialism in the world of the unconscious along with the unknown forces. Pesta, in this context, says: The Room can also be understood as a psycho-drama in which the room itself presents the island of conscious security afloat upon a dark sea of forgotten memories and vague wishes.

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