



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <http://www.iasj.net/iasj/journal/356/about>



Fragmented Landscape in Harold Pinter's "The Room": A Postmodern Study

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Received: 12 / 4 /2023, Accepted: 28 /5 /2023, Online Published: 31 / 12/2023

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Abstract

This paper explores the theme of fragmented landscape in Harold Pinter's play, "The Room," through a postmodern lens. The analysis examines how the play reflects and critiques the socio-political context of the postmodern era and how this context shapes the fragmented nature of the play's landscape. The paper argues that "The Room" is an important work of postmodern literature that exposes the dehumanizing effects of a fragmented landscape. This paper briefly explains Postmodernism and fragmented landscape and how Harold Pinter depicted them in his play.

Keywords: Alienation, Fascism, Comedy of Menace, Postmodernism, Fragmentation

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المشهد المجرأ في مسرحية هارولد بينتر "الغرفة": دراسة ما بعد الحداثة

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و

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كلية التربية للبنات | جامعة تكريت

المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث موضوع المشهد المجرأ في مسرحية هارولد بينتر "الغرفة" من خلال عدسة ما بعد الحداثة. يفحص التحليل كيف تعكس المسرحية السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي لعصر ما بعد الحداثة وكيف يشكل هذا السياق المشهد المجرأ في المسرحية.

يتجادل هذا البحث بأن "الغرفة" عمل مسرحي مهم لما بعد الحداثة الذي يفضح الآثار اللإنسانية لمشهد المجرأ. هذا البحث يشرح بشكل مختصر ما بعد الحداثة والمشهد المجرأ وكيف صورها هارولد بينتر في مسرحيته.

الكلمات الدالة: عزلة، الفاشية، كوميديا الخطر، ما بعد الحداثة، التجزئة.

1. Introduction

Following the end of World War II, a new philosophy appeared as a reaction against modern-age beliefs. Postmodernism, a new age, philosophy, movement, concept, etc., affected every field of science and literature. The idea that the world cannot be precisely defined or understood is prevalent in postmodern philosophy. According to postmodern philosophy, finding any definite meaning to any ideas, concepts, or events is useless because knowledge and facts are always relative to specific conditions, and there is no absolute truth. In contrast to modernism, which thought that knowledge and science could be used to solve issues, Postmodernism held that knowledge and science only brought about corruption, death, and war. The different movements and concepts adopted from postmodern philosophy have also significantly impacted postmodern literature writers (Sheeba, 2017).

Engaging in postmodern philosophy will show how this philosophy has upended the grand narratives of every culture. For instance, abortion was illegal in earlier ages but became permissible with Postmodernism because it is based on an individual's thoughts. It led to self-referentiality that results from this. There is no grand narrative to rely on; people act according to their own moral convictions. Also, language was affected by Postmodernism. According to postmodernists, the meaning of words can

vary depending on the situation and context, who declare that language is untrustworthy (Mandal, 2017).

-Below are a few instances of how postmodern literature frequently employs certain stylistic devices:

1. Pastiche: is the process of combining ideas from other literary genres and earlier works to create new styles.
2. Intertextuality: the practice of referencing earlier literary works in new creative creations.
3. Metafiction: the practice of writing about writing or informing readers that the fiction they are reading is fiction.
4. Temporal Distortion: Storytelling strategies and using non-linear timelines in a story.
5. Maximalism: Writing that is disjointed, long, and extremely descriptive.
6. Minimalism: the utilization of situations and persons that are distinctly ordinary and non-exceptional.
7. Magical Realism: introduction of improbable or implausible events without a clear distinction between fact and fiction.

-Main Characteristics of Postmodernism:

- The use of ambiguity is widespread in postmodern writing.
- A rejection of the foundational belief in science.
- Opposition to positivism and verificationism. Emphasized how postmodern thinkers criticize the concepts of a rational, autonomous mind and grand narratives.
- More emphasis was placed on individuality and subjective viewpoints. Different people's subjective perceptions produce knowledge, which creates subjective realities.
- Multiculturalism and globalization – Due to intense globalization, various cultures are blending. It has an impact on a variety of things, including organizations, food, music, literature, and architecture.

(Sheeba, 2017)

Despite all the uncertainty and criticism, the postmodernist movement offers a unique way to comprehend social reality. There is no denying that the world has changed significantly over the past 50 years due to the tremendous media dominance and significant technological advances. The media's actions have a huge impact on us; as a result, a virtual world is being constructed in our subconscious, and most of the time, we live in both the real and the virtual worlds simultaneously. Also, information has no boundaries now that information technology has advanced dramatically. As a result, multiculturalism is spreading across society (Sheeba, 2017).

One of the most important characteristics or techniques in Postmodernism is **Fragmentation**. The writers' themes and storylines were disintegrated, which is what it means to fracture anything. It was shifting away from ideas of completion and closure and toward discontinuities, isolations, and uncertainty. "fragmentation" most commonly refers to splitting up into pieces or divisions. It can also refer to the condition or outcome of being divided or broken up (Philominraj et al., 2018).

The fragmentation technique of Postmodernism affected the architecture as well. The inhabitants of the buildings became separated, isolated, and insensible of each other. This phenomenon was called **Fragmented Landscape**.

Landscape fragmentation, the actual physical division of continuous habitats into smaller units or patches, is most frequently brought on by the growth of the urban or transportation network. It has numerous ramifications for the environment, society, coping with and mitigating climate change, and biodiversity (Mullu, 2016).

One of the reasons behind its appearance is the poor treatment people faced because of the social differences between the classes. Because these isolated buildings prevented them from encountering others and remaining safe and away from problems, another reason was the political issues, especially fascism. A thriving intellectual, political, and cultural movement in 20th-century Europe. Fascists, most notably, dominated Italy from 1922 to 1945. Nevertheless, the term fascism truly refers to various radical right-wing movements that were active in other nations throughout Europe and other regions of the world. Fascism is a blend of nationalism and socialism as an ideology, rejecting materialism, liberalism, Marxism, and democracy in favour of the control of economic businesses by the community. It advocates for the leaders' full political dominance and criticizes the democratic ideal of the people's participation in major decisions. National unity, a major Fascist principle, is embodied in the state. Fascism seeks to establish a new civilization centred on the entire community, where all regions and classes will have a place to call home. Fascism in Germany was a little different. It believed in the superiority of one race over the other and that all other races should serve that race. As a result, the Nazi party, led by Hitler, burned six million Jews for being of a different race (Passmore, 2002).

One of the most outstanding pioneers of Postmodernism is Harold Pinter, who, through his plays, criticized the political issues and differences between the classes and displayed the fear people had, leading them to isolation. Harold Pinter was an English dramatist born into a Jewish family in England (1930- 2008). The beginning of the Second World War and the rise of the anti-Semitism phenomenon later affected his writings. Pinter was forced to leave his parents in the city to Cornwall. (Almaarroof, & Isa, 2022). It was quite traumatic for him. He spent that period of his life on the coast with 26 other boys until he was 14 he returned to London. At school, he was interested in English literature, especially poetry, so as a writer, he started by writing poetry for magazines (Raby, 2001).

Pinter turned his interest to writing plays. He wrote his first play in (1957) "The Room", which consists of one act. His first full-length play was "The Birthday Party" (1958). His plays attracted people's attention over the years for many reasons. Ansam Almaarroof said that "Thereby, the communal level reflects the realistic aspect in Pinter's work. Moreover, the importance of the language in a Pinter play represents the weapon, which is used by the characters to attack or to defend themselves"(2013). Most of his plays were realistically taken from a real event, whether explicitly or implicitly criticising the fascist rule. His plays frequently use an understatement, tiny chat, distance, and stillness, some of their most identifiable elements. These techniques communicate a character's thoughts in their essence (Hashish, 2015).

1.1 Hypothesis of the Study

This paper hypothesises that Harold Pinter's play, "The Room," embodies a fragmented landscape rooted in the postmodern critique of rationality and reason. The play exposes the dehumanizing effects of a Fragmented landscape and challenges traditional notions of space and place.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1- How does "The Room" embody a fragmented landscape?
- 2- What is the role of space and place in the play?
- 3- How does the socio-political context of the postmodern era influence the play?
- 4- What are the key themes and motifs in "The Room", and how do they contribute to its overall meaning?

1.3 Aims of the Study

The aims of this paper are to:

- 1- Examine how "The Room" embodies a fragmented landscape.
- 2- Analyze the role of space and place in the play.
- 3- Explore the socio-political context of the postmodern era and its influence on the play.
- 4- Provide a deeper understanding of the themes and motifs in "The Room" and their significance in postmodern literature.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This paper is significant because it provides a deeper understanding of the dehumanizing effect of a fragmented landscape and how this is reflected in literature. By analyzing "The Room" through the lens of Postmodernism, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of the socio-political context of the postmodern era and its influence on literature.

1.5 Contribution

This paper contributes to literary studies by providing a postmodernist analysis of Harold Pinter's "The Room." The paper employs a close reading of the text, drawing on postmodernist theories of space and place, to explore the themes and motifs of the play. The paper provides a deeper understanding of how "The Room" embodies the postmodern critique of rationality and reason and its significance in postmodern literature.

1.6 Literature Review

Harold Pinter's "The Room" has been subject to extensive literary criticism since its publication in 1957. The play has been analyzed through various lenses, including psychoanalytic, feminist, and postcolonial approaches. However, the postmodernist analysis has proven to be a fruitful lens through which to examine the play.

Postmodernism challenges traditional notions of space and place, emphasizing how they are constructed and deconstructed through discourse. Postmodernist literary analysis is concerned with how the socio-political context of the postmodern era shapes the landscape of literature and how this landscape reflects and critiques the postmodern condition.

1.7 Methodology

This paper employs a postmodernist literary analysis to explore the theme of fragmented landscape in Harold Pinter's play, "The Room." The analysis is grounded in the socio-political context of the postmodern era, drawing on postmodernist theories of space and place to analyze the text. The paper employs a close reading of the text, exploring the themes and motifs of the play and their significance in the context of postmodern literature. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the dehumanizing effects of a fragmented landscape and how this is reflected in literature.

1.8 Theory of the Study

The postmodernist literary theory is the primary theoretical lens employed in this paper. The theory emphasizes how space and place are reconstructed and deconstructed through discourse and how the socio-political context of the postmodern era shapes the landscape of literature. The theory argues that meaning is constructed through language and that power is inherent in discourse. The postmodernist literary theory is employed in this paper to explore the theme of fragmented landscape in Harold Pinter's "The Room" and to provide a deeper understanding of the play's significance in the context of postmodern literature.

The postmodernist literary theory is particularly useful in analyzing "The Room" because it emphasizes how space and place are constructed and deconstructed through discourse. The theory argues that meaning is constructed through language and that power is inherent in discourse. In "The Room," the characters' language and behaviour reveal a fragmented landscape that is dehumanizing and oppressive. Through a postmodernist analysis of the text, this paper seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the play's significance in the context of postmodern literature and its critique of the postmodern condition. The methodology employed in this paper involves a close reading of the text, drawing on postmodernist theories of space and place to explore the themes and motifs of the play. The paper aims to contribute to the field of literary studies by providing a postmodernist analysis of "The Room" and a deeper understanding of the dehumanizing effects of a fragmented landscape in literature.

2. Discussion

This play, "The Room" by Harold Pinter, is written as the comedy of menace genre; a sense of impending tragedy appears alongside or just after the audience laughs in some or all circumstances. Although there is no clear comedy in this play, the absurdity used in the play gives it a sense of comedy. The characters are in continual fear of the world outside. It is portrayed by the protagonist Rose, who lives in a small, cosy room with her husband; she fears the external world. She has spent most of her life in the room, and the reason she is scared is unclear, but the writer says she is frightened by everything outside the room, even the cold weather that represents death. Pinter declares that death is inevitable, so there is no need to delay the inevitable (Kohzadi, 2012).

Pinter, through Rose's fear of her past—she has dark secrets—and from the external world, tries to convey the situation of the Jews and the working class who were suffering from bad treatment under the Fascist rule and how they were oppressed, Pinter as a Jew tried to deliver this message implicitly (Qais, 2019).

Although the country, or specifically the government, provided little for its citizens, especially the proletarians, this ruling system forced people to love and devote themselves to their country. Citizens were frightened to leave their houses because of the totalitarian nature of the government, which oversees everything involving the individual. Isolation and alienation resulted from this sense of threat. Alienation is a strategy humankind uses to defend itself from the irrational forces that ultimately lead to its extinction in the land of emptiness. Pinter uses a combination of symbolism and Realism to highlight the absurdity of man's condition in his play "The Room". Also, by fostering a sense of danger, he increases the feeling of estrangement. For instance, Rose is isolated; she does not even know her neighbours. A blind black man named Riley resided in a basement room; until the play's end, Rose was unaware of him and intrigued to learn who he was. The room was a tool Rose used to give her life purpose and security. It is a barrier between her and the enormous obscurity of the world and its mystique. (Kohzadi et al, 2012).

Also, Rose and her husband, Bert, who, despite living in the same room, did not engage or communicate with one another, serve as a metaphor for the feeling of alienation and isolation. Bert did not respond to Rose's conversations as she prepared his breakfast; instead, he continued to read his newspaper and drink his coffee (Kohzadi et al., 2012).

Mr and Mrs Sands are two additional characters whose names are a depiction of "the sands of time," making them a symbolic reference of the utterance used to describe the natural evolution and progress of life with the change of things as well as the passing of time (Olson & Cooper, 2023).

Space and place play an essential role in the characters' life. The title "The Room" declares the limited space the characters are engaging with each other. Rose lives in a small warm, cosy, and comfortable room that she feels safe in. It; portrays her condition and that she is uncomfortable with the conditions outside. Then Riley, the blind black man who lives in the basement, shows his mysterious and estrangement side; he knows secrets, even Rose's secret, with her family (StudyCorgi, 2022).

All the conditions above were caused because of fragmented landscape or vice versa. The alienation of the characters and their fear of communicating led them to choose to live separated from each other or live away from each other in patches led to isolation and alienation.

Conclusion

The fragmented landscape of Postmodernism was expanded in this drama, "The Room". As a result, people drifted apart and lived in small, secluded spaces (like rooms). For his characters—including Rose, who preferred to avoid contact with the outside world—Pinter saw the room as a cosy, isolated area where they could feel secure and at peace. People increasingly prefer to spend their time alone in their homes, avoiding social interaction due to the drastic changes in the world. Pinter expressed his criticism of both the proletarian and Jewish realities by using Rose to embody both problems. Externally, time and place are different, yet within the room, nothing has changed. Even Mr. and Mrs. Sands behave like Rose and Bert when they enter the room, indicating that it has an unchanging, fixed aura. Everyone lives a different, isolated, and alienated life inside their rooms. Everyone has their fears, and

no matter how hard they try to escape or protect themselves from reality, death, or their fears, destiny and inevitable fate will surely find them.

"The Room", in this sense, presents a fragmented landscape that invites a postmodern study of its themes and techniques. The title itself suggests the fractured nature of the play's setting, characters, and narrative, which aligns with the postmodern literary tradition. Pinter's exploration of power dynamics, identity, and the breakdown of communication reflects the postmodern concern with the instability and uncertainty of meaning. "The Room" presents a physical space that is both familiar and unsettling, as it defies conventional notions of coherence and stability. The characters, trapped within this fragmented landscape, struggle to establish meaningful connections and communicate effectively. Their interactions are marked by silences, non-sequiturs, and ambiguous dialogues, creating an atmosphere of disorientation and alienation. Through this fragmented landscape, Pinter raises questions about the nature of power and control. The characters' shifting roles and actions challenge traditional power structures, highlighting the inherent instability and arbitrariness of authority. The play's postmodern sensibility invites readers to question the fixed hierarchies and social constructs that shape their lives. Moreover, the fragmented landscape in "The Room" serves as a metaphor for the fractured nature of identity. The characters' lack of a stable sense of self is reflected in their ambiguous names, contradictory behaviors, and elusive motivations. Pinter's exploration of identity as a complex and elusive construct resonates with postmodern notions of the self as fragmented and constructed through language and social interactions.

In terms of narrative structure, "The Room" resists linear storytelling, opting instead for fragmented and non-linear sequences. This postmodern technique challenges conventional expectations of plot and invites the reader to actively engage with the play's fragmented narrative, seeking meaning in the gaps and disruptions. The fragmented landscape in Harold Pinter's "The Room" lends itself to a postmodern study, as it embodies the postmodern concerns of unstable meaning, power dynamics, and the fragmentation of identity. The play's exploration of these themes through its fractured setting, characters, and narrative techniques invites readers to question established norms and embrace the uncertainty and ambiguity that characterizes the postmodern condition.

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