

Anti-Heroism and The Search for Identity in Yussef Idris's The Critical Moment, Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party and Yussef El-Guindi's Back of the Throat

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Abstract:

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a rapid change in science, technology and humanities. Therefore, the image of the classical or traditional tragic hero has vanished in most modern drama. There is no place for myths or supernaturalism. The tragic hero has been replaced by a more realistic ordinary man, who is responsible for his actions and choices. The 'anti-hero' has become a prominent character in most Arabic and English drama. Writers always relate such a character to politics, in an attempt to examine the character's search for identity within its relation to society; the relation between the self and the other, be it a given group or the entire society.

Yussef Idris' *The Critical Moment* was inspired by the Suez war. The central character is Sa'd who projects all his inner fears and cowardice to the others, accusing them of lacking courage and patriotism. He tries to convince himself and the others that he is a devoted nationalist. However, when the British soldiers conquer his own home, killing his father, Sa'd is unable to take any action. On the contrary, he stays at his room frightened of being killed, takes off his uniform and hides under the bed or inside the cupboard. He fails to defend his father or even himself.

Suffering too much from the terrors and pains of wars, Harold Pinter writes his masterpiece *The Birthday Party*. In this play, Stanley lies about his name, birthdate, address, profession and background, as a defense-mechanism to keep himself unidentified. He is sheltered inside his own room from the outsiders, but they invade the room and charge him with endless accusations. Failing to defend himself, Stanley is reduced to speechlessness and taken to the unknown.

Another unknown end occurs to Khaled, the Arab American writer in Yussef El-Guindi's *Back of the Throat*. The play explores the negative attitude towards the Arabs and Arab Americans after September 11. Two agents interrogate Khaled violently about his involvement in the attacks. Nothing he can do or say will ever clear him.

To conclude, the study shows that the three plays are similar in respect of themes and techniques. The three writers illustrate the search of the 'anti-hero' for identity, using the same dramatic technique-a square of four corners;

the anti-hero, the other, the room and the elements of menace. Yet, the three authors differ widely in presenting their concept of the 'anti-hero'.

Keywords: Heroism – identity - critical.