



Research Paper

## Search for Identity and Self-Awareness' in "The Rose and Crown" by J.B. Priestley

البحث عن الهوية والوعي الذاتي في مسرحية "الوردة والتاج" لجيه. بي. بريستلي

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### Abstract

*This research paper explores the themes of identity and self-awareness in J.B. Priestley's one-act play "The Rose and Crown". The London pub setting displays the tragic entrance of Death which promotes character reflection about how individuals build their personal identities when facing mortality. The research investigates how characters in The Rose and Crown build their identities and gain personal awareness particularly through their mutual interactions and existential confrontations. The research investigates the ways in which Priestley uses dialogue, setting, and symbolism to elicit moments of self-realization among seemingly ordinary individuals. Primary data was collected through a close textual analysis of the play's script, supported by secondary sources including scholarly articles, theatrical reviews, and biographical information on J.B. Priestley. This qualitative study employs a literary analysis approach, using thematic and character analysis to uncover underlying messages about identity and existential awareness. Using a hermeneutic framework, the study analyzed the dialogue between characters and story progression to understand why the characters refused confrontation initially then interacted with Death as a symbol for their conflicts with recognized and unrecognized personal truths. The characters displayed different levels of self-awareness as they rejected the truth and made peace with it which exposed their authentic selves in terms of social position and their feelings of guilt and ethical growth. The paper demonstrates how The Rose and Crown operates as a philosophical work on human nature because people must face death before examining their true selves. Through the narrative Priestley demonstrates how personal crisis brings about introspection in his characters who initially show passive drinking tendencies. True identity becomes apparent through internal contemplation of personal choices and values together with an examination of mortality instead of social masks.*

**Key words:** Identity, Existential, Individual, confrontation, Crisis and Death.

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### I. Introduction

The Rose and Crown by J.B. Priestley begets an intriguing analysis of identity and self-awareness since these elements establish fundamental parts of human experience. During British post-war turmoil in 1946 the play takes place in common English pub The Rose and Crown while displaying normal working-class citizen scenarios to represent national existential challenges. A curious visitor known as the Stranger interrupts ordinary activities at the pub by offering a challenge of departure to one among present characters thus triggering identity self-examination. Together with the Stranger's declaration someone from their group must depart with him brings the characters to challenge their current life circumstances and individual goals and social status. The meeting with this unfamiliar person enables Priestley to display how individuals build their identity since it emerges from external elements like social positions alongside personal experiences and actions. (Priestley, J. B. (1947)

Numerous studies demonstrate how J.B. Priestley continuously addressed philosophical ideas and social content through time, responsibility, and moral consciousness. Although academic studies of The Rose and Crown remain lower than those dedicated to an Inspector Calls and Time and the Conway's the play nonetheless partakes in the broader dramatic ethos of Priestley through its balance of realist and metaphysical elements.

Research by Ronald Hayman (1974) together with John Baxendale (2005) established that Priestley studied metaphysics and death alongside time as essential psychological and moral triggers appearing in his dramatic work. Various studies examine Priestley's readings of Dunne's time theory and Jungian psychology which shaped his character development focused on unrealistic situations that reveal inner truths. Baxendale, J. (2005).

The play presents identity through character experiences as a developing state which forms through internal mind exploration alongside external world effects. The characters of *The Rose and Crown* experience lives filled with disappointment and restless feelings. Each role stands for a different piece of identity as the play shows the disillusioned worker together with the resigned wife and passive observer and bitter widow. The characters initially believe their life situations determine their identity but they fail to grasp how their emotions toward themselves create their self-image. (Kingsnorth, 2011)

*The Rose and Crown* employs Death's arrival to perform the same thematic role while following existential development patterns in accordance with the above discussed emotional and philosophical processes. According to Priestley's portrayal working-class people experience the most significant character transformation because social roles conflict with their true emotional and moral nature. Ordinary customers in *The Rose and Crown* experience deep psychological changes that become significant to their overall shift. Studying *The Rose and Crown* exists in research about the play both onstage and offstage. BBC adaptation and regional theatre production (such as the Victoria Theatre in the 1950s) demonstrate that the play's private atmosphere and intellectual nature leads audiences to develop different readings of the text. The play has double meanings since some viewers interpret it as a moral tale but others focus on the realistic aspects of social class.

The appearance of the Stranger represents an essential trigger that drives people toward improvement. Through his vague statements and his declaration about a pub-goer going with him the characters must face death and examine lives that they have never truly evaluated. The imminent threat of death compels all characters to experience crucial moments when they must analyze their conduct and their remorse and connections with others. At times this experience transforms people to reach self-realization. Multiple individuals maintain their former beliefs by resisting the need to face existential problems. (Kingsnorth, 2011)

The existence of the Stranger helps Priestley demonstrate existentialist ideas about how personal knowledge becomes clear only during critical situations. Ordinary life does not force characters in *The Rose and Crown* to understand themselves deeply but they achieve clarity about their nature only when facing death or loss. According to the play both external perception and inner self-perception are insufficient to define identity. The essential character of this view points to the necessity of internal self-examination together with realizing that we determine our own identity. (Cooke, 2014)

This paper examines *The Rose and Crown* characters as they represent multiple elements of personal identity through an assessment of their inner struggles and personal development processes and responses to the arrival of the Stranger. Throughout the characters in the text Priestley asks his audience to examine their inner self and to evaluate if they truly recognize who they are or if awareness arises only during times of emergency. (Cooke, 2014)

## **II. Discussion and analysis:**

### **J.B. Priestley and His Exploration of Identity**

The writings of playwright J.B. Priestley focused primarily on multiple aspects between social identity and time alongside human consciousness. Through his investigating of identity Priestley clarify deep understanding of both psychological and philosophical elements of human nature. By writing *The Rose and Crown* Priestley delved into how people see themselves and how society affects their identity development as well as the self-transformative consequences of extreme events. Throughout his writing Priestley explored existential questions that analyzed whether people can truly know themselves without self-reflection and lacking understanding of their social effects.

Through his identity studies Priestley worked within the context of his individualist humanist and social-minded beliefs which formed his views on politics. He studied individual human presence in the universe through direct experience because self-awareness and self-examination brought both individual and societal growth. Throughout his playwriting career Priestley designed his characters to represent various societal identity traits which made them complex multidimensional representatives of modern cultural elements.

Throughout most of his productions Priestley attempted to reveal the inconsistencies which exist between human characteristics. Through his exploration Priestley studied how identity maintains variable aspects that external elements such as work, class, gender and family shape into existence. *The Rose and Crown* serves as an exemplary case in which Priestley presents unresolved social issues through an unsettling storyline to challenge his characters' life constructions.

Through his work Priestley studies the discrepancies that emerge between how each character sees themselves as well as how other people view them. Inside *The Rose and Crown* the characters expose their personal identities according to their employment roles alongside their family relations and their position in society. When the Stranger enters the narrative without social constraints the characters have to acknowledge their true selves which existed only within their inner minds. The identity analysis in *The Rose and Crown* by Priestley uses existentialist concepts emerging during his time to explore psychological aspects of self-knowledge. Throughout his work Priestley factored the human ignorance toward self-knowledge together with the unconscious way most people lead their lives. Throughout the first part of his play the characters reveal nothing authentic about themselves. Harry performs worker duties while Alice stays with her husband and Mrs. Reed relies on widowhood status to define herself because all three characters never pondered their role identities. The external world and day-to-day routines determine what they believe about themselves instead of internal awareness of their true desires and fears alongside their potential for transformation.

The mysterious Stranger brings unexpected challenges to these characters which make them analyze their true selves in relation to their rudimentary existence. The production creates an insight for viewers because it motivates them to examine their own self-definitions and the unconscious aspects of these conceptualizations. Identity exists outside external roles unless one faces one's boundary limits and transformational capabilities (Cooke, 2015)

Through *The Rose and Crown* Priestley expresses his personal social views about identity along with class distinctions. The author Priestley wrote about social responsibility and the industrial impact on people while criticizing how social positions and class status limited people to fixed roles. Harry and Alice Tully experience continued frustration since they fail to escape from their socially defined positions in the play. Harry and Alice Tully reveal their life frustration through both their private aspirations and societal limitations that control them specifically Harry works because society has trained him to settle into a world with restricted economic progression. Priestley uses his characters to investigate how social influences construct personal identities while sometimes putting such development into constraints.

People who fail to contemplate their lives experience negative results which *The Rose and Crown* by Priestley illustrates. Many characters throughout his writings face stuckness because they reject their sense of dissatisfaction or fail to face their true desires. People cannot see alternative possibilities of change because their self-awareness abilities have yet to mature. The existential thought of Priestley becomes visible because he points to self-realization requiring an experiential encounter with fundamental inner truths which frequently manifests from life-altering circumstances.

According to Priestley understanding that self-awareness does not occur alone or unaided. Every person gains insight into their individual identity through thought processes yet their personal self exists within the boundaries of social identity matrix. The characters in *The Rose and Crown* must understand how social expectations and economic systems with their economic system along with personal relationships shape their existence to reach complete self-awareness. According to Priestley a person's social position defines their identity so one must understand their true nature by recognizing individual goals while acknowledging limitations set by societal structures. (Innes, C. (1992)

The character named Stranger in *The Rose and Crown* serves vitally during the personal evaluation process. As an entity the Stranger exists outside typical societal limitations because he avoids defining himself from other characters' social roles. The Stranger's presence makes the other characters evaluate what a reflective way of life looks like since they usually just adapt to what life gives them. The Stranger in his disruptive role reveals to people that their personal identity evolves through a union of both personal forces and outside influences. According to Rivers (2018)

The Stranger delivers a transformative message to his characters about how self-contemplation and world-oriented analysis create authentic living. *The Rose and Crown* by Priestley reveals identity through numerous complex layers. The author examines how external social roles build an identity while emphasizing that self-awareness allows people to break free from those social constructs. Through the Priestley advocates both a fluid understanding of self-identity and the need to doubt established conceptions of personal identity. The exploration of profound identity questions according to Priestley enables people to escape role-based limitations thus leading to authentic awareness.

### **Characters and Their Struggles with Identity:**

Characters and Their Struggles with Identity The characters J.B. Priestley portrays in *The Rose and Crown* face internal battles to understand their selves as the play studies self-dependent consciousness. All the play's characters confront their own self-identity concerns while trying to define their position in their social environment. The characters cannot easily see their internal turmoil because their day-to-day responsibilities

strongly define their appearances to others. Later when the Stranger brings existential hardship into their lives each character must face the disparity between their self-image and their authentic inner being. Through these characters Priestley showcases that our identity develops from outside forces but achieves full comprehension only through observing our own mind and spirit. The play builds a life-sized model of human society showing how individual identities transform through social relationships plus social conformity and chosen social positions. Williams, R. (1958).

#### **Harry Tully: The Dissatisfied Worker:**

The character Harry Tully functions as a typical dissatisfied working-class man who feels disappointed by his uninteresting job activities. Through the beginning of the story Harry demonstrates his deep disapproval toward his work while showing no signs of significance in his life. The job at the factory fills Harry with such deep displeasure that his sense of annoyance can be felt by everyone. During interactions with his wife Alice Harry verbalizes his profound feeling of uselessness which defines his overall personality. From the beginning of the play Harry's essential attributes emerge from three external aspects which include his employment and his monetary issues alongside his social position. His role as an ordinary working person exists in such tight constraints from his employment and from social demands. His frustration develops due to recognizing that all his attempts fail to alter his present circumstances. Harry maintains a passive attitude toward his life since he consistently complains about his destiny while never trying to discover its root sources or solutions.

After the Stranger walks into the scene Harry faces a contest that tests his sense of self. Harry's life undergoes a questioning process after the Stranger reveals they must eliminate one of the characters. During the crisis Harry examines both his personal decisions and his feeling of limited options in life. The revelation about his character reveals that he understands himself through both his job responsibilities and his hidden feelings of dissatisfaction and change-related fear.

Harry's fight with his identity presents a social problem because his job forces him to experience a standard yet repetitive life. He feels trapped between social influences which create his identity through their assigned labels so he struggles to escape this determined role. Harry feels dissatisfied yet the play indicates his trouble facing his real wants and goals plays an equal part in his dissatisfaction along with his work and financial situation. His encounter with The Stranger pushes him to examine if his dissatisfaction needs to be because of his external circumstances or because he fails to understand and take control of who he truly is.

#### **Alice Tully: The Discontented Wife:**

As part of her identity Alice Tully identifies with being a wife and mother before establishing herself as a worker in the same way Harry does. She disapproves of her marital life because it requires her to stay home when her heart yearns for something deeper. Similar to Harry Tully Alice has accepted the life limitations yet her discontent expresses itself differently. Housework along with traditional female expectations suppress her need for something beyond repetitive daily chores.

While Harry displays his work-related frustration externally Alice keeps her emotional unrest focused on internal matters including self-esteem and desires for independence. Her social identity depends strongly on her household responsibilities including her husband Harry and her maternal duties. Her acceptance of the traditional roles has transformed them into the core components of her life although this acceptance manifests as restricting entrapment. Alice finds increased aggravation because she thinks outside influences control her existence while her personal interests lack any space.

Upon the Stranger's arrival and revelation about the need to eliminate one person Alice discovers that the stranger questions her very identity. The reality exposes to Alice that her existence mirrors Harry's existence through routine-bound performance of societal expectations which restricts any chance for personal self-discovery. When the Stranger announces that one must die Alice first rejects the idea with disbelief because she wants to avoid thinking about her dissatisfied life as much as she wishes to avoid death. (Grandy, 2016) Alice fights to discover herself throughout the narrative because her identity problems emerge from societal gender structures. The post-war British society dictates that women must play the role of wife and mother but these norms lead Alice to feel imprisoned. These female difficulties of the modern era representing the growing dissatisfaction of women against their traditional domestic roles. Through his unwelcome arrival The Stranger forces her to question both her hidden desires and if she possesses the ability to break free from her social roles. Williams, R. (1959).

#### **Mrs. Reed: The Bitter Widow:**

The widow Mrs. Reed occupies a leading position in the pub but her identity fight originates mainly from grieving her loss and widowhood status. She exists solely through her deceased husband because of her widow status. Mrs. The death of her husband dominates Reed's entire existence because she straightway became

permanently fixated on her mourning and bitterness. Mrs. Reed exists in such deep mourning that she refrains from acknowledging anything more than her loneliness which constitutes the core of her personal definition.

The characters Harry and Alice live with role dissatisfaction yet remain part of the world yet Mrs. Reed chose to withdraw fully from living. She keeps a remote relationship with others as she displays continuous sorrow together with resignation. Mrs. Reed defines herself as a widow first so every situation in her life gets analyzed through this perspective. The play implies that besides the loss of her deceased husband Mrs. Reed experienced a loss of her identity. Her grief has deeply rooted itself as her main defining characteristic.

Mrs. Reed suggests denial towards the Stranger during his initial challenges to the characters. Mrs. Reed actively denies any thought of death which includes rejecting the fact that her existence is shaped by loss. The Stranger encounters resistance since Mrs. Reed fails to overcome her mourning stage to discover new aspects of herself. Mrs. Reed encounters the Stranger as more than a threat to her life since the encounter becomes a direct challenge to the limitations she designs for herself. People can incarcerate themselves in emotional states to the point of overlooking their developing capacities although they remain blinded by grief.

#### **Tom: The Passive Observer:**

The passive character Tom stands in sharp opposition against all other characters of the play because he shows minimal struggle with self-definition. The external roles and frustrations which define Harry Alice and Mrs. Reed fail to affect Tom. The character does not share similar symptoms of open discontent regarding his current state of life. Throughout the sequence he stays silent as he quietly watches events without expressing emotional involvement in the suffering of his peers. Throughout the play we see Tom as a character accepting his circumstances since he abstains from fighting back or seeking changes to his life. Throughout the story we see that no viewpoint or character role defines him. His nonchalant attitude regarding the crisis that the Stranger disrupts in the pub demonstrates his advanced state of self-realization. Tom has developed the understanding that living is temporary so he approaches death without fear or resistance. The way he responds to the Stranger's challenge demonstrates his acceptance of the vivid awareness he has developed about the weakness of life itself. Tom displays acceptance as his primary character trait since he comprehends that personal identity evolves rather than remaining static and must be accepted during this transitional phase.

The role of Tom becomes essential because he presents an opposing model of identity for the rest of the characters. His quiet acknowledgment demonstrates that authentic self-awareness presents itself through acknowledging life's unpredictability before fully embracing your existence. Tom's true identity emerges solely from his position where he meets and accepts the fundamental impermanence of all existence. The characters in *The Rose and Crown* battle with their identity through their societal assigned roles that influence their conscious conflicts.

The play's characters serve as tools for Priestley to illustrate our conflicting need for self-perception via social expectations versus our internal need to reflect upon ourselves. Every character must drop their outer roles when discussing with others and facing the Stranger's questions so they can learn about their authentic selves and acknowledge their manufactured personalities' boundaries. Priestley shows that personal identity transforms when people gain self-awareness and experience life crises while reflecting on themselves.

#### **Crisis and the Emergence of Self-Awareness:**

The entrance of the Stranger to the story triggers a crisis among the characters which forces them to examine their true selves. Beginning with life-threatening crisis the characters obtain a chance to gain knowledge about themselves. The existence of mortal danger allows Priestley to expose the delicate nature of the identities his characters built through time which leads to phases of self-evaluation and uncertainty before reaching personal enlightenment. Each protagonist in *The Rose and Crown* achieves inner self-awareness through the pivotal crisis moment.

The Stranger pushes the characters to study their fatal situation by compelling them to analyze both their death-related bond and their life and self-commitments. Their precarious situation before death destroys their surface-level personal identities based on social roles and work responsibilities and interpersonal bonds thus making them open to self-analysis.

Through his analysis of identity crises Priestley illustrates that outside events which confront a person with mortality reshape their core understanding of who they are. The central question emerges at this moment which demands each personality to consider their identity outside the roles they perform in society. The play shows that severe life events develop genuine understanding of oneself. These characters would have stayed ignorant to their true nature if a crisis disturbance did not disrupt their mundane lives. Their interactions with the Stranger eventually reveal to them new understanding about their true nature beyond their existing perspectives. Hayman, R. (1974)

### **The Stranger as a Catalyst for Self-Awareness:**

The Stranger stands at the core position of the entire play. Through his external actions the Stranger interrupts ordinary character activities to make them face up to death's reality and the recognition of their true selves. At first people regarded the stranger as an unwanted intruder who made his enigmatic statement doubted by everyone. Throughout the play the Stranger develops greater importance through the narrative progression. Through this dilemma the Stranger reveals to his subjects their inevitable mortality because death can strike anyone at any time.

The existential crisis dismantles the fundamental aspects of their identities. The characters intensify their life assessment while pondering if they spent their time truthfully or simply obeying social norms. Through its reflective nature the Stranger demonstrates to characters their current life circumstances which compels them to rethink personal value and existence meaning. (Priestley,1968)

Each character to the Stranger finds different reactions from people which expose their private psychological dynamics. The awareness of mortal peril reveals to Harry his profound dislike of his occupation together with his helpless nature and his inability to leave behind limitations he created for himself. Through her encounter with the stranger Alice achieves realization about her totally centering around her relationship and family duties which compels her to question both her wants and self-worth. Mrs. Reed through her mourning becomes overwhelmed by understanding that she exists solely as a widow until death starts to expose her self-made psychological cage.

Although initially there is a crisis in *The Stranger* the story ultimately enables all characters to recognize themselves better. The emergency situation gives characters an opportunity to reevaluate their lives which leads some of them to obtain previously inaccessible self-understanding.

### **Mrs. Reed's Crisis: Confronting Grief and Loss**

The death of her husband establishes Mrs. Reed's identity as a person who lives through mourning and grief. The arrival of the Stranger generates intense denial because Mrs. Reed fears facing her mortality as well as recognizing how her widowhood defines her existence. Mrs. Reed has allowed grief to dominate her existence in such a way that she refused to embrace life although the Stranger brought her essential revelation about her stagnant state. Mrs. Reed resists her current state by refusing to give up her connection to her deceased husband.

Her identity depends on being a widow so she holds onto it but her intense dedication to this role keeps her from progressing into the future. Her life confronts Mrs. Reed with her self-imposed emotional cage to make her understand the crippling effect that her grief has had on her potential for development. Mrs. Reed develops awareness about her life during the struggle because she confronts how her sadness destroyed her entire existence. Identity forms barriers against personal progress because bitterness along with loss molds human identity into such a state. The crisis exposes Mrs. Reed to shaking free from her grief so she can create a fresh identity which leaves behind past constraints to welcome upcoming potential and development. Heinemann (1982)

### **Alice Tully's Crisis: Reclaiming Her Identity**

When the Stranger visits Alice she starts examining herself honestly because she understands her identity mostly came from her family roles. The roles of wife and mother have become so internalized they constitute all that she knows about her existence. Following an understanding of her potential immortality Alice starts evaluating the validity of the personal restrictions she placed upon herself. She acknowledges that housework has occupied most of her life and she never devoted time to explore her wishes and hopes for the future.

Her existence stems from the combination of social pressures and her unresisting adherence to socially constructed roles. Through the Stranger's intrusive appearance Alice finally chooses to confront her identity challenges which were previously off-limits to her. Through this experience she learns that her wife and mother responsibilities do not define her entire self and her ambitions and desires retain equal worth to her. The epiphany creates a turning point in Alice's development regarding self-knowledge.

Her crisis exists because of the gender-related forces operating in her life. British post-war society pressured women to conform to household roles yet Alice showed resistance to these traditional domestic expectations during that era. The Stranger gives Alice the opportunity to reassess her conventional beliefs about her own identity thus pushing her to understand she exists beyond the limitations of relational boundaries. The crisis drives Alice to discover both her independence and her power to establish herself independently from others. (Priestly 1969)

### III. Conclusion:

This study of *The Rose and Crown* reveals J.B. Priestley's nuanced exploration of identity and self-awareness through an unexpected yet effective dramatic structure. Through *The Rose and Crown* J.B. Priestley transforms identity awareness into a sophisticated dramatic puzzle which demonstrates his profound insight into human understanding. The presence of Death in ordinary circumstances makes Priestley break down routine life which forces all participants to face fundamental existential ideas. The way characters deal with mortality displays their hidden real identity that they normally mask through society-imposed routines. Through his research Priestley suggests that self-awareness evolves from challenging situations which especially include encounters with death or moral development and truthful revelations between individuals. As demonstrated through the play's exploration of identity which emerges dynamically through moments situations as well as from one's capability to confront disturbing facts. *The Rose and Crown* among Priestley's lesser-known works offers substantial meaning to study the process of personal development specifically within stories about working-class characters. Educators and directors can find valuable utility in such findings to select plays which encourage spectators to think about death along with personal standards and their search for genuine existence. Within the framework of society, the performance shows a vital need to step away from daily routines for self-evaluation which matches today's disconnected fast-moving world. The final message of Priestley's work promotes both introspective self-examination and a fresh perspective on how identity develops through life's ongoing transformations.

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