

Absurd person singular essay sample



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Absurd Person Singular is staged in three successive Christmases. The three Christmases show the change in status of the Hopcrofts. The Hopcrofts move up the social ladder each Christmas; starting in Act 1, whenre they are at the bottom, through to Act 3 whenre everyone is dancing to their tune. The Hopcrofts are not the only couple whose circumstances change; by Act three 3 roles have been reversed and it is Geoffrey Jackson in need of a job from Sidney. Even though circumstances have changed, the three years show how the characters have remained consistent. Each of the gatherings is more for the purpose of social climbing rather than to celebrate the season. In the third act Ronald asks Eva if she wants a drink ‘ seeing as it’s Christmas’. The three couples see Christmas as a time for going through the motions rather than a time to enjoy themselves. Christmas should be a time to prioritise family over business; instead business seems to be the main priority.

The warning Ayckbourn delivers about the Hopcrofts is communicated through Sidney’s behaviour. Sidney is an obsessive character who is precise with details, following everything in life by the book. In the first act he times the arrival of the guests to the minute ‘ consulting his watch’ and informing Jane that in ‘ seven minutes -they’ll be here’. Sidney is a character that who craves power and constantly feels the need to be in control. Sidney is most happy when barking out his orders. An example of this is at the ending of Act 3 when he shouts ‘ Dance, Come on, Dance, Keep on dancing’ to the other couples who are forced to participate in his party game. He is persistent in his efforts to climb up the social ladder and does not let anything get in his way.

As long as Sidney gets to the top he does not care about anyone else in the process. In the first act when Jane comes in dripping wet from being locked outside in the rain, he explains to Ronald that ‘ he was from the off-licence’ rather than admitting that it was Jane who Ronald had just let in. Sidney’s only concern is to keep up appearances for the guests and use whatever methods he can to try and convince the others that they are of higher class. Ayckbourn presents Sidney as the type of character who succeeds, criticising that the ones who will become successful are egotistical and dominant.

Where Sidney lacks power in the business world he feels he can make up for in his relationship with Jane. Sidney quietly bullies Jane to the point where she has no confidence and feels inferior to Sidney and the guests in the house. The stage directions in Act One 1 show us that she feels like a stranger in her own home. Jane ‘ wanders in rather aimless circles round the kitchen’ revealing her lack of confidence. When Jane asks for Sidney to bring in her slippers he responds by saying ‘ You’re really asking a lot tonight, aren’t you?’ It is responses like this that makes Jane feel inferior and powerless to Sidney. Sidney expects cooperation from Jane in his attempts for a better job, but refuses to do anything for her in return. Jane is an acolyte of Sidney, as shown through her repetition of his every sentence. In Act 3 ‘ Sidney puts on a nose mask’ and ‘ Jane laughs’. She is the only one to laugh while ‘ the others look horrified’: an example of one of her numerous attempts to please Sidney. Jane often has to deal with Sidney’s rude and sarcastic behaviour with verbal abuse such as ‘ You silly woman’.

Jane’s inferiority is an example of what society would be like if Sidney were to be in power. The idea of escapism is presented to us through Jane’s

attempts to escape from her problems in life. Jane's escape is cleaning. Jane is only happy and relaxed when she cleans. At the beginning of Act One 1 Jane 'sings happily as she works' whilst 'bustling round wiping the floors, cupboard doors and work surfaces'. The kitchen is the only place Jane feels in control, as she knows Sidney will not interfere or order her about whilst cleaning. Sidney is very much towards of the attitude that a woman's place is in the kitchen. He tells Jane that if she's 'looking for a little job' then there's a 'small spillage' that was his fault. Rather than cleaning the spillage up himself, Sidney expects Jane to clear it up, when she is clearly busy preparing the kitchen.

Alan Ayckbourn presents Eva's suicide attempts in Act 2 as a form of black comedy. A serious matter is turned farcical when the guests are oblivious to what Eva is trying to do. Eva 'gets the lid off the paints stripper and is about to drink it'. When Eva is about to drink the paint stripper Marion reads no further into it than the possibility of Eva getting mixed up with the drinks. None of the characters have any consideration for anyone except themselves. Because they are all self-absorbed with their own problems it does not occur to them that Eva could also have problems. When Eva 'lies down and sticks her head inside' the oven Jane thinks that she is cleaning rather than attempting to gas herself.

Not only is this an example of blindness, but it also shows that Jane still uses cleaning as an escape, a year on since she and Sidney hosted the Christmas party. Sidney is also jubilant, demonstrating his handyman skills by fixing the light bulb. Sidney picks up one of Eva's several suicide notes looking at it 'with a casual glance' thinking it is 'nothing important'. The audience laughs

at this farcical situation, but is aware it is black humour. The fact that Eva's suicide attempts have gone unnoticed reflects the lack of communication in society. Even though the characters are communicating they have no real understanding of each other. Being a social critic, this is a fault that Ayckbourn comments upon in society.

Alan Ayckbourn's warning about the up and coming Hopcrofts is due to their aggressive rise in society over the three successive years. Each year Sidney has risen in class, starting from when he struggled to impress the Brewster Wrights in Act 1 through to Act 3 where he barks his instructions for the game the others are forced to play. Visually, Sidney's rise is represented through his stage directions from under the sink in Act 2 to the top of the table in Act 3. Roles are slowly reversed as Sidney climbs up the social ladder. Throughout the play Sidney's speech is ridden with clichés, none of which Ronald can comprehend. The contrast in language between Ronald and Sidney in Acts 1 and 2 show their difference in class. In Act 2 Sidney's ease with technical terminology is contrasted with Ronald referring to appliances as 'thingummyjigs'. It is now Sidney who is in control with thorough knowledge of the subject being discussed. By Act 3 it is the Hopcrofts being invited to social gatherings and the Brewster Wrights are holding the Christmas party where they hope to impress Sidney. Ronald has gone from the wealthiest of the three couples in Act 1 to being concerned about the money spent on 'three blazing heaters' in Act 3.

The cold ending in Act 3 represents the suffering the characters undergo whilst in Sidney's power. His true hysterical character is brought out when he screams at the characters in mounting exhortation bordering in the

hysterical'. By this act Geoffrey and Ronald are powerless whilst they ' stand looking faintly uneasy' feeling forced to participate in Sidney's party game. At this stage Sidney has everyone exactly where he wants them: completely under his control.