

**From Ruins to Redemption:
The Journey of Postapocalyptic
Trauma in Claire Kiechel's *The Pilgrims***

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Abstract:

The concept of post-apocalypse in literature is not novel, but it has recently received increased attention. While many studies have explored the traumatic effects on characters following an apocalypse, there has been a lack of research examining this phenomenon from the perspective of apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic plays. This study adopts trauma theory as a framework to elucidate the psychological impact experienced by characters in a post-apocalyptic play entitled *Pilgrims* (2017) by Claire Kiechel. The play's main characters, the soldier and the girl, endure mental and emotional exhaustion as they confront the formidable challenges of survival in a world devastated by catastrophe. Consequently, they seek solace on another planet, hoping to escape the problems they face on Earth. This paper aims to delve into the psyche of these characters and identify the symptoms and causes of their trauma within the context of the play, as well as their corresponding coping mechanisms, contributing unique insights to the study of post-apocalyptic trauma.

Keywords: trauma, post-apocalypse, *Pilgrims*, survival, PTSD

ملخص:

مفهوم ما بعد الكارثة في الأدب ليس جديداً، لكنه حظي مؤخراً بمزيد من الاهتمام. في حين أن العديد من الدراسات استكشفت التأثيرات الصدمية على الشخصيات بعد نهاية العالم، فقد كان هناك نقص في البحث يدرس هذه الظاهرة من منظور المسرحيات المروعة أو ما بعد الكارثة. تعتمد هذه الدراسة نظرية الصدمة كإطار لتوضيح التأثير النفسي الذي يعاني منه الشخصيات في مسرحية ما بعد الكارثة بعنوان "الحجاج" (2017) لكير كيشيل. يعاني الشخصيات الرئيسية في المسرحية، الجندي والفتاة، من الإرهاق العقلي والعاطفي وهما يواجهان تحديات شاقة للبقاء في عالم دمرته الكارثة. وبالتالي، يسعون للعثور على حياة على كوكب آخر، على أمل الهروب من المشاكل التي يواجهونها على الأرض. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى استكشاف نفسية هذه الشخصيات وتحديد أعراض وأسباب الصدمة التي يعانون منها في سياق المسرحية، بالإضافة إلى آليات التكيف المقابلة لهذه الصدمة، مما يساهم في تقديم رؤى فريدة لدراسة صدمة ما بعد الكارثة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الصدمة، ما بعد الكارثة، الحجاج، البقاء، اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة.

1-Introduction:

Authors of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature have dared to contemplate the unimaginable, and the multitude of endings and future worlds they have envisioned are as varied as the survivors they have portrayed. In fact, throughout history, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature has been utilized as a tool to critique prevailing social orders and mirror people's apprehensions and anxieties about the repercussions of current events on the future. Because this genre of literature tends to emerge in the aftermath of traumatic events and times of adversity, James Berger views (post-) apocalyptic writing as a reminder, a symptom, an aftermath of some terrible disaster. As a result, such works serve as a reflection of society's collective psyche and a testament to our resilience in the face of adversity while simultaneously providing a cautionary tale about the dangers of complacency and inaction (Collins 7)

Since the conclusion of World War II, humanity has become acutely aware of its destructive capabilities and the potential for bringing about the complete annihilation of our planet. As Klaus Scherpe articulates in his article, "Dramatizing and De-Dramatizing the End," the notion of world destruction has become conceivable and assumed an interchangeable nature (Scherpe and Peterson 96). Since the dawn of human civilization, the concept of an apocalypse leading to the obliteration of life on this planet has been a deeply ingrained fear among humankind. The unsettling aspect of such an event is the lack of certainty regarding the timing and cause of the world's end and the inability to anticipate the outcome and ascertain if anything will survive (Collins 7).

This paper will delve into the post-apocalyptic genre in drama. Through using trauma theory, Berger discerns a striking similarity between the notions of apocalypse and trauma, as both involve destroying established structures of identity and language. Furthermore, they both leave a void in memory that can only be reconstructed by examining the remnants, survivors, and spectral echoes they leave behind – their symptoms, if you will. Trauma, the psychoanalytic equivalent of apocalypse, is characterized by its temporal inversion. In the aftermath of trauma, symptoms manifest themselves, and by interpreting these symptoms, piecing together the events that caused the trauma becomes easy, effectively reading backwards in time (Berger 19).

2-Trauma theory:

Trauma refers to the lasting psychological damage caused by such events to individuals or entire communities. The term has become ever-present in our culture, sometimes called posttraumatic (Erikson 154). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been defined as the reaction to an incident that falls beyond the boundaries of typical human encounters, encompassing profound disruptions in both physical and psychological realms (Marita Nadal Blasco et al. 1). The distinct indications of the new diagnostic classification were reliving the distressing incident; insensitivity towards, or diminished engagement with, the external realm; and an assortment of autonomic, melancholic, or mental indications, such as heightened vigilance, troubles with slumber and recurring bad dreams, remorse for surviving, memory deterioration and difficulties with concentration, avoidance of activities that may provoke memories of

the incident, and amplification of indications triggered by exposure to events that symbolize or resemble the traumatic occurrence (Diedrich 84).

Traumatic events compel the past to persist in the present; a future cannot be envisioned until these events are acknowledged, comprehended, and assimilated into a new way of life. In the context of an apocalyptic scenario, John Collins refers to engaging with and re-experiencing past traumas to shape a more desirable vision of the future as “the apocalyptic ‘cure’” in his work *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Collins 52). Berger posits that while traumatic encounters resemble an apocalypse, which is always followed by post-traumatic symptoms and psychological consequences, post-apocalyptic writing is a remnant, a sign, a result of some disorienting catastrophe (Berger 7).

3-From Ruins to Redemption

Claire Kiechel's play, *Pilgrims* (2017), is a work of science fiction set in a post-apocalyptic future. Against a war-torn Earth and an impending demise, the play follows two passengers aboard the spaceship *Destiny* as they seek refuge on a new planet. The primary focus is on the Soldier, a war veteran who harbors a deep sense of agitation upon discovering he must share his confined living space with a young girl who claims to be sixteen years old. The Soldiers had valiantly fought against the alien forces during the war. The girl, characterized by a talkative and adolescent demeanor, eventually reveals that she had deceived others about her age and is, in fact, twenty-two years old. The play subtly alludes to the girl's past trauma, hinting at a history of sexual assault. The last character is Jasmine, the robot stewardess on "the *Destiny*, the most amazing ship in the galaxy!" (Kiechel 13), starkly contrasting the bleak setting.

While Jasmine's upbeat disposition initially annoys the Soldier, she becomes the only companion to the human characters in the play.

Pilgrims offers a commendable portrayal of a futuristic society that thrives in a time beyond our own. Set in a post-apocalyptic world where advanced technology and artificial intelligence seamlessly coexist with humanity, the play delves into the multifaceted dynamics of human reliance on technological advancements. Additionally, it explores the struggle of fragmented characters to preserve their humanity and maintain their sanity amidst the chaos. *Pilgrims* presents a futuristic and post-apocalyptic drama that delves into various forms of trauma and examines the diverse reactions and performances of the characters in response to these experiences.

The play raises thought-provoking questions regarding the characters' motivations for escaping Earth and whether fleeing their problems would resolve their issues. Implicitly, the characters hold expectations of leaving their troubles behind, seeking a fresh start in a new environment. Moving forward and embracing hope becomes a crucial coping mechanism for survivors of the post-apocalyptic era as they grapple with the profound changes that have reshaped their world. Notably, the play highlights that the causes of the post-apocalyptic condition extend beyond the war against aliens and the characters' escape from Earth. Within the confines of the spaceship itself, there are manifestations of post-apocalyptic circumstances, such as the presence of a purported virus infection, although the certainty of its existence remains uncertain. The intentional ambiguity woven into the narrative further contributes to the play's disorienting nature, leaving the reader uncertain and questioning.

A colleague of Claire Kiechel named Benjamin Benne mentioned that

A robot informs them a virus has been detected aboard the ship, and they are being quarantined. But are they the ones being protected, or are they the ones infected? Is anyone infected...or are they all infected? And it was this pervading sense of mystery (and the question of who is a reliable source) that kept the play consistently engaging.

The Soldier was a veteran of the war against the aliens, through which he developed post-traumatic stress disorder. In the play, we realize that he is returning to where he was traumatized, which says a lot about his personality and the secrets that will be discovered later in the play. He refuses to be acknowledged as a colonist and instead insists on being a contractor, which shifts the blame for the painful and violent things that he has done to whoever sent him. It also contradicts the real reason, which is, as the Soldier said, "I'm coming back to stop us there can't be any more as we all have to be destroyed" (Kiechel, Pilgrims 101). The Soldier's intention of blowing the humans on the alien's planet up comes from regret for what he did to the aliens during war; he does not want to be another person like him again. This arises as a consequence of trauma, which brings about changes in one's personality and how one upholds their surroundings. Consequently, the affected individual experiences a diminished capacity to acknowledge and value the current moment (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 4).

For most of the play, the Soldier seems confused, tired, and unbalanced mentally, all of which are a result of him not being able to sleep because he fears that he would hurt the girl, which encourages us to believe he sleepwalks and that is why he does not trust himself anymore. Sleepwalking is another symptom that people with post-traumatic stress disorder have, as shown in medical research Advancing Science and Promoting Understanding of Traumatic Stress, PTSD, and Sleep (Gehrman et al.

2). Trauma has been a big part of the Soldier's life ever since the war. He adapted to it rather than fighting it, which could be because he thinks that he deserves it as he has killed many aliens, including the girl who used to come to his dreams, as well as some of his colleagues.

The girl is a character that seems to the reader more rational than the Soldier and brings movement to the plot way more than the Soldier, as she is the one to thank for any information that is taken from him. The girl says while playing pretend,

I once got tied up by a pirate much like you. I told him not to, but he did, and then I told him not to fuck me, but he did anyway, but I didn't care because the place he was trying to reach he couldn't reach there it wasn't there for him to reach I couldn't reach it either so he couldn't hurt me can't be hurt if you don't let it you can't hurt me either (Kiechel 55)

Depending on that, even though it was supposed to be a game of pretending, through the description she used, it is safe to say that she has been raped before, and it is speculated that it could have been her father who did it. Based on understanding the impact of trauma, the trauma is obvious from the way she desperately tries to fit into her surroundings, as if she feels incomplete, so she becomes what she thinks the people around her would want:

Girl I don't have to be sixteen I can be any age you want we're going to a different planet, after all a whole new culture history. besides the puritans their wives were all like fifteen soldier you're no puritan girl let's play puritans you be the reverend I'll be the witch you have to exorcise me (56)

As their journey continues, the girl's more mature aspects gradually emerge. We effortlessly perceive her as whatever she portrays herself as in each moment. Her fear of being alone is one of the reasons that she is desperate to be with the Soldier, trying to stop him from killing them all and helping him put more meaning into his life and the traumatic memories that he has.

The robot Jasmine is not a living creature, but her role in the play is central, as she is the only voice of authority in the play, representing the people responsible for creating a whole new society on another planet. As a machine, Jasmine also can mimic the needs of the humans she cares for. When the Soldier is annoyed by how cheerful she is, he asks her to be less cheerful as the situation does not require it.

Jasmine: this is the ship's female centric lexicon but I'd be happy to make adjustments as you see fit "soldier: a little less peppy, please.
Jasmine: sure I can tone down the optimism for your comfort to something a little graver perhaps more sincere" (16–17).

Jasmine consistently promotes the ship's slogan, adapting it to suit different circumstances. Initially, the slogan was "Saying yes is our middle name here on the Destiny." Subsequently, it changed to "Safety is our middle name here on Destiny," on the final occasion, it became "A good time is our middle name on board the Destiny; everyone is royalty." This pattern suggests a sense of urgency and a yearning to progress favorably, ensuring the passengers' safe arrival at their intended destination for a fresh start. As a non-human entity, she sometimes uses an overly joyful tone to deliver bad news; at other times, she completely lacks the ability to show enough emotions for that specific situation. These contrasting behaviors contribute to the disconcerting and horrifying aspects of the play. Jasmine is also the voice of authority; the passengers must abide by it if she makes a decision. Even though she is a robot, her power over the human characters elicits a sense of unease and fear.

The play's setting is distinctly futuristic, characterized by a minimalist aesthetic. The cabin within the setting features a single bed and two doors—one leading to the bathroom and the other serving as an entrance for the robot character, Jasmine. The deliberate use of minimalism in the design aims to shift the focus onto

the characters themselves and their dialogues. By minimizing external distractions, the play intensifies the characters' experiences of trauma, as they are left with no diversions apart from each other's companionship. The near emptiness of the cabin evokes a sense of tranquility and solitude for the Soldier, who desires solitude. However, it also instills fear in the girl, who goes to great lengths to avoid being alone. This deliberate juxtaposition of peace and fear within the sparse cabin reinforces the emotional dynamics and tension between the characters.

The mysterious world that Kiechel created gives her and the characters power over the reader, who has no choice but to bow and wait for the events to unravel, hoping to find answers. She purposefully presents a narrative that poses questions without readily providing answers and does not anticipate readers to supply definitive solutions. Instead, she intends to convey these ideas and queries to evoke a sense of openness, fostering a receptive space between herself and her readers. By embracing this approach, Kiechel invites an immersive experience where readers are encouraged to contemplate and engage with her work's thought-provoking themes and uncertainties. Kiechel herself said:

In terms of the play itself, I knew I was asking big questions and that they were questions I badly needed to answer for myself. I've always been interested in how our personal and political desires can conflict, and I was also interested in how we read trauma in different kinds of bodies in America. What's the difference between a veteran with PTSD and a teenage girl with it? Is there a hierarchy of trauma? What are the ways we ask people to perform their trauma? Why does it sometimes feel like a betrayal to heal oneself?" (Benne).

Pilgrims, a science fiction, futuristic, and post-apocalyptic drama, establishes a certain detachment between the reader and the text. However, this distance is effectively bridged by the characters' relatable experiences and emotions, which

diminish the perceived divide. As a result, the play possesses a timeless quality that resonates with audiences across different eras.

In an email that I had from Claire Kiechel, she mentioned that there are books that influenced her to write this play, *The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* by David J. Morris, which is an excellent book about the writer's experience with post-traumatic stress disorder after being a veteran in Iraq. Another book is *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. It is an antiwar book where the author tries to depict what he saw as an American prisoner of war. It also tackles post-traumatic stress disorder and postwar anxiety. Kiechel also mentioned that unconsciously, she was influenced by Sara Kane's play *Blasted*. It is understandable as there is way too much similarity between the two plays; both are considered futuristic post-apocalypse, but they also have some horror elements.

Kiechel made sure to emphasize mental health issues using trauma as a guide. Most of these issues result from the trauma these characters went through. She managed to deliver it from different angles, tricking the reader into believing the situation had a stereotypical element to it, only to realize with a shock the weight of the characters' burden on their psychological state. In a way, the characters are considered survivors, which makes them special, but knowing how damaged they indicate an unhealthy environment. This society prioritizes basic needs over anything else, as represented by the robot Jasmine and the people responsible for this spaceship; they can provide food. However, Jasmine was not successful in realizing that pairing two highly damaged people together with no good guidance would not result in a healthy space for both of the characters to "repopulate" as was expected from them, even though, in the end, the girl is pregnant. Are any of these two

characters capable of bringing a new healthy generation onto this new planet? David J. Morris mentions in his book that we owe the world death from birth. Trauma is the darkness that appears unexpectedly, destroying our consciousness and ability to live peacefully. Therapy and medication can ease the pain but not cure trauma. It stays with us forever, changing our physiology and affecting future generations. We cannot erase it from our consciousness. Trauma is our burden as sentient beings, separating us from animals. We must contain the pain and transform it into knowledge for the future (NPR).

In her book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Vickroy explains that the transmission of traumatic reactions can persist across multiple generations. The familial connections and offspring of those who have endured such experiences are profoundly influenced by their parents' encounters, as evidenced by feelings of despondency, scepticism, and emotional restraint resulting from their parents' excessive anguish and efforts to exert authority over their children. Furthermore, the offspring inherit modes of responding to trauma (Vickroy 19).

Vickroy also tackles the understanding of the perception of powerlessness in people with trauma, be it of a physical or emotional nature, which constitutes the fundamental aspect of a traumatic event. The incapacity marks this state to engage in actions that could potentially impact the situation's outcome. The inability to comprehend these preceding incidents can lead to the establishment of rigid beliefs, prompting ineffective attempts to re-experience these instances, which results in detachment from reality. This can be exemplified in the Soldier's symptoms as he does not want to sleep or fights against his memories throughout the play until he gives in and tells the girl what happened to him on that planet. As for the girl, the emotional

state of being unable to feel a wide range of emotions is not rare. It is a way for victims to protect themselves from pain. By disconnecting from their physical and emotional selves, they can lessen the immediate sense of violation and handle and endure the experience. (13). Not being able to be oneself is brutal, which is one of the essential ideas that the writer delves into because even though the girl is perfectly hiding all those feelings, she is incredibly deranged as she yearns for a connection with anyone surrounding her, to know she is not alone:

Soldier, you think it's going to help you forget going somewhere new
you think you can leave your old self behind girl maybe I'm good at adapting I
get along with people I sense what they want and then I give it to them it's a
talent I'm going to do well there (Kiechel 56).

The play contains scenes with the idea of doubling and hallucination. The first is when the girl is in the bathroom and talking to the Soldier sitting on the bed, but another girl enters the stage, and the reader realizes that the real girl is still inside the bathroom and the one on the stage is a hallucination that is inside the Soldier's head. Kiechel explained in her email that.

"the "girl" on stage changing the sheets is in the Soldier's head, which is why the real girl keeps talking from the bathroom so the audience understands we're in an uncanny, dream-like space. But yes, the moments of "uncanniness" and "doubling" with the Soldier and what the connection between bodies and the psychic space are" (Kiechel, email to).

The second scene is the one where the Soldier sees himself shooting others as if he was not the one doing it and that he is standing among the people who are being shot. This one occurrence had a lot to do with the Soldier's mental state as it seems to be the one that started all of his troubles and the one most of his thoughts revolve around. The Soldier's shocking outbursts of frustration and the feeling of helplessness toward the situation he is in—one example is his burst of anger after finding out that

the girl lied about her age—are an indication of his withdrawal from the world around him as his depression takes hold of him.

The sexual attraction that started with the girl throwing herself at him while he was pushing her away is not based only on sexual needs; it is her emotional needs that drive her to the bold actions she has committed. The Soldier, on the other hand, fears for the supposed teenager's safety because he sees himself as a monster who can hurt her and a dirty man with blood on his hand who should not touch the innocent girl. Claire Kiechel said that once

This elderly man came up to me and said, "But you always seemed like such a sweet, nice girl." No one is purely a sweet, nice girl. In my work, I like the idea of popping that fantasy and revealing an interiority for female characters that we rarely see in public." (Benne).

The sexual implications in the play were tools that the writer used to show the readers other dimensions of the characters. *Pilgrims* plays on many possible meanings for different ideas; the title gives the text a religious or spiritual feeling. A pilgrimage is an expedition embarked upon with a religious intention. Certain pilgrims have engaged in continuous travel without a predetermined destination, whereas pilgrims typically strive to attain a specific location that has attained sacred status under its association with a divine entity or other highly respected individual (Coleman). The characters' journey could be seen as a journey to find themselves and their purpose in life at a better destination. Yet still, the title could mean another thing, as the main character in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is named Billy Pilgrim. He is a troubled central character whose psychological state can be characterized as shattered. By delving into Billy's peculiar mental condition, it becomes possible to investigate the hypothesis that his encounters with extraterrestrial beings and his experiences with time travel are a

direct consequence of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that afflicts him. The findings indicate that Billy indeed exhibits prominent indications of PTSD, which are likely to have been triggered by a combination of childhood experiences and the trauma endured during the war. This expression of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Billy is evident through his employment of time travel and his experiences with extraterrestrial beings, which function as adaptive strategies (Kimblad 1). This would also make sense, as it would explain the Soldier's hallucination-like dreams or seeing someone that no one else does; these would be results of post-traumatic stress disorder that the Soldier suffers from.

The two passengers, the only human characters, do not have names; they are referred to either depending on their gender or their profession, which is the thing that caused them the trauma for the girl who was sexually assaulted and for the Soldier who was traumatized by the war against the aliens. It seems as if the writer wanted them to be generalized. On the other hand, giving the robot a name could indicate her power over the other characters, or it might be the writer's way of neglecting her as a robot and not providing her with what the human characters have.

The mention of the Puritans appeared more than once in the play; the indication can be taken from a religious point of view or a colonial one. The Puritans came from Britain to colonize America. In one of the scenes, the girl tells the Soldier that the Puritan's wives were fifteen years old to convince him to sleep with her. She does compare their journey to colonizing another planet with the Puritan's colonization, which resulted in the enslavement of the natives. The Puritans are also known as the pilgrim fathers. Passengers on board the starship are colonizers heading toward their new world. The Soldier refuses to be called a colonizer, as he explains

that they are living beings that feel, and just because they are different does not make them less than human beings. This type of mentality is shocking at first, as he was the one who fought against them in battle and killed many, but as the one who lived in their land for a while and faced death, it is natural for him to empathize with them and understand them:

Soldier, the news is shit they're always making it sound like we're liberating them from the tyranny of but we don't even try to understand what it is that what it means in their never mind soldier no because nobody understands that's the fucking problem somebody from our side needs to be on their side to make people finally get it (Keichel 63-64)

The girl mentions something ironic, which is, "I just mean I think It's fine it's fine as long as it's our future as long as we tell it like a love story" (Keichel 93), covering the flaws in history by trying to paint another better picture, is proven to be an act that historians and influential characters in history did to control how they, or others, were preserved for us now. It is a running away from the truth and expecting their trauma just to vanish.

The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder by David J. Morris was recommended as the best way to understand trauma by Clair Keichel. Morris states it as a condition that affects individuals over time. When individuals are in a state of optimal physical and mental well-being, they can fully engage with their current circumstances, derive pleasure from the sun's warmth, and derive satisfaction from their everyday existence. Nevertheless, in the most severe instances of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), they find themselves trapped in an altered state of consciousness characterized by hallucinations, persistently re-experiencing past traumas. The traumatic events or events that they have endured assume an eternal quality, devoid of limitations over time. For those who have survived traumatic ordeals, the passage of time assumes a circular nature, in stark contrast to the linear progression experienced by most individuals, traversing from one moment to the next, from the past to the present and the future. Instead, certain victims of trauma

find themselves momentarily anchored in the present, only to regress to past traumas once again. The intensity of PTSD is further magnified when individuals find themselves devoid of any semblance of control over the traumatic experiences they confront. The sensation of helplessness serves as a prominent indicator of the likelihood of developing PTSD. Lacking power over one's environment proves exceedingly arduous for individuals to manage. They experience a profound sense of powerlessness, unable to shape their destiny or ensure survival. This often culminates in heightened distress over an extended period of time. (NPR).

In multiple scenes, the girl appears to be encouraging the soldier to leave the past behind and look ahead for a better future. With her, she also seems way stronger in handling her trauma, and her symptoms are not as obvious and drastic as those of the Soldier. As she is soothing the Soldier's pain, it is hard to tell if she is that mature or if she is just as broken as he is. Yet in the Soldier's dreams, the reader sees a version of the girl that is similar to the real one but different as well, which is a recurring thing that can be taken as a prediction for the future or that the Soldier's mind is trying to stop him from getting close to the girl, fearing that he might hurt her just like he hurt the alien girl. The girl convinces him not to do a massacre by appealing to the soft side of human beings who always look hopeful for the future.

Girl is that what this is this notebook these plans you're going to blow us all up what about me what about all of us soldier all of who girl your people your seventy five grandkids soldier what about her grandkids all of theirs why are mine better girl I didn't say that there can be both we can live together. Even though the aliens do not have what is called regret, it is one of the heaviest packages that those pilgrims are bringing with them.

The conclusion of the play is just as perplexing as the entirety of the work, presenting not solutions but rather an abundance of questions that reveal names whose authenticity remains uncertain. At the beginning, it is mentioned that the soldier is referred to as Grant; however, he asserts that no one addresses him by that name. Curiously, as the play ends, we witness the girl calling him John while he addresses her as Mary. The playwright notes at the beginning of the scene that the dialogue is primarily directed towards the audience rather than each other, seemingly

attempting to demonstrate the great extent to which they have progressed. Introducing a British accent adds a layer of awkwardness, akin to a sudden transition to reading a novel by Jane Austen. It is possible that Kiechel intended to distance herself from the plethora of questions she posed to maintain an air of detachment from the reader while still managing to astonish them, possibly reminiscent of Brecht's epic theatre techniques. The final state of the characters may be interpreted as their deterioration into a more severe state of detachment from reality due to the depression inflicted by trauma. Alternatively, it can be that they have indeed achieved a happy ending, and the apparent portrayal of different personas is merely a facet of their playful games. Ultimately, the play not only focuses on the human passengers of the spaceship but also explores the clash of cultures with extraterrestrial entities; furthermore, the apocalyptic references enhance the depth of the characters' struggles as they strive to heal and embark upon a new existence. In relation to this, science fiction director Joss Whedon proclaimed, "People are people. The problems they bring to space will be the same old problems. The problems they find out there won't be" (Fugate).

Conclusion:

The seamless integration of post-apocalyptic elements and psychological distress is sculpted within the play *Pilgrims* by Claire Kiechel, showcasing various forms of trauma that resonate with our reality. Nevertheless, the playwright has also established a certain level of detachment from the audience. Kiechel bestows a great deal of weight upon the mentally unsettled characters, burdening them with rebuilding their lives within a new environment and just continuing living, as exemplified by the soldier. Understandably, the reader may feel discomfort with such an immense responsibility placed upon mentally unstable and potentially unreliable characters. However, this is the inevitable consequence of a post-apocalyptic world, as it significantly impacts the human psyche. The play poses thought-provoking inquiries regarding the evasion of personal troubles and the profound effects of trauma on individuals. Furthermore, it delves into the power dynamics between humans and artificial intelligence, emphasizing the necessity of companionship.

Trauma is a disease that is inherited, one that the new generation cannot evade, which would damage them even more as they continue trying to survive.

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