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## Postmodern English Drama:A Study

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**Abstract:** The postmodern drama often incorporates characteristics of the absurd and grotesque. Absurdity, which refers to the sense of meaninglessness, purposelessness, and hopelessness in contemporary life, has become a prominent element in our drama, reflecting the disillusionment and existential confusion prevalent in society. This shift from modernism to postmodernism is apparent in absurdist drama, where the rejection of established norms and the questioning of traditional values are common themes. In this contemporary context, life is portrayed as absurd, lacking clear meaning, definitive goals, or optimistic prospects for the future. Drama, which has historically mirrored or been influenced by real-life events and societal conditions, now captures this absurdity. Playwrights in absurdist drama do not necessarily aim to be social reformers or saviors; instead, their focus lies in depicting an authentic representation of the real world. Through absurd and grotesque elements, postmodern drama often exposes the contradictions, chaos, and lack of coherence in human existence. It challenges conventional storytelling and traditional dramatic structures by embracing ambiguity, non-linearity, and fragmented narratives. As a result, these plays offer a reflection of the complexities and uncertainties of contemporary life, rejecting the notion of clear resolutions or moral lessons and emphasizing the disarray and absurdity of the human condition.

**Keywords:** drama, characters, absurd, contemporary, complexities etc.

The postmodern drama indeed emerged within the context of a postmodern situation, which arose following the late modernist era and eventually gained dominance. Modernism reached its twilight in the late 19th century, and subsequent efforts by philosophers and thinkers in the early 20th century were primarily centered around rejecting the tenets and representations of modernism. A key principle of modernism was the belief in human intellect and the problem-solving capacity of the human mind. However, postmodernism viewed this belief as a futile illusion. In postmodern drama, the focus shifts away from depictions of wise individuals grappling with challenges using their intellect or striving to transcend the limitations of life, as seen in works like "Hamlet," "Doctor Faustus," or "Macbeth." Instead, postmodern drama tends to portray individuals who are unable to comprehend their distressing circumstances (as seen in characters from plays like "The Homecoming," "Waiting for Godot," and "Furry Gorilla"). Additionally, it often features characters who take no action to change their current situation (as in "Waiting for Godot" and "Homecoming") or individuals whose proposed solutions, if any, are excessively detrimental (as in "Furry Gorilla"). This shift in portrayal reflects a departure from the conventional heroic or problem-solving narrative arcs found in earlier dramatic forms. Postmodern drama tends to highlight the confusion, helplessness, and lack of agency among its characters, presenting a more fragmented and uncertain view of human existence.

Postmodern drama indeed emerges from a ground that highlights the absence of traditional values in the contemporary world. Its meaning or essence does not lie in being inherently meaningless; rather, it emphasizes the void created by the absence of values in the new world. In the absence of classical elements like philosophy, humanism, and democracy—traditionally considered the fundamental pillars of theater—postmodern drama explores themes of absurdity in emotions, wisdom, religion, and human endeavor. Eminent playwrights like Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter, and their contemporaries sought to depart from traditional theatrical foundations and establish new artistic and dramatic expressions that reflected the complexities faced by modern individuals. Ionesco expressed his inclination towards an "anti-theater" or the uprooting of classical theatrical underpinnings, aiming to rediscover the true essence of theater. His desire was to uncover the authentic origins of theater, diverging from traditional forms. Ionesco's perspective and the shared sentiments of playwrights of his era indicated a search for a novel artistic and dramatic approach that could effectively capture the challenges faced by modern humanity. They aimed for an imaginative, non-thematic, anti-ideological, anti-realism, anti-philosophy, anti-psychology, and anti-bourgeoisie form of theater that would be more relevant to the contemporary human condition—a theater that broke norms and departed from traditional theatrical conventions.

In the realm of postmodern drama, there are distinct characteristics associated with absurdity and the grotesque. Even authors not explicitly classified within the absurd-grotesque genre have addressed concerns that align with this style. For instance, Eugene O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh" touches upon themes like futile waiting, depicting a waiting that persists without purpose or productivity. Similarly,

O'Neill explores the impact of machinery, societal alienation, and the erosion of once noble and valuable ideals in "The Hairy Ape."

Absurdity forms the essence of contemporary drama, reflecting a life that appears devoid of meaning, purpose, or a hopeful future. Postmodernists and critics often assert the rejection of modernism, a rejection that finds expression in the domain of absurdist drama. From ancient times, drama has sought to reflect life or at least be influenced by real-life experiences. In our current age, life itself appears absurd, devoid of intrinsic meaning or clear aspirations for the future, and drama, as a reflection of this reality, captures this sense of absurdity. In works characterized as absurd, unlike classical narratives, there exists no clear cause-and-effect relationship between events. This lack of causality is due to several reasons. Firstly, there's often a lack of actions or intentions on the part of individuals, thereby negating any direct reaction or response from others. Secondly, characters typically lack specific ideas or challenges to provoke responses. Consequently, the plot of absurdist drama unfolds in a cyclical manner, detached from everyday logic and devoid of coherent progression.

Dialogues, which typically involve arguments or discourses, hold little significance in this context. There are no instances where one character speaks in opposition to another, as there is no individual with specific intentions or statements that necessitate a response. Furthermore, even if situations were to unfold differently, there would be no characters present to respond. Consequently, what these works often exhibit is a lack of a clear and coherent storyline, deviating from the structured plots found in classical narratives. In the context of new or postmodern drama, characters' personalities are depicted as subordinate to the

circumstances of their community. These communities often exert a strong influence, determining and shaping the individuals' personalities. The individuals, in turn, become entirely inactive and passive, adapting to the situations they encounter. This passivity contrasts sharply with the sentiments expressed by Hamlet, who pondered whether it was nobler to endure misfortune or take action against adversity. In the modern world, such protests against social circumstances rarely arise, let alone actual actions taken as a response. Bureaucratic structures entangle people's hands, feet, and minds, compelling them to act and think in accordance with the system's requirements. Additionally, through various mechanisms (referred to by some as ideology), the system presents the current situation as a "promised heaven." Consequently, individuals, under the guise of absolute obedience, are offered welfare, to the extent that they forget the constraints imposed upon them. However, this "hellish" scenario, where people are tightly controlled yet receive some benefits, seems more tolerable than the dystopian reality faced by citizens of third-world countries, living under oppressive autocracy. In postmodern drama, characters are depicted as being subordinated to prevailing conditions. They often lack the capability or willingness to

comprehend the circumstances they find themselves in, let alone take any meaningful action against them.

The traditional portrayal of drama, which centered on the will or actions of the main character, has evolved. Instead of the will of gods determining the narrative, it is now shaped by a metaphorical "Matrix," symbolizing a pervasive and dominating network that governs life. This network comprises elements such as technocrats, technology, capital, factories, and established scientific facts. These components collectively contribute to the intricate web of circumstances in postmodern narratives, often rendering the characters powerless in the face of their influence.

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