Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine a postmodern concept of theatre as it specifically relates to the theatre of the absurd by investigating the works and ideas of Samuel Beckett. Together with contextualism and rejection of modernist doctrines, I have utilized Jean-François Lyotard's theory of postmodernism to analyze the inner dynamics of Beckett's dramaturgy.

In the Introduction of this thesis I will attempt to discuss the major factors that underly the prevailing postmodern attitude: scepticism about the Enlightenment, repudiation of the idea of progress and traditional humanism, a huge growth in the mass media, consumerism, the subversion of any sense of central social authority. The introduction also examines a chain of related developments which explore the concept of postmodern and poststructural critical theory. They focus on four salient lines of theoretical impact: the critique of modernity, the suspicion of science, the attack on general theory, and the rise of pragmatism and attacks on foundationalism. The key role of language and theme and strategies of postmodern writing will be studied too. To reinforce the given study, I will make references to important literary, sociological, and philosophical works that reflect such traits.

The first chapter explores what has taken place during approximately the past two decades in the fields of art, architecture, literature and criticism, and painting. The chapter analyzes, describes, and provides an intellectual, social, and historical background for postmodernism as well as
examines creative expression and critical thought. It tries to demonstrate how we have first become conscious of, then, attempted to represent, and finally aimed to accommodate recent changes in the ways we experience reality and map out that understanding as art. Finally, it provides broad syntheses of critical issues and discusses representative figures and their work.

The second chapter aims to identify paradigms that represent the modernist thought and discern their role in theater. Of major interest in this chapter, is the failure of the modernist paradigms and thought which gives way to the emergence of two decades (1960s and 1970s) of theatrical innovation (postmodern theater). The chapter also discusses the numerous aesthetic strategies of postmodern theater and defines it as a theater suspicious of its ontology (presence, liveness), its tools of representation, and its mood of authenticity, authority, and originality.

The third chapter is concerned solely with the written form of the plays analyzed. There was no attempt to include elements of live performance such as the interpretation of actors, scene designers, light technicians, or directors. Chosen for the study are Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Act Without Words I, and Act Without Words II. Specific postmodern criteria for each play are expressed. The results show that the characteristics for postmodern theater differ largely from accepted modern definitions.

To provide necessary background for fuller understanding of postmodern condition, the conclusion of this thesis first considered the most salient line of assault towards postmodernism depicted by “neo-Marxist”
evaluation, then, will be concerned with a literature that advocates a postmodern and poststructural philosophical and analytic position. Lastly, on the basis of both the Lyotard's idea of sublime and the extent to which Beckett's objectives were recognized and fulfilled according to the postmodern critical responses it is concluded that Beckett's plays stand as précis of postmodern drama, embodying the indeterminacies - ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness - and the deformations - deconstruction, decenterment, difference, displacement - that can be identified as central to postmodernism.