

E -content

Developed By

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Sub: English Literature

Programme: Diploma

B.A. (Third Semester)

Course Title: British and American Drama

Course Code: A040301T

Unit 1

Module: Theatre of the Absurd

Content Specific Outcomes:

After the completion of this content students will be able to :

- Understand the term Absurd
- Learn the Theatre of Absurd
- Understand the impact of world war on post modern plays
- Learn the prominent features of the theatre of the Absurd

Introduction

Post- modern period in English literature is significant for various new techniques both in themes and style. Writers discard traditional norms in their writings . One of the novel techniques is Absurd Drama which became prominent as a result of the unimaginable devastation, traumatic experiences of the sufferers caused by the second World War(1939-45) that left people with a sense of nothingness in human existence.

Historical Background of Absurd Play

The root of the absurdist drama lies in dadaism, existentialism, expressionism, surrealism and in the novels of Franz Kafka.

The horrors and total devastation caused by the second world war played significant role in the development and nurturing of the absurd plays.

Meaning of the Theatre of Absurd

It is a tendency of drama that seeks to represent a world that does not make a sense, in which characters struggle to find rationality in the existence of human beings. The term is applied to a number of works which have in common the view that human condition is essentially absurd and this absurdity can be expressed in the works that are themselves absurd.

The movement was emerged in France after the horrors of the second world war as a rebellion against basic values in traditional literature and culture that assume that human beings are rational creatures living in an ordered, intelligible universe, but the absurdist plays project the irrationalism and purposelessness of human life and human beings.

Prominent Features Include -

Thematic Features

- A world without meaning
- Lack of communication
- The Abasement of reason
- Dark humour
- Isolation of the individual

Stylistic Features

- Decay of plot
- Concept of anti-hero
- Lack of characterization
- Devaluation of language
- Repetition of words, sentences
- Repetition of certain events
- Rejection of realistic setting

The most influential and eminent writers in this mode are Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller and etc.

Significant Absurd plays are *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Catch -22*, *V*, *The Bald Soprano*.

These mentioned writers and others, being realists and true observers, have powerfully created the absurd world representing meaninglessness and purposelessness of human life and irrational creatures as an effect of total death and decay caused by the gruesomeness of World War II.

Learning Based Objective Questions

1-What does the term Absurd refer to?

- a-Aimlessness of life
- b-Irrationalism
- c- Nothingness
- d-All of the above

2- Which one of the following is not a feature of absurd play?

- a- Dark comedy
- b- Bizarre elements
- c-Incoherent plot
- d-Logical events

3-Theatre of Absurd was influenced by-

- a- Writings of expressionists
- b- Devastation of war
- c- Elements of Surrealism
- d-All of the above

4- Absurd Drama is representation of -

- a- Fragmented events and dialogues
- b- Grotesqueness
- c-Both A and B
- d-External conflicts

Answer Key

- 1-d
- 2-d
- 3-d
- 4-c

References:

- Camus, Albert. The Myth of Sysyphus,1942.
- Esslin, Martin.Wit,Humor and the Comic,1968.
- Ionesco, Eugene. The Bald Soprano,1949.
- Max F, Schultz.Black Honour Fiction of the Sixties,1980.

