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Modernist Subjects' Transition into Postmodernist Ones in Modern Plays: A Selective Study of Krapp's Last Tape, Buried Child, and Travesties

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ABSTRACT

The present study identifies the features of postmodern subject in Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape (1958), Sam Shepard's Buried Child (1978), and Tom Stoppard's Travesties (1975). These three plays beautifully showcase the sense of belonging and non-belonging of modernist subjects toward essentialism, and that is how such subjects moves toward postmodernism's belief on lack of commitment to neither absolute belonging nor non-belonging. Dislocated memories, textual and constructed nature of memories, schizophrenic characters, and their inclusive belonging to discursive oppositional points of binaries are the features around which the study will pursue its discussions. Absence of even an abstract unified understanding of the past, the uneasy and hectic juxtaposition and superimposition of a series of contradictory narratives out of the past experiences of schizophrenic subjects, and lack of belonging to – or inclusive belonging to – either sides of binaries are the key titles of the study's findings. While discussing these issues, the study utilizes critical insights proposed by two key figures in literary theory and criticism: Linda Hutcheon when it comes to postmodernism in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), and Nick Mansfield when one wishes to discuss the issue of subjectivity in *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (2000). Amir Ali Nojoumian's *A Brief Introduction to Modernism in Literature* and *A Brief Introduction to Postmodernism in Literature* would be utilized to enrich the study's take from modernism and postmodernism too. In the study, it is argued that in all the three plays, the references to – and narratives of – the past are filled with contradictions and fragmentations, and only through relying on one of these references, characters may find a temporary and contingent sense of identity stability. This stability comes from characters' modernist inkling. At the same time, their inability to preserve this identity stability challenges this modernist inkling and nullifies any possibility of arriving at an essentialist and recessive take from the past; the take that looks solely for a number of touchstones. This inability heralds the possibility of looking to the past with a ludic non-nostalgic attitude that allows the fragmented past – and the series of contingent identities formed in the past – constantly imposing its presence on individuals like palimpsests. This palimpsestic imposition makes any in-depth understanding for characters impossible and only shows a series of categorically unrelated representations that have nothing to do with any transcendental point or anchorage in characters' temporal, subjective and mnemonic configurations.

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