Chapter 4

Multiple Personae: *Krapp’s Last Tape*
MULTIPLE PERSONAE: KRAPP’S LAST TAPE

Krapp’s Last Tape is regarded by Beckett himself as “a stage monologue” (Iwata 34) and contains narratological paradoxes. Beckett experimented with a new theatrical style and stage device in which he highlights the predicament of an alienated man confronted with his multiple selves. The equipment becomes Beckett’s medium to shred the personality of Krapp—the principle consciousness of the play. The tape dramaturgy is an encounter of Krapp with his many selves at different stages of his life. The tape reveals and interpolates Krapp’s past, present and future in his own voice. He is presented in an inescapable situation which is self created and in Beckett’s own words Krapp is a “dream-consumed man” (Gussow 180). The plays of Beckett offer an almost grey and barren landscape with man in despair and in this regard Jules Aaron observes:

Samuel Beckett’s theatre portrays contemporary man as physically and spiritually isolated in a sparse landscape, forced to accept the static condition of a tragicomic existence. Man’s universal malaise is that death is implicit in birth; he is born “astride of a grave” where “the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more.” Yet man endures, faced with the irony of waiting for an inevitable end which never seems to come, as well as with the awesome task of occupying the omnipresent time. (Aaron 103)

This play is pre-eminently a novel experience, quite unique and experimental in its strategy. It is different from Waiting for Godot, That Time, and Endgame in its enactment. There is a radical digression from the conventional style of playwriting drama. The instant drama has been discussed by its author as a play “for one actor” (Kenner 129). Krapp’s Last Tape is indeed not designed with innumerable characters. Instead Beckett makes use of the mechanical device. The tape recorder serves as a character and becomes an inherent companion to the ‘one actor’ who plays the spools. It opens in “a late evening in the future”. The beginning is quite similar to Endgame as the origin of the drama itself sets the tone play and indicates a typical ‘Beckettian present’ which conversely implies the future and begins as a pantomime. The play offers a new variation at the level of technique as the prop used here for creating drama is a ‘tape recorder’. Beckett has proved his control over language for forming a
new kind of theatre. The tape assists in transporting the man into his past and unfolds a intricate mesh of predicaments from his past.

The drama is shaped discourse ‘with’ and also ‘on’ the electronic equipment. Hence Beckett reduces the boundaries of the theatrical space. In so doing his manifests a new variation on stage. This digression startles readers and theatregoers by portraying Krapp (human), the tape recorder (electronic machine) and the spools (companions). All three are visible manifests of Krapp’s voice. These three forms the cast of Beckett’s play and the entire thread of action is acted through the recorded spools and the machine. The spools form a small set of stories and the dramatic action takes place through inanimate objects.

A human figure Performs pantomime
A machine Performs action
Few Spools Perform as companions of Krapp

The language is precisely shaped as it registers every pause, nuance, intonation in the text written and articulated. The minimum decor and stage setting of Beckett’s play does not curtail the audience from experiencing drama as language orchestration fulfils the need. Beckett’s bold experimentation with the tape recorder precipitates a new speech function. Language does not convey meaning in order to merely promote communication instead it becomes and enacts drama causing the action to flow swiftly and precisely.

The subtext of Krapp’s Last Tape available to the reader provides a wealth of information. Modern drama has exploited the convention of stage directions to a great extent. All prominent playwrights from Brecht to Pirandello, Beckett, Ionesco, O’Neill and Williams have used this dispensation to add meaning and dimension to their drama. Stage directions become indispensable and virtual subtexts. Often the dramatic quotient of the theatre experience rests on these cryptic notes that precede the actual monologue. They control the body language and the inherent action of the play and the major participants. This component of Krapp’s Last Tape can easily be divided into three parts on the basis of information about actor’s physical appearance, disposition, and action. It gives a concise insight into stage settings. The first part details the time, place and stage setting and introduces “a wearish old man: Krapp” to
the readers and outlines the play precisely by aural and visual imagery expanding the dimensions of Beckett’s theatre.

* A late evening in the future. 
* Krapp’s den. 
* Front centre a small table, the two drawers of which open towards audience. 
* Sitting at the table, facing front, i.e. across from the drawers, a wearish old man: Krapp (Beckett 215)

The play announces the time at the onset and adds aberrant dimension by the succinct reference of time to an “evening in the future”. This pronouncement in the play is genuinely absurd and prepares the readers to witness an absurd photographic album. The time is followed by the place and then preceded by the details of stage concluding with Krapp- the only animate inhabitant on stage. The second part of the subtext connects with the first.

*Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him. Rust black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious pockets. Heavy silver watch and chain. Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar. Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed.*


*Laborious walk.* (Beckett 215)

The subtext proceeds with a colourful portrayal of Krapp. The sub-structure in the subtext vividly defines and portrays Krapp. The portrayal of protagonist in the play is an antithesis and the reference to black shades denotes decay and futility. The language of subtext has innumerable adjectives for Krapp’s appearance. The adjectives assist language by being precise and accurate without lengthening it. The underlined words are adjectives chosen by Beckett for Krapp, his choice of words are distinctive and peculiar to this play.

“*Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him.**”

“*Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious pockets.***”

“*Heavy silver watch and chain.***”
“Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar.”

“Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed.”


“Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing.”

“Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation.”

“Laborious walk.”

Beckett has used the contrasts of colour by defining Krapp either with the shades of white or black. The specifications of Krapp have departures and variations. Language of subtext performs a kinetic experiment with colours. The black colour corresponds to decay and futility while “white face” is signified as a mark of mockery for the audience where the protagonist is entitled with no colour. These words define the personality of the individual and shape him as a clownish figure and a disjuncted man for the vaudeville pantomime in a “universe that was predominately grey” (Pattie 141).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLACK</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rusty black</td>
<td>Grimy white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rust black</td>
<td>Dirty white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other noticeable language peculiarity lies in the adjectives used for his attire. These references to adjectives also contain rhythm and pattern. The balance in the employment of words is sustained throughout as the negatives are followed by negatives leading to stable language equilibrium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrow trousers</th>
<th>Sleeveless waistcoat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacious pockets</td>
<td>Heavy silver watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirt- Open at neck, no collar</td>
<td>Boots- very narrow and pointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disordered</td>
<td>Unshaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near-sighted</td>
<td>Hard of hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracked Voice</td>
<td>Laborious walk</td>
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</table>
The language which Beckett has invented is essential for his plays. The sentences are concise but lucidly transport the intention and meaning of the dramatist. The picture of Krapp is drawn clearly in the minds of the readers. The later stage directions are followed by the aforesaid portrayal. The contrast is not only employed in Krapp’s depiction but for the stage as well as one part of stage is in “strong white light” while other in “darkness”.

adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of the stage in darkness (Beckett 215)

The final part of the subtext is a detailed account of Krapp’s actions. The language creates movement at the level of action with the illustration of Krapp completing “thirty three (33) operations, using twelve objects(12)” (Borriello 393). The monologic mime opens with a bundle of verbs which outline Krapp’s actions. These words are followed after “a moment motionless”. The action words are clubbed with four (4) motionless stances. This again represents contrasts by creating motionless moments followed by innumerable actions. Each verb is classified with an act and Beckett spells out every detail quite meticulously. The reference of Krapp being motionless is underlined and capitalized so that a clear picture of Krapp’s action can emerge. The words cited below replace physical action.

remains, A MOMENT MOTIONLESS, heaves, looks, fumbles, takes, puts, fumbles, takes, raises, chooses, gets up, moves, stoops, unlocks, peers, feels, takes, peers, puts, locks, unlocks, peers, feels, takes, peers, locks, puts, turns, advances, halts, strokes, peels, drops, puts, remains, MOTIONLESS, bites, turns, begins, treads, slips, falls, recovers, stoops, peers, pushes, resumes, finishes, returns, sits, remains, MOTIONLESS, heaves, takes, raises, chooses, gets up, moves, unlocks, takes, peers, locks, puts, advances, halts, strokes, peels, tosses, puts, remains, MOTIONLESS, puts, goes, comes, sits, lays, wipes, wipes, brings and rubs

Beckett use of banana as a motif may stand for the unfulfilled objectives. He is depicted on stage staring, peeling, skidding and finally eating a banana and this sets the tone of a vaudeville pantomime. Shimon Levy elaborates,

The banana— one of the more conspicuous props in the play — has a number of functions. It is a phallic symbol (“Plans for a less...[hesitates] ... engrossing
sexual life’); it suggests exploitation in throwing away the peel after having eaten and used the content; and probably most important, like Krapp’s two (or more) selves, the banana has an inside and an outside. Only at the end do we discover which of the selves is the peel and which is the content. The banana establishes Krapp’s contempt for the audience, but at the same time it evokes a sense to sympathy for the pathos and humor of weakness. (Levy 42-43)

More than a page is ascribed to stage directions and sets an accurate tone for the opening burlesque. Krapp’s Last Tape dramatizes a man’s irretrievable loneliness on stage. This assessment is made on the basis of Beckett’s language employment in the subtext. Jump rightly observes that “his characters do not use language to show that language does not work; they use it as a cover for fear and loneliness”. (Hinchcliffe 83)

Language in Beckett’s plays generate drama as an instrument ‘to think’ and ‘to express’. In Krapp’s Last Tape language permeates in numbers. They assist in producing drama in the instant play Beckett himself has said in How It is that “I always loved arithmetic it has paid me back in full” (Borriello 391). The drama is abundant with numerical synaesthesia. The reference to numbers exists in the text from the subtext till the end of the play. The detailed and elaborate subtext is stacked with numerical references. The subtext is employed initially for numerical references. These are both direct and indirect. Direct references correspond to numbers while indirect references make use of articles ‘a’ and ‘an’. These numbers are Beckett’s choice over words and abound with numerical coincidences. The direct and indirect numeric references incorporated by Beckett in the stage directions are given below:
The above tables neatly display the incorporation of numbers. The inclusion of the numeric is an intentional attempt for projecting drama with clarity. Beckett does so as a technique for putting forth each minute detail accurately without with resorting to language exercise. The direct and indirect numerical references are woven in the text with the intention of presenting clarity of thought and intention. The involvement of numerics is not confined to the stage directions at the time of play’s opening. The play opens with the monologue of Krapp.

Krapp: (Briskly). Ah! (He bends over ledger, turns the pages, finds the entry he wants, reads.) Box . . . three . . . spool . . . five. (he raises his head and
stares front. With relish.) Spool! (pause.) Spooool! (happy smile. Pause. He
bends over table, starts peering and poking at the boxes.) Box . . . three . . .
three . . . four . . . two . . . (with surprise) nine! good God! . . . seven . . . ah!
the little rascal! (He takes up the box, peers at it.) Box three. (He lays it on
table, opens it and peers at spools inside.) Spool . . . (he peers at the ledger) . .
five . . . (he peers at spools) . . . five . . . five . . . ah! the little scoundrel! (He
takes out a spool, peers at it.) Spool five. (He lays it on table, closes box three,
puts it back with the others, takes up the spool.) Box three, spool five. (He
bends over the machine, looks up. With relish.) Spooool! (happy smile. He
bends, loads spool on machine, rubs his hands.) Ah!...... (Beckett 216)

If the subtext is removed from Krapp’s first monologue then the speech will
be read as,

Krapp: Ah! Box . . . three . . . spool . . . five. Spool! Spooool! Box . . . three .
. . three . . . four . . . two . . . nine! good God! . . . seven . . . ah! the little rascal!
Box three. Spool... five . . . five . . . five . . . ah! the little scoundrel! Spool
five. Box three, spool five. Spooool! Ah!

The entire Krapp’s monologue has not been taken into account. The play
opens with indirect numerical references revolving around “a” and “an” in the
subtext. But the drama takes over by moving on and counting “three, four, and five”.
Krapp’s delight is visible in the articulation of “thrree” and “spooool” with variation
in spelling and sound. Here language drama blends the text and subtext which is
sustained with numbers, the mechanical device, retrospect and Krapp’s activity with
the spools.

Beckett’s predilection for numbers and especially for number three (3) is
apparent throughout the text. Gianni Manzella has aptly expresses that “Beckett’s
personal universe is rigorous and dominated by mathematical precision and
everything is minutely planned, calculated, thought-out in great detail, on the order of
mathematical asceticism”. (Manzella)

The primary themes of the play are also three “solitude, light-darkness and
solitude” (Gussow 180). The number three exists along with its multiples. The
protagonist is projected in triple ages, the narration of three stories and the three
women remembered. Beckett is disposed to use number three either as a whole or by being divisible or multiplied by three. The recurrence of triple perspective is evident throughout the course of the play. The dominance of number three continues in the description of Krapp- the triple-aged protagonist and pronouncement of palpable experiences of the three stages of Krapp. The time captured during the enactment of play reveals three life-stations of Krapp’s life. The three life-stations correspond to youth, middle age and old age. The ages are precise specifications of number three, representing sixty-nine (69), thirty-nine (39), twenty-seven (27) which are again multiples of three.

The plays stage directions conduct thirty-three (33) operations with twelve (12) objects. And three shades were used for Krapp “grimy white”, “dirty white” and “white”. Beside this the total number of colours referred in the text is nine (9) which is again a multiple of three (3). The nine colors referred in the text are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White</th>
<th>White face</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>A number of objects ball, plumage and perambulator is referred of black colour (Borriello 393).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>Grey hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Purple nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusty</td>
<td>“Rusty black” trousers and waistcoat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Shabby green coat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>One of those dirty brown roller affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysolite</td>
<td>The eyes! Like... (hesitates)... chrysolite!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Gathering holly, the red-berried</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The apparent reference to colours is indication of extended language dramaturgy. Language is not confined to words only, instead it extends its scope by being referential or representational. Numbers and colours both assist Beckett’s dramaturgy Beckett. The text abounds with triple perspective where repetitions are made with triple recurrences. The subtext itself repeats.
hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.) And the resolutions! (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.) To drink less, in particular. (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.) (Beckett 218)

The first dialogue of Krapp’s Last Tape abounds with the existence of drama in its subtext. The play opens with the counting of spools and moves to the remembrance of ‘black ball’ and ‘memorable equinox’. A close study of the subtext of Krapp’s first dialogue asserts that drama in Beckett takes its course with stage directions crafted in subtext. The subtext of first dialogue is assembled in systematic order so that it provides a clear picture of the drama it contains.

(Briskly).

(He bends over ledger, turns the pages, finds the entry he wants, reads.)

(hes raises his head and stares front. With relish.)

(pause.)

(happy smile. Pause. He bends over table, starts peering and poking at the boxes.)

(with surprise)

(He takes up the box, peers at it.)

(He lays it on table, opens it and peers at spools inside.)

(hes peers at the ledger)

(hes peers at spools)

(He takes out a spool, peers at it.)

(He lays it on table, closes box three, puts it back with the others, takes up the spool.)

(He bends over the machine, looks up. With relish.)

(happy smile. He bends, loads spool on machine, rubs his hands.)”

(He peers at ledger, reads entry at foot of page.)

(He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.)

(He peers again at ledger, reads.)

(He raises his head, broods, peers again at ledger, reads.)
(He peers closer.)

(He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.)

(Pause. He shrugs his head shoulders, peers again at ledger, reads.)

(he turns the page)

He raises his head, broods, bends over machine, switches on and assumes listening posture, i.e. leaning forward, elbows on table, hand cupping ear towards machine, face front."

The subtext focuses on creating drama with quick series of actions and activities of Krapp. The language of the dialogue is not suggestive of action in the play but the drama emerges through its subtext which acts as a dialogue and provides action to the text. The action is apparent with the underlined words. The words connect with each other as all of them are first form of the verb and placed in simple present tense. Beckett’s choice of words is an absolute indication of his intention to generate drama through language. The drama flourishes with language only. The words employed in the text take the role of multiple characters and do not let readers feel that they are witnessing the drama of a single man. There are forty-eight (48) action words which are used as verbs out which eight (8) are repeated while the rest are acted only once. Krapp himself performs action of multiple characters by bending and peering so oftenly that the minimalistic incorporation of characters is not felt. Beckett has bent and raised Krapp five times (5) each in the subtext of its first dialogue of the play while he peers ten times (10) in the subtext. The first dialogue takes almost three minutes for its enactment out of which hardly one minute goes into the dialogue the while rest is taken up by subtext. All the words play the role of action and drama. The focus has to be on the existence of following in the subtext of the first dialogue which is followed by the tape later. The words are entwined with drama in its language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bends</td>
<td>Five times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads</td>
<td>Five times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raises</td>
<td>Five times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stares</td>
<td>Three times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes</td>
<td>Three times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The *Krapp’s Last Tape* is a one-act play presented as a short pantomime and sometime referred to as dialogic. The drama is in the form of monologue if recordings are excluded from the text. The play gives a complete impression of a monologue. Factually also the first draft of *Krapp’s Last Tape* written in 1958 is entitled *Magee Monologue*. It was written for the Northern Irish actor Patrick Magee. Thus the structure can be regarded as an extended dramatic monologue of a man. Mel Gussow has referred to *Krapp’s Last Tape* in his book *Conversations with and about Beckett*,

It is one of the few Beckett pieces inspired by an actor, in this case Magee. Drawn by his own mellifluous voice, the author initially referred to the play as ‘Magee Monologue’. Beckett was also drawn by his own curiosity about the tape recorder, realising that he could use it as mechanical equivalent of a photographic album, as a way to transport the character back to his past. (Gussow 180)

The play is crafted as a collection of monologues. Dialogue in drama stands for conversation between two characters. Beckett’s character indulges in monologues. It could be defined as a soliloquy if the long winding chain of thought is apparently addressed to one’s self only. It ceases to remain a soliloquy with the revelation of another Krapp on the tape. The monologue depicts Krapp’s “time-hurt quandary” (Al-Udayli 189) on stage. This time-hurt quandary reduces the only human figure into tragic grotesquerie and shows the inconsistent urge to repeat the incorrigibles of habit, nostalgia and memory. The pantomime defines and outlines old Krapp’s habits and his past life incidences. These occurrences are preserved on the tape machine. The play unfolds the story of Krapp through his habit of recording his own voice-personae at each of his birthday. Therefore it creates ripples of action through tape dramaturgy. Each recording is distinct from the other. Being recording at different points of time with protracted intervals between them each presents a new image which is distinct from forlorn old man. The character of Krapp emerges through the spools so it would not be incorrect to assume that there are as many Krapp’s as there are spools in Krapp’s den. The entire action of the drama takes place is Krapp’s den, which offers a
profound vision though it is, “bleak, of a time trapped, palpable, human bind” (Al-Udayli 189).

The first dialogue of the play is preceded by the tape’s recording. The revelation of the new Krapp and the recording is chosen by himself thus it is in connection with his dialogue. His monologue ends on the note of,

Farewell to— (he turns the page)—love. (Beckett 217)

The drama lies in the set of hyphens used in the printed text “—” where love is hyphenated with farewell. The function of the hyphen is to connect but here farewell is connected to love. It is proved by Beckett that action is not necessarily required for promoting drama. Language itself is enough as a tool for generating the dramatic action on stage. This farewell to love is followed by the tape:

Tape: (strong voice, rather pompous, clearly Krapp's at a much earlier time.) Thirty-nine today, sound as a--(Settling himself more comfortable he knocks one of the boxes off the table, curses, switches off, sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground, winds tape back to the beginning, switches on, resumes posture.) Thirty-nine today, sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness, and intellectually I have niw every reason to suspect at the . . . (hesitates) . . . (Beckett 217)

Here the tape dramaturgy assists the language dramaturgy of the play by “deconstructing one individual into different voice personae” (Al-Udayli 190). The dramaturgy employed is the deconstruction of self through language experimentation. The tape is deconstructing a self into three separate personae. The action generates with the pressing of switch-on and switch-off button of the tape recorder. And the recovery of the recorded tapes creates drama on a dark stage lit by a faint light. It is yet another unique strategy of Beckettian discourse.

The drama originates through Beckett’s startling dramatic technique as now there are two Krapp’s in front of the audience and reader and this offers a new theatric experience to them. Krapp- at 69 who listens to Krapp- at 39, creates a palpable experience before both readers and the audience. This tape-machine as a prop successfully shapes the drama of the protagonist. The 39 year old voice personae of the tape is juxtaposed against the living and corporeal Krapp on stage. Beckett thus
paves the way for a novel stage experience which experiments with recorded sounds on a mechanical device and human presence.

Beckett *Krapp’s Last Tape* is unique in its dramaturgy. Though a one-act play it also incorporates and explores the technique of ‘a play within a play’. As a play within a play it unfolds the life and psyche of a man toying with his divided selves which correspond to various stages of his being. From the vantage point of sixty nine years Krapp views life in retrospect. Simultaneously multiple planes of comprehension and reality becomes operational creating drama at several levels. Language is the sole instrument of its transmission. The play is a heuristic process where Krapp’s monotony is equated with his three selves. The process incorporates a world of extremes that represent polar opposites during the three narrations. There are several instances where drama is interwoven into another drama. The first dialogue of Krapp assimilates the strategy of play within a play with reference to ‘mother’, ‘black ball’ and ‘equinox’.

...Ah! Mother at rest at last... Hm... The black ball... Black ball?... The dark nurse... Slight improvement in bowel condition... Hm... Memorable...what? Equinox, memorable equinox...

This sets the tone where language exhibits an intermingling of numerous short stories employing one word to peep into an entire dramatic situation. The first such story opens syntactically with the pronouncement of his age.

Tape: Thirty-nine today, sound as a — (Settling himself more comfortable he knocks one of the boxes off the table, curses, switches off, sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground, winds tape back to the beginning, switches on, resumes posture.) Thirty-nine today, sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness,... (Beckett 217)

The subtext assists in the narration, and the reaction of the present day Krapp is visible in the parenthetical details aligned to the monologue emanating from the stage. Here the functioning of two Krapp is visible at the same time and this parallel dramatic action is proof of Beckett’s dramaturgic excellence.

The narrative voice in the spool of the thirty-nine year old Krapp presents one level in the drama of his existence. Dramatic action emerges from the utterance of the
spool thirty-nine (39) where Krapp is reliving his unrealised past. There are two actions which move on stage and Beckett juxtaposes the two planes of dramatic reality at the same point of time. The action stated by Krapp -39 refers to ‘the songs of Old Miss McGlome and eyes of Bianca in Kedar street’. Drama in the tape-recording takes its course at two levels: first as a play within a play where the recorded recollections are disclosed with nostalgia. On the second level drama is generated with the present Krapp on stage. His reactions and facial expressions add to the drama of the situation. There are several instances in the tape’s recording where Beckett has created spaces. These are categorically crafted by Beckett for theatrical action. The drama is stimulated with the ‘subtext’ and the placement of extended dash ‘—’. Following are the places where dashes and subtexts form dramatic units running parallel to the drama created by the mechanical device.

“Thirty-nine today, sound as a —” ['extended dash’ is used as a device for generating drama]

“(Settling himself more comfortable he knocks one of the boxes off the table, curses, switches off, sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground, winds tape back to the beginning, switches on, resumes posture.)”

“(...hesitates...)

“crest of the wave — or thereabouts.”

“(...hesitates...)

“dust has—when all my dust has settled”

“(Pause. Krapp closes his eyes briefly).”

“... tribute to her eyes. Very warm. I suddenly was them again. (Pause.)Incomparable! (Pause.) Ah well... (Pause.)”

“ I often find them— (Krapp switches off, broods, switches on) —a help before...”

“(...hesitates...)

“(Brief laugh in which Krapp joins), (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins),(Brief laugh of Krapp alone)”

“— (brief laugh)—”

And

“(Prolonged laugh in which Krapp)”
The aforesaid instances illustrate how language becomes a perfect apparatus for dramatizing effects. Beckett has liberated theatre from constrains and limitations. Here the visually seen Krapp stays quiet furnishing performance space to sound. This indirect interaction between the machine and Krapp foregrounds the existential quandary which comprehensively dominates the proscenium. The incorporation of the extended dash as a tool for drama is carried further as Krapp resumes his tape. The tape recommences with the dash again and tells a story of the house “on the canal where mother lay a-dying”. The dash is repeated four times and this exercise is merged with Krapp’s action where he brings the dictionary to search for the meaning of “viduity”

“Tape: —back on the year”

“and the —[KRAPP, switches off, winds back tape a little, bends his ear closer to machine, switches on]— a dying, after her long viduity, and then—”

The play abounds with references to person and places which exhibits the strategy within a play. As the recording is played the many personas of Krapps start emerging with multiple references and stories. The tape chronicles the monotony in the life experiences of a poor, pitiable and impoverished individual. The monologue is of an old man’s dialogues with his ‘previous selves’. The drama is interwoven in the monologues of Krapp and tape recordings. It is triggered between the two-mode narrative structures. The tape is re-wound often and leads to different narrations with diverse tones and moods. These assorted narrative voices assert drama and does not let the reader feel that they are experiencing a stage occupied by a single character. These domains are in conformity with the dramatic action and movement. The diverse narrations in the speech of Krapp-39 in the recording of spool are given below in chronological order of their occurrence.

Textual illustration of narration within narration present in the recordings of the Tape-

- “(Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again)— great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propellor, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most.”
• *Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*—unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire—”

• “*Krapp curses loader, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*—my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.”

Beckett’s heroes are mostly afflicted with diseases, thus they correspond to the idea of human failures and manifest the playwrights ‘physical theme’. The play demonstrates Krapp’s unique relationship with the tape as he hugs his recording machine. The play is a dramatic experience of time and unfolds the grotesqueries of human corporeality. The movement of Krapp’s mind in time ‘station to station’ represent his restlessness and desire to seek peace. This shows ‘man’s inability’ as time moves beyond all ambits of human experience. The ‘stations’ or situations illustrate Krapp’s activities and interest “writing, dining, drinking, sex, ambition, aspirations, vision, lyricism and thoughts of magnum opus”(Al-Udayli 215). The play is an exhibition of futility and this exercise is dramaturgically presented through many disjunctions. The act of winding the tape forward and back, stories within are replayed and repeated. The re-run of specific moments focus on Krapp’s interest and importance in life. The lines about his personal moments are repeated three times.

Events in the tape are played to recollect his past. The reheard lines articulate layers of memory related to personal moments with ‘her’ in a self-persuading tone. Repetition engenders drama at three levels and each time the lines are followed by three diverse subtexts. The tape empowers Beckett to delve into Krapp’s character at two time stations simultaneously. The visible at 69 hears Krapp at 39 and reconnects with his former life.

It is apt to conclude with Hugh Kenner’s assessment of Beckett,

The Beckett books and plays repeatedly public confessions by men who have cut themselves off and have nothing left but the language to fondle, old language, new language. (Kenner 135)
Work Cited


