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Self as a Failed Project in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*

Samuel Beckett'in *Krapp'ın Son Bandı* Oyununda Başarısız Bir Proje Olarak Benlik

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Abstract

This study aims to provide an analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* with reference to the concepts of memory, subjectivity, and selfhood, arguing that the self is a constructed idea rather than something inherent to the subject as such. Taking the monologic and dialogic qualities of the play as its point of departure, the study examines the character Krapp in light of his project of archiving his past selves in the form of voice recordings he makes over the years. In the play, it is evident that by using these recordings as a tool for fashioning himself a consistent self, Krapp ends up creating a breach between his past and present selves instead, thereby failing in his project. Focusing also on the role of time and memory in the construction of the self, the study draws the conclusion that the play succeeds in revealing the discontinuous and inconsistent nature of any such process in and through Beckett's manipulation of the techniques of characterisation associated with realist drama.

Keywords

Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, character, memory, self and subjectivity, Twentieth Century British Drama

Öz

Bu çalışma, Samuel Beckett'in *Krapp'ın Son Bandı* oyununu bellek, öznelik ve benlik kavramları çerçevesinde inceleyerek benliğin özneye içkin bir şey olmaktan ziyade inşa edilmiş bir fikir olduğu görüşünü savunmaktadır. Oyunun monolojik ve diyalojik özelliklerini çıkış noktası olarak alan çalışma, Krapp karakterini geçmiş benliklerini yıllar içerisinde yaptığı ses kayıtları aracılığıyla arşivleme projesi bağlamında incelemektedir. Krapp'ın kendine istikrarlı bir benlik oluşturma aracı olarak seçtiği ses kayıt yönteminin, amacının aksine, geçmiş ve şimdiki benlikleri arasında bir yarık oluşturduğu, bu nedenle de projenin başarısızlıkla sonuçlandığı oyunda açıkça görülmektedir. Zamanın ve belleğin benliğin inşasındaki rolüne de odaklanan çalışma, Beckett'in bu oyununda gerçekçi tiyatro teknikleri üzerinde yaptığı oynamalar yoluyla bahsi geçen inşa sürecinin süreksiz ve tutarsız doğasını yansıtma konusunda başarıya ulaştığı sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Samuel Beckett, Krapp'ın Son Bandı, karakter, bellek, benlik ve öznelik, Yirminci Yüzyıl Britanya Tiyatrosu

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Introduction

In *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958[1]), one of Beckett's shorter stage plays, the character Krapp holds a similar position to the characters in the playwright's earlier plays, such as Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* (1952), and Clov and Hamm in *Endgame* (1957). In a way that differs from the fragments of characters in his later plays, who are structured with no apparent purpose of realistic representation, such as M, W1 and W2 in *Play* (1963), Auditor and Mouth in *Not I* (1972), and Listener, voice A, voice B and voice C in *That Time* (1975), as well as W and V in *Rockaby* (1981), Krapp emerges as a more relatable character to the reader/spectator who is familiar with the mechanics of realist drama. Being the only character in the play, he is depicted as an old man who creates an archive of voice recordings of his past as he wants to see himself in the future but then remembers those past selves to the degree of "being" them again.

By focusing on the ways in which the play problematizes the concept of memory without disrupting the corporeal existence of the dramatic character on the stage, this study demonstrates that Krapp's use of a tape recorder as a tool for his project is the thing that condemns his project to failure from the outset. As his recorded voices create a clear-cut separation between his past and present selves, it results in a kind of self-reflection, self-assessment, and an identity crisis in Krapp that forces him to face his various selves. This, in turn, opens the question of retaining one's identity throughout a lifetime. Thus, the "fiction" surrounding the character's identity, as well as the concept of identity itself, is shattered.

Voices in Beckett's Plays: Monologues/Dialogues

Lawley groups *Krapp's Last Tape* together with Beckett's two other major plays for theatre, *Happy Days* (1961) and *Play* (1963), in that they all develop around the idea of monologue.[2] He argues that this is not necessarily due to the number of speaking voices in those plays, but rather, to the "radical treatment … of the isolated consciousness" in every one of them.[3] Even so, however, each one of these three plays includes more than one voice, even if other speakers are not bodily present on the stage as in the case of *Krapp's Last Tape*.

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1 The dates given in parentheses throughout the study refer to the composition date of the play in question.

2 Here, Lawley raises the issue of grouping for Beckett's dramatic works. Stating that whereas the plays composed during the 1970s and 1980s can be rightfully categorized under the heading "late plays," *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are better grouped together as "longer plays" rather than "earlier" ones. Furthermore, as he proposes that the three plays mentioned above can be grouped together forming a "micro-sequence," he bases this suggestion not merely on their chronologic proximity, but rather, on the way they all are structured around a monological core. See Paul Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 88.

3 Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," 88.

In *Happy Days*, for instance, Winnie stands buried in a mound up to her waist (up to her neck in Act Two), going on with her daily life and commenting on various things. Even if she has Willie, he speaks only occasionally in the course of the play in juxtaposition with her speeches, which make up the majority of it. *Play*, similarly, has three speakers, namely, W2, W1 and M, whose bodies are placed in three identical urns on the stage so that only their heads are visible. In the play, each speaker performs her or his own speech about the love affair they had in an indefinite past, in bits and pieces following one another or, at times, simultaneously, but by no means forming a dialogue whatsoever. In a similar fashion, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, Krapp listens to various monologues from the voice of his younger self, disrupting the recorded voice with his occasional comments and rendering either a dialogue or a monologue impossible as such.

There is, however, more to the reason why monologue is both unattainable and inevitable in these plays. In addition to the way monologues are formed in and through interruptions by various voices, there are also other elements that complicate the monologue. In *Happy Days*, for instance, "Winnie [has] her quotations and 'voices,' and the inquisitor light of *Play* interlaces no less than three monologues into a single brutal relay."[4] In *Krapp's Last Tape*, on the other hand, the multiplication of voices has a more concrete basis, namely, Krapp's tape recorder. As a result, even though the dramatic text of the play is written to be performed by only one actor or actress, its verbal structure is based upon two voices rather than one, belonging to two speakers denoted by "Krapp" and "Voice." Therefore, the play is rendered as a dialogue on the surface, or, in terms of its form, while what underlies the structure of the play is a loose combination of various monologues rather than a dialogue between two voices. By thus complicating the concept of monologue in terms of its form, these plays at the same time offer a more complex and unstable understanding of subjectivity.[5] This is due to the fact that as the subject is conceived as a totality, its onstage representations are expected to be monologic, as well. The problematization of the monologue, therefore, leads to the problematization of the unified and consistent subject.[6]

The action in *Krapp's Last Tape* focuses mainly on the daily routine of an elderly man, who does not quite seem to enjoy his life. His actions are limited to eating bananas, drinking alcohol, and most importantly, listening to the records he has made over the past years, on his birthdays, which he refers to as "awful occasion[s]."[7] When the play begins, he is preparing to "celebrate"

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4 Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," 88.

5 Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," 88.

6 Here, a comparison could be drawn between the way Beckett structures the monologues in these plays and the role monologues, or soliloquies, play in Early Modern British Drama, such as in the plays of Kyd, Marlowe and Shakespeare. In both, the differing concepts of monologue run parallel to the changing tendencies in the understanding of subjectivity between the two periods. Whereas the Early Modern period witnesses the rise of the subject as uniform, the period when Beckett composes his plays is when that subject is in a process of dissolving. This comparison, of course, can be extended to include the changes the concept of character undergoes in those periods.

7 Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (Faber and Faber, 2006), 217.

his sixty-ninth birthday. Therefore, alongside other daily activities, he is about to make a new tape that will summarize his past year.

Even though little action is presented on the stage, this is countered by the multiplication of Krapp through the records, and as the play preserves its inherent monologic quality, it evolves into the form of a dialogue between Krapp—the senior present self—and his younger self or, as Brater puts it, "a special duet" in which "Krapp-on-tape plays 'voice' and Krapp-on-stage plays 'listener.'"[8] That is why, for instance, Malkin calls it a "dialogue between living remembrance, present and past: Man and his Memory."[9] Arguing for the centrality of the monologic quality in the play, however, Lawley coins the term "dual monologue" to describe the way Beckett includes multiple voices in his various plays, from *Krapp's Last Tape* onwards, while at the same time preserving the monologue in them.[10]

This technique is one Beckett keeps employing in his later plays including *Footfalls* (1975), *That Time* (1975), and *Rockaby* (1980), in which the number of actors on the stage is limited to one, but there is still an apparent dialogue devoid of any communicational value with at least one outer voice. So, the multiplicity of actors which support or carry the action through language in traditional drama, as well as in certain early plays of Beckett, such as *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *Endgame* (1957), is replaced with voices without corporeal existence, which simply make use of language without appearing on the stage.[11] Even though this technique is frequently used by Beckett as a means of embodiment for the supposed inner voices of his characters and in this way creates and multiplies the speakers, in *Krapp's Last Tape* it is used for a different purpose. In the former cases, for example in his radio play *Embers* (1959) and the plays he wrote for television such as *Eh Joe* (1965)*, Ghost Trio* (1975) and . . . *but the clouds* . . . (1976), Beckett focuses on what Brater calls the "physical materialization of the inner voice," which has an elemental function in his writing.[12] As the voices supposedly belonging to onstage characters are represented distinctly from their so-called owners, the present is expanded in a state of self-observation and commenting on behalf of the characters, which, however, results in the fragmentation of their subjectivity, which calls their roles as characters into question, in return. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, however, the meeting of the two Krapps takes place with thirty years lying between them. Hence, the past and the present are compressed together, compared and contrasted, undermining the idea that the subject is a unified and coherent being. This process first multiplies Krapp as both a subject and a character, subsequently engendering challenges to their established definitions.

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8 Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 10.

9 Jeanette R. Malkin, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), 45.

10 Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," 89.

11 Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater*, 10.

12 Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater*, 166.

It is therefore possible to assert that one of the things that gives *Krapp's Last Tape* its distinct place, even among Beckett's other dramatic works, is its making a dialogue between various selves through the personal history of the subject possible, by means of the technology of the time. Here, Krapp's tape recorder functions as an archival device or as a memory aid. Even so, however, as Krapp listens to the record made by his thirty-year-younger self it, becomes clear that the concept of one single unchanging self, maintained through one's lifetime is an idea often taken for granted. Even if certain personal traits remain the same, people may change radically in terms of their appreciation of the past and their approach towards the past, let alone the way they feel about the implications of the concepts of the past and the future.

In compliance with the changing nature of the "self," in *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett disturbs this presupposition regarding the oneness and unchangeability of the subject. Beckett achieves this by letting the voice recording of the younger Krapp talk about his memories and aspirations in detail in his own present, whereas the older Krapp does not give much detail about these concerns in his own present. As a result, Krapp's recorded voice achieves the totality of a subject as distinct from himself, equal to his own, if not more. Moreover, if it is possible to call Krapp a character in its traditional sense, it becomes possible to position Voice as a character, as well. Here it should be noted that in the course of the play, 'Voice' becomes the name of an entity, an agent in itself, instead of merely denoting something that belongs to Krapp, the supposed main character of the play. For this reason, comparing it to other possible names which Beckett could have given to Voice with reference to its relationship with the older Krapp, such as "Younger Krapp" or "Voice of the Younger Krapp," could give a better insight into the significance of his choice.

Krapp and His Project: Archiving the Self

In an interview, Beckett reveals how the idea of writing *Krapp's Last Tape* first occurred to him: "I wrote *Krapp's Last Tape* for Patrick Magee. I hadn't met him, but I heard his voice reading texts for the BBC Third Programme and was so impressed that I wanted to write a monologue for him. That's how *Krapp* began."[13] As he wrote the play, Beckett had the Irish actor Magee[14] in mind; hence, the play was initially called "Magee Monologue."[15] Granted that this is a minor detail, its significance lies in the way it shows how Beckett's aim was, from the very start, to compose a monologue, and to do it to be performed in a specific way by a specific voice. His focus on the

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13 Quoted in Cathy Courtney, *Jocelyn Herbert: A Theatre Workbook* (Art Books International, 1993), 219.

14 Often considered Beckett's favourite actor, Magee would later play Hamm in the 1964 London production of *Endgame*. See John Fletcher, *About Beckett: The Playwright and the Work* (Faber and Faber, 2003), 44.

15 Ronan McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59.

actor's voice, at the same time, is indicative of his interest in the concept of voice in theatre from the late fifties onwards.[16]

In terms of its opening scene, on the other hand, *Krapp's Last Tape* seems like a play that can easily satisfy the expectations of the ordinary audience in terms of the visual images it presents: an old man sitting at a table in strong white light, facing the audience.[17] In this sense, Krapp differs from Beckett's other characters of drama, as he is "rooted in a familiar world whose every detail is realistically plausible."[18] In line with that, the first stage directions name the place "Krapp's den," after his own name, and describes the "wearish old man" in the following way:

> 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.
> White face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair. Unshaven.
> Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing.
> Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation.
> Laborious walk.[19]

Not having quite a decent look, though, he still possesses a "distinct character, a discernible story, a room, a name."[20] Similar to the way characters are built in realist drama, his physical appearance has a descriptive value which makes further contribution to his onstage subjectivity, as well as to the way the play communicates with the audience both on textual and performative levels. That Krapp has a "heavy silver watch and chain," of which he makes frequent use in the course of the play, for instance, highlights the gap between the sense of control he once thought he had, and planned to have over his own life in the future, which, in his current way of living, has now turned into a set of emptied-out rituals:

> Immediately after Krapp looks at his pocket-watch, he begins his birthday ritual of eating bananas, drinking wine and whisky, fumbling through reel tapes and listening to old tape recordings of past birthdays. This initial act of looking at his pocket-watch begins the play and establishes its structure

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16 The various plays Beckett wrote for radio can also be seen as proof of this interest. His works for radio include *All That Fall* (1956), *Embers*, *Rough for Radio I* (1961) and *II* (early 1960s), *Words and Music* (1961), *Cascando* (1962), *The Old Tune* (1963). For further information on Beckett's radio plays and his use of this medium, see Joseph S. O'Leary, "Beckett and Radio," *Journal of Irish Studies* 23 (2008).

17 Its setting, according to Lawley, alongside the familiar way Krapp looks as the play's only physically present character, and the way the "situation invites dramatic treatment," namely, an old man's retrospection of his past, explains why critics consider *Krapp's Last Tape* an easier play to appreciate in comparison to many of Beckett's other plays. See Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," 89.

18 Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton University Press, 1974), 167.

19 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 215.

20 Malkin, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*, 43.

> and themes. When Krapp looks at his pocket-watch in the middle and towards the end of the play, he unknowingly reveals that he is controlled by time and paralysed by the past.[21]

Thus, serving as the initiator of the minimal action in the play, Krapp looks at his watch, providing himself with a reference point in time for the rest of his actions as well. Moreover, it also shows that he takes the linear, measurable concept of time for granted, which can also be deduced from the way he still keeps an account of his birthdays and age. Such an understanding of time is also reminiscent of the way Heidegger differentiates between "Time," which remains unrelatable to humans in their daily lives, and time as it is known, also called "public time." According to him, "one knows only public time that … belongs to everyone," which is "levelled down."[22] It is in constant reckoning with time and "lives with its watch in its hand," proving its inauthentic relation to Time through its questioning with "hows" and "how muchs."[23] For Krapp keeps no company in his den and rarely goes out, his deep commitment to public time, with reference to which social life is organised, can also be seen to have turned into a habit, all meaning of which has been emptied out. He still possesses an understanding of time that implies one's being related to the outside world and therefore requires timekeeping; however, he has no use of time as such.

The irony created in this way is further intensified through his clownish or vagrant looks and attire described in the stage directions: white unshaven face, messy hair, purple nose, rusty short trousers, grimy shirt, no collar, pointed large size shoes.[24] This detailed description of Krapp's physical appearance, alongside the image created by it, are the things that render him more similar to the characters in Beckett's earlier plays, rather than to the character-like figures in his later plays, as mentioned above. In line with that, it should also be noted that both *Krapp's Last Tape* and the earlier plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* dwell on the effects of time on the human body, which can simply be considered a gradual wearing away. Though their ages are not always specified as in the case of Krapp, the characters in those plays all give the sense of having lived long lives of hardship and disease. The case being so, however, the plays do not aim to show the passage of time in a cause-effect relationship like the plays in the realist vein do, but instead, present time as frozen at a point, at any point, with all its effects condensed at that point as if everything is happening all at once, has already happened and will go on happening as well. In the second act of *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, Vladimir is amazed at how Pozzo could possibly become blind in one day and asks him insistently when it happened, to which Pozzo violently answers: "Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden

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21 Katherine Weiss, *The Plays of Samuel Beckett* (Methuen Drama, 2013), 31.

22 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (State University of New York Press, 1996), 389.

23 Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1992), 15E.

24 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 215.

from them too."[25] Not having a proper answer, however, Vladimir then learns that Lucky has become dumb, as well:

> VLADIMIR: Before you go tell him to sing!
> POZZO: Who?
> VLADIMIR: Lucky.
> POZZO: To sing?
> VLADIMIR: Yes. Or to think. Or to recite.
> POZZO: But he's dumb.
> VLADIMIR: Dumb!
> POZZO: Dumb. He can't even groan.
> VLADIMIR: Dumb! Since when?
> POZZO: [Suddenly furious.] Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?[26]

Similarly, then, the description of Krapp as having problems in his eyes, ears, and voice shows that he, too, may go blind, deaf, and dumb one day. That he walks with difficulty, too, is reminiscent of Hamm's inability to walk, alongside Clov's inability to sit in *Endgame*.[27]

What brings Krapp closer to the questioning attitude of Vladimir concerning the passing of time, on the other hand, lies in the way he chooses a tape recorder as his only company, with which he records his own voice on a yearly basis and then listens to those old recordings. This is because the tapes, together with the ledger in which he writes down their content, are ideally the perfect archive, referring to which one can expect to find the exact answer to the question "when."

Moreover, as Malkin suggests, by embodying the concept of memory in the physicality of a tape recorder, a "mechanical, material box" that stores the past for later use, Beckett presents a certain understanding of the way memory functions, in and through its relationship with the idea of selfhood: "Memory in a box means memory localized within a concrete, material form. No longer elusive or diffuse, memory seems self-contained, redeemable, very present, depending for its 'use' on finding the right reel, twisting the right lever, locating the desired section of tape."[28] Such an approach towards memory, then, goes hand in hand with the view of the subject as a stable being that maintains its unity and coherence through time. It appears that it was a similar view which was adopted by Krapp as he set out on his project in the first place: to record his life as it is, not considering the fact that all his records would be inevitably partial and open to manipulation by his own self. Thus, being after an objective observation of himself in the totality of his life, he chooses not a person to accompany him in the process, but a tape recorder to aid him, possibly

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25 Samuel Beckett, "*Waiting for Godot*," in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (Faber and Faber, 2006), 80.
26 Beckett, "*Waiting for Godot*," 83.
27 Similarly, in the first novel of Beckett's *Three Novels*, *Molloy*, Molloy has a bad leg and a worsening other leg, which, again, makes it impossible for him either to walk properly or to sit.
28 Malkin, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*, 44.

because it is impartial and much more dependable as an archive in comparison to the memory of a human being. Eventually, archiving his life yearly could possibly present his own self to himself, as a consistent self in its totality.

The play, on the other hand, juxtaposing Krapp's recorded past self with his present self as distinct from one another, counters this idea of a unified self from the very beginning. As the supposed unity of the subject is brought under the constant scrutiny of temporal change in the course of the play, the dividedness inherent in the subject becomes apparent and points to "the impossibility of perceiving the self without turning the self into an object — and thus the impossibility of unity."[29] In a way, memory, considered the faculty that endows the subject with unity, now runs the risk of breaking it irremediably apart.

Here, the paradox also lies in the way Krapp, by putting his project into action, has transformed into a partial writer, or editor of his own self, rather than an objective observer of it. Lawley calls this attitude authorial, in that "on the tape he (re)imagines his past, and on the stage he edits into his present."[30] Thus, his initial attempt to create a history of his own life as it was, turns into, or has always been without his knowledge, an act of construction rather than recording. Moreover, he adopts this attitude not only as he records but also as he listens to his younger self: "Krapp… edits out certain memories and emphasises others in an effort to construct who he *was* as well as who he *is*. The activity of listening to and editing the past allows him to rewrite the past and the present."[31] His efforts to attain a unified self through recording and listening to his own life, nevertheless, turn into a matter of writing and editing it, shaping and reshaping the events he picks and chooses, or in his own words, "separating the grain from the husks."[32] Therefore, as he "seeks a way beyond the architecture of inscriptions that tacitly promises mastery over the past," he ends up "disintegrat[ing] his (and the audience's) sense of his identity."[33] In other words, even though his memory aid, the tape recorder, his archive, does not fail Krapp in his project, his desperate attempts to reach a compromise between his past and present selves bring about this result.

The traces of a similar approach towards memory could be followed back to Beckett's study on Proust, in which he also discloses his own views on the concepts of time, memory, and their relationship with subjectivity. In this work, he argues that the subject is undeniably and inevitably caught in the passage of time, a process that leaves permanent effects Beckett calls "deformations":

> Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday. A calamitous day,

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29 Malkin, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*, 45-46.
30 Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," 91.
31 Weiss, *The Plays of Samuel Beckett*, 35.
32 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 217.
33 Robert Reginio, "Samuel Beckett, the Archive, and the Problem of History," in *Samuel Beckett: History, Memory, Archive*, ed. Seán Kennedy and Katherine Weiss (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 112.

> but calamitous not necessarily in content. The good or evil disposition of the object has neither reality nor significance.[34]

Regardless of how positive or negative the experiences may prove for the subject over time, then, as time incessantly changes, or better, redefines its mode of existence, the subject keeps turning into various others, leaving the former ones behind. Drawing a line between who a subject was yesterday and who it is today – and, needless to say, who it will be tomorrow – Beckett argues that in each period the subject will have varying desires. Therefore, it is meaningless to expect a feeling of utter satisfaction upon reaching a desire, for time has passed, and now the subject has become another person whose needs and wishes have already changed, or as Beckett puts it, "The subject has died – and perhaps many times – on the way."[35] Thus, it is possible to deduce that the memory of the subject is what provides and preserves any possibility of connection among those various selves, through a remembrance of the past that results in a state of chronic sadness in the subject, rooted back in a constant feeling of being fallen far from its aspirations which are never to be fulfilled.

Return of the Archived: Meeting of Two Krapps

What Krapp goes through in his "den," especially on this day of his sixty-ninth birthday, represents the aforementioned idea on the stage. At the beginning of the play, after a moment of motionless silence, the first thing he does is break the silence by letting out a sigh, then take a look at his watch, which, as discussed above, will prove quite an unnecessary action in the course of the play, for he does not live a life which requires precision in terms of time. Even so, this gesture becomes the thing that sets him in motion. He takes an envelope out of his capacious pockets, then puts it back as if the time for it has not arrived yet. After that, he finds the keys to one of the drawers of his table, opens it, and then starts looking for something inside it, which turns out to be a large banana, which he devours meditatively. His movements convey a sense of slowness, which is implied through their repetitive and over-meticulous nature, and which, for instance, can be understood from the way he keeps his drawers locked in his place where he lives alone, as well as the need he feels to look at his watch before doing anything else. Such movements also have a ritualistic quality, which, apparently having lost their initial functions, have now turned into a way of passing his day for Krapp. Hence, he takes out a second banana following the same pattern of movement. Then, it seems, he comes up with an idea of a different kind of activity, which includes going upstage, out and away from his light, having a drink there, and then coming back with a ledger in his hand. Having properly prepared himself for the occasion, he speaks for the first time in the play:

> [Briskly.] Ah! [He bends over ledger, turns the pages, finds the entry he wants, reads.] Box … thrree … 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 … thrree … thrree …

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34 Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (Grove Press, 1978), 2-3.

35 Beckett, *Proust*, 3.

> four … two … [with surprise] nine! good God! "… seven … ah! the little rascal! [He takes up box, peers at it.] Box thrree. [He lays it on table, opens it and peers at spools inside.] Spool … [he peers at 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 thrree, spool five. [He bends over the machine, looks up. With relish.] Spooool! [Happy smile. He bends, loads spool on machine, rubs his hands.][36]

The stage directions provided in this part make it clear that Krapp takes it slow, looks happy doing it, and squeezes out each moment so as to get every bit of "flavour" out of it. "Krapp is measuring out his life … with bananas and whiskey and, more importantly, a tape recorder and a collection of audio diary entries."[37] As long as he is within the limits of his habits and definition, then, he seems to feel calm and content. When, however, he goes through some entries in the ledger and sees that he does not have the slightest clue to which they might be referring, such as "black ball" and "memorable equinox," confusion replaces his good mood gradually. This is due to the fact that these entries the younger Krapp considered worth recording have become unidentifiable and therefore uncontrollable for Krapp with the passing of time, if not irrelevant at all. Ironically enough, the entry named "memorable equinox" has lost its reference in Krapp's mind. Therefore, the material, though archived properly in the tape and recorded in the ledger, does not in itself have the ability to perform the duties of Krapp's memory. As these entries have lost their meaning for him, they remain outside the controllable field that Krapp considers a safe zone and feels comfortable within, thus he vehemently refuses to listen to them and insists on skipping them. Only upon coming across the part he seems to aim for, "Farewell to love," does he begin listening to the tape.[38]

Following the talk given above, which includes nothing but fragments of exclamations and his reading of the entries in the ledger, however, comes the part where Krapp's thirty-year younger self, introduced in the play as "Tape," and embodied, indeed, within the concrete boundaries of a tape, commences his talk. As given in the stage directions, the voice clearly belongs to Krapp at a much younger age, strong and pompous.[39] Instead of the older Krapp's bits and pieces of talk, the younger one sounds like he rather likes to talk about himself, thus he relates to his past year, as well as his plans for the future, in detail:

> Thirty-nine today, sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness, and intellectually I have now every reason to suspect at the… [hesitates] … crest of the wave–or thereabouts. … Have just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man with my condition. [Vehemently.] Cut'em out! [Pause.] The new light above my table is a great improvement.

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36 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 216.

37 Dustin Anderson, "Krapp's Last Tape and Mapping Modern Memory," in *The Plays of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Katherine Weiss (Methuen Drama, 2013), 180.

38 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 217.

39 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 217.

> With all this darkness round me I feel less alone. [Pause] In a way. [Pause.] I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to … [hesitates] … me. [Pause.] Krapp.[40]

As observed in the extract above, the younger Krapp cares about the way he uses language as well and enjoys using elaborate language even if he is only making this record for himself. Much as the older Krapp shows some obvious signs of change such as a physically aged body, slower movements and an unwillingness to create new memories in the end, considering the way his younger counterpart mentions his banana addiction, the light above his table, and his loneliness, it is possible to see that there are also certain personality traits Krapp retains as he gets older, providing the connection between these two selves. As the younger Krapp comments on one of his earlier records to which he listened recently, the older Krapp joins him:

> Just been listening to an old year, passages at random. I did not check in the book, but it must be at least ten or twelve years ago. … 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 of KRAPP alone.][41]

However, it is not quite clear whether the older Krapp joins the younger Krapp's laugh because he agrees with his younger self's past aspirations or because he senses the irony created by the high self-confidence in the voice he hears, whose "aspirations" and "resolutions" sound just as ridiculous today.

In the following sections of the record, the entries Krapp does not remember and finds obscure in the ledger, namely "black ball" and "memorable equinox," get clarified. His experience with the ball seems to have left a strong mark on the younger Krapp – strong enough to make him include it in his yearly record, and it is part of the section in which he relates his mother's death. Just as his mother passes out and he watches as the blinds of her room are taken down, he happens to see a white dog and has an epiphanic experience, which he describes as:

> I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. [Pause.] Moments. Her moments, my moments. [Pause.] The dog's moments. [Pause.] In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. [Pause.] I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. [Pause.] I might have kept it. [Pause.] But I gave it to the dog.[42]

Nevertheless, this moment that the younger Krapp experiences and describes so intensely, together with the sensation caused by the black ball, which makes it impossible to be forgotten, as he thinks, is now completely erased from the older Krapp's memories. In a similar vein, what was mentioned in the ledger as "memorable equinox" is simply of no importance for the old man who Krapp is today. Even though the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp describes that night as "never to be forgotten" when he suddenly "saw the whole thing," the long-expected "vision," and says that this event is

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40 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 217.
41 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 218.
42 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 220.

what he should be recording so as not to forget it in the future, his older counterpart just gets impatient to skip it and winds the tape forward in order to reach the part summarised in the ledger as "Farewell to love."[43] Commenting on the scene, Reginio observes that "[o]ur adherence to narratives that project an archivable 'meaning' is evidenced by our frustration at the old Krapp switching off at the threshold of the revelation of his 'miracle.'"[44] The way Krapp's reaction affects the spectator/reader, therefore, could be considered an intentional bathos on behalf of Beckett.

The younger Krapp, in an attempt to protect the memory of those events from the effects of time on himself, entrusts them to tapes. Even if the tapes initially seem to be ideal for this purpose as objective keepers of the past, however, Krapp's changing aspirations, manipulating the archive, nullify this objectivity. The play, according to Lawley, is "concerned with the continuous *construction* of individual identity in the face of an encroaching threat" which is "[t]ime, impalpable yet ubiquitous, not ever-present only but because it eats away every presence."[45] In this context, the fact that the younger Krapp made voice recordings of his life reveals his awareness of a possible failure on the part of his memory. The precaution he took against this threat, on the other hand, points to his confidence in the unchanging quality of a subject through time. In other words, much as he was aware that he could one day unintentionally forget those important moments, he did not reckon with the possibility of his not wanting to remember them.

Furthermore, Reginio states that "memories specifically voiced into a tape recorder in order to be listened to and understood later are 'written' under the shadow of forgetting; they are inscribed in the face of an impending sense of oblivion."[46] Furthermore, this comment is reminiscent of Derrida's statement that the archive is inherently paradoxical, for it requires "consignation in an *external place*" that "assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression" in return.[47] What is more, repetitions, as well as the need for them, imply the danger of losing the thing which arouses the protective tendency in the first place. In other words, one wants to preserve the thing which is already in danger of getting lost. As he puts it: "right on what permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than what exposes to destruction, in truth what menaces with destruction introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument. … The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself."[48] Similarly, the case of the older Krapp is analogous to that of a self-fulfilling prophecy when he chooses not to recall those moments even if they are archived and within his reach. No matter how significant the younger Krapp deemed them to be, for the older

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43 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 220.

44 Reginio, "Samuel Beckett, the Archive, and the Problem of History," 119.

45 Lawley, "Stages of Identity: from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Play*," 94.

46 Reginio, "Samuel Beckett, the Archive, and the Problem of History," 114.

47 Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 14.

48 Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,"14.

Krapp, they are nothing more than obstacles between the thing he wants to remember or to "be again."

Towards the end of the play, upon coming across the part he seems to aim for, "Farewell to love," Krapp begins listening to the record which describes the younger Krapp parting from his lover but includes a love scene between the two as well. The scene is described in a sensual manner; however, it is made clear that it was Krapp himself who told her that "it was hopeless" with which she agreed.[49] The older Krapp, on the other hand, seems not so sure if that decision was the right one to make. As he gets prepared and begins to make a new record for his sixty-ninth birthday after listening to this part, the disagreement and the distance between the two Krapps once more surface. In a similar way but with a much stronger language than the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp used to criticise his younger self, the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp begins to record: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway."[50]

Conclusion

Overall, it is possible to observe that *Krapp's Last Tape* describes a radical relationship with the past: as Krapp's memories come back to him from the outside, he no longer possesses the immediate, organic connection he once had with them. He, in a way, stands at a critical distance from those memories as if his past selves were not the same person as himself. Therefore, the lonely life he chose for himself, coupled with his old age, leaves him with no companion other than those past selves, whom he detests but longs for at the same time. Thus, instead of busying himself with other activities in the present or making future plans, he limits his life within those past moments, integrating his past, in a way, into his present and his future. That, too, is why his attempt to make a new record on his sixty-ninth birthday is bound to fail at the end of the play.

Thus, Krapp's already weakened will to create new memories is overcome by the urge to re-live the past ones, to "be again" his past selves instead of simply to "be." As his life now mainly consists of remembering instead of living, with almost nothing new that would be worth remembering, he questions his effort to make a record at all. Beginning his project with the aim of recording the present, he ends up abandoning that purpose and letting his past self take over the present. Ironically enough, however, the play ends as old Krapp listens "again" as his thirty-nine-year-old self proudly proclaims that he would never want his past years back.

The way Krapp uses his tape recorder as a memory aid, on the other hand, creates a vicious circle in return. His memories that become external to him in this way end up being what he relies upon for his future as well as for his present. He literally lives in the past or re-lives his past in the present with no future plans apart from going on in this way. Thus the play problematises the concept of memory, presenting Krapp as a subject who makes a record of his past as he wants to

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49 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 221.
50 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 222.

see himself in the future, and then remembers those past selves to the degree of "being" them again. Considering a tape recorder apt for his project in the first place and thus severing his past from his own self as if it were an outside object, however, he condemns his project to failure from the start.

All in all, it becomes possible to argue that Krapp is constructed as a character who has an unusual relationship both with time, and consequently, his memories. Krapp's expectations from the tape recorder as an archiving machine echo in the way the spectator/reader tends to presume that the tape recorder, through its archival function, has the potential to reveal Krapp's past, so to speak, in the form of a life story as in the plays written in the realist tradition. Even though the play does not aim to tell a story that relates to a chain of events based on a cause-effect relationship, and thus deviates from realist drama, in terms of the techniques of characterisation it employs, *Krapp's Last Tape* stands in between the more concretely drawn characters of Beckett's longer dramatic works and his later fragmented abstractions. So, Krapp becomes an unusual character, whose physical existence on the stage does not directly represent a person as such, but rather, a state of mind in and through which life and its dependence on memory and the past are questioned.

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