

## The Role of Setting in *Krapp's Last Tape*

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### Abstract:

*This study involves the explanation of the role of setting in revealing the theme with reference to Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape in relation to the components of time, place and social circumstances. One of Samuel Beckett's main concerns is the polarity of existence. In, Krapp's Last Tape, such characteristic polarities as sight versus blindness, life versus death, time present versus time past, body versus intellect do exist in those works significantly. One of Beckett's main concerns, then, seems to be characterizing man's existence in terms of these polarities. The appearance of the absurd theater comes as a result of the desperate man living during the great wars and during their aftermaths, which have made him hopeless, desperate and fearful of future events as in the case with the main character Krapp. The action of the play has been greatly affected by its setting which limits the movements of character, his way of thinking and finally the end of the action of the plays in which he appears. The stage on which an old man is sitting on chair is symbolic of the fact that man is made only to wait for his end as is the case of Krapp.*

**Keywords:- Absurd, dramatist, obsession,**

### 1 Introduction

Absurdism with its more specific companion term "Theatre of the Absurd," refers to the works of a group of Western European and American dramatists writing and producing plays in the 1950s and early 1960s. The term "Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by critic Martin Esslin

who identified common features of a new style of drama that seemed to ignore theatrical conventions and thwart audience expectations. Characterized by a departure from realistic characters and situations, the plays offer no clear notion of the time or place in which the action occurs. Characters are often nameless and seem interchangeable. Events are completely outside the realm of rational motivation and may have a nightmarish quality commonly associated with Surrealism (a post-World War I movement that features dream sequences and images from the unconscious, often sexual in nature). At other times, both dialogue and incidents may appear to the audience as completely nonsensical, even farcical.

However, beneath the surface the works in this respect explore themes of loneliness, isolation, the failure of individuals to connect with others in any meaningful way and the senselessness and absurdity of life and death. All the mentioned above aspects are defined clearly in the setting of the play and here comes the importance of the setting in the Absurd theatre. Setting in drama points to the place in which and the time at which an action of a play occurs: "The where and the when of a story or a play; the locale. In drama the term may refer to the scenery or props" (J. A. Cuddon, 1999: 812).

### 2 The Significance Time and Place in *Krapp's Last Tape*

To be in line with the Absurdist style, Beckett manages to set the place and time of *Krapp's Last Tape* in an untraditional way in that he makes them seem as having multiformity. That is the place assumes many forms as to different



and many situations of daily life as recorded on the tape recorder. Similarly, as to time, it is of course to accompany the place at which it assumes its presence. Past, present and future are three in one as felt by not only the protagonist, Krapp, but also by the audience. Krapp appears to be obsessed with the process of recording his present experience that will be part of his past in the next moment. He wants to experience his witnessing of his character as being recorded as an retroactive experience, making use of modern technology as a documentary means to register his daily life, which then makes available for him his past, present and future multiformity of his entire life. He does so in an attempt to find a meaning for the multiplied selves which he assumes during the course of the development of the many and various of his life stages.

The final stage of Krapp's life shows that he one new tape has already been thrown away on which he has already recorded his thoughts, so that he can listen to his past recorded experiences. In doing so, he attempts to perpetuate the past pattern of his life, which indicates the inner conflict between his consciousness of the mortality of which he is quite aware and the immortality which he aspires for recording it as an perpetual form of his life. Johnsen (2011) clearly crystalizes Krapp's treating his situation through setting out to come to terms with his mortality through retrospection and introspection, Krapp ultimately fails to make any progress, and closure eludes him. Despite the conscious knowledge of his impending death, Krapp opts to continue his habit of regret and absence—enabled by his tape-recorder—and resolves nothing, finding no purpose and simply adding to the weight of his accumulated regret.

Setting the place and time of a drama in a tape recorder is a clever means on the part of the dramatist in that it saves time and many representations in only one component unfolding

multiformity of events, situations, dialogues, descriptions, props, character and action which otherwise could be unfolded through a long period of time. Throughout listening to the tapes unfolding Krapp's past, not only Krapp realizes scenes and events of his past life, but also the audiences will view in their own imagination what Krapp is listening to. Thus, Krapp along with the audience manage to relive review scenes already gone, which might have required the dramatist to create many dramatic scenes and characters to represent them on the stage. Tom Lagier (2006) has his word in this regard as he says:

The most interesting phenomenon that the viewer experiences while regarding this play, then, is the feeling of regarding past events through several sets of eyes, each more experienced and more jaded than the last. The audience gets to immerse itself in three timelines, each further in the past, as each separately aged Krapp remarks on events and actions in the past.

On the other hand, a sense of a very long lifetime already spent by a man who devoted much efforts to recollect it in a tapes is felt by the audience that must have very curious ears, as it were, to see what happened to that strange person called Krapp who appears on the stage listening to tapes telling of many and various stages of his life.

### **3 Beckett's Treatment of Time and Place in *Krapp's Last Tape***

In Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, there is only one protagonist that Krapp who appears at the beginning of the play to be sitting at a small table and listening to his tapes. He is an old and weak person who used to listen to his younger sounds. He is pompous and self-centered towards his younger self. He is also subjective when criticizing and considering his past behavior that figured in a certain time and at a certain place. He also appears to live alone and shows his interest in



the past in so far as his concern is about his past sounds representative of his past experiences.

The past seems to him more important than the present and future moments. He concentrates on things which he already experienced. He is actually a person that sticks to the past. He does not engage himself with new experiences. It has been suggested that in this play the background and symbolism are unfolded by means of imagery and tone. Krapp's self-provided recordings unfold his emotions and attitudes towards particular past issues and reflections, besides the kind of emotions he may show when examining his past sounds. Thus, the play provides the audiences with a brief account of Krapp's loneliness and dumb and boring life as reflected by the long hours which spends at his small table listening to his younger self speech concerning various situations and concerns and affairs: "In Krapp's Last Tape, the most important literary devices are imagery and tone because they provide human-like characteristics in the character. They also strive to portray one of the main themes of the play that is self-reflection and attraction towards past recollections" (<https://www.bartleby.com/essay>).

*Krapp's Last Tape* has been set in Krapp's den, a room which is, to a great extent, a reflection of his own personality. It appears to be bare with the exception of only one table. This bareness of the place is a symbol of the state of sterility and loneliness on the part of Krapp. No human interactions interfere into his life. His room does not show any sign that there is a human living in it, for it lacks everything that may comfort the humans. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, the action takes place on a barren stage with particular lighting directions given by Beckett. For instance, the barren table and the area in which it appears are engulfed by "strong white light," whereas the rest of the stage is made to

figure out in complete darkness. One may ask the question why should Beckett makes this part of the stage dark? And why should not he make the entire barren room a stage? The answer to these questions can be showing Beckett's attempt to avoid the symbolic and figurative connotations darkness may convey.

Krapp's craving for past experiences and his old voice when young is an indication of the inner conflict between the idea of life and the idea of death of which the latter turns to be his most significant concern reflected in his interest in his past. Thus, he appears to be finding his relief in the young voice which he once produced. What remains of his past youth is only the voice that comforts him when listening to it. Ross E. Lockhart (2003) believes that Beckett is one of the powerful dramatists of dramatic movement that is called The Theatre of the Absurd that figured out in the wake of the World War II. He proceeds to say that Beckett is among those dramatists who have been inspired by the existential philosophy as set by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre whose arguments imply that the universe cannot be rationally explained, that man cannot grasp its meaning and that the "world could only be seen through an absurd lens" (Lockhart, 2003). The absurd point of view concerning the world can be made crystalized by Beckett and other Absurdist by means of their attempt to intentionally challenge the past conventions of drama, getting away on purpose with the elements of traditional plots and "crafting long-winded stream-of-consciousness speeches for their characters, and using symbolic imagery drawn from seemingly innocent everyday objects" (Lockhart, 2003). Human sufferings are the most significant concern of the Absurdist's who always pose questions concerning survival and who always portray their characters struggling the idea of the meaninglessness of life and the idea that the world represents nothing.



*Krapp's Last Tape* is considered Beckett's most confusing and absurd play in which is portrayed "an old, sordid, wearish man, dressed in rags and living alone in his den," listening to his own voice recorded thirty years earlier. Krapp does not only try to review and contemplate aloud his earlier self, but he also "sighs, fumbles, squints at keys and written papers, extracts bananas from a desk drawer kept resolutely locked, skids on banana peels," and "stares vacuously before him with a banana end in his mouth." Every detail of his movement has been spelt out by the dramatist in a very subtle manner who attempts to remove any ambiguities that may arise from some vague movements, and at the same time, the spectators' mental imagery of the action is very clearly seen and pondered, which points to a departure from the customs of traditional drama whose directions are almost always in the hands of the director. Rather, Beckett, as Lockhart (2003) declares, "insists on total control over *Krapp's Last Tape*, beginning with almost an entire page of stage, set, and movement directions before Krapp even utters his first line."

At first sight, the spectators may think that *Krapp's Last Tape* can be classified as a monologue, a one single character speaking all the time, but rather, and more precisely, the play can be seen as a dialogue between what is considered to be Krapp's past and his future self. The present Krapp is trying to celebrate his ninety sixth birthday by means of hearing an earlier recording of his voice, which may be a yearly tradition which he used to follow. The voice may indicate that he must have been twenty years old, a "young whelp." At this stage, he could hardly believe he has ever been in the situation when he was eight years old, for the various recordings point to various Krapps: "There may be, in fact, an infinite number of Krapps, imprisoned on the spools of tape carefully catalogued and locked away should

the present-day Krapp feel the need to summon them (Lockhart, 2003).

Naturally speaking, traditional literature juxtaposes happiness and sadness as two definite states of man's feelings and emotions. These two elements are juxtaposed in Krapp's character. That is to say, both elements of comedy and tragedy are reconciled in only one single character, and as explicated by Lockhart (2003) as follows:

On one hand, the elder Krapp is portrayed comically, wearing "rusty black narrow trousers too short for him" and a "surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed". This costume, along with his "cracked voice," and "laborious walk," is evidence that "there are remnants of the clown in his appearance, a white face and a large red nose (and in the banana skin over which he inevitably falls) but [tragically] he is also still [...] 'condemned as always to live again in the dream-reality of the instantaneous present'"

Despite the fact that Krapp hopes that he will never sing in his life when he is an old man, Krapp of the future could sing a prophetic refrain: "Now the day is over, / Night is drawing nigh-igh, / Shadows — of the evening / Steal across the sky." It can be suggested that the lyrics he sings are in line with what the title may symbolically mean. The lyrics are not only bitter for him, but they are also sweet. This may point to an example of oxymoron which shows a contradictory element; this is, the songs reminds him of his happy youth, and at the same time he is conscious of his old age which excites the horror of old age and its problems "When these bittersweet lyrics are considered in light of the play's title, Beckett's symbolism is quite clear: the reader is witness to the recording of Krapp's last tape; Krapp has reached the end of his life and the value of that life is, well, Krapp" (Lockhart, 2003).



By means of the setting, the place where Krapp is sitting and the time at which he listens to his old speeches point to one of the most significant themes of Beckett which is the theme of goals unfulfillment. Although Krapp has earlier decided to abandon his bitter obsessions, drinking and eating bananas, he is still doing the same habits, for the spectators are still seeing him at sixty-nine and hearing him at thirty-nine doing both actions. This is reminiscent of the fact that many people in reality are doing the same thing year after year. Therefore one can conclude that Beckett alludes to uselessness of every goal that has ever been set by Krapp, for the latter has never brought about anything which he hoped to, nor has he ever attempted to do so: “Beckett employs the banana motif throughout the play as a representation of these unfulfilled goals.

From the opening burlesque of slipping on the discarded banana peel to the confession from thirty-nine-year-old Krapp that he has “just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth” (Lockhart, 2003). The bananas can be taken as a symbol of the uncontrolled desire of man towards the things he likes, natural, instinctive or ordinary. He yields to the pleasures got from something he likes, which is a characteristic feature of man. The eating of bananas is always attributed to monkeys. Beckett may allude to the notion that man has got that animalistic desires which make him stand by animals. Man is an animal when it comes to the animalistic desires which he/she unfolds: “Through the symbolic metaphor of the banana, and all it entails, Beckett is insinuating that in reliving the unrealized dreams of his past, Krapp has driven himself ‘ape shit,” (Lockhart, 2003).

Interestingly enough, the tape recordings can make available the presence of various events that have taken place in a certain place and at a certain time. It is then a clever idea that the action

of the play is embedded in tapes telling of the past and at the same time unfolding character and action in a new fashion. The tapes tell of what kind of behavior Krapp has made during the course of the development of his life. Throughout his memories spectators watch the events which they have to imagine when listening to the voice of the protagonist. In addition to that, not only does the protagonist share the theatrical experience, but also the audiences do share the same experience in so far they and Krapp listen to the same voices of only one person telling of his own past experiences.

For instance, there is one significant event in the life of Krapp that is drawn from his memory and that is triggered in his ledger. The event shows the situation in which he once gave a black ball to a white dog when he awaited the death of his mother:

Into this momentary connection, he has loaded a cascade of emotion. Unfortunately, he is unable to grasp the gravity of the association as he reviews these “moments. Her moments, my moments. The dog’s moments,” giving each equal measure. Although elder Krapp was unable to remember the situation with the dog mere moments earlier, young Krapp claims that he will remember the encounter, stating, “I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. I might have kept it. But I gave it to the dog”(Lockhart, 2003)

Krapp’s tapes have not only provided the dramatists with a source of inspiration, but they have also provided him with the occurrences, happenings and events that have confronted the protagonist. They unfold certain themes, which can only be understood when their setting is unfolded. For example, the situation in which Krapp gives the white dog a black ball points to the opposite between two concepts—the concept of life versus death. The spectators think in this way because the event occurred when Krapp’s



mother was about to die. Whiteness or light is the opposite of black or darkness.

Life is allotted to him while death is allotted to his mother. The theme of the opposites can further be explained in terms of Krapp's memories of his affair with Bianca in Kedar street. Before breaking off their love affair, Krapp had lived with Bianca—*white* in Italian—on Kedar Street, Kedar being an anagram for *dark*. The names "Bianca" and "Kedar" further Beckett's dark/light imagery:

Beckett chooses 'Bianca' for the name of one of Krapp's lovers, [...] mainly on account of its associations with light in a play that is full of black and white contrasting imagery....Ultimately, it appears that Krapp has rejected the light of the outside world in favor of the darkness of his own interior. "This darkness can certainly be seen as extending to a whole zone of being that includes folly and failure, impotence and ignorance. (Lockhart, 2003)

Past and present are both integrated in only one single situation by means of restricting Krapp to hearing the stories related to his own personal life which he has already recorded on a tape recorder. Krapp wants not to forget his memories which do not only tell of his past experiences, but they also make his youth present in his eyes. When hearing his young voice, he becomes conscious of his own youth in such a way as if he had not wanted himself to be an old man that is sixty years old: "By confining the younger Krapp to magnetic tape, Beckett avoids the need "for one character to separate himself from the action, call another aside and tell him everything" (Lockhart, 2003). Lockhart further makes a comparison between Shakespeare's Prospero and Beckett's Krapp in an attempt to illustrate the fact that both of them engage in a close fight or struggle with their past, which gives "unprecedented freedom to the dramatic

monologue" (Lockhart, 2003) Like Prospero with his books, Krapp is empowered by his recordings, relying on their magic to allow him to grapple with his past, hoping that through them, he can somehow reconnect with his former life.

The comparison between Shakespeare's Prospero and Beckett's Krapp, however, does not remain undamaged or unaffected by the test of the storm. Prospero participates in the action or the events occurring at the same point in time or space with others: his daughter Miranda, the spirit Ariel, the subhuman Caliban. Krapp, on the other hand, is alone, master only of the voices of his own past, which, like Caliban, seek to make him obsessed by them. Krapp exists in the darkness of his own memories, a hell of his own design. For Prospero, magic gave him hope of escape, for Krapp, there is nothing escape.

At the end of the play, the older Krapp remains silent listening as his younger self thinks carefully about the loss of his best years, saying, "But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back." With that, the tape runs out.

Careful pondering of Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape makes the reader reflect on the notion that Krapp's life can be taken as representative of the circle of life. Life starts at a certain time and ends at a certain other time as it has already witnessed and recorded on a tape recorder. This is reminiscent of William Shakespeare's Macbeth who, in moments of depression and despair, illustrates the meaninglessness of life represented by "sound and fury":

She should have died hereafter. There would have been a time for such a word. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day To the last syllable of recorded time, And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty



death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.

Here, Macbeth laments the day on which his wife died. He wished that she had died later anyway. He says that that news would be bound to come someday "Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and tomorrow. Days are creeping slowly until the end of life, and every day that starts takes fools to some point much closer to their departure. To Macbeth, life appears to be nothing more than an illusion. It is compared to a poor actor. She would have died later anyway. That news was bound to come someday. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. The days creep slowly along until the end of time. And every day that's already happened has taken fools that much closer to their deaths.

Out, out, brief candle. Life is nothing more than an illusion. It's like a poor actor who struts and worries for his hour on the stage and then is never heard again. Life is a story told by an idiot, full of noise and emotional disturbance but devoid of meaning. Likewise, Krapp acts on the stage in a way similar to Macbeth's role on the stage. As Macbeth describes the meaningless of life that is like a story told by an idiot, Krapp makes his story be told by a tape recorder, an object played with man, and at the same time, as Macbeth is hearing the story of his life on the stage, waiting for the hour of his death, Krapp hears his story on the stage, waiting for the end of his life in old age. Krapp, like Macbeth, discovers that his life is nothing more than the sounds which he has already recorded, and which will be heard no more after his death.

It can be suggested that *Krapp's Last tape* is a dramatization of the protagonist's review of

his past behavior. He confronts it with an attempt to reconcile himself with it. His attitude towards what he hears of his past shows ambivalence in that he at times shows a great desire for it and at other times he shows his scorn towards it, which points to one of the traits of human nature.

Now Krapp likes something, now he dislikes something. Krapp is a representative of two mixed desires, or a mixture of presences and past, and as set by Patrick Kindig-Johnsen (2011) who declares that Krapp is an amalgamation of the contemporary and the outdated, and he has mixed feelings about the roles of presence and absence in his life history. In placing these conflicting desires in opposition to one another, Beckett engages the reader in a meditation on the circular nature of life, as well as the role of regret in a life that is recorded rather than lived and the pattern of remorse and self-loathing that subsequently develops from this regret. Here is Krapp's contemplation of the circular shape of his life recorded by means of modern technology represented by the tap-recorder, which posteriorly enables him to contemplate the presence of his past at the present time. It appears that he could not reconcile himself with his past experiences when he was young. He just hears his sounds voiced in his past life which do not bring him his youth again, and therefore he becomes frustrated and develops a sense of regret. Modern technology has given Krapp the chance to contemplate the nature of his circular life. His contemplation provides him with a sense of disappointment and remorse rather than a sense of happiness when exploring his lifetime during a very short while.

The stage directions as written by the dramatist himself shows that the action of the play is set in "[a] late evening in the future." The Crystallization of Krapp's earlier life is one of the influences of modern technology that can record place and time and be a source of setting



significant to the drama Beckett wants to expose. It enables the dramatist to create many settings that refer to the past places and times and at the same time the future that is Krapp's present moments during which and for which he has recorded his life.

The place in which Krapp figures out on the stage shows a casually furnished stage in whose front center there is a small table on which there is a table on which there is a tape-recorder with "*microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes.*" The tape record functions as a symbol of modern technology that creates in Krapp a sense of regret, and at the same time it is a source of remorse, frustration and disillusionment. Most important is the fact that the tape recorder acts as a gateway between the past Krapp and the future Krapp, which can also be regarded as a "a mediator between different times and different selves" (Johnsen, 248).

The entire drama is based on this stuff of modern technology that allows its user to present a conversation or monologues between the present Krapp and the future one, and at the same time the intervals between them provide an in-between absence of his character. The presence of Krapp in the past, present and future are crystalized at once at only one place—the stage—and in past, present and future moments. This kind of representation of the multifarious discourse has been created by means of "meditative documentary technology" (Johnsen, 248).

Thus, modern technology helps the dramatist to present the absent Krapp (younger Krapp) in the present Krapp (the older Krapp), which is "itself the product of modern technological developments and ideologies" (Johnsen, 248) able to create a conflict within the mind of the protagonist among past, present and future representations. Furthermore, Krapp's tape

recordings, carefully kept and organized as it were, and point to his wish to preserve some aspects of his personality after he completely disappears from the entire world. Thus, his absence from the world has been retroactively preserved even in the moments that point to his imminent departure. To make his recordings safe, he has duplicated them in his lodger as indicated in the stage directions and his recordings and as follows: "[*He peers at ledger, reads entry at foot of page.*] Mother at rest at last...Hm...The black ball" (Beckett, KLT, 248). He records this exact same thought orally, however slightly more coherently: "I was there when...the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog."

Interestingly enough, this clever yet witty technique of letting a character preserve its thought connected and disconnected is an indication of the dramatist will to reciprocate the technique of reverie or day dreaming by the tape recordings. Besides, the dramatist's attempt to let tape recordings speak aloud of its mind telling of past occurrences is reminiscent of the stream of consciousness technique. Krapp appears to be so obsessed with recordings his presence for the future. He sits in a park at his mother's death, wishing that she were gone. Thus, he is trying to relive the moment by means of his diary which has already been recorded. However, he has been deeply affected by emotions and self-contemplation: "[*KRAPP switches off, broods, switches on again.*]" He expects that his mother will sooner or later disappear from the earth, and this is the reason why he preserves those moments that remind him of his past times spent with her. Krapp anticipates his mother's absence and, more broadly, prefers absence to presence: his tape-recorder essentially allows him to live his life in absence, experiencing everything from the safe distance of the future. Beckett's play is concerned with the effect of





this mediative technology on Krapp's ability to live a fulfilling life; his tapes paradoxically invert the relationship between presence and absence—allowing him to mediate and moderate his presence in his life—and create a permanently retrospective situation in which regret comes to dominate his emotional spectrum. (Johnsen, 2011)

As a result, the sense of regret and the fact that Krapp's past life is nothing more than a tape recordings that could be lost at any time during his death give Krapp a sense of frustration and disillusionment as to the fact which he has already attained and which explains for him the nihilistic point of view concerning his life in particular and the life of man in general. In a word, he comes to the conclusion that life is meaningless. Despite the fact that modern technology provides him with retroactive circular form of his life, Krapp's actual life will no more be present.

This modern technology is a significant factor that makes available the sense of juxtaposition of Krapp of the present and Krapp of the past and unfolds the similarities between them both: "Despite the linear progression of time, Krapp is trapped in a cycle of self-loathing, a circularly repetitive pattern of thought" (Johnsen, 2011). In his youth, he decides to quit eating bananas: "Have just eaten three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man with my condition. [*Vehemently.*] Cut 'em out!" The old Krapp eats one banana at the beginning of the play and hides another one in his pocket. Sometimes, young Krapp locks bananas in his drawer, which indicates that the bananas are as important as his invaluable tape recordings which are representative of his great desire for achieving self-documentation.

One important change that occurs during the course of the development of Krapp's character across time is that when he was young

he used to drink little alcohol, but when is old now he drinks too much alcohol perhaps due to the miserable situation in which he finds himself—being trapped by old age that convinces him of the idea that life in nothing more than futile moments that can be recorded on tape recorder and then it will no be heard any more. Thus, Beckett seems to be successful in convincing his audiences of the meaninglessness of life. Facts about the young Krapp and the old one show the a significant contrast that may govern the life of man of the moments lived by man that can be recorded by modern technology which manages to unfold this kind of contrast. When he was young he makes less plans for his sexual desires, but when is old and feeble he gives an active sex life: "Fanny came in a couple of times. Bony old ghost of a whore...I told her I'd been saving up for her all my life."

The setting of the play is made on the stage that shows two Krapps at the same time, the old and the young ones. Beckett, through this kind of personality, manages to unfold many and various places and time all connected by only character obsessed by recording important aspects of his life that parallel one another. For instance the two Krapps detest the past in the same voice. Young Krapp shows his contempt towards "what he calls his youth and thanks god that it's over." He give the audience a quote from his recordings saying "Thank God that's all done with anyway." It appears that Krapp has detested both his past, present and future, the future that was once represented by his past. He comes to the conclusion that his life has so far been absurd.

The tape recorder shows the circular nature of the kind of life lived by Krapp who manages to make it perceptible. He entertains the idea of the word "spool" that is an object circular as it were. The movement of the tape during its course parallels the action done by Krapp during



his life. His recorded sounds are paralleled by the actions he did in the past. It seems that he has been trapped by this kind of circle from which he is unable to get out, and as explicated by Johnsen (2011):

Krapp becomes trapped within this pattern of circularity despite his seeming desires to re-experience the past and to change himself for the future; he has difficulty being mentally and emotionally present for events in the moment—his mother's death, his profound revelation in the rowboat—but he constantly relives these moments by repeating his patterns of thought and behavior.

Naturally speaking, nothing remains in as it is in this life: man changes every moment and ends: things change every moment and end; that is the teleological nature of all animate and inanimate things will sooner or later disappear. It seems that Beckett has been conscious of this fact which he has embedded in the personality of Krapp whose conflict with the fact that there will be an end for his personality makes him very cautious about recording his speech. Had he got a cinema camera in his time he would have recorded both his voice and his image acting whatever he might have wanted to. His recordings have given him a sense of regret instead of a sense of happiness for the bitter fact which he is aware of and which drives him within the domain of conflict between the circular nature of the life he lived already and the nature of time that is teleological, and as it is set in Johnsen's (2011) wording of the idea:

Because of the conflict between the circular nature of Krapp's life and the teleological nature of time, Krapp is both unable to physically experience his life as it occurs and forced continually to live it over in a vicious cycle of regret. The circularity of Krapp's life is reflected in both the physical tapes he uses to record his voice and the patterns of thought and behavior to which he adheres, and his meditation on this

paradox of cyclical repetition within the teleological progression of time is enabled by the availability of modern documentary technology.

Krapp's feeling of ambivalence is the result of his distinct capability to realize his previous self. Relying on modern technology, Krapp is made able to control, preserve, discard, or moderate his occurrences in the situations in which he may figure out, and at the same time it is his own choice as to whether he wants to record something or not: [*KRAPP curses, switches [the tape] off, winds tape forward, switches on again*]. For instance, he skips a certain dramatic situation in which he revels because he does not want to revisit in the future again.

Interestingly enough, Beckett manages to unfold the setting of his drama that has been embedded in a tape recorder that has recorded both time and place of the entire play which is nothing more than tape-recordings experienced by the concerned character. The time, place and the relevant action vary during the stages of life experienced by Krapp who has documented them in the tape recorder. In this case, Krapp's Last Tape can be regarded as a historical document of the life of a character representative of a human trapped by the teleological nature of life that is seen in retrospect. In a later time, Krapp is able to experience his past actions of which some are disdained. He blames himself for some acts which he once did in the past.

Furthermore, when listening to his past self, Krapp seems to possess an escapist nature from his situation of the present time in which he is now an old man listening to his last tape. According to Tom Lagier (2006), "The most noticeable feature of Samuel Beckett's plays, when regarded as a whole, is the almost complete lack of a story-line or a plot. The majority of his works, rather, describe an event or series of events



from a removed, or even surreal reflective standpoint.” As a result, there develops in his mind a sense of conflict between his nostalgia for a time better than what it was before when he was at the peak of his youth and the profound disdain which he feels now towards his past experiences. He says that he has “Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that.”

Modern technology has opened the path for the Absurd theater to manipulate time and place in a way that profoundly serves its purpose which can be summed up by its first and foremost notion that life is meaningless and absurd. Beckett has managed to deal with place and time in relation to one of the representatives of modern technology, letting his character Krapp to record significant aspects of his past experiences which he then hears and considers something futile. Thus, modern technology helps the dramatist to depict scenes of modern life reflected in the character of Krapp in an attempt to prove that life is meaningless, an idea and a conclusion that has already attained by Krapp after having heard the whole story of his past life.

Therefore, Krapp feels astonished when hearing of the kind of life he has already lived, and at the same time he feels alienated from it in so far he desires not to live that kind of life. He appears to be an old man that is “wearish.” His tape recordings of his past life makes him of course detached from his presence in actual life. He is a person who has submerged himself in his past, trying to find a glimpse of something that may give him significant interpretation for it.

Krapp appears to have recorded almost every aspect of his past life in which he has been obsessed. Lagier (2006) declares that “the most strikingly apparent emotion found in *Krapp's Last*

*Tape* is the intense separation of self that Krapp finds among his tapes.”

Since his life is circular and he has experienced a repetitive pattern of ideas and actions, his contempt may be widened into a loathing of all the images of himself which represent his past and present. Despite the fact that Krapp is now having profound feelings towards the teleological time, he shows a wish for progress: “Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back.” He may have developed into a person who finds pleasure in self-denial, submissiveness, or a person who finds his comfort in experiencing pains—a masochist and as it is explained by Johnsen (2011) as follows:

he is drawn to masochistic retrospection. He desires and hates the past, wants to be present and absent, yearns for progress and develops repetitive habits of behavior. The mediative documentary technology of the tape-recorder allows for retrospection and comparison between past and present selves, and Krapp's meticulous documentation results in nothing but ambivalence, regret and loathing of his past and present selves.

### **Beckett's Treatment of Human Nature**

It is one of the representations of human nature that man may find himself obliged to distance himself from those people surrounding him to live a life of seclusion as is the case with Krapp who has set himself apart from the friendship and love made available for him by the people who know him. His isolation from society and his disability to cope with is another feature of humans. He once loved a woman called Bianca whom he discarded and described as a “hopeless business” despite her beauty. Besides, due to his obsession with loneliness, he celebrates his thirty-nine birthday alone. During that year his mother



died and he informed his girlfriend that it was useless to proceed with their love relationship. Since that time he has become entirely alone with the exception of some visits from what he calls to be Fanny, the “old ghost of a whore.” His attempt to record his past indicates to his strong desire for it and his nostalgic nature which is a characteristic feature of human nature in general. He yearns for the past which he then discovers to be futile.

Krapp’s isolation may mark him to be self-important character. His only companion is the tape recorder whereby he has been deluded:

the cold and mechanical nature of a *recorded* voice (as opposed to a live one) reflects his essential isolation from human companionship and emotion. To further heighten the viewer’s sense of Krapp’s loneliness, Beckett has him listen eagerly to the tape (in a special “listening pose”) that reveals Krapp’s desperation to have anyone (even himself) engage him in conversation.  
(<https://books.google.iq/books>)

### **The Importance of Human Nature and Nature to Themes**

Those themes discussed in Krapp’s Last Play are made in relation to the idea of the futility of life as seen in Krapp’s regret and feeling of disappointment caused by the nothingness life has left him with the exception of the tape recordings which will sooner or later be destroyed after his death. Despite the fact he attempts to form a significant image of his past life in his tape recordings which he then listens to them that stand for his backward self and his forward self speaking and commenting on his past situations whatsoever, he comes to the conclusion in his old age that what he has already done is regarded as something pointless and useless, for his life has been crystalized into a mere voice which is of no use for him at this stage of his life. What prompts him to record his past to be heard in the future is

human nature, specially the trait of curiosity and his strong desire to immortalize his voice. On the contrary, his voice cannot give him immortality in so far as it is a mere voice that will not be cared for by others because it does not concern them.

The light and dark that run throughout the play are symbolic of happiness and sadness, and more specifically, of life and death, which are main significant factors of human life and human nature. It is indicated in the play that Krapp’s attempts to remain in the light are a failure, for as he does so he finds himself dragged to darkness. This situation of the kind of atmosphere man faces during the course of his life in this world. The world consists of light that will sooner or later be surrounded by darkness. Human nature shows that man is not always happy and at the same time man is not always sad. Once man feels happy, he will soon lose that kind of feeling and be in a state of sadness, and perhaps, of melancholy. Beckett tries to emphasize the notion that state of light lasts for a very short period of time and darkness will ultimately prevail and close upon the living being.

### **Conclusion**

It has been pointed out that the setting of the absurd drama is very significant because it directs character and action, and at the same time it is regarded as a significant structural element. The setting of the absurd drama is not only reflecting the traditional place and time in which the action occurs, but it is also symbolic of many and various connotations. It has been made clear that the setting in the plays concerned affect the kind of themes the dramatist wants to expose. The stage on which an old man is sitting on chair is symbolic of the fact that man is made only to wait for his end as is the case of Krapp.

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