ISSN: 1812-0512 (Print) 2790-346X (online)

Waist Journal for Human Sciences

Journal Homepage: https://wjfh.uowasit.edu.iq/index.php/wjfh/en

Research article

Language as Technology of Absence: A Deconstructive Reading of Samuel Beckett's Selected Plays

Asst. Lect. Jinan Abd Zaid Okab[1], Prof. Dr. Ali Taghizadeh[2], Prof. Dr. Seyyed Rahim Mousavinia[3]

English Department, Faculty of Literature & Humanities, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran.[1-2]

English Department, Faculty of Literature & Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran[3]

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: *Samuel Beckett; Absence; Waiting for Godot; Endgame; Krapp's Last Tape*

***Correspondence author*:**

jinanbadzaid@sport.uoqasim.edu.iq

altaghee@razi.ac.ir

Received: 05 **July** 2026

Revised: 15 **July** 2026

Accepted: 16 **July** 2026

Published: 01 **November** 2026

1812-0512 /© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Wasit Journal for Humanities Sciences, Wasit University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

***Cite*:**

Okab, J. A. Z., Taghizadeh, A., & Mousavinia, S. R. (2026). Language as Technology of Absence: A Deconstructive Reading of Samuel Beckett's Selected Plays. Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 22(4/Pt1). https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol22.Iss4/Pt1.2154

ABSTRACT

This article investigates structural and performative mechanisms through which language operates as a technology of absence in three canonical plays by Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot (1953), Endgame (1957), and Krapp's Last Tape (1958). The approach is a qualitative library-based methodology, which is oriented toclose reading and theoretical interpretation. Situating each play within a unified Derridean analytical framework, the article follows a developmental path: the dialogic instability produced in Waiting for Godot through iterative deferral, the limited linguistic exhaustion and mechanical ritualism of Endgame, and the technological literalization of trace and supplementarity in Krapp's Last Tape. The paper identifies a significant gap in existing Beckett scholarship: whereas critics have extensively noted the effect of absence in these plays, few studies have methodically explored the precise mechanisms through which this effect is produced.

اللغةُ بِوَصْفِها تِقْنِيَّةً لِلْغِيابِ: قِراءَةٌ تَفْكِيكِيَّةٌ في مَسْرَحِيّاتٍ مُخْتارَةٍ لِصَمُوئيل بيكِيت

م.م جنان عبدزيد عكاب[1]، ا.د على تقى زادة[2] ، ا.د سيد رحيم موسوى نيا[3]

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة رازي، كرمانشاه، إيران[1-2]

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة شهيد جمران، اهواز، إيران[3]

ما بين التعلق والاستغلال:

المُستخلص

تَبْحَثُ هَذِهِ الْمَقَالَةُ فِي الْآلِيَّاتِ الْبِنْيَوِيَّةِ وَالْأَدَائِيَّةِ الَّتِي تَعْمَلُ مِنْ خِلَالِهَا اللُّغَةُ بِوَصْفِهَا تِقْنِيَّةً لِلْغِيَابِ فِي ثَلَاثِ مَسْرَحِيَّاتٍ كَانُونِيَّةٍ لِصَمُوئِيلَ بِكِتْ: فِي انْتِظَارِ غُودُو (١٩٥٣)، وَنِهَايَةُ اللُّعْبَةِ (١٩٥٧)، وَآخِرُ شَرِيطٍ لِكْرَاب (١٩٥٨). يَعْتَمِدُ هَذَا الْبَحْثُ مَنْهَجِيَّةً نَوْعِيَّةً مَكْتَبِيَّةً تَتَوَجَّهُ نَحْوَ الْقِرَاءَةِ الْمُتَأَنِّيَةِ وَالتَّأْوِيلِ النَّظَرِيّ. وَبِوَضْعِ كُلِّ مَسْرَحِيَّةٍ ضِمْنَ إِطَارٍ تَحْلِيلِيّ دِرِيدَاوِيّ مُوَحَّدٍ، تَتَتَبَّعُ الْمَقَالَةُ مَسَارًا تَطَوُّرِيًّا: عَدَمُ الِاسْتِقْرَارِ الْحِوَارِيّ الْمُنْتَجِ فِي فِي انْتِظَارِ غُودُو مِنْ خِلَالِ الْإِرْجَاءِ التَّكْرَارِيّ، وَالِاسْتِنْزَافُ اللُّغَوِيُّ الْمَحْدُودُ وَالطَّقْسِيَّةُ الْآلِيَّةُ فِي نِهَايَةُ اللُّعْبَةِ، وَالتَّجْسِيدُ التِّقْنِيُّ الْحَرْفِيُّ لِلْأَثَرِ وَالتَّكْمِيلِيَّةِ فِي آخِرُ شَرِيطٍ لِكْرَاب. وَتُحَدِّدُ الْمَقَالَةُ ثَغْرَةً مُهِمَّةً فِي أَدَبِيَّاتِ الدِّرَاسَاتِ الْبِكِتِيَّةِ: فَفِي حِينِ لَاحَظَ النُّقَّادُ بِإِسْهَابٍ أَثَرَ الْغِيَابِ فِي هَذِهِ الْمَسْرَحِيَّاتِ، فَإِنَّ قَلِيلًا مِنَ الدِّرَاسَاتِ اسْتَقْصَتْ بِمِنْهَجِيَّةٍ الْآلِيَّاتِ الدَّقِيقَةَ الَّتِي يُنْتَجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهَا هَذَا الْأَثَرُ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: صَمُوئِيل بِيكِيت؛ الْغِيَابُ؛ فِي انْتِظَارِ غُودُو؛ نِهَايَةُ اللُّعْبَةِ؛ آخِرُ شَرِيطٍ لِكْرَاب

Introduction

The relationship between language and absence is one of the most philosophically provocative issues of twentieth-century literary theory. In the domain of modern drama, no body of work has made this problem more acutely — or more systematically — than that of Samuel Beckett (1906 -1989). From the iterative circularity of *Waiting for Godot* through the constrained exhaustion of *Endgame* to the technological self-fragmentation of *Krapp's Last Tape*, the theatre of Beckett builds a rigorous dramaturgy in which language is no longer the transparent medium of subjective expression but a self-referential apparatus which produces its own conditions of failure. The pervasive critical observation that Beckett's work is marked by 'absence' has long been acknowledged; yet precisely how, through what structural, rhetorical, and performative operations, that absence is technically engineered by language itself has remained undertheorized.

Derridean deconstruction offers the theoretical resources that are most appropriate for addressing this question. Derrida's sustained critique of the Western metaphysical tradition —its privileging of presence over absence, speech over writing, identity over difference — constitutes a philosophical framework that is not merely applicable to Beckett's theatre but structurally convergent with it. The correspondences between Beckettian aesthetics and Derridean deconstruction are, as Anthony Uhlmann (1999) has compellingly demonstrated, a matter of historical and intellectual formation: both Beckett and Derrida encountered, in

the post-war decades, the radical instability of all humanist certainties, and their respective responses — one theatrical, one philosophical — converge upon a common insight: that language is not the instrument of presence but its perpetual deferral.

The current study intervenes in this critical landscape by advancing a specific and theoretically precise argument. It argues that the dramatic language of the three selected plays is what could be called a 'technology of absence': a structured set of textual and performative operations — iterability of utterance, supplementarity of stage inscription, logical tracing of repeated phrases and prescribed silences, and differential economy of dialogue — through which absence is not merely expressed but actively produced and regulated as a dramaturgical effect. By applying this designation, the study builds upon and extends the existing scholarly engagement with Beckett and Derrida, while departing from prior scholarship in a critical respect. Rather than reading Beckettian absence as a thematic content that deconstruction serves to illuminate, the study reads it as a deconstructive operation that Beckett's theatre enacts through the material and performative mechanisms of its own language.

The inquiry is structured around three research questions: (1) How does the iterative structure of dialogue in *Waiting for Godot* enact Derridean *différance* as a formal principle of dramatic speech? (2) In what ways does *Endgame* deploy the rhetorical economy of command, response, repetition, and silence to expose language as a mechanical system of deferral incapable of generating stable presence? (3) In what ways does *Krapp's Last Tape* literalize the Derridean concepts of trace and supplement through the technological mediation of the tape recorder, transforming memory and subjectivity into archives of constitutive absence? By addressing these questions through a comparative and developmental framework, the study traces the evolution of Beckett's linguistic technology across three distinct but interrelated dramaturgical phases.

Literature Review

Existentialist and Absurdist Readings of Beckett

The critical reception of Beckett's drama has traversed several major interpretive phases since the premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in Paris in 1953. The strongest early model was Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), where he had put Beckett in the same category with Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter under the umbrella term of a dramatic reply to the loss of religious certitude and the existential situation of modernity. To Esslin, the plays by Beckett convey their feeling on the senselessness of the human condition and the failure of rational approach through the open rejection of the rational tools and discursive logic (Esslin, 1961, p. 25). This interpretative tradition was summed up in a work of academic criticism: *Samuel Beckett: Modern Critical Views* (1985) by Harold Bloom, and in a collection of readings: *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* (1987) by Ruby Cohn, which though formally attentive, is inclined to subordinate linguistic analysis to the thematic interpretation. Though entrenching Beckett in the canon,

these early texts arguably restricted the interpretive options to which they could be subjected, focusing on the existentialist-absurdist facet over formal and linguistic experimentation.

Chatterjee (2013), Jani (2013), and Rakwal (2014) explore various aspects of the existentialist reading of Beckett through the lens of Camusian absurdism, futility and meaninglessness in *Waiting for Godot*, and existentialist aspects of Beckettian fear and ontological insecurity. All these works show that the absurdist-existentialist paradigm remains stable in modern academic analysis, despite the shift of the discipline to more theoretically advanced methods.

Poststructuralist and Deconstructive Readings

A significant reorientation in Beckett studies occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s with the emergence of poststructuralist approaches. Connor's *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (1988) was paradigmatic in this regard, offering a theoretically precise account of repetition as the governing structural principle of Beckett's drama. Drawing on Derridean iterability and Lacanian accounts of repetition, Connor argued that Beckett's texts do not merely represent repetition as a thematic content but enact it as a formal and linguistic practice that resists the teleological assumptions of narrative and communication. Uhlmann's *Beckett and Poststructuralism* represents a most sustained theoretical engagement from this perspective, situating Beckett's work in relation to Foucault, Deleuze, Levinas, and Derrida, and demonstrating that the relationship between Beckett's literary practice and poststructuralist philosophy is a genuine intellectual reciprocity rather than a mere application.

In the research that is applied deconstructive approaches to postmodern literature, the one by Shahid (2018) mentions *Waiting for Godot* as a text where language is "a vulnerable phenomenon," since language is no longer "an inevitable way to convey meaning," as the boundaries of language are "surpassed to annunciate the sense that meaning lies beyond" (p. 108) it. Then, shahid mentions "silences and pauses" in postmodern literature as modes of "unwording" (p. 108) in it. Akhter (2015) interprets the play as a theatrical representation of the critique of logocentrism, interpreting Godot as an absent signifier whose constant non-arrival denotes a structural deferral of language and story. Weiss (2012) discusses *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* as performances of ontological absence that relates the conflict between the voice in the record and the current self to the theory of trace by Derrida. Malkin (1997) develops this by reading how Beckett constructs Krapp as two loosely related versions of self each of which are characterised by time and language difference. However, the theoretically most accurate extant consideration of the nexus of technology, memory and supplementarity in Beckett is provided by Charalambous (2020), who views the tape recorder itself as a prosthetic supplement, by which the seeming fulfillment of presence reveals its constitutive lack.

The originality of the present study lies in its systematic application of such a single Derridean framework on three established plays of Beckett (a process that, so far as this article's knowledge, has

never been carried out), in order to prove that the production of absence in Beckett's theatre is not a thematic phenomenon but a structural and performative function inscribed in the very formal operations of theatrical language.

Identified Lacuna and Present Study's Contribution

The researches reviewed so far show that there are echoes between Beckett's dramaturgy and Derrida's deconstruction. For example, there are critics who have attempted to analyze the salient effects of absence in Beckett such as failure of communication and perpetual putting back of meaning. However, existing scholarship offers no sustained and specific explanation of how Beckett's theatrical language generates absence. It does not analytically study such Derridean mechanisms in Beckett as iterability of utterance, additionality of stage directions, logic of repetition, and economy of dialogue and silence.

However, the current research attempts to fill in the gap through analyzing the representation of the main concepts of Derrida's deconstruction in Beckett's selected plays under the banner of "language as technology of absence." In this way, the research intends to accord a unified analytical structure into his plays and explain the appropriation of particular processes that make absence into a textual reality of Beckett's drama. By doing so, the work serves a dual purpose in terms of adding not only to the Beckett scholarship but also to the deconstructive theory of literature. Thus, the present research provides an analytical framework for reading dramatic language not as a transparent medium but as a performative technology.

Theoretical Framework: Derridean Deconstruction and the Problem of Presence

Logocentrism and Metaphysics of Presence

The deconstructive research of Derrida is aimed, at its most basic, at what he terms "logocentrism," the structuring belief of Western metaphysics that the logos—the spoken word — is the privileged location of pure and unmediated self-expression. Logocentric tradition, which runs back to Plato via Husserl and Saussure, sees speech as the immediate and clear expression of interior thought: in this version, language is the means by which the self-present subject expresses its intentions to another and in which meaning is located in the consciousness of the speaking subject before and regardless of its articulation in a linguistic medium. In this tradition writing presents itself as a secondary, derivative, and possibly corrupting adjunct to the living voice, as a notation of speech, always subject to the danger of corrupting the primary presence of meaning. (Derrida, 1976, pp. 27–73).

In *Of Grammatology* (1976), Derrida systematically dismantles this hierarchy. His pivotal argument is that the features attributed exclusively to writing — its iterability across contexts, its independence from authorial intention, its capacity to function in the absence of both sender and receiver — are in fact constitutive features of all language, including speech. What Derrida designates 'arche-writing' or

'écriture' names not empirical writing (marks on a surface) but the structural condition of all signification: the differential, deferring, and iterating system of traces that underlies and makes possible any act of communication, spoken or written. By demonstrating that speech is already inscribed within the structure of arche-writing, Derrida dismantles the metaphysical hierarchy speech/writing, and with it the entire architecture of logocentric thought. Derrida illustrates this by reading Husserl and Saussure, two authors who in some ways prefigure the theory of the trace: speech itself is not a place of pure self-presence but is always already organized by the differential and deferring logic of the trace, which makes meaning inaccessible before or outside of the signifying system that underlies it. Instead of simply turning the logocentric hierarchy upside down, however, Derrida reveals an enigmatic pretext of originary and founding graphematic writing which constitutes the condition of all signification, speech being the secondary and derivative process that can only follow on but never precede it.

"Metaphysics of presence" — the assumption that being, truth, and meaning are grounded in self-presence — underpins logocentrism. In *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), Derrida subjects Husserl's phenomenology of inner monologue — the 'hearing-oneself-speak' (Sich-hören) regarded by Husserl as the privileged site of self-presence — to a rigorous deconstructive reading, demonstrating that even this innermost act of self-communication is structured by temporal difference. The subject, in the very moment of hearing itself speak, is divided between the position of speaker and hearer, introducing a structural hiatus at the heart of self-presence. This division is not contingent but necessary: it is the minimal repeatability — the trace — that makes any act of self-communication possible (Derrida, 1973, p. 56).

Différance: Deferral, Difference, and Impossibility of Presence

Among Derrida's theoretical innovations, différance constitutes the most generative and far-reaching. The term is a neologism coined by substituting the letter 'a' for the 'e' of the French différence — a substitution visible in writing but inaudible in speech, and thus a performative demonstration of the argument it names. Différance condenses two irreducibly related operations: to differ (spatial distinction between elements in a sign system) and to defer (temporal postponement of presence).

'Différance*'* as a spatial operation, assigns the constitutive role of difference in the making of meaning: in the wake of Saussure, signs do not gain their identity through positive, self-contained properties but through differential relation to other signs. 'Différance' as a temporal operation, names the eternal postponement of presence: that meaning is not simply there in the sign but is to come, dislocated with the present moment of utterance towards a future which is structurally unreachable.

Crucially, Derrida insists that 'différance' is "neither a word nor a concept" (Derrida, 1982, p. 3): it cannot be named without being subjected to the differential logic it seeks to describe; it cannot be rendered present without contradicting its own content. This quasi-conceptual status — the term that resists conceptualization — makes différance structurally homologous with the condition of all language: the

impossibility of the perfectly self-present sign. As Raman Selden (1989, p. 88) has observed, Derrida "challenges the entire metaphysical tradition which assumes that language can transparently express thought or reality," and this challenge is precisely what Beckett's linguistic minimalism enacts at the level of theatrical practice.

Trace: Ghostly Remainder of Constitutive Absence

The concept of the trace names the irreducible contamination of presence by absence at the level of the sign. Trace is the mark of what the sign is not, has not become, or might not become: the ghostly remainder of difference within every signifying element. Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* that the sign "represents the present in its absence" (Derrida, 1976, p. 49): every sign stands in for a presence that is no longer there, yet the trace is not the simple negation of presence but the structural condition of signification itself. There is no sign without trace, no presence without the memory of an absence that has constituted it. More precisely, trace ''is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site — erasure belongs to its structure'' (Derrida, 1976, p. 47).

Thus, trace names a minimal repeatability — the structural condition that enables any sign to be recognized, reproduced, and communicated across different contexts. This minimal repeatability is at once the condition of possibility of signification and its condition of impossibility: it enables the sign to function while ensuring that no sign is ever fully self-identical, fully present, or fully determined by any single context of utterance.

Iterability: Identity through Structural Alteration

Derrida's concept of iterability, developed principally in "*Signature Event Context*" (1972) and elaborated in *Limited Inc.* (1988), names the structural capacity of every sign to be repeated, cited, and re-deployed across contexts indefinitely and without exhaustion. The term derives its productive ambiguity from two etymological roots: the Latin 'iter' (again, anew) and the Sanskrit 'itara' (other, different). So, 'iterability, names the paradox that repetition is never a simple self-identical reproduction: every iteration of a sign is simultaneously a repetition (it reproduces a recognizable form) and an alteration (it deploys that form in a context that transforms its meaning). Identity and difference, sameness and alterity, are co-constitutive in iterability: a sign is recognizable as the same sign precisely because it can be repeated, yet each repetition introduces a difference that makes perfect self-identity structurally impossible.

The implications for theories of communication are far-reaching. If every utterance is structurally iterable — if every sign carries within it the possibility of being severed from its originating context and re-deployed elsewhere — then no utterance is fully anchored in a present intention, no meaning is entirely determined by context, and no communicative act achieves the transparency the logocentric tradition assumes. As Derrida (1982) argues, "Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written, can be

cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context" (p. 320). This "force of rupture" is not an accident that befalls language but its fundamental condition of possibility.

Supplement: Logic of Addition and Substitution

Derrida's logic of supplementarity, which he elaborated in *Of Grammatology* through a reading of Rousseau, describes the paradoxical economy by which what appears secondary, marginal, and additional to a primary presence turns out to be the very condition of that presence's possibility. The supplement is simultaneously an addition (it supplements what appears already complete) and a substitution (it replaces a presence that was never fully present in the first place). Writing, as the supplement of speech, reveals this paradox structurally: writing appears to complete and preserve speech yet reveals that speech is always already constituted by the differential, iterable, context-independent structure that the logocentric tradition used to attribute to writing alone. The supplement thus supplements an origin that is itself always already supplementary — revealing the 'origin' as a retroactive effect, not a prior presence (Derrida, 1976, pp. 141–164).

Methodology

This study adopts a library-based qualitative approach and takes advantage of close reading and theoretical interpretation. The main corpus of the research is a combination of a trio of Beckett's plays: *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp's Last Tape*, which we analytically read in light of Derrida's deconstruction formulated here and there in *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena*, *Margins of Philosophy*, and "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Each selected play dramatizes the concept of language as a failing instrument and an autonomous technology of iteration and control, and each contributes to the developmental cycle where Beckett's linguistic technology becomes increasingly more explicit and more radical in its self-reflexive processes.

Commitment to close reading involves a sustained, detail-oriented examination of each play's linguistic and structural features — dialogue structure, rhythmic patterning, strategic silences, stage directions, and scenic constraints — treating these as textual operations rather than merely expressive symptoms. The deconstructive approach of the research does not seek to 'decode' Beckett's texts for a determinate hidden meaning; rather, following Derrida's injunction that reading "must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses" (Derrida, 1982, p. 158), helps the study to trace the fissures where Beckett's language undoes itself and analyze presence as a textual effect rather than an ontological reality.

The study is a comparative analytical research, that analyzes how each of Beckett's selected plays constitutes a different mode of linguistic absence, dialogic deferral, mechanical exhaustion, and technological mediation, and examines them in the context of a single technology of absence. Cross-textual comparisons shed light on how Beckett develops his dramaturgy out of the open iterative cycles of *Waiting*

for Godot via the tight rationing of *Endgame* to the externalized technological prosthesis of *Krapp's Last Tape.* The theoretical apparatus is provided by Derridean concepts outlined above, while critical scaffolding is drawn from Connor, Uhlmann, Charalambous, and Culler (1982).

Discussion

Waiting for Godot: Dialogic Iterability and Structural Deferral of Presence

Waiting for Godot enacts the most expansive and open-ended modality of the technology of absence. The structural principle of the play is the iterative loop — a dialogic form that circles without destination, generating the illusion of progression, systematically displacing any arrival at presence or meaning. The famous symmetry between its two acts — where virtually identical exchanges recur with only minor, non-cumulative variations — is not a dramatic failure but rather the formal demonstration of iterability as the constitutive condition of language: each repetition reproduces the recognised form while introducing the differential displacement that makes perfect self-identity structurally impossible. This formal logic is nowhere more precisely illustrated than in the opening exchange of the play, in which Estragon's inaugural declaration — "Nothing to be done" — is immediately appropriated, modulated, and re-deployed by Vladimir: ''I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me,'' saying Vladimir, ''be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle'' (Beckett, 1953, p. 1). The term is not merely repeated but iterated, reintroduced in a version which is familiar but irreducibly different, taken away out of its immediate referent (the boot) into a broad philosophical medium (the human condition) and therefore lacking any localised sense of stability. This repetitive movement is further reinforced on structural level: the two acts end with the same dialogue ''Well, shall we go? / Yes, let's go'' and the stage direction ''They do not move'' (Beckett, 1953, pp. 52, 94). The play of the performative contradiction between the verbal intention and the stipulated immobility effects the play of Derridean diffractions: the meaning is continuously proclaimed and continuously denied, and it exists as a linguistic sign but not as a fulfilled state. Every repetition of ''let's go'' re-enacts the grammatical and semantic structure of a resolution but at the same time imprints its structural impossibility, such that the utterance is not a communication but a recursive machine of deferral - repeating, as it does, its own formal repetition, it creates the absence it claims to resolve.

However, the technology of absence works best in the way the play handles the relationship between utterance and meaning. The verbal exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon are not logocentrically communicative, i.e., they do not convey determinate contents between the self-present subject and the other, but are Derrideanly performative, i.e. they repeat recognizable linguistic forms without placing the recognizable linguistic forms in relation to any present or intended intentions or determinate referents. The result is an ever-gestural speech that structurally defers its arrival. In the scene where Vladimir and Estragon talk about Godot, the conversation does not go to the supposed object but moves away around it by way of qualification, contradiction and digression: "Do you know him? / Not to know him by sight. /

We have seen him. /Certainly not. / Passages which create the trace of a referent (Godot) but ensure its inaccessibility" (Beckett, 1953, pp. 15–16). The name Godot serves as just what Akhter describes as an absent signifier: a linguistic signifier whose meaning is always deferred and only made up by its difference to what it is not.

Waiting for Godot also uses a systematic use of the gap between speech act and effect to enact the structural deferral of meaning. The language of the characters is strictly performative - commands, promises, declarations, etc. - but organized so as to fail systematically to bring into being the states of affairs that it alleges to constitute. Vladimir and Estragon do not wait Godot; they wait as Connor (1988, p. 133) puts it in a register that reveals the infinite repetitive cyclic nature between the original and its repetition which can never be fully closed. This is not a performance of failure but a performance of it: the performative aspect of their speech shows, in the material action of its own performance, the inability of the logocentric ideal of speech as the clear tool of the intention of self-presentation.

Yet, stage directions of the play are further manifestations of the technology of absence. The uncharacteristically exact performance directions given to Beckett by the creator of the play, the time of breaks, the rhythm of repetition prescribed, the prescribed gestures and movements, are not added commentaries to the dialogue, but part of its makeup. They serve as what Derrida would call supplement: what seem peripheral additions to the main text that become essential to that text and dictate the rhythm of speech and how silence will be handled in a manner unachievable by the dialogue itself. The stage direction therefore carries out supplementarity as a structural action: they are secondary considerations but they form the primary circumstances of the linguistic effects of the play.

Endgame: Linguistic Exhaustion and Mechanical Ritual of Deferral

Endgame (1957), where space and time are narrowed down to a situation in which the mechanical and ritualistic aspect of the Beckettian word is heightened, is a more condensed mode of the technology of absence. If *Waiting for Godot* achieves absence by the open iterative cycles of an unanchored discourse, *Endgame* gains it by a closed system of repeated exchanges out of which any remaining openness is discharged. The scenic limitations of the play such as the bare room, Mamm's inability to move in his chair, the closed windows looking out to the dead world, and Clov's limited and robotic actions all serve as spatial equivalents to a linguistic economy where signification is turned into its bare structural shell: command and response, assertion and contradiction, declaration and retraction.

Yet, absence in *Endgame* works best when it is possible to refer to it as a mechanical iterability: the obsessive reiteration of linguistic forms that have been deprived of the self-present intent which the logocentric tradition ascribes to them. The orders Hamm gives, such as "Back to my place! (Clov pushes chair back to center.) Now I feel a little too far back. (Clov moves chair slightly.)'' (Beckett, 1957, pp.15-16) are not, in the Austinian (1962) sense of speech acts, since they do not have the effects they claim to

cause. Neither are they expressions in good faith of subjective desire: they are, in fact, formulas that can be repeated and which keep alive a ritual of survival, without any substantial content. The way Clov reacts to it, and he reacts in a mechanical, repetitive, predictably unpredictable way, reflects this structural emptiness: Clov repeats a form of responsiveness, but not its logocentric content. The dialogues between Hamm and Clov, taken together, therefore, represent what Habib (2005, p. 654) refers to as a system which is simultaneously constituted by the conditions of its own undoing: language that is, uttered language, reproducing itself compulsively and evacuating the conditions of its own meaningfulness in a systematic way.

Further, the tension between presence and absence in the scenic and linguistic economy of the play is very specific. Hamm's statement when he says "It's finished, we're finished, Nearly finished, There'll be no more speech." (Beckett, 1957, p. 1) is an example of the logic of différance in a nutshell: the supposed end is asserted, and deferred, the fullness of a finality is structured as a perpetual 'nearly' that prevents its own arrival. Both qualifiers delay the terminal presence to which the statement nominally points, generating the trace of an ending, which acts by postponing itself. It is not a depiction of impossibility but a playing out of it: the sentence itself is inexhaustible in the very process of declaring its completion.

Even the supplementarity of stage directions in *Endgame* is more structurally conclusive than in *Waiting for Godot*. In the former, the directions are somehow like a quasi-independent text that not only commands movement and gesture, but also embodies the rhythmic intervals of silence, which define the meaning of what is spoken. In *Endgame*, the silences, the pauses between the dialogues that are very carefully measured are not lacks of language but language events in their own right: they are traces, in the strict Derridean sense, of what the conversation is unable to say, organising the speech as the silence puts pressure on it. The silence that follows Clov's line ''Then I'll leave you'' (Beckett, 1957, p. 11) is not an absence of meaning but a technology for producing the trace of a departure that is perpetually deferred, marking the boundary between the said and the unsaid without resolving it.

***Krapp's Last Tape*: Literalization of Trace and Supplement**

Krapp's Last Tape represents the most technologically explicit and theoretically consequential modality of the technology of absence. In this play, Beckett literalizes the structural operations that remain implicit in the other two — trace, supplement, iterability — by introducing a technological apparatus — the tape recorder — that externalizes and makes visible the constitutive structure of all language. The tape recorder is not merely a theatrical prop but a technological demonstration of what Derrida calls arche-writing: the differential, iterable system of traces that underlies all signification, spoken or written, and that precedes and conditions any act of communication (Derrida, 1976, pp. 6–26).

The tape recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape* functions as a paradigmatic supplement in the Derridean sense. Krapp uses the recorded tapes to supplement his memory — to complete and preserve his identity across time — yet this supplementary function reveals, in its very operation, the constitutive absence at the identity it ostensibly preserves. The recorded voice of Krapp's thirty-nine-year-old self is present to the ear yet irrecoverable in experience; it signifies a past self that was never fully self-present even at the moment of recording; it marks the absence it seems to preserve. The tape recorder, far from completing Krapp's identity, reveals that identity is always already constituted through technological mediation, through the differential relations among recorded voices, listening subject, and present moment. Diane Glancy(1995, as cited in Abd-Zaid Okab, J., & Kareem Abd- Aun, R. 2023) adopts recorded as symbolic means for her plays,where identity and memory function as authorizing forces that empowering people bonds and offer healing. As Charalambous demonstrates in his analysis of Beckett's technology of memory, the tape recorder functions as a "prosthetic supplement," (2020, pp. 23-40) demonstrating that what appears to complete presence only exposes its inherent absence.

The play's structure enacts trace in its most precise Derridean formulation. Krapp's engagement with his younger recorded self is an attempt to recover a presence — a past self, a moment of plenitude — yet each moment of apparent recovery only deepens the sense of irrecoverability. The recorded voice carries within it the trace of what it cannot be: the living presence of the speaking subject at the moment of recording, now permanently inaccessible. Krapp's characteristic gesture of rewinding the tape — replaying particular passages, refusing others, returning obsessively to the scene of a woman lying in a punt — is not an act of recovery but an enactment of the trace structure: each return to the recording reproduces the form of the past voice while confirming the impossibility of coinciding with it. The identity that the recordings seem to preserve is revealed as a series of traces — marks of an origin that was never fully present, supplements that substitute for a presence that was always already deferred.

The play also stages a complex operation of iterability at the level of its self-reflexive form. Krapp not only listens to past recordings but makes a new recording in the course of the play — yet this new recording, which will itself become an archive of absence for a future Krapp, reveals that the act of recording is not the preservation of presence but its immediate transformation into trace. The moment of utterance is simultaneously the moment of its archivization, and archivization is simultaneously the beginning of its deferral. The voice that Krapp records is already a voice-for-the-archive, constituted by the differential logic of iterability rather than the logocentric ideal of self-present speech. As Malkin (1997) observes, "identity in the play is fractured across time and language" (p. 30) dramatizing Derrida's insistence that subjectivity is never self-present but always marked by temporal and linguistic difference.

Performative Deconstruction in Beckett's Theatre

The comparative analysis conducted above yields a developmental picture of Beckett's technology of absence that both extends and refines the existing scholarship. Across the three plays, a clear trajectory is

visible: from the open iterative loops of *Waiting for Godot* — in which absence is produced through the unanchored circulation of dialogue around a perpetually deferred centre — through the compressed mechanical ritualism of *Endgame* — in which the technology of absence operates through the exhaustion of language to its bare structural skeleton — to the technological literalization of *Krapp's Last Tape* — where the operations of trace and supplement are externalized through the material apparatus of the tape recorder. This trajectory is not merely thematic but structural: Beckett progressively makes the mechanisms of his technology of absence more explicit and more radical, as if dramatizing the very logic of supplementarity that Derrida identifies in the history of Western metaphysics.

The most accurate thing the analysis shows is that Beckett's theatrical language is not actually a transparent medium that fails to work, i.e. which tries to communicate and ends up creating silence, absence and deferral, but a very specific apparatus that creates absence by working through its own formal procedures. The repetitiveness of the dialogues between Vladimir and Estragon is not an impairment of communicative competence but a structural characteristic of a language system that is intended to show that the logocentric ideal is impossible. Mechanical ritualism of the Hamm and Clov dialogue is not the dramatization of existential exhaustion, but the performance of a language which has been divested of all illusion of self-present intention, the exposure of its own skeleton of differentials. The technological mediation of the voice of Krapp recorded is not a metaphor of the frailty of memory but a manifestation in a material form of the order of arche-writing that Derrida defines as the state of all signification.

This reading has profound consequences to the wider study of Beckett. It questions the prevailing interpretive disposition —which the current work has defined as a gap in the literature on the topic— of understanding Beckettian absence as a thematic object: something that the plays say about human life, language, or the inability to communicate. When absence is not a theme but a formal role of the material activities of language itself then the theatre of Beckett is not the dramatization of existential emptiness, but an experimental and precise investigation of the conditions of all signification. The plays are not characterized by the impossibility of presence; they generate, by their own linguistic and dramatographic apparatus, the absence of presence as a result of the constitutive operations of language. In this regard, the theatre of Beckett is an act of deconstruction as opposed to a description of it: it is not the application of Derridean ideas to an autonomous text but the performance through the sheer materiality of its language of the structural processes that Derrida's philosophy attempts to theorize.

The Beckettian theatre and Derrida deconstruction converge here, with the help of three distinct and closely related analytical frameworks: différance, trace, and supplement, not due to influence, or even retroactive application, as Uhlmann convincingly asserts. It carries on a more structural homology between two responses, one theatrical, one philosophical, to the common historical and intellectual experience of post-war radical instability: the disillusionment of humanist certainties regarding the dependability of communication, the unity of subjectivity, the clarity of language to thought. Beckett's theatre and Derrida's

philosophy both inherit the metaphysical tradition they critique, and both work, from within that inheritance, to expose the instabilities — the traces of absence — that the tradition has always already harbored at its own foundations. The technology of absence is, in this sense, not merely Beckett's invention but the structure that all language has always already been, and that Beckett's theatre, with its rigorous minimalism and its radical formalism, is the first to make fully and irreversibly visible.

Conclusion

This study has made the case that theatrical language of Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Krapp's Last Tape* is a kind of technology of absence: a formalized system of textual and performative actions in which absence is not just articulated but actually generated and controlled as a dramaturgical effect. Based on the key concepts of Derrida's deconstruction, that is, différance, trace, iterability, and supplementarity, the analysis has followed a developmental path through three different modalities of dramaturgy: the open, iterative loops of dialogic deferral in *Waiting for Godot*, the mechanical ritualism of linguistic exhaustion in *Endgame*, and the technological literalization of trace and supplement through the tape recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

The research has highlighted and filled a major gap in the current body of knowledge: many critics have talked at length about the impact of absence in Beckett, but few people have gone in detail, to investigate the exact linguistic and dramaturgical procedures by which this impact is created. The analysis can be applied both to Beckett criticism and to a deconstructive literary theory by demonstrating that the theatre of Beckett practices deconstruction - that the structural functioning of différance, trace, and supplement takes place in the material functioning of its language. It provides, in particular, a model of a way of reading dramatic language as a performative technology, as opposed to a transparent medium; a framework that not only is relevant to Beckett's own theatre, but to anybody of drama in which the conditions of signification themselves are sufficiently subject to systematic investigation.

Future research might extend this framework in several productive directions within the corpus of the three plays examined here. First, a comparative study might examine the technological mediation of voice across the three plays: the absent Godot as a disembodied referent in *Waiting for Godot*, the unseen world beyond the windows in *Endgame*, and the tape recorder as prosthetic supplement in *Krapp's Last Tape*, thereby tracing an evolution in Beckett's dramaturgical treatment of technological absence. Second, future research might explore the temporal structures of deferral in greater theoretical depth, drawing on Derrida's later work on hauntology and spectrality to analyze how these plays construct time itself as a technology of perpetual postponement. Thirdly, dialogue with more recent post-Derridean theoretical frameworks — including Judith Butler on performativity, Giorgio Agamben on the potentiality of language, and Jean-Luc Nancy on the voice — might further enrich the analytical vocabulary available for reading these three canonical plays. What remains certain, across these possible extensions, is the foundational claim established here: that Beckett's theatre in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp's Last Tape* does not

merely depict the impossibility of presence but constitutes, through the rigorous formalism of its own linguistic apparatus, the most systematic and consequential theatrical demonstration of that impossibility in the history of modern drama.

References

Abd-Zaid Okab, J., & Kareem Abd- Aun, R. (2023). Female Agency in Diana Glancy's The Woman Who Was A Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance. *Journal of College of Education*, *53*(1), 633-644. https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.Vol53.Iss1.3119

Akhter, T. (2015). Waiting for Godot: A theatrical expression of Derrida's critique of logocentrism. *European Academic Research*, 2(11), 14164–14173.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

Beckett, S. (1953). *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*. Grove Press.

Beckett, S. (1957). *Endgame: A play in one act*. Grove Press.

Beckett, S. (1958). *Krapp's last tape and other dramatic pieces*. Grove Press.

Bloom, H. (Ed.). (1985). *Samuel Beckett: Modern critical views*. Chelsea House Publishers.

Charalambous, S. (2020). *Beckett's technology of memory: Prosthesis, supplementarity and the archive in Krapp's Last Tape*. Journal of Beckett Studies, 29(1), 23–40.

Chatterjee, S. (2013). Camus' absurdity in Beckett's plays: Waiting for Godot and Krapp's Last Tape. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 17(3), 57–60.

Cohn, R. (Ed.). (1987). *Beckett: Waiting for Godot*. Macmillan Education.

Connor, S. (1988). *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, theory, and text*. Basil Blackwell.

Culler, J. (1982). *On deconstruction: Theory and criticism after structuralism*. Cornell University Press.

Derrida, J. (1973). *Speech and phenomena* (D. B. Allison, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.

Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of philosophy* (A. Bass, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited Inc* (S. Weber & J. Mehlman, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.

Esslin, M. (1961). *The theatre of the absurd*. Anchor Books.

Habib, M. A. R. (2005). *A history of literary criticism: From Plato to the present*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Jani, D. (2013). Futility, hopelessness and meaninglessness: Central forces leading towards absurdity in Beckett's Waiting for Godot. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 1(3), 232–236.

Malkin, J. R. (1997). Matters of memory in Krapp's Last Tape and Not I. *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 11(1), 25–40.

Rakwal, K. (2014). Today's fear of being in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 2(2), 2321–3108.

Saussure, F. de. (1966). *Course in general linguistics* (W. Baskin, Trans.). McGraw-Hill.

Selden, R. (1989). *A reader's guide to contemporary literary theory*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Shahid, A. (2018). Towards a deconstructive text: Beyond language and the politics of absences in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. *International Journal and Cognitive and Language Sciences*, 12(1): 108-113.

Uhlmann, A. (1999). *Beckett and poststructuralism*. Cambridge University Press.

Weiss, K. (2012). The aesthetics of absence: Beckett's self and the trace in Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 21(2), 115–132.

Publications, Inc .https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.4.1.63