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透过荒诞寻求意义

——利用衔接分析《克拉普最后的录音带》

Exploring Meaningfulness through Absurdity:

Analyzing *Krapp's Last Tape* with Cohesive Devices

白 鹏 鹏

指导教师姓名: 李力 副教授

专 业 名 称: 英语语言文学

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## Abstract

This thesis endeavors to analyze Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape* by resorting to cohesion analysis and intends to illuminate on the content, the way and the reason of the author expressing his unique ideas in his special manner. Through the analysis, the ultimate purpose of this thesis will be to figure out the significance of the play in a psychoanalytical light and achieve conformity between form of the play, its underlying meaning and themes through cohesion analysis.

This thesis will focus on the functions of different cohesive elements in three distinguishing parts of the play. Through association of their functions with the context and themes of the play, and through comparison and contrast among the cohesive elements in different parts of the play, the analysis can be boiled down to three interrelated argumentations, through which and coupled with some of the substantial indications and symbolic features of the text, the significance of the play is revealed.

In the concluding part, the thesis attempts to find out the meaningfulness of the play, even though absurd in nature, in a psychoanalytic perspective. Hopefully, we can identify a proper existential philosophy to help us face the absurd reality in human life. Though our dust is bound to get settled absurdly, the way we rise up to such absurdity should be the top priority that merits retrospection.

**Key Words:** Absurdity, Cohesive Device, Human Existence

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## 摘 要

本论文采用衔接手段来分析萨缪尔·贝克特英文剧作《克拉普最后的录音带》，探究作者贝克特要表达什么主旨，如何表达，以及他为什么要以这种方式进行表达。通过主体部分的衔接分析，该论文旨在发现其剧作的现实重要性，达到形式、内容和主旨的一致性。

本文将从剧本中三个不同叙述者的角度出发，对这三部分文本中出现的各种词语衔接功能进行探讨，并通过研究这些功能及其与主题的关联，以及它们在不同叙述者口中起到的或相互照应或前后对比的作用，我们最终得出三个相关的论点，并将其整合，总结出贝克特的这篇剧作揭露荒谬人生的现实意义。

论文结尾通过心理分析理论，阐述了荒诞派戏剧代表人物贝克特看似消极的文风背后所暗藏的现实意义。通过克拉普荒谬人生的总结分析，我们旨在找到坦然面对人生的途径，虽然每一个短暂的人生终将毫无意义地尘埃落定，享受人生的每一刻美好并活出每一秒的价值，才是值得我们去关注和反思的。

**关键词：**荒谬，衔接，存在

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## Chapter One Introduction

### 1.1 Hypothesis

Since cohesion theory was first put forward by Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion has been of great concern in the linguistic circle. Scholars at home and abroad have made the multi-level researches about this theory and it is not difficult to find theses and books concerning cohesion. However, it is noteworthy that most of them in China focus on cohesive devices in ordinary texts rather than literary classics and seldom approach certain cohesive devices in a deep and detailed way. So in this thesis, we hypothesize that cohesion theory can be applied to the analysis of literary works. Through cohesion analysis, we can achieve the conformity between the form, the underlying meaning and theme of the literary works. This thesis aims to find out cohesive devices used in Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape*<sup>1</sup> and analyzes how they function to construct a coherent text.

### 1.2 Research Methodology

Sample collection illustration is the basic method of this thesis. About 14 paragraphs of examples are selected from the object texts and they are also analyzed in detail in order to illustrate the functions of various cohesive devices in the text. The main three parts of the whole analysis are examined by means of cohesion analysis, with a close look at such cohesive devices as reference, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis, parallel structure and lexical cohesion. By uncovering the interrelationship between the arrangement of expressions and the themes of the play, the thesis will come to the conclusion of three argumentations in the final part of each section.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel, B. *Krapp's Last Tape*[EB/OL]. [2011.4.20].  
<https://www.msu.edu/~sullivan/BeckettKrapp.html>

Comparison and contrast is another important method used in this thesis, by which the underlying meaning and themes of this play are studied. Besides, other methods are also used, such as close reading. Close reading is the method considered as and used for a kind of necessary preparation for further analysis of the selected examples.

### 1.3 Organization of This Thesis

Before the author starts the analysis, a brief outline of the content of this thesis will be helpful:

**Part 1:** Chapter 2 (Introduction of cohesion theory, the play and its author)

“What does the play convey in terms of content?”

**Part 2:** Chapter 3-5 (Cohesion analysis of the words and expressions used in the play)

“How does the play convey the content and themes?”

**Part 3:** Conclusion (Psychoanalytic implications of this play and major findings of this thesis and its limitations)

“Why does the play convey the meaning in this way? That is, what is the significance of the play?”

In the first part, the author will introduce the development of cohesion theory, its definition and cohesive devices, and then will elaborate the play from two aspects: the plot and the themes, from which the readers can hopefully grasp the main idea of *Krapp's Last Tape* and get prepared for the understanding of the subsequent analysis.

For Chapter Three, the author will focus on the repetition of phrasing in the Prelude and find the sense of repetitiveness in Krapp's actions to reach our first conclusion: dehumanization of human beings.

For Chapter Four, this thesis puts a relatively stronger emphasis on the older Krapp's use of personal reference – *he*—which indicates the sense of separation. From

an in-depth analysis of other cohesive elements in this section, this thesis comes up with the second argumentation: dissociation of personality.

For Chapter Five, the final section of the main part of this thesis, the author will carry out the analysis through comparison and contrast between the voice of the younger Krapp and that of the older Krapp. The author then finds out that the younger Krapp appears more self-important than the older Krapp, and that as Krapp turns old his sense of *I* becomes vaguer and his sense of uncertainty and failure becomes stronger. That is how this thesis can come to our third argumentation: dissolution of soul.

The fact that his sense of uncertainty and failure intensifies throughout the whole play highlights the absurdity in human existence. Samuel Beckett succeeds in displaying such absurdity in a most direct way – a one-man performance and the combination of three periods of a lifetime, i.e., the past, the present, and the future.

After discussing the theme of absurdity in this play through cohesion analysis, the thesis aims to convince the readers that there must be something in this play that can inspire people in terms of the sense of absurdity. So the concluding part of this thesis will be based on the interpretation of the older Krapp's inner world and his ego to figure out a positive attitude towards such inevitable reality of people's absurd existence.

In the concluding part, this thesis achieves what it initially hypothesizes: to achieve the conformity between the form, the underlying meaning and the themes of this play. The thesis also aims to bring the readers' awareness the development of "self" in this drama. Since absurdity is inevitable in the ordinary people's life and is experienced by every human, the author believes that people should focus their attention on developing the true value of their existence.



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