Krapp’s Last Tape (1958), is again, one more variation on the theme of the Absurd or the Non-ent.¹ In this play also, Beckett dramatizes in material stage-terms, the irrationality of an existential predicament, only that, it now shapes² itself primarily as manifest corporeal change, the favourite Beckettian ‘physical theme’.³ Time dments, though habits linger. Also nostalgia haunts, and isolation bewilders, both being always at a nagging increase. The play is a fresh experience of the Absurd in the sense that its drama is different from Waiting for Godot, as well as, Endgame. It is in fact, yet another novel experiment. The playwright hazards a daring innovation by making the first ever use of a tape-recorder to institute a dark and bleak vision of Time as an on-stage experience of the Irrational. This experiment needed courage, for the vogue of the ‘tape’ was still not a firmly established practice even in public life. The machine helped the playwright situate on-stage, ‘there’ a different abstract notion altogether. For, if a Waiting and an Ending, were made tangible theatrical experiences in the earlier plays, Krapp’s Last Tape makes Time and its excruciating lapse another profoundly overwhelming stage-phenomenon. The dramatist appears in complete control of the concrete language of theatre. And, what is called ‘theatrical space’, undergoes, significant reduction, because, as in Waiting for Godot and Endgame, the stage is almost bare, save for a table, a chair, a tape-recorder and some spools. The table and immediately adjacent area is in strong white light, while the rest is in darkness. And there is just one human figure to perform before the audience. He is called Krapp, that is, excrement, because an
aborted and irrational condition is little more than excrement and defecation. Lucky's schizophrenia had de-constructed language to concretize an equally worse existential impasse. As the play proceeds, what first appears a monologue shapes itself into an intense dialogue between old Krapp and his former voice-personae, recorded on tape. In fact, there are as many Krapps as there are spools in Krapp's den, though only three suffice to stage an overwhelmingly profound vision, however bleak, of a Time-trapped, palpable, human bind.

The entire 'action' of the play takes place in Krapp's den. Like Engdame, Krapp's Last Tape also has a pantomime begin it to situate Krapp's Time-hurt quandary on stage, reducing him to a tragic grotesquerie. Krapp at 69, is a clownish old figure seen sitting at his table. He is white-faced, purple-nosed and unshaven, with dishevelled hair. He wears extremely short trousers and dirty white boots. The pantomime has the aged Krapp pace the stage meditatively. He is eating bananas and even occasionally slipping over a peel. The pantomime has him leave the lighted stage and disappear in its darkened half. There, he is heard to have a peg or two of wine. The emphasis in the play is on sound. Infact, this play was written after the dramatist's experience with ALL THAT FALL a radio-play, broadcast on BBC. The play's concern with or fascination for sound gets Krapp only a tape-recorder and spools as campanions. Infact, the ritual re-play of his tapes appears his incorrigible habit. Therefore, after his return to the brightly lit part of the stage, and, as still a part of the pantomime, begins the stage-business with keys, drawers, ledger-entries and spools. It is a grotesque all through. Krapp is a shortsighted old man with a laborious walk, and lives in excruciating silence. This existential state is more presentational than a represented condition, and is
therefore a tragic spectacle. The pantomime contextualizes on
the proscenium, a newer version of Beckett’s ‘physical
theme’. Put on stage is a decrepit, old-age corporeality, as
a terribly lonely, futile, human presence ‘there’. Krapp is a
solitary old man. The stage-directions help contextualize
the acute loneliness. Old Krapp next selects a spool recorded
decades ago, for it was his habit to prepare a tape of his
voice-personae at each birthday. These early tape-records are
used by the playwright to de-construct one individual into
different voice-personae, each distinct and separate from the
forlorn old man, physically present near the speaking tape
voices. One voice is of Krapp-at-27, and the other, when he
was 39. But Krapp-at-27, is only heard by Krapp-at-39. The
audience hears Krapp-at-39 and his commentary at his younger
self at 27. Now, as old Krapp stands hearing his past voice,
he utters choice epithets like ‘the little rascal’ or ‘the
little scoundrel’ at the younger Krapp, at the early age-
milestone. This is an original way to de-construct a single
Self into three separate personae. The same technique also
helped telescope or re-struct the three into one, when Krapp
at 69 hears Krapp at 39 who supposedly hears a younger Krapp
at 27/29. It is a mere matter of a switch-off and switch-on
of the tape-recorder button. The recorded voice is recovered
as quickly as it is silenced. The same button helped disjunct
a person into two, while the third listened. Also, the same
disjunction helped telescope the three into one, that is, the
one actually ‘there’ as the old forlorn one at 69. He is now
older, maturer, lonelier, hard of hearing, and of a cracked
voice. This Krapp at 69, hears a youthful, ambitious and
illusion-ridden version of himself, who had just heard a
Krapp, ten or twelve years his younger, and a ‘rascal of a
whelp’ at that age. The tapes were recorded over a 40 year
period or more. They recover and recall, at will, earlier
life-stations, only as voiced articulations though. The tape-
recorder initiates a dialogue amongst the different versions
of a single Self at different age-milestones. It also achieves a contemporaneity with an articulated Self of the past, and, of that past with its future, which for the audience in the hall, is the Krapp-at-69. Furthermore, the taped articulations make the age-factor, at various life-milestones prominent. And, to repeat, against either of these disjunctions, or, telescoped re-constructions stands a lonely old man seen and heard as a stage-presence. This technique helps silence, or, recall, at will, earlier voiced articulations. Each recall sounds absurd and meaningless when juxtaposed to the physically live, though old Krapp-at-69, literally seen and actually heard on stage 'there' as a visual manifestation of the playwrights 'physical theme'. Therefore, the pantomime, the tape machine and a single actor, coarse of dress, old and decrepit and almost blind, together materialize an existential quandary that spreads over Time, and invite the audience to a participatory dialogue with it. The audience not only see and hear a lonely isolate, they also hear the voice that speaks to him, and to them too! The audience literally see and feel the disjunctions of a Self into its pasts and present. They also hear the existential impasse telescoped into a re-constructed collage, and the disjuncted Selves almost appear to hold conversation. Two pasts, at healthier stations are recovered as taped voice-personae, and juxtaposed to an on-stage aging bodily presence. The terrible counterpoints destroy and demolish all past and all present, and all future also, into an irrational condition, which is shorn of meaning and benumbed into a futility, or a Non-ent.7

While searching in the ledger for 'spool number five' old Krapp comes across a 'spool number seven' which prompts a chuckle, 'Ah! the little rascal!'. And once when he finds 'spool number five' he is equally pronounced with, 'Ah! the little scoundrel'. Spool number five, records the death of
his mother. It also mentions the 'black ball', 'the dark nurse', a 'memorable equinox', and, a 'farewell to love'. Some of these incidents appear lost to old Krapp, or at least, puzzle him quite. The past is of course somewhat recovered. However, that it cannot ever-afterwards, be the present, is shaped into drama by Krapp's peer at the ledger, his puzzled expression, the blank stare, his broodings, the shrugs of his shoulders, and, by the turn of the page too, and finally, through the totality of the dramaturgic concretization that accumulates as an on stage experience with---

Krapp: Ah! (He peers at ledger, reads entry at foot of page.) Mother at rest at last..... Hm ---- The black ball --- (He raises his head, stares blankly front puzzled.) Black ball? --- (He peers again at ledger, reads.) The dark nurse -- (He raises his head, broods, peers again at ledger, reads.) Slight improvement in bowel conditions. --- Hm --- Memorable --- what? (He peers closer.) Equinox, memorable equinox. (He raises his head stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Memorable equinox? (Pause. He shrugs his shoulders peers again at ledger, reads.) Farewell to -- (He turns page) - love. (p.11)

Old Krapp repeats 'memorable equinox' and the sheer repetition makes it sound grotesque and rinses it of its memorable quality. And, 'memory' and 'memorable' also get quite a drubbing---

Hm --- memorable --- what? (p.11)

The repetitions in the quotation continue, and get the company of a blank stare to add to the situation, the dimension of a tragic grotesquerie----

Equinox, memorable equinox. (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Memorable equinox? (p.11)
Subsequently, the turn of a page, spaced between 'Farewell to --' and 'love' becomes yet another reconstructing to suck the emotion of love of its meaning-content---

Farewell to -- (He turns page) - love (p.11)

Krapp’s physical inadequacies are also given enough dramatic emphasis. Beckett capitalizes on Krapp’s short sight and cracked voice to make the simple act of reading a dramaturgic exercise. He is made to peer closer at the ledger. Again and again he is unable to see what his hand had written decades ago. With sight and memory both failing, he can only ‘stare blankly front’. Through just a simple act of reading, theatric in expression, the past and present are made palpable experiences. There was the youth who had made the ledger-entry and was sure to remember; and there is the old decrepit who is unable to read and no longer remembers. Was it Proustian vision treated as profound drama? Krapp’s Last Tape exploits the different ‘voices’, a human being speaks in, at different age-milestones. Thus the tape dramaturgy contrasts on old cracked voice with the earlier Krapp’s youthful confident tone. The pantomime and the ledger reading stage-business had already contextualized the loneliness of an old addict. The creative use of the tape helps throw up his dissatisfaction with his youthful versions. He even sneers at them now. The illusion of a Time flow is disjuncted and then telescoped, and an entire life span is concluded to be meaningless. Having found ‘spool number five’, and managed somehow to read the key headings in the ledger, old Krapp switches on the tape-recorder, whereafter tape-dramaturgy takes full control of both theme and technique. It mischievously, as it were, juxtaposes the
forlorn and aged Krapp-at-69, to the younger more confident voice of a strong and middle-aged Krapp at 39---

Tape: Thirty-nine today, sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness, and intellectually I have now every reason to suspect at the --- (hesitates) --- crest of the wave -- or thereabouts. Celebrated the awful occasion, as in recent years, quietly at the Wine- house. Not a soul. Sat before the fire with closed eyes, separating the grains from the husks. Jotted down a few notes, on the back of an envelope. Good to be back in my den, in my old rugs. Have just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man with my conditions. (pp.11-12)

The juxtapose is a mixed fair, for there is, as should be, telescoping as well as disjunction. The first tape-play paragraph introduces us to a middle-aged Krapp whose voice is 'strong and rather pompous'; he is an addict of bananas. He celebrates 'the awful occasion' of his birthday alone in a wine-house. And he too had the incorrigible habit of recording and listening to his old tapes. At 39, Krapp is heard to say that he found the new light above his table 'a great improvement'. However, even at 39 he was aware of an extraordinary 'Silence' in his den; it was an awareness which by the age of 69 became excruciatingly overwhelming, for, it then appeared to literally envelop existence. Also, at 39, scepticism had already crept in, and so there was laugh both at past ambitions as well as past resolutions. The magnum-opus was now inverted sceptically into an 'opus --- magnum'. And each time, old Krapp is seen and heard to laugh with the 39 year old Krapp who at that moment was laughing at aspirations and behaviour of a Krapp, 10 or 12 years younger.

The young Krapp even chose to conclude with a 'Yelp to Providence'. He also referred to a certain old Miss MacGlom who always used to sing 'but not tonight', so much so that it
was hard for him now to believe that Miss MacGlom was ever young, which strangely made the middle-aged Krapp think whether he would sing when he was old. He was pretty sure that he would not, because he had never sung in a lifetime! To add to the drama of the situation, the 39 year old voice-personae of the tape is juxtaposed to the live and corporeal on-stage Krapp, old, lonely, and at 69. This is deconstruction of a single Self into a Being, and a voice-personae, testing the experience potential at 39, against the harsh 'physical' fact that was now at 69. The 'tape dramaturgy' capitalizes on the contrast between the visually seen and heard 'there', and a voice-personae that is merely heard, because along with this the existential predilections at 39, as well as those at 69, are also counterpointed, by a mere press of a tape button, that switches on a past, and switches it off too, disjuncting and telescoping at will, though never involuntarily. Infact, the recall or silence of the past was very deliberate. There was full control over this deliberate recall, and what did it achieve? Was it a disjunction merely? Or was it telescoping? Either was meaningless in the context of the Time-trap of an existential corporeal condition, so that even if there was control over the recall of an earlier experience, it was impossible to recover the whole experience because of the Time-flux and corporeal decay factors. And the tape helps situate on stage this profound existential quandary. Thus Krapp at 69, is a presence 'there' accessible to touch, sight and hearing, but lost to all the 68 years that have long since lapsed. He is lonely, and restless, and pacing the stage, often entering its dark half, and, coming out engulfed still by isolation and silence. Against this plight of age, the 'tape-dramaturgy' helps sound a mere voice-personae, more sure and confident and youthful at 39. However, it is a recorded voice version not accessible experientially at all to either touch or sight. Therefore it does not reassure at all. Infact it is
only a partial recovery and adds to the torment of nostalgia. This apart, the middle-aged Krapp also records some of these discomfitures and uncertainties. What is more, the 39 year old Krapp had himself been listening to a past tape, recorded when he was 10 or 12 years younger. In this way 'tape' helps recover two pasts simultaneously. However, it is this same simultaneity that disjuncts one Self into three, though the telescoping helps achieve some perspective also. Thus at 27/29, Krapp was heard by Krapp at 39 to be still living 'on and off' with a girl named Bianca in Kedar street. At 69, a voice at 39 is heard to say that it was happy to get rid of 'her', for 'it' had realized by then, that it was a 'hopeless business'. Nevertheless, the middle-aged voice still remembers the incomparable eyes though the voice at 39 sneers at the Self at 27/29, and finds it hard to believe that it was ever that 'young whelp'. This is a 'telescoping dramaturgy' indeed: Krapp at 69, hearing his voice at 39, which is supposed to have just heard a voice-personae at a milestone, 10/12 years earlier. The chuckles of the 69 year old Krapp at 'the little rascal', and, 'the little scoundrel', while looking at 'spool numbers 5 and 7', had hinted at a future telescoping, which is put into operational drama only when Krapp-at-69, actually hears Krapp-at-39, while the latter recounts with commentary, the experiences of Krapp of 27/29. Beckett's primary interest was to give dramaturgic shape to his theme, for it was the shape of thought that attracted him most. His drama is, in fact, a constant effort at shaping his theme of an Absurd existential condition. Therefore, it always has a metaphysical slant and profound metaphysical overtones. This helped him create tangible versions of three different Time-stations within a single life-span to throw up the tragic grotesquerie that existence as a Non-ent always was. Such a de-construction had earlier not been tried by Beckett. The two previous plays, Waiting for Godot and Endgame, had their Pauses, Silences,
Yawns and even Brief Laughs. They had their grimaces, and mannequins; and, even grotesqueries of human corporeality. They also had language de-constructions, as effective devices. In *Endgame*, two tableaux, a pantomime, and several voice modulations were also used. However, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, it is the tape that helps pass different Time concretions of a single Self through the dramaturgic sieve. Two are on its spools and one is outside the spool. Both operate as effective counter-points to each other for a synchronous stage experience. And, in this way the existential impasse for whatever it is worth, at these different Time-stations, is permitted a simultaneity, otherwise not possible, because Time and age are at a perpetual flux. It is this simultaneity as well as disjunction, this telescoping as well as triple perspective, that is the primary technical achievement of Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. Of course, given a tape and spools who would not have achieved it! However, it must be remembered and it has been pointed earlier, that Beckett had the temerity to experiment with the electronic gadget long before it was the commonplace it is today. It is possible that Proust's involuntary memory concept, which helped recover the past, had prompted Beckett to ironically resort to such an electronic device. Be that as it may, the fact of the matter is, that in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the tape is employed creatively, as a dramatic device, to make the Time-factor in the existential predicament a palpable experience. Much rather than a Proust, it was Beckett's own commitment to his theme of the Non-ent or Absurd that made him creatively exploit a tape to recall, silence, counterpoint, telescope, structure and re-structure Time.
Now, Krapp at 39, upon hearing his own voice recorded ten or twelve years ago is heard by the old Krapp at 69 to say---

Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.) And the resolutions! (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.) To drink less, in particular. (Brief laugh of Krapp alone). (p.13)

The middle-aged Krapp, and old Krapp seem to agree on the first two issues and therefore laugh together. But when it comes to ‘less drinking’, old Krapp laughs alone. This is the point of departure between the two. With an imaginative use of telescoped tapes, Beckett creates the situation of a dialogue between old Krapp, and his mechanically summoned voice-personae. Also, the laughs at the resolutions and aspirations at 27, show that they were hard to digest at a later age. The telescoped tapes helped put simultaneity and time-lapse through the dramaturgic seive, to shape the existential imbroglio into an Irrational Non-ent. Time, and therefore age, take their toll, which no memories or tapes can restore. And a re-call recovers only partially, even if it be at the press of a button. Besides this, the re-call juxtaposes the past and the present, so that the past as well as the present, because of the Time and age factors become bereft of meaning. This is done on-stage by making an old isolate, hear just one tape record of his own voice put into the tape 30 years before, in which he is heard responding to a tape of his voice recorded 10/12 years earlier when he was just 27/29. Time, age, maturity would alter perspectives drastically. Therefore, the re-call would only be a partial recovery, and age-milestones, if counterpointed, would expose the existential irrationality and meaninglessness at every point of time, and at every age-station in any life-span.
Now, even as the voice-personae at 39 is speaking, old Krapp at 69 switches off the tape-recorder, gets up from his table and walks into the darkness back-stage for his habitual drink. That switch-off of the Krapp-at-39 is tremendously effective. The self-confident and ambitious middle-aged Krapp was just switched-off, out of countenance, as it were. But was it not a voice merely? What had it helped recover anyway? Did its confidence even at middle-age measure up to the disillusion of old age with its demented hearing and sight, cracked voice, and lonely isolation? What is more, the switch back to the 'present' of the lonely old man of 69, on stage, and to his audience in the hall, is because of the same stroke of a tape-button! The switch-off matches with the fast flux even of recorded time. The tape is worked creatively to get these effects in Krapp's Last Tape.

With both time - present, and time-past debunked, and, a recall and recovery only partial, the disillusionment is enhanced manifold. And yet, old Krapp at 69, still sits, a slave to the incorrigible habit of hearing his old tapes, and of filling at each birthday, a fresh spool. He resumes listening again to a younger Krapp recounting his mother's death. He sat that day, so the tape says, by the canal in the biting cold, on a bench outside, bored and impatient, waiting and watching his ill-mother's window, wishing she were gone! His non-chalance brings Meursault of Camus' The Outsider to mind, who also wished that his old mother should die, and received the news of her death without any regret. At the burial too, Meursault had found the sun intolerably hot, and had not failed to notice the bright new screws in the coffin, and the colour of the nurses clothes, as well as the large stomachs of his late mother's closest friends! On his return, Meursault had even met one of his old girlfriends, and had spent the night with her; she had proposed marriage and he had agreed! Time made manifest as heredity
was thus given short shrift! Earlier, *Endgame* also had given heredity severe treatment and the attitude was similar, or even worse! As the source of procreation, heredity only unnecessarily prolonged the traumatic torture of an aborted irrational bind!

Now, from his bench, the young Krapp could see nurse maids, infants, old men, and dogs, and as the taped-voice announced---

One dark young beauty I recollect particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funeral thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her -- not having been introduced -- she threatened to call a police man. As if I had designs on her virtue! (p.14-15)

The non-chalance at the filial bond with heredity directly comes through because of this dramaturgic counterpointing. Krapp's attitude towards his dying mother is shocking. But so is the switch off of the middle-aged Krapp, by the Krapp-at-69. Life, youth, aspiration, and death are all allowed a simultaneity, as it were, and ultimately it is the Absurd that gets materialized as a 'there', on the proscenium, Beckettian drama, to repeat, being more presentational than representational.¹⁰

The young Krapp had always wanted to be a great writer. He was also pedantic, and used the word 'viduity' to describe his mother's state of widowhood. By contrast, old Krapp had forgotten the exact meaning of this word and therefore had to consult a dictionary. That strikes at the root of old Krapp's past pedantry and ambition. It makes insignificant even the perpetual human struggle to arrive at some kind of meaning at the least. At 69, the experiences and dreams at 39 would definitely need dictionaries, because at 69, with isolation,
loneliness and physical decrepitude to bear, many would find it hard to keep life and meaning together. The consequent dramaturgy on-stage would then have to be of the Absurd, a Non-ent, or a Nothing is, with the flux of Time, as in Krapp’s Last Tape doing most damage. It not only caused radical corporeal change but also created the incorrigibles of habit, nostalgia and memory!

The incident of the death of Krapp’s mother is mingled with the memory of a ‘black ball’ which the middle-aged Krapp was throwing to a little white dog while waiting for his mother to die. In fact, Krapp speaks more about the ‘white dog’ and the ‘black ball’, than about his mother. The mother’s death is announced by just saying that the blind went down. And, even after he knew that his mother had passed away, he sat for some more time on the bench, thinking about the ‘black ball’, which he ultimately gave to the ‘little white dog’. The juxtapositions as counterpoints are grostesquely tragic-

Tape: I was there when -- (Krapp switches off, broods, switches on again)–the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was, All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (Pause.) Moments. Her moments, my moments. (Pause.) The dog’s moments (Pause.) In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (Pause.) I shall feel it in my hand, until my dying day. (Pause.) I might have kept it. (Pause) But I gave it to the dog. (p.15)

Juxtaposing Krapp’s moments and his mother’s with the dog’s moments, Beckett bestows on all three, equal
insignificance, and, this link among the three is had through just one dramaturgic Pause---

Her moments, my moments. (Pause.) The dog’s moments. (p.15)

Earlier, in *Endgame*, Hamm also had his parents and his dog treated on similar egalitarian principles, only the number of Pauses was raised to three, and there was a slighter delay in articulating the word ‘dog’ after the pronoun ‘My---’. The entire quotation from *Endgame* is---

My father? (Pause.) My mother? (Pause.) My --- dog? (Pause.) (p.12)

However, the pathos also does not escape attention. For, there is tenderness in the way the ball is put into the grasp of the dog’s mouth, ‘gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (Pause.)’ The tenderness with which the dog is gently given grasp of the ball, and , the feel of the ball at that moment in Krapp’s own hand, deepens the pathos, which appears strange because of young Krapp’s non-chalance at heredity. But for the older Krapp who actually sits hearing the Spool, ‘there’, in the present, neither heredity, nor the dog is remembered and therefore it is hardly a memorable moment! Is it Proust once more at Beckett’s dramaturgical anvil, exposed for what ever his concept of ‘involuntary memory’ was worth?12 The memory of ‘the black ball’, about which Krapp-at-39 says ‘I shall feel it in my hand, until my dying day’, is also a non-starter for the older Krapp. Infact, when he reads it in the ledger he is puzzled, and dramaturgy has pathos, at hand in---

Hm --- The black ball --- (He raises his head stares blankly front. Puzzled) Black ball? (p.11).
Quite plainly, a tragic change had come over old Krapp, for he forgets even to remember the tender, memorable moments in his past. The irrationality of an existential condition is overwhelming, and memory or no memory, tenderness or no tenderness, the Absurd overawes human existence. As for Time, therefore, the less said the better! What may be human and memorable now, may not be human and memorable later! With the passage of Time, both meaning and worth are undermined. Old Krapp preserved his birth-day tapes out of sheer, incorrigible habit. Imaginative use of the tapes helped expose even the notion of 'a deeper interest', and whatever were ambitions, aspirations, tenderness, and even love! Were not they KRAPP! An aborted existential quandary could only permit a schizophrenic’s cliche-ridden 'word-salad'. And Lucky’s schizophrenia would call this existential condition EXCREMENT and DEFECATION! The playwright gives to a human being an appropriate name therefore. Man is labelled KRAPP!? He is krapp-at-27, krapp-at-39 and krapp-at-69. Man is just krapp and little more. It is a futile, worthless existence. Therefore, nothing can be sacred, eminent, or even unforgettable. That was potently palpable on-stage, and the playwright has the old Krapp share it with his audience at that particular dramaturgic moment. The ability to present it as a profound experience by creatively manipulating an electronic device is a milestone in Beckettian dramaturgy. It was an entirely new experiment, because the year was 1958, and to repeat, the tape-recorder was as yet not a popular public gadget either. The experiment was entirely new, innovative, and even daring. Beckett was extremely successful with the machine in Krapp’s Last Tape. Of course, it suited his theme, helping him recall and recover even a past and lost time, and play with notions of memory, time, age, and nostalgia. Through conjunction, disjunction and telescoping he got distance, contemporaneity and even simultaneity. This was all to the benefit and advantage of shaping what Beckett
committedly felt to be an existential Non-ent, and concretize it as an overwhelmingly intense stage experience.

The lonely isolate Krapp, had only his tape-recorder and its spools as companions. Of course he returned to them out of sheer incorrigible custom too. Therefore, once more we find old Krapp return to the spools and tape-recorder to hear himself again when he was 39. The record was crucial. It evidenced the memorable night when the middle-aged Krapp had had a vision. However, the ecstasy in the middle-aged Krapp voice is switched off thrice by the impatient old man, who is too sceptical to share the young man's visionary experience. 'Tape-dramaturgy' helps recover not only the visionary's ecstasy, it also counterpoints it to the older man's impatience to such visions and has drama demean it by making the lonely old man fast-forward the tape, till it is well past its recorded inspirations. The Godot-play had dreams and visions soured through the sheer rhythm and beat, inherent in banal cross-talk. In Krapp's Last Tape, each switch-off by an old and impatient Krapp has the tape literally strike a vision into a dustful heap. Each impatient fast-forward, and the curses that accompany it, create a situation of pronounced conflict between his younger voice-versions and himself, and therefore gives to Krapp's tape-exercise a dialogic content. These two dramaturgic uses of the 'tape' could hardly be lost upon an audience. One helps debunk vision, the other initiates a temporary dialogue between the younger and the older Krapp. Krapp at 69 is angry with himself for having been a young fool, and the fooler too, to record a so-called vision, the thought of which, he, now at 69, could not even bear! The 'krapp audience' also travel along with old Krapp, now to the past, now to the present, and now to the present but looking into the future, and share the on-stage rinse of visionary experience. Furthermore, the tape-device, contrasts the vision of the
young Krapp with 'the terrible darkness' within, which Krapp had always struggled to keep under. At 69, it is experienced as the more immediate and terrifying existential quandary. It is this that Krapp had forever coped with. The audience, by now deeply involved, can hardly miss the poignant pathos of the lonely old man. Of what consequence, in any case were light and darkness to an Absurd, and an Irrational existence! The lines already considered earlier are quoted below to show how effective is Beckett's manipulation of the language of theatre. It is 'tape dramaturgy' without doubt. However, the tape-device is exploited to create a situation of conflict and dialogue, with only one visible dramatis personae on-stage! Memory and vision topple; ecstasy gets debunked. There is recall or silence at the mere press of a button! Time-flux is jettisoned; disjunction and counterpoint, as well as, contemporaneity and simultaneity are had, and yet, nothing is got thereby. The quotation has already been considered in the previous pages, but is quoted entire for its aptness of example---

Tape: The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that --- (hesitates) --- for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely - (Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again)- great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most-(Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again) - unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire -- (Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again). (pp.15-16)
Krapp's 'I' must have taken a severe beating. Was the 'I' consistent enough to be called 'character', or, had it taken on Pirandello's 'conglomerate' colour? Could Krapp-at-69 have said of either Krapp-at-39, or, Krapp-at-27, 'That is me?' Or, would old Krapp have preferred instead, 'That was me?' What in any case does memory recall? How much does it recover of the past? Does a voice-recall always satisfy? Is it sufficient? And, suppose, if the entire was recalled, how much of it would a Krapp, at 69, be prepared to accept and own as his? There is no guarantee that a past recall would create less nostalgia or solve problems? How much would old Krapp be prepared to affirm and how much would he reject? Beckett's commitment to his theme of an Irrational Non-ent made him see the dramaturgic potential in an electronic device, fresh in the market, that would help give one more, and, a new shape to his theme of a Non-ent or the Absurd. Like Waiting, or, Ending, or an Absent presence, or Happiness, Time too, particularly its change and flux was an excruciating element in an Irrational existence. Would a tape's potential ability to recall and silence, at will, change the basic nature of a purposeless existential condition by the kind of control it would have over the lost past? What would actually happen if the lost past is brought into the present? Thus, there is old Krapp, with his cracked voice, who has forgotten even the meaning of words used by him earlier, and, who now enjoys only their articulations like the sound of 'spooool'. Moreover, he cannot even bear to listen to what he had recorded earlier. Perhaps the tape-recorder itself was a folly, because it could only preserve tin and can, name, date, label and ledger, voice articulations and little more! But then, there is more of this creative use of the tape-device yet to come to help shape and make palpable the intense experience that a Non-ent could be.
Now, to repeat, a tape records only a voice-personae, be it of a 'vision', or, of 'lyrical love'. For, meanwhile old age sets in. And therefore, the tape that recorded and later reported a 'vision', would at 69, lose all its ecstasy. But then, libido could still search vicarious pleasure, and, therefore, old Krapp re-plays thrice the record of his youthful experiences with the girl in the punt, although trapped in physical decay, and bound by time, heredity, habit, memory and nostalgia---

Tape: Picking gooseberries, she said, I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (Pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments --(Pause) -- after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low) Let me in. (Pause.) We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (Pause.) I lay down a cross her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side. (p.16-17).

The above passage is supposed to be highly lyrical, and, catches the fancy of the reader, audience, and critic alike. But once again, the re-play of this lyrical detail, be it repeated umpteen number of times, is at such a remove from the immediacy of the original experience, that the thrice evoked facility of the press-button-recall, is always an exercise in helpless futility! And, what would better emphasize this, than the juxtapose of the later switch-off from that past to this present, after which follows another short pantomime by the lonely man.

The pantomime is a preparation for old Krapp's record of his own tape, now at 69. He could not even cure himself of the past habit of the last 40 years or more. It has the
hapless creature afumble in his pockets. He fishes out a banana and an envelope. This time he does not eat the banana. After consulting his watch he goes back-stage for a drink and a brief siphon is heard; perhaps he suffered from constipation too! Then he returns, reads the jottings on the envelope, loads a new reel in the tape-recorder, and switching it on, begins to record his mentality, now at 69. It was a new exercise in futility, and prolongs through many disjunctions. Since it is considered in some detail some repetitions will occur even as this analysis proceeds, particularly because each disjunction has some dramaturgic point or the other to make.

Old Krapp, it is to be presumed, records his last tape on his 69th birthday, and affords yet another counterpoint to all the previous tapes of his youthful days. The short pantomime, had just defined the old man’s die-hard habits on stage, one of which was to prepare a fresh spool at each birthday, by reading into it the significant events of his life of the past year, previously jotted on an envelope. In this way, he supposedly preserved the memories of a lifetime on machine. The spool-number would be entered in a ledger, under key-headings, for ready reference later. Beckett creatively manipulates the spools, and, with the facility of the juxtapose is able to literally rub in the irrational existential quandary in dramatic detail. And, with Krapp still in his habit-trap of ‘operation spool’, the playwright’s technique also takes up the challenge. But with the proscenium already littered with the debris of Time, the Self, Youth, Ambition, Memory and Habit, whatever was there that old Krapp could preserve! Furthermore, what was there that needed to be kept away as sacred! In any case, could he preserve at all, despite all the spools, the ledger and the tape-recorder! Therefore, the fact that old Krapp re-acts to
the youthful tapes is evident in the very first lines of his sixty-ninth year recording---

Krapp: Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway. (p.17)

By now, it is abundantly clear that the action of the play actually turns out to be a repetition of a ritual that Krapp has mechanically performed for the last forty five years. And once a ritual loses meaning, it often ends up in a purposeless exercise, which would apply to all such recordings Krapp had ever made and listed, and all the effort therefore ever made by Man to preserve, recall and recover past experience. Fond excess had age lurking furtively at its heels, and the past could at best be only partially preserved. A throw back, therefore rendered even ecstatic visions terribly grotesque redundancies. Vis-a-vis the magnum opus, or the vision, old Krapp now neither had anything to say, nor even to squeak---

Krapp: Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool. (Pause.) Revelled in the word spool. (With relish.) Spoooool! Happiest moment of the past half million. (Pause.) Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas. (p.18)

At 27, and 39, Krapp had had much to say, being the 'rascal' and 'scoundrel' that he was! Now, at 69, Time had taken its toll, body had shed its youth, and shades of scepticism at 39 had become shadows. The irrationality of the existential bind had now spread over an entire life span. Therefore, the lonely old man has little to say and finds life over. The voice-personae of the earlier recordings, played a short-while ago, counterpointed with the present
existential strait, create ripples that devastate the meaning of life, branding it a purposeless futility. To achieve his ambition young Krapp had even bid farewell to love. The ambition not achieved, Krapp, at 69 has to make do with Fanny, 'the old ghost of a whore', with whom he 'could not do much'. He is now full of regret, but the crucial factor was not the wrong choice made, nor even a fond option preferred, at the earlier stages of his life-span. The regret is excruciating, because all along, it was a meaningless exercise, the irrational existential trap never quite permitting any respite or escape, neither then, nor now. Consequently, right choices or wise options were not ever the point. Right, wise, youthful, strong, ambitious and aspiring were always empty adjectives, absolutely irrelevant in the context of a Non-ent; and, illusions were worse! Death was the only reality, and a rising inner darkness, the harsher truth. That nullified every achievement. To be dead is now old Krapp's only hankering. He asks himself if he could have been happy had he stayed with his beloved on the Baltic, and not just cut himself off from the rest of the world to write his magnum opus.

Recorded voice-memories of his youth, whether of ambition, vision, or lyrical love were a travesty of the lonely life he now lived, at 69. For, it seems that at his age, his 'day is over'. Like the evening shadows he will soon pass away, unnoticed. Therefore, how does, either a beloved, or, even loneliness matter. In a letter for the working plan of San Quintine's production of the play, Beckett explains the agony of Krapp thus---

The fire filling the younger Krapp was the fire of the vision, the magnum opus. The 69-year old Krapp feels a fire burning in him too, but it is a different one, the old Krapp is burning to be gone. 14
The old man of 69, is utterly disillusioned, with no future plans; his whole life has been a 'misery'. It is 'the fire to be gone' that now makes him contemplate his lost past, imagining himself lying in the dark, when Pause after Pause, and in 6 Pauses all, a life-span is incoherently covered. At that moment, no more tapes play. The nostalgia is in the refrain of a 'Be again----' till technique makes the hapless man utter only 'And so on'. Then after a Pause, he repeats 'Be again----' twice. As already remarked, this was life remembered without a tape, an incoherent babbling at a desire to express. It is significant dramaturgy—

Krapp: Lie propped up in the dark - and wonder. Be again in the dingle on the Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. (Pause.) Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. (Pause.) And so on. (Pause.) Be again, be again. (Pause.) All that old misery. (Pause.) Once wasn't enough for you. (Pause.) Lie down across her. [p.19]

The entire spoken piece recalls Estragon, according to whom to be dead was not enough for the dead, because the 'talking', keeps up a perpetual articulation under an obligation to express, and, a compulsion to do so that is acute, and for that very reason tragically grotesque—

Vladimir: What do they say?
Estragon: They talk about their lives.
Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.
Estragon: They have to talk about it.
Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.
Estragon: It is not sufficient. (Silence.) [Act.II, p.63]
Krapp realizes only when it is too late that he has nothing to say. He removes the tape, loads on the first spool, searches for his favourite passage with the unnamed girl in the punt, and plays this part of the recording till the finish, while he himself sits silent and motionless before it. Lyricism and erotica apart, the dramaturgic de-construction is between the youth, that Krapp could still boast of at 39, and, the lonely decrepit that Krapp was, at 69. His pleasure was only vicarious at this moment, though aged Krapp may have had more than fulsome sex in mind. The dramaturgic counters of two Krapp-times, the Krapp-at-39 with his fulsome sex, and, his counter at 69, who now coughed away the life left to him, puts the existential plight of a human being into profound perspective. Permit a vision, allow a mangnum opus, let love in the punt be at its lyrical ecstatic, and even let Krapp-times be three, still Time, age, and physical decay demean life into an excrement. Life remains krapp, however loud-mouthed, sex-hungry and knowledge-loving one ever is! Man just ‘wastes and pines’ as Lucky’s shouted schizophrenia would have us believe.

Like most Beckettian ‘protagonists’, Krapp is also aged and afflicted with painful disease; one more, on-stage manifestation of the playwright’s ‘physical theme’. He is almost deaf and nearly blind, and suffers from perpetual constipation. Hard of hearing, he hugs his recording-machine and makes the act of listening highly dramatic. This also demonstrates Krapp’s unique relationship with his tape. The old man has developed some kind of emotional rapport with it. It is, after all, his sole companion and acts as a mediator, however incompetent, between him and his past. Perhaps, that is why, when the recorded voice gives the account of the unnamed girl in the punt, Krapp bends over and almost embraces his surrogate friend, the tape-recorder! But his enthusiasm for it notwithstanding, the gadget is susceptible
to creative exploitation, to situate on stage, a profound

dramatic experience of Time and the existential Non-ent. However, switches have constantly to be manipulated to get
the choice-pieces throw up their voice-personae. The past
can at best be vicariously re-experienced, and, at great
remove. The machine de-constructs a life-span, and lends
three such de-constructions a crass and mechanical
simultaneity. It bestows on time-past and time-present, a
contemporaneity that facilitates a collage type re-
construction. However, the re-construction on-stage concretizes a profound existential futility, which is the
playwright’s favourite theme. The contemporaneity achieved,
need not be purposeful, because it also lends a surprising
perspective to the life-milestones under drama’s scrutiny.
The switch-ons and the switch-offs, from one milestone to
another, by themselves offer tell-tale commentary, because no
two milestones can ever agree, the Time-flux in between
becoming a formidable obstruction. This time-gap prevents
complete recall. In any case all Time can never be within
the ambit of human experience, and therefore, complete
simultaneity or contemporaneity is humanly impossible. Tapes
achieve only apparent and partial juxtaposition or
counterpoint. Infact, the juxtapose is at times so full of
potential conflict that creative manipulations of switch-ons,
switch-offs and fast-forwards, radically alter a life-time
perspective. Time therefore, becomes an Irrational, Absurd
condition, and, whether at a flux or standstill, is an on-
stage anathema. However, like memory and nostalgia,
incorrigible habit is also part of the existential trap. It
is because of this that old Krapp is still found at his tape,
recording the events of his sixty-ninth year. But then
habit, memory, and nostalgia are all traps indeed. To repeat,
therefore, tin and can Time, if one will, in a recorded tape,
but all that is retrieved is a voice-personae to which though
reaction is instinctive, experience and bodily health are at
a complete disjunct. This is more particularly so when the desire is only to be away and gone! Therefore, the old man is set abrood, till he realizes that the tape records only Silence. This is dramaturgy in full play. The tape could record a Silence also! It is switched-off, but now for that very reason old Krapp's voice goes unrecorded into ions of Time and History, and, not even into the tape! For it did not record what the old man was saying---

Everything there, everything all the--- (p.18)

The tape is switched-on again, and old Krapp repeats---

Everything there, everything on this muckball, all the light and dark and famine, and feasting of --- (hesitates) --- the ages! (p.18)

Old Krapp is a 'stupid bastard' no more. Of course he does have fits of memory and nostalgia, but age has set on, and Time has taken its toll. The earth, the silence of which, at 39 also, he had found extremely disturbing, was a 'muckball' after all, full of the contradiction of all the ages! Old Krapp is now desperate. He shouts a loud and hopeless 'yes!'. However, escape out of this irrational Time-trap is impossible. The come-down from the desperation is graded even as the work-up was. Krapp becomes tired and weary. Existence as a task was taxing and traumatic. It was like homework, from which the mind could not ever be taken off. He speaks into the last tape again his uncertainty about Christ---

Ah well, may be he was right (Pause.) May be he was right (Pause.). (p.18)

Krapp pauses and the tape continues its wind once more recording only the Silence that engulfs him. Realizing this
he switches off, and consults the jottings on his envelope and is disgusted—

'Pah!' (p.18)

The jottings are dismissed, the envelope crumpled and thrown away. He again broods, and then switches on the tape and says—

Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now! The sour cud and the iron stool. (Pause.) (p.18)

Cursed Time had seen him a whelp, a scoundrel and then a stupid bastard; these were three Time-milestones. There had been writing, dining, drinking, sex, ambitions, aspirations; even a vision, lyricism and thoughts of a magnum opus; there was splutter, bother, rant and confidence; there was scepticism, indifference, and non-chalance also. However, stealthily, age had set on, and with that came loneliness and Silence. Each time-station had its reservations about the earlier milestones. The tape spools could record only a voice and not a whole life. The voice reproduced did not recover even an iota of the ions of Time that had sped by. It is poignant and tragic. Time was once at 27 and then at 39. That had made two voice-spoolsp merely. In any case, it was life taken at an artificially set time-station: an year; a birthday! Now he was 69, and had little to say! Time as flux, as duration, as memory had lost significance. The krapp and defecation that life forever was, has now become an 'iron stool', a 'sour cud'. The happiest moment was therefore also the most grotesque; not that, earlier ones, long ago, were any better, or any worse! In any case there were no happy moments left now; if any there were it could only count one in half a million, and that too in the grotesque sound of the word 'spooool'. The magnum opus had sold just 17 copies; the
farthest that his reputation could travel was not very far. But then old Krapp’s last tape was atwirl, and after a Pause the decrepit again spoke into it---

Crawled out once or twice, before the summer was cold. Sat shivering in the park, drowned in dreams and burning to be gone. Not a soul. (Pause.) Last fancies. (Vehemently.) Keep’em under . (Pause.) (p.18 )

At the 69-milestone, old Krapp felt himself at a crawl, cold and shivering. Memory and nostalgia were now a bane and a curse. Krapp was alone and very lonely now, conscious of an inner darkness and a ‘burning to be gone’. It was pathetic. Between two Pauses, and, a vehement Krapp effort, drama exposes his attempt to keep his memories reined. These are stage-concretizations of the abstract concept of Time. The human being is shown ‘to do and suffer’ through its lapse and flux, retrieving minimally and losing all. Tapes and memories, nostalgia, habit and heredity are desperately hugged, but what is lost to Time cannot ever be retrieved as a full-blooded life experience. And therefore, as a profound theatrical experiment, the playwright situates a late age-milestone, corporeally stationed ‘there’,15 as a ‘physical theme’, on a practically empty, half-lit-half-dark stage, and past milestones are recovered as taped voice-personae. Just one of them, of the right age-station is played to narrate, comment, or counter, a past, present or ‘future’. What was ‘future’ to a past at 39 or 27, is made a tangible existential bind at 69. In this way, an abstract phenomenon like a past, or a future, are contextualized as on-stage palpable experiences. And, in the process, life in the context of Time, and Time in the context of a lived life, are shown as lived irrationalities. It is a hard, harsh, and cruel condition, but crueler, far more are nostalgia, habit, and memory, for these, prod and instigate. Recorded spools do not help recover the life that has sieved through the
sands of Time. But still, out of incurable habit, old Krapp keeps speaking into his last tape. The aspirant to a magnum opus could now barely struggle through a page. Memory rushes in and with it enters Fanny, as a ghost from the past. Dramaturgy is in full control---

(Pause.) Could I? (Pause.) And she? (Pause.) Pah!
(p.18)

Old Krapp repeated into the gadget a song he had partly sung earlier discontinuing it then, because of a coughing fit---

Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh-igh,
Shadows -- (Coughing, then almost inaudible) of evening
Steal across the sky. (p.19)

The theme of the song, and the coughing, as well as the Silence, and the imaginative play of spools, together define Time, as an on-stage, intense irrational condition. Old Krapp now gasps. He wonders about last efforts. He becomes delirious, almost lost in bits and pieces of memory. He is repetitious. The refrain is 'Be again ---', and 'Be again ---' has already been noted. To reconsider its language dramaturgy, the refrain spaced between Pauses and culminates in a Long Pause---

(Pause.) And so on. (Pause.) Be again, be again.
(Pause.) All that old misery. (Pause.) Once wasn't enough for you. (Pause.) Lie down across her. (Long Pause.) (p.19)

The Long Pause ensues and the play is now about to end. Old Krapp is still at his last tape. Just then, and very appropriately too, grotesque melodrama takes over. Old Krapp bends over the machine, switches it off and takes out the
tape he was recording on, crumbles it and throws it away. Time had had him graded a whelp, a rascal, a scoundrel, and then a stupid bastard. But now he had had enough of Time. However, escape there could be none, and memory, habit and nostalgia also took their heavy toll. Krapp is shown on stage, literally struggling to keep dreams and fancies repressed and under. The re-play of the punt scene was yet to come, with its lyricism, but it hardly recovered anything but memory, and its nostalgic re-play was now little more than a habit. The re-play is however, an appropriate counterpoint. The tape is adjusted at the re-play of the punt scene, but the playwright does not have the re-play stop. It plays on silently even after the two Krapps at 39 and 69 have finally stopped speaking.

Now, Time having been zeroed into a futility, the play must end in a Silence, and of Silence, Krapp’s Last Tape has a new drama, with its specific sound-contour. The Godot-play had made maximum use of Silences. There were Longer Silences too. In the excruciating back-drop of these Silences the tramps were at a dramaturgic pressure to keep up a banal conversation, to ward off the eerie meaninglessness of an irrational existential bind. Endgame did not use Silences at all. It preferred the shorter duration Pauses, and also voice modulation to disjunct and de-construct extended speech deliveries. In neither the Godot-play, nor Endgame is any dramatis personae directly aware of a Silence, much less does it speak of, or, mention it as a conscious awareness. On the contrary, Krapp’s Last Tape has it mentioned as a consciously felt, profound experience. In fact, the close of the play is witness to a new kind of drama so far in Beckett, that treats Silence differently as a concretized, on-stage, overwhelming phenomenon. Of Silence, the lonely old man appears intensely aware. Now at 69, he only hankered for death and felt the inner darkness of which he had always been conscious, take
greater possession of him. He had sat at his last tape and felt he had nothing to record; not even as, much as a squeak! Silence had ultimately to take over, and it is built up dramaturgically as a strategy. When the end of the play approaches, there are two situations of very profound Silence. It is the middle-aged Krapp at 39. His voice-personae speaks over the tape as old Krapp sits alone and listens. The younger man is heard between 2 Pauses—-

(Pause.) Past mid night. Never knew such Silence. The earth might be uninhabited. (Pause.) (p.16).

Earlier at p.12 also, the middle aged Krapp has his sceptical awareness—-

Extraordinary silence this evening! I strain my ears and do not hear a sound... (p.12)

And so, Krapp's Last Tape has the first direct mention of Silence by a dramatic personae so far. Quite plainly this is a new 'Silence dramaturgy' and requires consideration, even at the cost of repetition. In Waiting for Godot, Silence was used almost as rhythm and ritual, and so also was Pause -orchestration. But no one spoke about it, though it was felt to overwhelm the cross-talk, which was rhythmically stopped at umpteen dramaturgic points to sink in the metaphysical burden, which the banal conversation each time underscored. Now Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape have Pauses only except that, in the latter there is this new 'Silence dramaturgy', when Krapp-at-39, just quoted, specifically refers to a kind of Silence he found extraordinary. He just speaks three short sentences, placed between three Pauses. It is past midnight, the earth appeared uninhabited. Never did he know such silence. This is Beckettian drama making the audience feel anew an excruciating quiet indeed. Or was it a Disquiet!? The pause-hedging, the evoked midnight, the earth
pronounced as uninhabited, together add to the on-stage experience of a Silence which now keenly hurts the old and lonely Krapp. The three extra words spoken by the younger Krapp before he is switched off accrue to the 'silence dramaturgy' a fresh dimension, providing it a different sound contour altogether---

Here I end--- (p.16)

At this point, as we remember, old Krapp had switched off for a re-wind, because he had wanted to get the punt scene again on the sound track. He locates it and enjoys entire, the lyricism of the love-scene. It was a re-count of the punt-episode in the voice of the middle-aged Krapp. After this re-count there is a Pause in the tape. In the play it is on p.17. The third variation of the sound contour of Silence follows, for, after the Pause referred to, it repeats just 4 words out of the 3 sentences that had noted the extraordinary Silence earlier---

past midnight. Never knew -- (p.17 )

However, as we already know the younger man was switched off; cut off in mid-speech. He was not allowed to repeat the 3 short sentences that had earlier evoked the Silence. Yet, the contour variation on Silence introduces the theme and the switch-off actually re-habilitates Silence, initially activated by the switched-off speech. The old man had stopped the tape, because, as pointed out earlier, he had wanted to prepare a new spool at his sixty-ninth birthday. Let us linger a little longer at the contour variations Beckett plays on the 'dramaturgy of Silence'. For, later, old Krapp wrenches off the new reel, crumples it, and throws it away. It is replaced by the punt-scene spool. The lyricism of the love-scene is once again voiced by the
middle-aged Krapp. However, old Krapp only stares and sits motionless. The play is about to end, so is the re-play of the punt-scene tape. The spoken reference to the pervasive Silence on earth arrives. And, as still more effective drama, the playwright makes just one slight variation on his 'dramaturgy of Silence'. This variation is in the shape of a small stage-direction. After the Pause, and before the middle-aged Krapp's reference to the strange Silence, the stage-direction has only old Krapp's lips move. There is no speech however, and there is no sound either. This is at p.20. After this, the audience hear on tape, the middle-aged Krapp repeat the entire 'Silence ritual' of 3 sentences—

Past midnight. Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited. (Pause.) Here I end this reel ---- (p.20)

That evokes Silence again and immediately after old Krapp speaks his and the play's last speech 'Box-- (Pause) -- three, spool --- (Pause) --- five. (Pause.)'. That spool was made 30 years ago, when the old man was at the prime of life, but now that no fire was left in him anymore, he did not want Time unwound at all. He sat motionless, staring, while the tape having re-worked the last Silence on-stage, and, exhausted its voice-content, ran on silently. Such are the playwright's variations in strategy that contextualize Time, on-stage, into a dramaturgic Silence. Towards the play's end this excruciating Silence was shaped into a fresh and intense experience.16

The Silence was there. It is there. Three moves on its devastating scale were sufficient. A Pause; a reference to midnight; and a reminder of its obviousness, 'Never knew --'. At 39, Krapp had become aware of the Silence. Now, at 69, he was in lonely isolation and had in fact found himself enveloped by its agonizing presence. All that the old man
could now do was to switch-off his 39-year-old voice and brood, possibly at the life left far behind in lost ions of time, of which a mere voice-record remained---

Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway. (Pause.) The eyes she had! (Broods, realizes he is recording silence, switches off, broods) (pp.17-18)

The earlier 'whelp' and the later 'scoundrel' is now become a 'stupid bastard'. This was a fine way to grade Time, on an affectionately adverse scale of degradation and abuse. And of course, as pointed out earlier, it also de-constructs one Self into as many Krapps as the spools. And, a perspective is set up on the past, which became graded on some kind of a scale. The play adds the lapse of Time to the irrationality of existence, taking away all its certitude and compelling each successive age--milestone to reject its predecessor. This was a trap-situation, but what of the touching nostalgia---

The eyes she had (p.18)

To conclude, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the playwright made a daring innovation by making the first ever use of a tape-recorder to concretize a dark and bleak vision of Time as an on-stage experience of the irrational. The machine helped the playwright contextualize Time, yet one more abstract notion on-stage, like a Waiting and an Ending in the earlier plays.

As usual in Beckett's theatre, the stage undergoes a significant reduction. The stage as always is almost bare, save for a table, a chair, a tape-recorder and some spools. The proscenium holds only one human figure during the entire action. He is called Krapp aged 69 years. What seems to be a
monologue shapes itself into an intense dialogue between old Krapp and his former voice-personae, recorded on tapes at different birthdays.

The entire 'action' of the play takes place in Krapp's den, which is divided into two halves, one is brilliant and the other is dark. Like Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape, too has a pantomime begun it to situate Krapp's Time-hurt quandary on-stage, reducing him to a tragic grotesquie 'there', an irrational meaningless physical presence, Beckett's favorite 'physical theme'. A ritual re-play of his tapes appears to be Krapp's incorrigible habit. Old Krapp is short-sighted and hard of hearing, and has a laborous walk. He is a solitary and lives in excruciating silence, a very effective positioning on stage of an existential state as presentational rather than a representational condition. It is a decrepit human corporeality, and a terribly lonely human presence 'there' in all its tragic grotesquie.

The tape-recorder recovers and recalls, at will, earlier life-stations only as voiced-articulations though. It initiates a dialogue amongst the different versions of a single Self at different stages in life. The tape recorder also achieves a contemporaneity with an articulated Self of the past, and of that past with its future, which for the audience in the hall is Krapp-at-69. Furthermore, the taped articulations make the age-factor, at various life-milestones prominent. And, against either of these disjunctions, or, telescoped re-constructions, stands a lonely old man, seen and heard as a stage presence. The terrible counterpoints dramaturgically debunk, past, present and future. Beckett was extremely successful with the machine in Krapp's Last Tape, of course, it suited his theme, helping him recall and recover a past and lost time and play with notions of memory, age and nostalgia. Through conjunction, disjunction and telescoping
he got distance, contemporaneity and even simultaneity. This was all to the benefit and advantage of dramatically shaping what Beckett committedly felt to be an existential Non-ent, and concretize it, as an overwhelming, intense, stage experience.

Like all Beckett's protagonists, Krapp too is aged and afflicted with disease. His physical inadequacies are of great dramatic significance. Beckett capitalizes on Krapp's short sight and cracked voice to make a simple act of reading poignant dramaturgic exercise. As the old man peers closer at the register the past and present are counterpointed as palpable experiences. And when old Krapp hugs the tape it is as if he desperately wishes to hold on to Time, and memory.

With just one pantomime, a counterpointed voice-personae through the tape-recorder, and, a single actor who is coarse of dress, old, decrepit, hard of hearing and almost blind, Beckett is able to situate on the proscenium an existential predicament that spreads over Time, and invite the audience to a participatory dialogue with it.

In *Waiting for Godot*, a set of illusions like dream, vision, story, belief, place, object, and nature are literally shorn of meaning by the sheer beat and rhythm inherent in banal cross-talk, one variety of the playwright's favorite 'language theme'. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, another set of illusions like youth, memory, and ambition are dramatically shrivelled into the Time-trap of age by just the creative switch ons and switch-offs of a tape-recorder. The same technique also helped create conflict and dialogue between old Krapp and his youthful, ambitious past. Furthermore in *Krapp's Last Tape*, a new kind of Silence-dramaturgy is introduced. *Waiting for Godot* makes a good dramatic use of Pauses and Silences but as stage-directions
to institute on stage the existential phenomenon of an overwhelming eerie Silence. *Endgame* prefers the shorter duration Pause and voice modulation to disjunct and deconstruct extended speech deliveries. But in neither *Waiting for Godot*, nor in *Endgame*, is there any dramatis personae directly aware of Silence, much less does it speak directly of it. *Krapp's Last Tape*, like *Endgame*, has its share of Pauses, but it has Silence given a sound-contour through deconstructed permutations of a conscious actor-awareness that is new. The play ends in Silence, and old Krapp sits at his table and feels he had not as much as a squeak to record! Silence ultimately takes over, Silence, even as the Curtain dropped.
References:


5. Ibid. p.90.


11. Leventhal, op. cit., p.46.


