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Dialogism, Polyphony, Chronotope and the Grotesque in *Krapp's Last Tape*: a Bakhtinian reading / *Dialogismo, polifonia, cronotopo e grotesco em A última gravação de Krapp: uma leitura bakhtiniana*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to present an analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, based on theoretical concepts from the writings of Russian literature theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, such as dialogism, polyphony, chronotope and grotesque in order to investigate the voices present in the play, according to the dramaturgical structure created by Samuel Beckett. Such concepts will serve as a support for a reflection that seeks to understand the relations between Krapp and his alterities as well as the games and conflicts developed through the different selves of the different Krapps present in the text, sprung from the materiality of his recordings. It will focus on the space-time question proposed by Beckett in the play, as well as the grotesque characterization of Krapp and its relation to the genesis of the character, within what we call in our research of poetics of failure. This work was originally presented as part of our master's thesis.¹

KEYWORDS: Samuel Beckett; Dialogism; Polyphony; Chronotope; Grotesque

RESUMO

Este artigo, um recorte de nossa dissertação de mestrado, tem como objetivo apresentar uma análise da peça A última gravação de Krapp, de Samuel Beckett, a partir de conceitos teóricos provenientes dos escritos do teórico da literatura russo Mikhail Bakhtin, tais como dialogismo, polifonia, cronotopo e grotesco. Com o intuito de problematizar a questão das vozes presentes na peça, de acordo com a estrutura dramaturgical criada por Samuel Beckett, tais conceitos servirão de suporte para uma reflexão que busque compreender a questão das relações existentes entre Krapp e suas alteridades; os jogos e conflitos desenvolvidos entre as diferentes consciências dos diferentes Krapps presentes no texto a partir da materialidade de suas gravações; a questão do espaço-tempo proposto por Beckett na peça; bem como a caracterização grotesca de Krapp e sua relação com a gênese do personagem, dentro do que denominamos, em nossa pesquisa, de poética do fracasso. Este trabalho foi originalmente apresentado como parte de nossa dissertação de mestrado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Samuel Beckett; Dialogismo; Polifonia; Cronotopo; Grotesco

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¹ See Santos (2015).

Introduction

“*Krapp’s Last Tape*, a play written in English by playwright and director Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) in 1958, represents a major change in the structure of his dramaturgy” (SANTOS, 2015, p.115).² The play presents a significant rupture in relation to his previous dramaturgy, characterized by more extensive plays, centered in the contrasting of several characters, bringing more concision with respect to the central dramatic situation and breaking with the conventional structure of the dramatic dialogue. For the first time in his playwriting so far, we have only one central character on the stage, the old Krapp, a failed sixty-nine years old writer struggling with the end of his existence, once again experiencing, on his birthday, the annual ritual of revisiting his past from the prism of memory through the act of listening to tapes recorded by himself every anniversary of his life. If some of the central themes explored by Beckett in earlier plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* reappear again, such as circularity, alterity, failure, contrasts, and repetition, just to name a few of them, the way in which they materialize in the play is completely different.

The origin of the play dates back to Beckett’s first encounter with Irish actor Patrick Magee, for whom the author wrote *Krapp’s Last Tape*. The vocal quality of the actor, his cracked and aged voice, attracted Beckett’s attention for his specificity and dramatic weight, leading him to conceive a play that was first called *Magee Monologue* and later renamed *Krapp’s Last Tape*.³

Beckett first heard the Irish actor, Patrick Magee, reading some extracts from *Molloy* and *From an Abandoned Work* on the BBC Third Programme in December 1957. He was impressed and moved by the distinctive cracked quality of Magee’s voice which seemed to capture a sense of deep world-weariness, sadness, ruination and regret. Two months later, he began to write a dramatic monologue for a character who was described in the first draft as a ‘wearish old man’,

² In the original: “A última gravação de Krapp, peça escrita em inglês pelo dramaturgo e encenador Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) em 1958, representa uma grande mudança no que se refere à estrutura de sua dramaturgia.”

³ According to James Knowlson, “[...] for some time, in fact, the play was simply referred to by Beckett as the *Magee Monologue* until, several versions later, he conferred on the failing old man the harsh sounding name of ‘Krapp’ with unpleasant excremental associations that lead its owner and the watching audience back to a decaying, disgusting, yet still demanding body with which Krapp has tried in vain to come to terms all his life.”(KNOWLSON; PILLING, 1980, p.81).

with a ‘wheezy ruined voice with some characteristic accent’ (KNOWLSON; PILLING, 1980, p.81).

The title of the play, according to Michael Robinson (1969, p.283), “brings together dung and time,” alluding to the development of a dramaturgical approach about the relation of man to the corrosive and transformative effect of time, that is, “the ever-changing identity of the Self which is in a constant process of decantation from the future to the past.”

1 *Krapp’s Last Tape*: a Bakhtinian Reading

The concept of grotesque,⁴ explored by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) in his study related to the work of François Rabelais (BAKHTIN, 1984),⁵ seems appropriate for a reflection on the characterization of the character Krapp as described in the original version of the play, dated 1958. Beckett’s approach to the character is still influenced by the writing experience of earlier dramaturgical works such as *Waiting for*

⁴ According to Patrice Pavis, “grotesque is what is comic by a burlesque and strange caricatured effect. The grotesque is felt as a significant deformation in a manner known or accepted as a norm. [...] ‘In the thinking of the moderns, on the contrary, the grotesque has an immense role. We find it everywhere; on the one hand, creates the deformed and the horrible; on the other, the comic and the bufoon’ [HUGO, *Cromwell* preface, 1827]. Applied to theater – dramaturgy and scenic presentation – the grotesque retains its essential function of deformation principle plus, additionally, a great sense of concrete and realistic detail. Meierhold refers to it constantly, making even the theatre, within the aesthetic tradition of a Rabelais, a Hugo and, later, a theorist like Bakhtin (1970), the form of expression *par excellence* of the grotesque: premeditated exaggeration, disfigurement of nature, insistence on the sensitive and material side of forms. [...] The reasons for grotesque deformation are extremely variable, from the simple taste for free comic effect [in *Commedia dell’arte*, for example], to political or philosophical satire [Voltaire, Swift]. There is no grotesque, but grotesque aesthetic-ideological projections [grotesque satirical, parabolic, comic, romantic, nihilistic, etc.]. In the same way that *distancing*, the grotesque is not a simple effect of style, it encompasses the whole understanding of the spectacle. [...] The grotesque is closely associated with the *tragicomic*, which arises historically with *Sturm und Drang*, *drama and melodrama*, romanticist and expressionist theatre [Hugo, but also Büchner, Nestroy, Wedekind, Kaiser, Sternheim] and the *grotesque theatre* of Chiarelli or Pirandello. Mixed genres, the grotesque and the tragicomic maintains an unstable balance between the laughable and the tragic, each genre assuming its opposite so as not to crystallize into a definitive attitude. [...] In this sense, the grotesque is a realistic art, since the object, though intentionally deformed, is still recognizable [as in caricature]. It affirms the existence of things while criticizing them. It is the antithesis of the *absurd*, at least the kind of absurd that rejects all logic and denies the existence of social laws and principles. It is also far removed from nihilist or dadaist art, which rejects all values and believes only in parodic or critical function of artistic activity. [...] From the tragicomic grotesque to the absurd there is only a small step, and it is quickly taken in contemporary theatre. But the dividing line [even if it is only theoretical] is usefull to distinguish between dramaturgies such as those of Ionesco or Beckett and those of Frisch, Dürrenmatt or even Brecht. For the three latter authors, the grotesque is a last attempt to give an account of today’s tragicomic man, of the rending of his fabric but also of his vitality and regeneration through art” (PAVIS, 1999, pp.188-189).

⁵ BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and his World*. Translated by Helene Iswolski. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Godot and *Endgame*, which bear striking features of diverse comedy, such as the influence of music hall, clownery and circus. It is preponderant from the first versions of the text to the version published in 1958, in which the traits of the physical characterization of the character point to the influence of grotesque elements, in order to break with the dramatic illusion associated with realism-naturalism in theatre, proposing something close to what Bakhtin points out “in an exemplary way in his study of Rabelais’s work [...] and calls it ‘grotesque realism’” (ARÁN, 2006, p.141; my translation).⁶ We believe that the theoretical dialogue with Bakhtin’s approach to the concept may help us to carry out a reading about the original characterization of Krapp.

Bakhtin mentions, in one of the chapters of his work about Rabelais, what would be the genesis of the concept of grotesque: “exaggerating, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style” (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.303).⁷ According to Bakhtin (1984, p.315),

We find at the basis of grotesque imagery a special concept of the body as a whole and of the limits of this whole. The confines between the body and the world and between separate bodies are drawn in the grotesque genre quite differently than in the classic and naturalist images.⁸

Starting from this meaning of the term, we can observe its relation with the clownish influence present in traces of the first characterization of the character Krapp, exposed in the original version of the text published in English, that we take as reference for our translation of the play, included in this work.

The character’s initial conception, as described in the introductory rubric of the play, features an individual whose characterization refers to a decadent clown, a sort of grotesque version of a conventional clown, supported by small details relating to his costumes and makeup.⁹ The “rusty black narrow trousers too short for him,” the

⁶ In the original: “[...] de manera ejemplar en su estudio de la obra de Rabelais [...] lo denomina ‘realismo grotesco.’”

⁷ For reference, see footnote 5.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 5.

⁹ “[...] Sitting at the table, facing front, i.e. across from the drawers, a wearish old man: Krapp. Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him. Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious pockets. Heavy silver watch and chain. Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar. Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed. White face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair. Unshaven. Very near-sighted [but unspectacled]. Hard of hearing. Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation [...]” (BECKETT, 1990, p.215).

“surprising pair of dirty white boots,” the “white face” and the “purple nose” (BECKETT, 1990, p.215)¹⁰ represent some of the typical constructions linked to grotesque elements appropriated by the clowns, which refer to the archaic comic forms, based on coarse elements and situation comicality, such as the fescenino, satura and even *Commedia dell’arte*, but are transformed [or corrupted] by elements that refer to an aesthetic of failure, recurrent in much of the work of Samuel Beckett. But the grime and decrepit aspect of his clothes, as well as the clown face of an old writer, create a paradox of estrangement in an aesthetically naturalistic scenic setting where the scenic space and all objects seem to refer to a situation that is too real, evidenced by the presence of recorded registries that demonstrate that it is not an imagined story or carries any clue that points to a distortion or a delirium about reality. On the other hand, the extreme plausibility of the dramatic situation of the play, based on the discourse and the narration of the character, promotes a true estrangement operated in a different way from that resulting from the Brechtian effect of the *Verfremdungseffekt* [distancing or estrangement effect], in which the identification of the reader-spectator with respect to the scenic space and the structure of the dramatic narrative, close to realism-naturalism, is brutally confronted with the decrepit old writer’s view and ridiculed by his features and his “rags,” resulting in a disturbing paradox.

In Modernity, grotesque forms are increasingly becoming the expression of the failed reconciliation between subjectivity and the

¹⁰ On the question of the nose within the grotesque representation, Bakhtin points out, in his study of Rabelais, according to a comment by Susana Romano-Sued, “[...] the function of the bodily whole in the grotesque image, [...] highlighting the particular importance of the mouth and nose in the representations of the grotesque face. [...] The nose motif is one of the most widespread motifs of universal literature and is found in almost every language, in expressions such as ‘nose-up,’ ‘to the nose,’ etc. It is well to say that the nose is the representative of the phallus. According to a concept generalized by popular wisdom, it is possible to infer the size and performance of the male member by the size of the nose. This the common sense of the nose in Medieval and Renaissance literature, based on the imaginary of the popular festival – a well-known example is the *Nasentanz* carnival game [nose dance]. Therefore, from the head only the nose and mouth are the elements that are of essential importance to the grotesque” (ARÁN, 2006, pp.144-147; my translation). In the original: “[...] La función del todo corporal en la imagen grotesca, [...] destacando la importancia particular de la boca y la nariz en las representaciones del rostro grotesco. [...] El motivo de la nariz es uno de los motivos más difundidos en la literatura universal y se lo encuentra en casi todas las lenguas, en expresiones tales como ‘enseñar la nariz’, ‘hasta las narices’, ‘nariz parada’, etc. Bien se puede afirmar que la nariz es representante del falo. Según un concepto muy extendido en la sabiduría popular, es posible inferir el tamaño y el desempeño del miembro masculino por el tamaño de la nariz. Este es el significado corriente de la nariz en la literatura medieval y renacentista, basada en el imaginario de la fiesta popular – un ejemplo conocido es el juego carnavalesco *Nasentanz* [danza de la nariz]. Es que, de la cabeza, solo nariz y boca son los elementos que tienen relevancia esencial para el grotesco.”

immanent structures of the world. In this way, the grotesque is the means of representing the irrational, the paradoxical, the absurd, the nihilist, as can be seen in the works of Kafka, Brecht, Dürrenmatt, Beckett and Ionesco. Büchner, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche could be considered precursors of this tendency (ARÁN, 2006, pp.142-143; my translation).¹¹

If the construction of the character Krapp cannot be compared to that of the characters of Rabelais or even to the popular context of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, analyzed by Bakhtin, on the other hand some of the traits mentioned by Bakhtin seem to approach the characterization of the character, such as the clownish purple nose, the surprising dirty white boots worn by Krapp, his bodily appetites,¹² his need to satisfy them, and the excremental associations related to the character's own name. On the importance of these elements within the perspective of grotesque realism, we can quote what Susana Romano-Sued points out:

The dominant characteristic in grotesque realism is relegation, that is, the transference of all that is elevated, spiritual, ideal and abstract, to a

¹¹ In the original: "En la modernidad, las formas grotescas pasan a ser cada vez más la expresión de la reconciliación fracasada entre la subjetividad y las estructuras inmanentes del mundo. Así, el grotesco constituye el medio de representar lo irracional, lo paradójico, lo absurdo, lo nihilista, como por ejemplo se constata en las obras de Kafka, Brecht, Dürrenmatt, Beckett y Ionesco. Podrían considerarse precursores de esta tendencia a Büchner, Dostoevski, Nietzsche."

¹² According to Susana Romano-Sued: "As we point out, eating, drinking, defecating, sweating, secreting mucus, sexual intercourse, childbirth, growth, old age, illness, death, dismemberment, shredding, absorption by another body, are carried out in the limits, in the frontier zone between the body and the world, or in that which exists between the old and the new body. In all these events of bodily drama, the beginning and the end interwine. The grotesque image shows the external physiognomy, but also the inner one, through the blood and distinct organs, and in parts such as veins, guts, heart, etc. [...] It should be noted that, according to the Bakhtinian thesis, the grotesque image of the body is the 'anticanon' image *par excellence*, for it has never been subject to rules like other conceptions. [...] The activities that give carnival man pleasure are precisely those in which the limits are transgressed, where the unfolded body fully lives its expansion outwards: coupling, pregnancy, death, eating, drinking, satisfying the natural needs. It is a kind of provisional body, always in the instance of transfiguration, without rest. A body always open-mouthed, which can only be in abundance, which appeals, incessantly, to the excess" (ARÁN, 2006, pp.148-150; my translation). In the original: "Como hemos señalado, el comer, beber, defecar, sudar, segregar mucosas, el coito, la preñez, el parto, el crecimiento, la vejez, las enfermedades, la muerte, la desmembración, el despedazamiento, la absorción por otro cuerpo, se efectúan en los límites; en la zona fronteriza entre cuerpo y mundo, o en la que hay entre el cuerpo viejo y el nuevo. En todos esos acontecimientos del drama corporal, el comienzo y el fin se imbrican. La imagen grotesca muestra la fisonomía externa pero también la interna a través de la sangre y distintos órganos, y partes como las venas, las tripas, el corazón, etc. [...] Cabe señalar que, según la tesis bajtiniana, la imagen grotesca del cuerpo es la imagen 'anticanónica' por excelencia, pues no ha estado nunca sujeta a reglas como las otras concepciones. [...] Las actividades que le dan placer al hombre carnalesco son, justamente, aquellas en las se transgreden los límites, em las que el cuerpo desbordado vive plenamente su expansión hacia afuera: el acoplamiento, la gravidez, la muerte, comer, beber, satisfacer las necesidades naturales. Es una especie de cuerpo provisório, siempre en la instancia de la transfiguración, sin descanso. Un cuerpo siempre boquiaberto, que sólo puede estar en la abundancia, que apela, sin cesar, al exceso."

material and bodily plane. The Earth and the body are perceived as indissoluble unity perhaps in response to the inevitable separation between the pure biological universe and the human species, the beings of language (ARÁN, 2006, p.145; my translation).¹³

Another important element in the conception of *Krapp's Last Tape* is the threshold, or rather, the different types of threshold that permeate the existence of Krapp, allowing us to truly characterize him as a creature of the threshold. Differentiating the threshold from the border, that is, the first being the place between the here and there, of the indivisible, and the second being the place of this or that [one to the detriment of the other], it seems to us that Krapp remains throughout the play dealing with different threshold forms. If we transpose the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's reading of the concept of threshold into this approach of the play, we can see this question more clearly:

Rites de passage – this is the designation in folklore for the ceremonies that attach to death and birth, to marriage, puberty and so forth. In modern life, these transitions are becoming ever more unrecognizable and impossible to experience. We have grown very poor in threshold experiences. Falling asleep is perhaps the only such experience that remains to us. [But together with this, there is also waking up.] And, finally, there is the ebb and flow of conversation and the sexual permutations of love – experience that surges over thresholds like the changing figures of the dream. “How mankind loves to remain transfixed,” says Aragon, “at the very doors of the imagination!” [*Paysan de Paris*, Paris, 1926, p.74] [...] (1999, p.494).¹⁴

Krapp sits on the threshold or “sill of the imagination” throughout the play, dipping into his [or other Krapps] memories, complementing the information heard through the voices of his others, brought to light by the materiality of the tape recorder, with visualizations coming from his imagination. The tape recorder, therefore, is present in the play as the object with which Krapp develops a kind of affective relationship, because it serves as a true album of memories of his personal trajectory. But the tape

¹³ In the original: “El rasgo dominante en el realismo grotesco es el rebajamiento, es decir la transferencia de todo lo elevado, espiritual, ideal y abstracto, a un plano material y corporal. La Tierra y el cuerpo son percibidos como unidad indisoluble, acaso como respuesta a la separación irremediable entre el universo biológico puro y la especie humana, los seres de lenguaje.”

¹⁴ BENJAMIN, W. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

recorder also has another important function in itself, i.e., that of facilitating the character's transit within the threshold of reality and memory. Recovering Benjamin's definition of the threshold concept, we can clarify in a more punctual way the relation of Krapp with the different thresholds present in the play:

[...] The threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A *Schwelle* [threshold] is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses. On the other hand, it is necessary to keep in mind the immediate tectonic and ceremonial context which has brought the word to its current meaning – *Dream House* (1999, p.494).¹⁵

Krapp seems to be always in this “zone” described by Benjamin, continually moving within its limits, never establishing insurmountable and definitive borders in his existence.¹⁶ If we take as reference Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's literary work, we come across a passage where Bakhtin states that:

In Dostoevsky, the participants in the act stand *on the threshold* [on the threshold of life and death, falsehood and truth, sanity and insanity]. And they are presented here as *voices*, ringing out, speaking out “before earth and heaven” (1984, p.147; emphasis in original).¹⁷

Unlike the Dostoevskian characters, Krapp also stands on a threshold between light and darkness, life and death, presence and absence, reality and memory. Throughout the play, the confrontation between light and darkness, materialized from the aesthetic conception proposed by Beckett, seems to situate Krapp on the threshold between these two worlds, which are directly parallel to reason in opposition to the vicious appeals of the character [women, sex, bananas, whiskey]. At various moments in the play, Krapp travels between the light [the scenic area where are circumscribed his

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 14.

¹⁶ The decisions taken by Krapp at thirty-nine, instead of belonging to the border plan, leaving behind the old negative habits of the character by virtue of embracing new and better habits, delimiting, therefore, a kind of before and after, as true boundary line, seem to be revoked by him [at least in part], as we see in his account of allusion to sex with the prostitute at his sixty-ninth birthday, contrary to his “farewell to love” (BECKETT, 1990, p.217) adopted at age thirty-nine, and his resolution to have “plans for a less... [hesitates]... engrossing sexual life” (BECKETT, 1990, p.218). Here we see clearly the transit of the character on this threshold between what is useful and healthy, and what ravages his existence, according to his own parameters.

¹⁷ BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

desk and his necessary equipment to the annual recording of his voices, and also to the fruition of his recordings] and darkness [the rest of the stage that is immersed in the total absence of light]. In the scenic space of his den, Krapp is characterized as a character situated in the “between” spaces, element explained through his permanence both in the light zone and in the dark zone at different moments of the play and even through his movement, which makes him travel between these spaces throughout the single act of the play and even turn around while manipulating his recordings with a certain dread, as if the presence of death rounded the whole space of the character’s den.

But his relation to the threshold is not exhausted in the scenic setting proposed by Beckett, emphasized in his several directions of the play. Krapp, according to Beckett’s own testimony, is living what would be his last moments, about to find what he wants, as evidenced by his speech in his last recording at sixty-nine years, that is, he is “[...] drowned in dreams and burning to be gone [...]” (BECKETT, 1990, p.222), therefore being located on the threshold between life and death, between the reality of the present and the memories materialized through the recordings. Death seems to haunt the character throughout the single act of the play, and the contrast between the light above his desk and the absolute darkness that surrounds the rest of the stage also evoke the presence of the threshold between life and death; that is, the physical activities performed by Krapp occur mostly in the illuminated area of his desk, where all the necessary things for the character are [tape recorder, magnetic tapes, dictionary, old ledger, microphone, and tape storage boxes], and the area in the penumbra exists only as a transition area, in the moments in which Krapp leaves his desk in search of some of the objects that are in the bottom of the stage.¹⁸ Therefore, we could gauge that the zone of intense light, where Krapp performs his movements, listening to the recordings and recording his new testimony about the previous year, could mean the vital area of the character, unlike the zone of total darkness, where character actions [other than passing motion] do not occur, where there are practically no movements or noises, and to where Krapp comes to look scared, as if death inhabited such darkness, and looked at him throughout the whole performance.

¹⁸ Even in the version of the text used in the staging of Schiller-Theater in 1969, where Beckett introduced the cubby hole to the back of the stage, containing a small light that leaked subtly through the area of darkness, this scenic game remains.

This real existence between thresholds is also made explicit when Krapp recalls his old love affairs with women, evoking the presence of absent subjects to serve as companionship, once again standing on the threshold, this time on the threshold between presence [his, those evoked] and absence [absent subjects rendered present through the materiality of recordings and visualizations from Krapp's memory]. Memories or "dreams," as Krapp mentions, are also in counterpoint with the reality of the character exposed through the dramatic action of the play, and again we can say that here it is a threshold, that is, within the proposed dialogue between recordings listened [memories] and recording performed in present time [reality], alternately, Krapp literally transits between these two worlds, gradually dipping into visualizations that clash with his account of the present moment of his existence, and make his consciousness constantly oscillate at this threshold of reality and memory, revisiting past events and causing them to dialogue with the events of the present.

Characterized as monodrama,¹⁹ by the convention of presenting only one character on stage, *Krapp's Last Tape* seems to break from the start with any reference to the conventional theatrical monologue.²⁰ If on the one hand we see only the old Krapp on the stage, from beginning to end of the play, on the other hand we realize, from the beginning, that somehow the character is not completely alone. Krapp converses literally with recordings of his voice eternalized on the magnetic tapes he has in his power, resulting from his annual reflections about his existence, records that enable him to make a reappraisal of his life in each new annual ritual of listening and recording new impressions about the year just ended. According to Martin Esslin, "[...] *Krapp's Last Tape* deals with the passage of time and personality instability [...]" (1961, p.40),²¹ that is, the relationship of the current Krapp with the countless Krapps recorded annually in his recorded tapes. The current Krapp hears the recorded tapes containing the voices of his "others," and is affected countless times by them, but he does not

¹⁹ According to the definition of Patrice Pavis, "In the everyday sense, this is a play with a single character, or at least a single actor (who may take on several roles). The play is centred around one person and explores his innermost motivations, subjectivity or lyricism" (1999, p.217). [PAVIS, P. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.]

²⁰ Pavis states that "[a] monologue is a speech by a character to himself. [...] The monologue differs from the dialogue in the lack of verbal exchange and in that it is of substantial length and can be taken out of the context of conflict and dialogue. The context remains the same from beginning to end and changes in semantic direction (proper to dialogue) are kept to a minimum to ensure the unity of the subject of enunciation" (1999, p.217). For reference, see footnote 19.

²¹ ESSLIN, M. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1961.

directly affect them dialogically, since these are sound records of his alterities, unable to develop a directly responsive communication with the character. Dialogical relationships are outlined in Krapp's attitudes and speeches reacting and being affected by his alterities in the act of listening to the recordings, but are not directly realized by the inability of these "other" Krapps to be affected by the discourse of the old Krapp at the present time. But at the same time, Krapp's manipulation of the records of his "others," through the selections of events that he performs during the act of listening, advancing and returning the tape to passages that he considers more pertinent, and avoiding others that may disturb him, makes the voice files of the different "I's" of Krapp to be affected by the present, being transformed and resignified, consequently affecting again the character, in different ways from which Krapp had been affected in the past by the same events, thus constituting dialogical relations²² between the different "I's" of Krapp.

Therefore, the recordings allow the confrontation of Krapp with his "others,"²³ that is, his various "I's" featured in the play as his alterities. From this flow of consciousness, expressed in the form of a monologue of dialogic trait,²⁴ Krapp can confront on stage the yearnings and expectations of his "others" [Krapp at twenty-nine and thirty-nine] with the actual reality experienced by him in the present time, at the age

²² According to Bakhtin (1984, p.64), "[...] only a dialogic and participatory orientation takes another person's discourse seriously, and is capable of approaching it both as a semantic position and as another point of view. Only through such an inner dialogic orientation can my discourse find itself in intimate contact with someone else's discourse, and yet at the same time not fuse with it, not swallow it up, not to dissolve in itself the other's power to mean; that is, only thus can it retain fully its independence as a discourse." For reference, see footnote 17.

²³ According to Kristin Morrison: "[t]wo plays of Beckett's deal directly with this matter of not saying 'I' while dealing with autobiographical material. The earlier and more complicated one, *Krapp's Last Tape*, is composed almost entirely of narrative units in which the character on stage treats his past self as 'other,' a strategy made possible by Beckett's innovative use of the tape recorder. Beckett's whole dramatic career has evidenced an interest in the phenomenon of voice, isolated at times from any visible gesture, as in the radio plays, or with a minimum of gesture, as in *Play* and *Not I*. [...] Here in an early one-act, *Krapp's Last Tape*, he presents a single character at various stages in his life, hoarding the madeleines of memory, reveling in a whole autobiography fixed on tape, immortalized by his own voice. The concept is a brilliant one, and the play, for all its brevity, is tantalizingly complex" (MORRISON, 1986, pp.53-54).

²⁴ According to Pavis, "[...] the monologue tends to exhibit certain dialogic traits. This occurs particularly when the hero evaluates his situation, addresses an imaginary interlocutor (Hamlet, Macbeth) or externalizes an inner conflict. According to Benveniste, the 'monologue' is an internalized dialogue, formulated in 'inner language,' between a speaking I and a listening I: 'Sometimes the speaking self is the only one to speak, but the listening self remains present nevertheless; its presence is necessary and sufficient to render significant the enunciation of the speaking self. Sometimes, as well, the listening self intervenes with an objection, a question, a doubt, an insult' (1974, pp.85-86)" (1999, pp.218-219). For reference, see footnote 19.

of sixty-nine. If we think that the voices of the other Krapps act as true “consciousness of others” in relation to the sixty-nine year old Krapp, belonging to his other “I’s” of the past as true alterities, no longer representing or agreeing with the current consciousness of Krapp, often not even being recognized by him, we can do a parallel with what Bakhtin says:

The consciousnesses of other people cannot be perceived, analysed, defined as objects or as things – one can only *relate to them dialogically*. To think about them means to *talk with them*; otherwise they immediately turn to us their objectivised side; they fall silent, close up, and congeal into finished, objectivized images (1984, p.68; emphasis in original).²⁵

Therefore, the confrontation between Krapp’s different judgments about the events that permeate his existence, expressed through oppositions arising from a real “dialogic reaction”²⁶ on the part of the character on stage in relation to the voice²⁷ of his recorded self at thirty-nine, makes evident the dialogic relations proposed by Beckett within the structure of *Krapp’s Last Tape*. According to Bakhtin:

Both these judgments must be embodied, if a dialogic relationship is to arise between them and toward them. Thus, both these judgments can, as thesis and antithesis, be united in a single utterance of a single subject, expressing his unified dialectical position on a given question. In such a case no dialogic relationships arise. But if these two judgments are separated into two different utterances by two different subjects, then dialogic relationships do arise (1999, p.183).²⁸

In this context, Krapp’s tape recorder²⁹ allows him to find the other, the otherness; that is, through it Krapp can glimpse his other “I’s” coming from different moments of his trajectory. At the same time, it allows Krapp the glimpse of diverse spaces that bring with it its temporality and historicity, contextualizing, therefore, the

²⁵ Fore reference, see footnote 17.

²⁶ According to Bakhtin, “[a] dialogic reaction personifies every utterance to which it responds” (1984, p.184). For reference, see footnote 17.

²⁷ According to Kristin Morrison: “[...] there is a certain ‘interaction’ among these voices, as Krapp, both on stage and on tape, responds to, comments on, and repudiates himself at earlier periods” (MORRISON, 1986, p.54).

²⁸ For reference, see footnote 17.

²⁹ “According to Martin Esslin, Beckett had become fascinated with the newly developed tape recorder and experimented in this play with its dramatic possibilities; ‘Samuel Beckett and the art of broadcasting,’ Encounter 45 [September 1975]: 42” (ESSLIN *apud* MORRISON, 1986, p.53).

events evoked on stage by the character. The initial heading of the play, where we read “a late evening in the future” (BECKETT, 1990, p.215), points to a space-time location. If the action of the play takes place in the future, where Krapp appears on the scene as an old frustrated writer, at sixty-nine, embittering the choices of the past, especially the fact that he chose darkness as the central axis of his [literary and existential] path, we can conclude that since the text of the play was written in 1958, if we take that date as a possible reference for the recordings made by Krapp at the age of thirty-nine, the sixty-nine-year-old-Krapp would be performing the actions of the play around the year 1988. The presence of a tape recorder, whose early models date back to the 1950s [before that the first recorders used magnetized metal cables instead of magnetic tapes, unlike the recorder used in the play], locates what would possibly be the present time when the recordings were performed by Krapp, that is, at some point throughout the 1950s. Although this datum is only a projection, without traces in dramaturgy that exactly define the time of dramatic action, we can affirm that past and present would be located somewhere between the decades of 1950 and 1980, thus delimiting the space-time of the play in a way closer to the realistic theatre, unlike all other plays of the author.

In plays such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days* we cannot characterize actions and events as “realists,” for Beckett operates various unfamiliarities that break with such a perspective: the imperfect symmetry of the acts of *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*, in which amid similar elements such as the stage setting mirrored in both Godot’s acts with the changes in the tree and the physical condition of Pozzo and Lucky, or Winnie’s parasol in *Happy Days*, which after being totally charred by the heat of the sun during the first act, returns absolutely flawless at the beginning of the second act. However, in *Krapp’s Last Tape* the dramaturgical and scenic structure of the play points to a remarkably realistic substratum. The indeterminacy of space-time from previous plays is replaced, in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, by a determined space-time. We see in the play a realistic stage space, the “Krapp’s den” (BECKETT, 1990, p.215), a kind of small and dark room, presenting only a single table with two drawers³⁰ and the

³⁰ In Beckett’s staging for *Das letzte Band* [*Krapp’s Last Tape*] at Berlin’s Schiller-Theater in 1969, the author altered the stage space of the play, adding a restricted space at the bottom of the stage [*cubby hole*], a kind of cubicle where Krapp keeps part of his objects. He also modified the table model used, which, instead of containing two drawers that would open towards the public, as described in the original version of the text, had only a side drawer, to eliminate unnecessary time [in the opinion of Beckett

essential necessities for the existence of the character: the respective magnetic tapes where Krapp meticulously holds the voices of the other Krapps of the past, the microphone, an object that allows Krapp to continue the ritual of registering his “I’s” at each new birthday, an old ledger, where Krapp writes words from his old recordings, as a sort of referential catalog for terms that the character often no longer remembers, a dictionary, the element that enables Krapp to decipher much of what he finds in his old ledger and no longer understands, boxes where he stores his tape recordings, bananas and the whisky bottle, addictions that have accompanied him since his youth, and the lamp above his desk, whose illumination is the only material element that represents a refuge from the total darkness that plagues his room and his existence. James Knowlson develops an interesting account of Krapp’s relationship with the daily rituals left over from his youth, such as the banana craving, drinking, and the annual event of his retrospective recordings:

For Krapp’s present concerns revolve around the gratification of those very bodily appetites that, earlier, he had resolved should be cut out of his life. Eating bananas and drinking whisky have become for him habitual ways of filling in the time. Of the physical activities that He once considered excesses, only sex has come to play a reduced part in his lonely existence. But all of them have become mechanical actions from which Krapp derives little comfort (KNOWLSON; PILLING, 1980, p.81)

The old Krapp is a frustrated and lonely writer,³¹ who mocks his thirty-nine year old self by listening to the passage of the recording where he recalls the main reason for his current state of isolation, that is, “the vision”³² that happened on that “memorable night in March,” the moment when he decided that darkness should be the central theme of his work and consequently of his existence. The choice of the dark path, the search for the development of his *opus magnum* and the inability [or unwillingness] to find happiness alongside a woman seem to have guided the pompous Krapp we hear in the

director] of the pantomimes of opening and closing the drawers in the passages where he removes objects from within.

³¹ Krapp’s reference to his solitude is evident in the passage of his recording at age thirty-nine, which reads: “[...] Celebrated the awful occasion, as in recent years, quietly at the Wine-house. Not a soul” (BECKETT, 1990, p.217).

³² “Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision at last. [...]” (BECKETT, 1990, p.220).

old recording to failure and loneliness that make up the life of old Krapp at the age of sixty-nine. Although the play presents a profusion of quotations to women who played some part in Krapp's life, such as his mother, Bianca, or the girl at the lake, and even to those who appear in a fanciful way in his story, as in the cases of his ramblings about the girl at a train station, and even Effie, the heroine of Theodor Fontaine's novel *Effie Briest* [whose reading of "a page a day"³³ is the only intellectual activity of old Krapp at the age of sixty-nine], Krapp's mentions of the amorous passages of his life are always surrounded by negative comments, which denote a certain disbelief in full happiness and love.³⁴ According to James Knowlson, "[...] all of Krapp's 'affairs' are described in terms of mingled regret, relief, and unsatisfied longing [...]" (KNOWLSON, 1980, p.86).

The contrasts presented in the play are centered on the opposition between light and darkness evidenced in the stage setting proposed by Beckett since the first handwritten version of the text, according to Dougald Mcmillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, and that would be deepened in Beckett's staging of *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Schiller-Theater in 1969 (MCMILLAN; FEHSENFELD, 1988, p.243). As the play begins, we see the old Krapp at his desk, arranged under a small beam of light positioned above its top, leaving the rest of the stage in complete darkness. The Manichean opposition between light [reason] and darkness [the negative habits that Krapp attempts to abandon] permeates various elements of the play, not just the setting of the scenic space. Krapp's clothes, as in *Waiting for Godot*, maintained the opposition between black and white, materialized in the contrast between the black trousers and waistcoat, the grimy white shirt open at neck, and the pair of dirty white boots (BECKETT, 1990, p.215). His mention of the relationship with Bianca also seems to echo such duality, by the meaning of the name [white] as opposed to the name of the street where they lived [Kedar Street, kedar being the Hebrew word for black] (KNOWLSON; PILLING, 1980, p.87). The dark nurse also presents this opposition, evidenced in Krapp's description recorded by his thirty-nine year self: "[...] one dark young beauty I recollect

³³ "[...] Scalded the eyes out of me reading *Effie* again, a page a day, with tears again. Effie... [Pause.] Could have been happy with her, up there on the Baltic, and the pines, and the dunes. [Pause.] Could I? [Pause.] And she? [Pause.] Pah! [...]" (BECKETT, 1990, p.222).

³⁴ In the passage where he refers to Bianca, a companion with whom he lived on Kedar Street, Krapp comments with some relief: "[...] At that time I think I was still living on and off with Bianca in Kedar Street. Well out of that, Jesus yes! Hopeless business. [...]" (BECKETT, 1990, p.218).

particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing [...]” (BECKETT, 1990, p.219). According to James Knowlson:

The black and white imagery that runs through the entire play suggests that Krapp’s inability, even his unwillingness, to find happiness with a woman arises out of a fundamental attitude towards life as a whole that affects most aspects of his daily living. Krapp is only too ready to associate woman with the darker side of existence and he clearly sees her as appealing to the dark, sensual side of man’s nature, distracting him from the cultivation of the understanding and the spirit. Krapp’s recorded renunciation of love is then no mere casual end of an affair. [...] In Krapp’s case, earthly love is not renounced for the greater love of God, as it was in the Petrarchan tradition. Instead, the renunciation of love part of an ascetic quest that rejects the world as an inferior creation and shrinks away from the material element of the flesh to concentrate upon the spiritual or the pneumatic. Krapp is clearly following here in a Gnostic, even a specifically Manichean tradition, with its abstention from sexual intercourse and marriage [...], its rift between God and the world, the world and man, the spirit and the flesh, and its vision of the universe, the world and man himself as divided between two opposing principles, the forces of darkness constantly threatening to engulf the forces of light (KNOWLSON; PILLING, 1980, pp.86-87).

The confrontation with the different alterities is not limited to the voices evoked by the recordings of Krapp at the age of twenty-nine and thirty-nine. It also enables, in a different way and through Krapp’s discourse recorded on his thirty-ninth birthday, the evocation of other voices,³⁵ which echo the time related to each different recording, as is the case of the scenes narrated by the character in the middle of his statements about past years. Therefore, these voices constitute true polyphony: they are present throughout the play through the old recordings listened by Krapp – they are recorded on

³⁵ Jean-Pierre Sarrazac makes an interesting comment about the concept of voice: “Considering the polysemy of this term, with regard to the analysis of the drama, two distinct conceptions must be taken into account: on the one hand, the ‘voice’ in the proper sense, as physical or phonetic data resulting from an enunciation, which is already the subject of various analyses; and, on the other hand, a dramaturgical, or poetic, ‘voice’ that prevails in the contemporary dramatic texts that multiply the ‘voice effects’ [...], elaborate a theatre of speech [...] or pulverize the identity or integrity of the characters’ characteristic voices [Samuel Beckett, Valère Novarina]” (SARRAZAC, 2012, pp.185-186; my translation). In Portuguese: “considerando a polissemia desse termo, no que se refere à análise do drama, duas concepções distintas devem ser levadas em conta: de um lado, a ‘voz’ no sentido próprio, como dado físico ou fonético resultante de uma enunciação, que já é objeto de várias análises; e, de outro lado, uma ‘voz’ dramática, ou poética, vigente nos textos dramáticos contemporâneos que multiplicam os ‘efeitos de voz’ [...], elaboram um teatro da fala [...] ou pulverizam a identidade ou a integridade das vozes características de personagens [Samuel Beckett, Valère Novarina].”

his thirty-ninth birthday and address, in a reflective way, the events of the previous year – and through the evocation of other voices in the recordings listened to on stage [notably Krapp at twenty-nine about the women he remembers].³⁶

The polyphonic or dialogical text is a Bakhtinian concept that allows us to examine the question of otherness as a presence of another discourse within the discourse. This concept is in continuity with the theories of enunciation and, according to Todorov, its originality consists in placing the context of enunciation within the utterance (AMORIM, 2004, p.107; my translation).³⁷

We can consider the evoked voices as polyphonic due to the fact that, as Bakhtin claims, they have their own particularities and bear different worldviews (BAKHTIN, 1999). And in the case of the recorded voices of Krapp, we still have the aspect that with each new recording realized in the event of a new birthday of the character, the Krapp that speaks and records himself carries in his voice the other Krapps that existed before him; that is, his current voice always maintains a dialogical relationship with the voices of his predecessor “I’s.” According to Jean-Pierre Sarrazac:

The term “voice,” [...] according to Bakhtin, can still designate *the voice or voices of a dramatic text*, allowing elaborating a poetic of the voice, able to influence the voice work of the actors. [...] The speech of a character becomes polyphonic when, in his speech, a voice breaks out and extrapolates the psychological identity or when it no longer inscribes a situation of communication with another character [forms of *stream of consciousness* or polylogo]; or when other sound sources of signification that participate in the shattering of the speaking subject [interference of other speeches, noises or music] are added to

³⁶ According to Sarrazac, “Modern and contemporary drama, such as film writing, attaches other possible origins to the voice, with the *voice off* [internal to fiction, off-stage], or the *voice over* [extra fictional, on stage, or off-stage]. Distinct from the character category – as choral, narrative, and commentary voice – and even sometimes from the actor – in the case of a voice recorded or synthesized –, this voice introduces to the viewer an ‘uncertainty about its origin and about the subject of speech’ [Patrice Pavis]” (SARRAZAC, 2012, pp.186-187; my translation). In Portuguese: “O drama moderno e contemporâneo, como a escrita cinematográfica, anexa outras origens possíveis à voz, com a *voice off* [interna à ficção, fora do palco] ou a *voice over* [extraficcional, no palco ou fora do palco]. Distinta da categoria de personagem – como voz coral, narrativa e comentadora – e inclusive, às vezes, do ator – no caso de uma voz gravada ou sintetizada –, essa voz introduz, para o espectador, uma ‘incerteza sobre sua origem e sobre o sujeito do discurso’ [Patrice Pavis].”

³⁷ In the original: “O texto polifônico ou dialógico é um conceito bakhtiniano que permite examinar a questão da alteridade enquanto presença de um outro discurso no interior do discurso. Esse conceito está em continuidade com as teorias da enunciação e, segundo Todorov, sua originalidade consiste no fato de colocar o contexto de enunciação no interior do enunciado.”

his discourse (SARRAZAC, 2012, p.187; emphasis in original; my translation).³⁸

Therefore, Krapp's recordings enable what Sarrazac calls "multiplication of the subject in different voices" (SARRAZAC, 2012, p.189). Even if they come from the same subject, that is, Krapp, the voices carry the marks of the socio-historical context of the character through real extracts of his trajectory, allowing the distinctions between the different Krapps to function almost like records of different subjects coming from different contexts, composing a true polyphonic orchestration on the scene. If we take as a reference Bakhtin's statement concerning Dostoevsky's work, according to which "[...] *the polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through*. Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally. [...]" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.40; emphasis in original),³⁹ we can undertake the transposition of the concept of polyphony for the dramaturgy of *Krapp's Last Tape*, based on the dialogical relations present in the text and analyzed earlier in this essay. This approach is coherent, since, according to Bakhtin, "[i]t seems to us that one could speak directly of a special *polyphonic artistic thinking* extending beyond the bounds of the novel as a genre" (1999, p.270; emphasis in original).⁴⁰

Another aspect of extreme importance within the play concerns the relations between space and time. If we take as a reference the essay written by Samuel Beckett about Proust's literary work, which could illustrate punctually some of the elements and problems expounded by Beckett in his dramaturgy, *Krapp's Last Tape* is built on the idea of time, that is, "[...] that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation – Time" (BECKETT, 1931, p.1).⁴¹ In his den, deprived of any human contact for a long period of time [we must remember that the refusal to love – and therefore to the other – happened when the character is thirty-nine years old], Krapp undergoes the action of time in a corrosive and extreme way, having as refuge only the possibility of dialogue

³⁸ In Portuguese: "O termo 'voz', [...] segundo Bakhtin, ainda pode designar a voz ou as vozes de um texto dramático, permitindo elaborar uma poética da voz, capaz de influenciar o trabalho de voz dos atores. [...] A fala de um personagem torna-se polifônica quando, em seu discurso, irrompe uma voz que extrapola a identidade psicológica ou quando ela não inscreve mais uma situação de comunicação com outro personagem [formas de stream of consciousness ou de polílogo]; ou quando se acrescentam a seu discurso outras fontes sonoras de significação que participam do estilhaçamento do sujeito falante [interferência de outras falas, ruídos ou música]."

³⁹ For reference, see footnote 17.

⁴⁰ For reference, see footnote 17.

⁴¹ BECKETT, S. *Proust*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1931.

with his other “I’s,” the only way of contact with otherness in his isolation. There is no possibility of escape or salvation, only the exercise of the absorption of the experience of time. According to Beckett:

There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday. There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us. The mood is of no importance. Deformation has taken place. Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday (1931, pp.2-3).⁴²

Krapp needs an old ledger and a dictionary so that he can understand passages and quotations pertaining to moments experienced by his others, events described by his different “I’s” before the catastrophe of the daily transformation of his “I” into other “I’s.” But for the sixty-nine year old Krapp, many of them became incomprehensible even with the help of his old ledger and dictionary. And even the passages recognizable by him oscillate between that which still makes some sense in his solitary existence [as the remembrance of the affections experienced with women, especially Bianca, the death of the mother, etc.] and that which no longer makes sense for his present “I,” notably his aspirations⁴³ and literary pretensions, that is, “[...] the aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday’s ego, not for to-day’s” (BECKETT, 1931, p.3).⁴⁴

Within this context, habit plays a fundamental role in the existence of Krapp. If on the one hand Krapp isolates himself from the world and love by virtue of pursuing only his highest objective, that is, the realization of a masterpiece that represents his power as a writer, on the other hand he adopts a series of habits that keeps him away from the possibility of madness coming from the absence of any other individual in his daily life and the oppression exerted by time. His most relevant habit refers to the annual recordings of his voices, each representing a stage of development of his

⁴² For reference, see footnote 42.

⁴³ In the recording made by Krapp at age thirty-nine and heard on the scene by the sixty-nine year old Krapp, we have a passage where the character refers to his old aspirations at age twenty-nine: “[...] 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. [...]” (BECKETT, 1990, p.218).

⁴⁴ For reference, see footnote 42.

personality, accurately capturing some of the major events of the year immediately preceding each recording, therefore still susceptible of being rescued by the memory with certain freshness. But other habits also “chain” Krapp, like his compulsion for bananas [despite the worsening of his intestinal conditions], his compulsion to drink, and in a more diluted form his compulsion for sex. The annual habit of listening to the voices of other Krapps is only possible through a previous habit, that is, the habit of recording his voice through recordings, but the listening itself can also be recognized as an essential habit for Krapp, because only through it is the character able to access the recondite of his memories. According to Beckett:

The laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit. Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. [...] Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects (1931, pp.7-8).⁴⁵

Therefore, in this dialogical relationship with the alteritary voices of his other “I’s,” Krapp oscillates between the planes of the real and the imagination, that is, his dialogue with the recorded voices takes place both in a way that is linked to the real [the here-now of his existence] and in a way linked to the imagination, without which Krapp could never attain the visualization of the events described by the other Krapps, many of them buried in his mind under the rubble of the sum of the past years, laden with sensations, traumas, and disappointments. Reality and imagination evoked through memory would thus be the foundations that move the events in the present time in which lives the sixty-nine year old Krapp, and that consist of the structure of his permanent dialogue with his other “I’s.” We can recover here what Beckett says in his essay on Proust:

The identification of immediate with past experience, the recurrence of past action or reaction in the present, amounts to a participation between the ideal and the real, imagination and direct apprehension, symbol and substance. Such participation frees the essential reality that is denied to the contemplative as to the active life. What is

⁴⁵ For reference, see footnote 42.

common to present and past is more essential than either taken separately. Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic. Imagination, applied – a priori – to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo and cannot tolerate the limits of the real (1931, pp.55-56).⁴⁶

The evoked scenes, such as the mention of Bianca on Kedar Street or the scene with the girl at the lake, carry, in their narration, details and references that allow Krapp [as well as the reader and the viewer] to visualize the space where the actions developed in the past time. This true contrast between spaces and times, through the permanent confrontation between the past and present of the character, reminds us of the Bakhtinian concept of cronotope.⁴⁷

The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic (1981, pp.84-85).⁴⁸

From this reflection, we can think of the chronotope structuring of *Krapp's Last Tape* as something oscillating, in the sense that there is not only a single chronotopic plane defined, but at least three of them that alternate and intercalate throughout the play. The first chronotope would be related to the immediate action of the character in the here now of his reality, at the moment in which he makes his recording about the year that had just closed, on the occasion of his sixty-ninth birthday. The second

⁴⁶ For reference, see footnote 42.

⁴⁷ Concerning the meaning of the chronotopes analyzed in his work, Bakhtin states that “[...] what is most obvious is their meaning for *narrative*. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. We cannot help but be strongly impressed by the *representational* importance of the chronotope. Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins. An event can be communicated, it becomes information, one give precise data on the place and time of its occurrence. But the event does not become a figure [*obraz*]. It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events. And this is so thanks precisely to the special increase in density and concreteness of time markers – the time of human life, of historical time – that occurs within well-delineated spacial areas” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.250).

[BAKHTIN, M. Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel (Notes toward a Historical Poetics). In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.84-258.]

⁴⁸ For reference, see footnote 48.

chronotope of the play would be related to the time narrated by Krapp on his thirty-ninth birthday. Finally, the third chronotope would occur when he mentions that the thirty-nine year old Krapp makes the other recording that he had just heard at that moment. This is when the narration of a younger Krapp, who would be around twenty-seven to twenty-nine years old, would appear. Thus the dramaturgical structure of the play aligned three different chronotopes for the construction of the plot and development of the dramatic situation; that is to say, the dialogical relations between three different consciences refer to three different subjects separated by time and space, although all three represent facets of the same subject, that is, the old Krapp.

In fact, Bakhtin resists regarding time and space as pure forms of the consciousness of man; on the other hand, he estimates that they are categories – in the sense that without them there can be no knowledge of the world –, but that they constitute entities of objective character whose existence is independent of consciousness (ARÁN, 2006, p.69).⁴⁹

Therefore, the chronotopes in *Krapp's Last Tape* are not confused with the character's consciousness, as Bakhtin postulates, but help the character locate the transfigurations of his own consciousness, each one tied to its socio-historical context, recomposing, in the eyes of the reader/viewer, the trajectory of the consciousness of an individual in three distinct stages of his existence. Chronotopes do not define the awareness of Krapp's different "I's," but allow us to understand the different aspects of a personality that is constantly changing, in a dialogical relationship with its space and time.

Within the chronotopic categories proposed by Bakhtin in his essay on the concept, some of them seem to approach the context of *Krapp's Last Tape*. If, as we said earlier, we perceive more than one chronotope within the dramaturgical structure of the play, we can affirm that its nature is also variable. In the first case, focusing on the recording of Krapp's voice at age thirty-nine, it seems to us that we are close of what Bakhtin calls the *chronotope of threshold*, that is, a "[...] chronotope highly charged

⁴⁹ In the original: "En efecto, Bajtín se resiste a considerar al tiempo y al espacio como formas puras de la conciencia del hombre y, en cambio, estima que son categorías – en el sentido de que sin ellas no puede haber conocimiento del mundo –, pero que constituyen entidades de carácter objetivo cuya existencia es independiente de la consciencia."

with emotion and value [...] it can be combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.248).⁵⁰ In the recording of his thirty-nine years old “I” listened to by Krapp on stage, we noticed a writer turning around with a change in his personal trajectory that would reverberate throughout the rest of his life and lead him into a state of loneliness, failure,⁵¹ and disenchantment in which he is immersed in his sixty-nine years. At that moment, Krapp mentions the “vision” he would have had of his work and his existence, according to which he should embrace the darkness and the renunciation of love as forms of departing in search of the realization of his *opus magnum*,⁵² that is, of his masterpiece. If for Bakhtin the threshold “[...] itself has already a metaphorical meaning [...], and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life [or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold]” (1981, p.248),⁵³ the chronotope of threshold seems to represent fully the threshold moment of the thirty-nine year old Krapp.

In the second case, which refers to the present time, in which we see old Krapp at the age of sixty-nine, we seem to approach what Bakhtin calls the *chronotope of the space of parlors and salons*, a place “[...] where encounters occur [...], the webs of intrigue are spun, denouements occur and finally – this is where *dialogues* happen, something that acquires extraordinary importance [...], revealing the character, ‘ideas’ and ‘passions’ of the heroes” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.246; emphasis in original).⁵⁴ If on the one hand the encounters in Krapp’s room do not have the same nature as the encounters of a realistic structure of Dostoevsky’s or Tchekov’s works and are the materialization of an encounter between alterities from the same subject, on the other hand the structure of events is close to what Bakhtin mentions. It is in Krapp’s place, which remains undefined and is only described in the initial rubric as “den” – but it could perfectly well be a room –, where the encounters take place through the mediation

⁵⁰For reference, see footnote 48.

⁵¹ The mention of the failure of the character is evident when Krapp, a frustrated writer, records his impressions relative to the year that had just closed, on his sixty-ninth birthday: “[...] Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas. Getting known. [Pause.] One pound six and something, eight I have little doubt” (BECKETT, 1990, p.222).

⁵² According to Kristin Morrison: “[...] although he has been a professional writer, his real magnum opus seems to have been composed for himself alone: that collection of tapes, his own logorrheic musings about his own life listened to by himself. He fondles his life by replaying it; he fondles his own words” (MORRISON, 1986, p.55).

⁵³ For reference, see footnote 48.

⁵⁴ For reference, see footnote 48.

of the tape recorder. As Bakhtin says, here the characters, ideas and passions of the character are exposed, and it is in this space-time that Krapp can access the voices of his others, experiencing the encounters until their end.

The third chronotope, more complex and encompassing the previous two in the structure of the play, would be the *biographical chronotope*, which according to Bakhtin “[...] flows smoothly in the spaces – the interior spaces – of townhouses [...]” (1981, p.249).⁵⁵ This chronotope, in our opinion, would be responsible for tackling the central axis of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, that is, the issue of the fragmentation of Krapp’s identity in three distinct moments of his existence, condensed from the confrontation between his different alterities materialized in Krapp’s dialogue with his two other “I’s.” It is through the biographical chronotope that we reconstruct the trajectory of the character, fragmented by the play through the stories located at different times, separated by decades between them. It is through this effect of *mise en abyme*⁵⁶ that the reader/spectator can perform the reconstruction of the fragmented identity of the character, exposed through the different moments of the narrative.

Within the perspective of thinking about a new type of chronotope present in the play that crosses all its thematic and scenic structure and that is not related in the chronotopic categories proposed by Bakhtin for the study of the literature, we thought to propose a *chronotope of the confinement*, which would be related to the central dramatic situation both in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and in other plays of the beckettian dramaturgy, such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Happy Days* and *Footfalls*, due to the fact that in the play the idea of confinement behaves like a central element within the plot, that is, the events of the character’s life are experienced in the present time from this particular perspective, where the detachment of the character from the other allows him to approach “his others,” to make the encounter with the different Krapps an annual event in his life, which becomes ritualized and systematic due to the importance it assumes in the daily life of the old solitary writer. This chronotope, in our opinion, would contain the other three chronotopes described previously, because it is through it that the

⁵⁵ For reference, see footnote 48.

⁵⁶ According to Pavis, “the heraldry term abyme [...] refers to the fess point, the central point of the coat of arms. By analogy, the *mise en abyme* (or *abyme*, a term introduced by Gide) is a device in which an enclave is embedded in the work (which may be pictorial, literary or theatrical), reproducing certain of its structural similarities or properties. [...] The reflection of the external work in the internal enclave may be presented in the form of an identical, reverse, multiple or approximate image” (1999, p.215). For reference, see footnote 19.

dramatic action unfolds. Encouraged by Bakhtin's final talk about the possibilities of future unfolding of the concept within the field of literature [and consequently of dramatic literature], we believe that it is possible to propose this chronotope of confinement, due not only to its presence and importance in the structure of *Krapp's Last Tape*, but also to its presence and importance in the other four plays cited. In our opinion, this chronotope is at the heart of *Waiting for Godot's* structure, due to the confinement of the two vagabonds on the empty road, of *Endgame*, due to the confinement of the four characters in Hamm's shelter, of *Happy Days*, due to the confinement of Winnie and Willie in the hill of land and finally of *Footfalls*, where the confinement of May and her mother is indeterminate, but could be described as a confinement in the the character May's memory, the place where the evoked images of what appears to be the character's past continue to echo, slowly and steadily towards perhaps a deletion.

James Knowlson develops an interesting synthesis about the complex symbolism of *Krapp's Last Tape*, briefly expounded by Beckett in his production notebook of the play:

Krapp decrees physical [ethical] incompatibility of light [Spiritual] and dark [Sensual] only when he intuits possibility of their reconciliation as rational-irrational. He turns from fact of anti-mind alien to the mind to thought of anti-mind constituent of mind (KNOWLSON *apud* COHN, 1980, p.245).

According to Knowlson, Krapp's perception of a possible reconciliation between these two conflicting elements, light and darkness, that characterize themselves as constituents of the character immediately leads to a repulsion on the part of Krapp in relation to a possible referral to that which would be the main conflict of his solitary existence. When Krapp decrees his "farewell to Love" (BECKETT, 1990, p.217), the character opts for an existential path to the detriment of another, possibly closer to happiness, in search of an achievement that would occur through his possible success as a writer, materialized in the form of his *opus magnum*. But his work does not reach the desired impact, and Krapp, as we see it on the scene, walks more and more toward his own darkness, until he concludes, as in his recording made during his thirty-ninth birthday, that his time is nearing the end: "[...] Perhaps my best years are gone. When

there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back" (BECKETT, 1990, p.223).⁵⁷

I know that Sam has always said that on the morning after the play Krapp was surely dead. He has always insisted on the fact that Krapp is debris. Some sort of an old man with hardly any age at all and just before his end (MARTIN *apud* MCMILLAN; FEHSENFELD, 1988, p.257).

We will conclude our reflection on *Krapp's Last Tape* mentioning that we believe that the Bakhtinian architectonics, that is, the set of theoretical concepts developed by Mikhail Bakhtin within the fields of literary theory and the philosophy of language, provides important tools of analysis in relation to Samuel Beckett's dramaturgy, especially with regard to questions related to the problem of the voice status in the author's dramaturgy, as well as the relations between space and time present in the Beckettian plays. In this way, concepts such as chronotope, dialogism and polyphony allow us to develop a new look at Samuel Beckett's extensive and complex theatrical work, not only with regard to the work of the author as playwright, but also to his work as director of his plays.

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⁵⁷ According to Kristin Morrison, "[...] Martin Held, who rehearsed Krapp under Beckett's direction, recounts Beckett's own view of Krapp: "He told me the character was eaten up by dreams. But without sentimentality. There's no resignation in him. It's the end. He sees very clearly that he's through with his work, with love and with religion." Quoted by Ronald Hayman, *Samuel Beckett* [New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973], pp.79-80" (HELD *apud* MORRISON, 1986, p.60).

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