



FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS  
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA

TESIS DOCTORAL

**“STAGING MEMORY AND TRAUMA:  
PAST VOICES AND BODIES HAUNTING  
THE PRESENT IN THE THEATRE OF  
SAMUEL BECKETT”**

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UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID  
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PARA LA OBTENCIÓN DEL GRADO DE “DOCTOR.”

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*For you, Andrei.*



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Madrid, 2011.





“time she stopped  
sitting at her window  
quiet at her window  
only window  
facing other windows  
other only windows  
all eyes  
all sides  
high and low  
time she stopped”

(Beckett, *Rockaby*)

“who may tell the tale  
of the old man?  
weigh absence in a scale?  
meet want with a span?  
the sum assess  
of the world’s woes?  
nothingness  
in words enclose?”

(Beckett, *Watt*)



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## ABBREVIATION INDEX

*ABM – autobiographic memory*

*OCD – obsessive-compulsive disorder*

*LTM – long-term memory*

*PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder*

*STM – short-term memory*

*STS – short-term store*

### **Abbreviation of Beckett's plays:**

*WFG - Waiting for Godot*

*KLT – Krapp's Last Tape*

*HD – Happy Days*



## **BRIEF GLOSSARY OF PSYCHOLOGY TERMINOLOGY**

**ABM** - (**autobiographic memory**) is a memory system consisting of episodes recollected from an individual's life, based on a combination of episodic (personal experiences and specific objects, people and events experienced at particular time and place) and semantic (general knowledge and facts about the world) memory. (Williams, H. L., Conway, M. A., & Cohen, G. 2008. "Autobiographical memory". Eds. G. Cohen & M. A. Conway. *Memory in the Real World* (3rd ed.). Hove, UK: Psychology Press: 21-90)

**BEHAVIOURAL RE-ENACTMENTS** - frequently repeated actions that re-enact traumatic experience in one's person life. (Freud 1954. *Beyond Pleasure Principle. SE*, Vol. 3, London: Hogarth Press.; van der Kolk 1989. "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma: Re-enactment, Revictimization, and Masochism". *Psychiatric Clinic of North America*, Vol. 12, 2: 389-411)

**CHRONOLOGICAL LANDMARKS** – turning-points in one's identity stored in ABM. These landmarks are the periods of transition in our identity, which places us in time, and provides a unity. (John J. Skowronski, W. Richard Walker, and Andrew L. Betz 2004. "Who Was I When That Happened? The Timekeeping Self in the Autobiographical Memory". Eds. Beike R. Denise, Lampinen M. James, Behrend A. Douglas. *The Self and Memory*. New York: Hove Psychology Press: 201). Bergson refers to them as "transition periods" (2004: 96) and Beckett uses the term "turning-points" (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 19).

**CLOSED MEMORY** - a type of memory, chronologically integrated in one's ABM. Denis R. Beike, Erica Kleinknecht, and Erin T. Wirth-Beaumont 2004. "How Emotional and Non-emotional Memories Define the Self". Eds. Beike R. Denise, Lampinen M. James, Behrend A. Douglas 2004. *The Self and Memory*. New York: Hove Psychology Press: 144)

**DIACHRONIC DISUNITY** - a pathological perspective on the past, when a person does not associate himself with his past selves. (James M. Lampinen, Timothy N. Odegard, and Juliana K. Leding 2004. "Diachronic Disunity". Eds. Beike R. Denise, Lampinen M. James, Behrend A. Douglas 2004. *The Self and Memory*. New York: Hove Psychology Press: 231)

**FLASHBULB MEMORY** - a highly detailed, exceptionally vivid "snapshot" of the moment and circumstances in which surprising and consequential (or emotionally arousing) news was heard. Flashbulb memories have six characteristic features: place, ongoing activity, informant, own affect, other affect, and aftermath. Flashbulb memories are believed to be highly resistant to forgetting. Arguably, the principal determinants of a flashbulb memory are a high level of surprise, a high level of consequentiality, or perhaps emotional arousal. Flashbulb memory is an appropriate name for the phenomenon in that it suggests surprise, an indiscriminate illumination, and brevity. The name is inappropriate, however, in that an actual photograph, taken by flashbulb, is indiscriminate and preserves everything within its scope. Flashbulb memories, in actuality, are only somewhat indiscriminate and are far from complete (Brown and Kulik 1977. "Flashbulb memories". *Cognition*, 5(1): 73–99).

**OPEN MEMORY** – a type of memory, which is not negotiated into one's ABM; thus it keeps emerging in the present, leading to diachronic disunity. (Denis R. Beike, Erica Kleinknecht, and Erin T. Wirth-Beaumont 2004. "How Emotional and Non-emotional Memories Define the Self". Eds. Beike R. Denise, Lampinen M. James, Behrend A. Douglas 2004. *The Self and Memory*. New York: Hove Psychology Press: 144)

**PTSD** – **Posttraumatic stress disorder** (also known as **post-traumatic stress disorder** or **PTSD**) is a severe anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological trauma. This event may involve the threat of death to oneself or to someone else, or to one's own or someone else's physical, sexual, or psychological integrity, overwhelming the individual's ability to cope. As an effect of psychological trauma, PTSD is less frequent and more enduring than the more commonly seen acute stress response. (American



Psychiatric Association 1994. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association)

**SCREEN-MEMORY** – a mixture of experience and highly-relevant fantasy. (Freud 1914. Qted. in Mitchell J. 2006. “Memory and Psychoanalysis”. Eds. Fara P. and Patterson K. *Memory*. UK: Cambridge University Press: 95)



Please note that with some exceptions the plays referred to in this thesis are found in Samuel Beckett *Complete Dramatic Works* (1986), Faber and Faber's edition. Quotations to this edition are followed by the page number.



# **INTRODUCTION**



## INTRODUCTION

“...agile monster or Divinity: Time – a condition of resurrection because an instrument of death; Habit – an infliction in so far as it opposes the dangerous exaltation of the one and a blessing in so far as it palliates the cruelty of the other; Memory – a clinical laboratory stocked with poison and remedy, stimulant and sedative...” (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 35)

Samuel Barclay Beckett (Dublin, April, 13, 1906 – Paris, December, 22, 1989) is one of the most distinguished writers of the last century. A poet, a novelist and a playwright, he left more questions than answers as his literary heritage. Although his life is well-documented and there is a bulk of criticism on his works, he remains an enigma to us and so is his real date of birth (Knowlson 1997: 1). “Little is left to tell” (445), reads the Reader in *Ohio Impromptu*, but as always with Beckett, this “little” is translated into one’s life story. Beckett turned to theatre late in his life. His first play *Eleutheria*, written in French in 1947, was his first endeavour in theatre. Beckett considered it a failure and never allowed to stage it. His first staged play, *Waiting for Godot* (1953), brought him success and recognition as a playwright. Beckett’s dramatic works do not rely on the traditional conventions of drama. He changes plot, characterization, and final solution, which had hitherto been the hallmarks of drama, for a series of concrete stage images. Beckett does not trust language to convey painful truths about human experiences. He creates a mythical universe peopled by lonely creatures who struggle vainly to express the inexpressible. His characters exist in a kind of dreamlike vacuum, overcome by an overwhelming sense of bewilderment and grief, grotesquely attempting some form of communication, then going on, endlessly. Thus, his plays are not easy to understand. Rosemary Pountney writes that “Beckett demands more from the audience than they have been accustomed to give” (1988: 165). Breaking away with conventional theatre traditions, Beckett has innovated theatre aesthetics bringing it to another level: the level of the subconscious.

After World War II, Beckett turned definitively to the French language as a vehicle of expression, but later he returned to English, when he was sure of his style.

## *Introduction*

Drama may be considered his main genre. It was his theatre aesthetics, together with the “revelation” experienced in his mother’s room in Dublin—in which he realized that his art must be subjective and drawn wholly from his own inner world—that would result in Beckett’s best-remembered works. Ruby Cohn even suggests that his writings are “so *personal* a possession for his readers” (2001: 2).

Thus, the task I set in this thesis is daunting and challenging, taking into consideration that the simplicity of Beckett’s writing is actually being based on life’s knowledge and experience, not only that of an outstanding scholar, but also that of a man, who had an eventful, and in part traumatic life. I decided to narrow down my topic of research to centre on how memory, and especially trauma, is staged in Beckett’s plays. On writing my DEA research paper<sup>1</sup>, which dealt with a comparative analysis of the physical stage language in Beckett’s and Chekhov’s plays, I came to the conclusion that the elements of the physical stage language (such as “light” – “darkness”, “room” – “the stage void”, and even props, etc.) in their minimalism represent the subconscious and the memory of Beckett’s elderly characters, who incessantly tell stories of their past, holding on words for their mere existence; this conclusion led me to conduct the present research on the workings of memory and trauma in Beckett’s plays.

Since trauma is an event, which belongs to memory or to the past, memory takes on a leading role in Beckett’s theatre. By memory, I mean not only remembering, but also forgetting, since with age, our memory is not reliable in many aspects.

“La memoria no repite exactamente el pasado, sino que conserva lo importante, selecciona. Esto basta para refutar la interpretación psicoanalítica del olvido, puesto que en ningún caso es posible recordar sin olvidar.” (Polo 1998: 57)

Beckett’s characters present both: remembering and forgetting. His interest in the studies of memory is well-known; *Proust*, written in 1931, is the result of his deep reflection on the mechanisms of memory. In this essay, Beckett discussed memory in connection with Time and Habit. And there he demonstrated his interest in voluntary and involuntary memories and in the mechanisms of remembering. Beckett used his

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<sup>1</sup> Antropova, S. DEA: “The Physical Stage Language in the Theatre of Chekhov and Beckett”, defended in December, 2007, UAM.



## *Introduction*

“life material” in his works; Knowlson (1997) in *Damned to Fame* signals out the similitude of some of Beckett’s biographical details to the material of his plays. Beckett was also familiar with psychoanalysis (Feldman (2006); Knowlson (1997)). In his correspondence with McGreevy<sup>2</sup>, for instance, Beckett described his sessions with Bion and his attendance at Jung’s lecture at Tavistock clinic. In these letters, Beckett also demonstrated deep interest in Psychology and had unresolved doubts for which he attempted to find answers when he was an adult. For example, his fascination with pebbles and stones when he was a small child (he used to bring stones home to protect them from the wearing away of the waves) brought him later in life to Freud’s teaching. Knowlson comments that Beckett “linked this [his fascination with pebbles] interest with Sigmund Freud’s view that human beings have a pre-birth nostalgia to return to the mineral state” (1997: 29). “Pebbles” found their way into his novels and theatre. Matthew Feldman points out that:

“... Beckett’s notes on psychology must be viewed in terms of a larger self-education process during the interwar years, one that was especially intense between 1932 and 1936.”  
(Feldman 2006: 78)

Some of Beckett’s own experiences, as for example his “intrauterine memory”, resurrected in one of his sessions with Bion, is represented in his plays, e.g. *A Piece of Monologue*, *Not I*, etc. Thus, I may suggest that Beckett’s interest in the mechanism of memory and psychoanalysis found a path into his works. Consequently, on analysing the plays in this thesis I apply mainly Freud’s, Adler’s and Rank’s theories on trauma and neuroses.

The main aim of this thesis is to provide a thorough research on the workings of memory, especially of traumatic memory in Beckett’s theatre. I attempt to demonstrate that in the universe of Beckett’s theatre, memory and trauma are fully interwoven. This thesis is based on philosophical, psychological and psychoanalytical areas of research applied to the analysis of Beckett’s plays. The objects of the current analysis include the physical stage language and its relation to the words in Beckett’s plays. The plays that I

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<sup>2</sup> Eds. Fehsenfeld, Dow and Overbeck 2010. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*. (Letters to McGreevy October 8, 1935; January, 29, 1935): 282, 305.

## *Introduction*

focus upon in this research are the following: *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Embers*, *Footfalls*, *Eh Joe*, *That Time*, *Happy Days*, *Play*, *Not I*, *A Piece of Monologue*.

I apply the binary approach of phenomenological and semiotic methods of analysis (Garner, Stanton B. and Keir Elam), which complement each other and as a result give us thorough theatre analysis. Phenomenology helped me in the analysis of Beckett's plays: two big areas of memory and trauma are two phenomena discussed in this thesis from philosophical, psychological and psychoanalytical points of view. And the semiotic approach proved to be a necessary tool in the analysis of scene and props. I attempted to analyse different theatrical aspects in staging traumatic memories, although in my analysis I have always had the whole theatrical performance in view.

“Since the art of theatre is the joining together of numerous parts to form a composite whole, it is obviously artificial to attempt to separate the parts from each other, isolating light from image, for example. At the same time it is essential to an understanding of the process of theatre to be able to see how each part operates and has its particular function in the formation of the whole.” (Pountney 1988: 164)

The layout of my thesis is justified by mnemonics<sup>3</sup>, which deals with memory storage processes. According to mnemonics, memories are stored in our brain in both forms: as unforgettable images against the background of places (*memoria rerum*) and in words (*memoria verborum*). The present thesis on memory and trauma in Beckett's theatre is organized as follows:

**Chapter I** sets the theoretical framework of the present research, which is divided into two parts: “Memory Constructs Identity” and “Trauma Re-Constructs Identity”. This chapter starts with a general overview of present criticism in relation to memory and trauma in Beckett's theatre. Further on, memory storage processes and the ways of memory retrieval in connection to identity and ABM are discussed. Mnemonics is dealt with in relation to memory storage, as well as with the factors which make our memory stronger. Simonides of Ceos, St. Augustine, Aristotle and St. Thomas de Aquinas memory models are dwelt upon. All of them stress perception, especially emotion, as memory intensifier, as well as attention on later recall of memories. This

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<sup>3</sup> Mnemonics is discussed in Chapter I following Yates A. Francis' book *The Art of Memory*.

## *Introduction*

idea leads to modern memory studies; Bergson's as well as Beckett's ideas on memory have a lot in common with the abovementioned philosophers. Taking into consideration that emotion may be of two types (negative and positive), memories may be open or closed. Consequently, the second part of this chapter deals with negative emotion via trauma. It has been demonstrated that trauma can remodel identity and reality (Freud, van der Volk, van der Hart, Kaplan, Caruth). Van der Volk (1991) states that trauma is a special form of memory. As a result of a traumatic experience, there occurs a gap in a person's memory, which leads to identity disruption and to nightmarish present existence. Trauma is not recorded linguistically or in words, but on a sensori-motor level. Thus, it is difficult to verbalize; the narration itself occurs on the level of images, flashbacks, repetitions, emotions and behavioural re-enactments. Moreover, voices and images gain importance, and language loses coherence. These theories are related to Beckett's theatre at the end of this chapter.

**Chapter II** deals with painful memory *locus* in two of Beckett's plays: *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. Both plays have a closed space of a "room" as setting. The room itself is discussed in relation to Otto Rank's trauma of birth/death, since both rooms are hermetic places, and the characters present catatonic symptoms, imprisoning themselves in them. Both, Hamm and Krapp are anchored in their memories, and both have behavioural re-enactments, which are symptoms of trauma. Related to *Endgame*, I have analysed Hamm's repressed memory and story-telling in relation to the trauma of filial/progenitor's guilt against the background of the room, which may be viewed as his memory-room. *Krapp's Last Tape* is discussed in relation to autobiographic memory (ABM) and chronological landmarks of Krapp's memory. Memory processes gain importance in this discussion vis-à-vis the tape-recorder manipulation.

**Chapter III** discusses other types of *loci* in Beckett's theatre. Since memories may be also stored on an acoustic level, the sound of the sea in *Embers* and the sound of pacing in *Footfalls* are linked to the landscapes of traumatic memories. Both sounds are monotonous and last throughout the plays, making the main characters either remember or forget. In *Embers*, Freud's obsession-compulsion syndrome comes into view, since Henry cannot tear himself away from the sound of the sea. The latter triggers his most painful memories, while embodying his father, and bringing on the trauma of filial guilt.

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In *Footfalls*, May's rhythmical pacing is more than a simple sound. Nine steps together with "revolving it all" prompted the idea to discuss this play in relation to Rank's trauma of birth, mother-daughter relation and Jung's trauma of "not being born".

**Chapter IV** deals with the disembodied voices in *Eh Joe* and *That Time*. It was discussed by Freud that a traumatized person may hear voices in his head; these voices are the remnants of his/her trauma and make him/her re-experience traumatic experiences. Beckett's theatre is full of this type of voices, which come from nowhere and make his characters remember. In *Eh Joe*, it is the Voice that has a nightmarish quality and practically harasses Joe, who is trying to protect himself and "kill" this voice. The feminine Voice is a torturer which brings back his most painful memory. Joe, in return, is deprived of voice and is made an active listener, unable to contradict his torturer. Traumas of loneliness and loss are dealt with in this subchapter, as well as identity disruption. In *That Time*, the three voices coming from three different angles of the theatre are the voices of the Listener's memory, which try to reconstruct his life. ABM and chronological landmarks of the protagonist's memory are analysed. The trauma itself is made visible in the disembodied head floating in the darkness of the stage.

**Chapter V** deals with onstage images. Since memory affects the perception of our bodies, body fragmentation comes into view in relation to different types of traumatic memories. The onstage images discussed in this chapter are the image of Winnie half buried in earth in *Happy Days* and of the three heads in urns in *Play*. In both plays, bodies are sinking into material containers, as though devoured by them. Body disconnectedness affects the characters' speeches and their memories. In *Happy Days*, Winnie entombed to her waist and talking incessantly about her "happy days", while sinking into earth, is analysed as a barren mother image as a result of the trauma of sexual repression. I attempt to reconstruct some of Winnie's traumatic memories shielded by her story-telling as a "screen-memory". *Play* is exposed in relation to the Light as body and memory fragmentator, since the Light is made another protagonist of the play. It is treated as an inquisitor who is searching for a particular memory, repressed by the three characters. Circularity, echoing, overlapping, and repetitions lead me to explore this repressed memory as traumatic.

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**Chapter VI** deals with the language of trauma, which may be perceived as “narration without narrativity” (Kaplan 2005:65). As I have already stated, trauma is not recorded in words, but in images, sounds, emotions, etc. Thus, the attempt to translate it into words is doomed to failure. “Unmediated and inexpressible, trauma remains unrepresented by narrative constructions” (Malkin 1999: 32).

“Traumatic experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level and this failure to arrange the memory into words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level: as somatic sensations, behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks.” (van der Volk and van der Hart 1991: 443)

A person is unable to reconstruct coherently an event, but he/she is compelled to spit it out in words. And here different elements of narration of trauma come into view: lack of the authority of voice, dissociation, regression, overlapping, prevailing of images and sensations, continuous flashbacks of memory, etc. As an example of the language of trauma, I deal with *Not I* and *A Piece of Monologue*. *Not I* is probably the most traumatic of Beckett’s plays, Mouth’s continuous verbal diarrhoea affects the audience’s perception, and makes them witness the trauma of sexual abuse staged. *A Piece of Monologue* presents other characteristics of trauma. Due to the balance of the Speaker’s speech, the pendulum movement discussion in relation to the language of trauma comes to the surface. Therefore, the analysis is based on the pendulum movement of narration/memory in connection to Freud’s trauma of mourning and Rank’s birth/death trauma, as the extremes of a pendulum swing; thus, the language of mourning acquires a poetic quality in this play.

This thesis ends by providing Conclusions of my research as well as some suggested lines of future investigation.

Conforming to the regulations of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid regarding Ph. D. theses written in any language different from Spanish, I also include a summary and conclusions of the present thesis in Spanish.



**CHAPTER I**  
**On Memory and Trauma**





# CHAPTER I

## On Memory and Trauma

This chapter provides a theoretical background for the analysis of Beckett's theatre. As my objective is to analyse both memory and trauma in Beckett's plays, I decided to split the theory in two major bodies of research, organized by subchapters: 1) research on memory and 2) research on trauma. The field being so vast, that in this thesis I deal only with specific aspects of the studies on memory and on trauma. I believe that trauma is interconnected with memory through the concept of identity. Thus, I focus in this chapter on the research in the fields of Time, long-term memory (LTM), or memory storage that leads us to the construction of identity and on to autobiographic memory (ABM) and the relevance of positive and negative emotions in the "recording" of important events in our memory, consequently to the construction or de-construction of identity. The latter part deals with the field of trauma. I try to prove, that traumatic memories due to the process of their encoding persist in our memories, and although they are mainly repressed memories, we are doomed to re-live them again and again in our present. Thus, I also concentrate on the process of retrieval of traumatic memories: what may be the potential triggers that make us remember? I believe that only through broad understanding of workings of memory can we discuss the influence of trauma on a person and on his environment. In this thesis we apply these theories to Beckett's dramatic characters.

Due to the vivid and disturbing nature of traumatic memories, they present an interesting material for theatre. Traumatic memory images may be paralleled to the effects of the plague as stated in Artaud's famous book *The Theatre and Its Double*:

"The plague takes dormant images, latent disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of the most extreme gestures. Theatre also takes gestures and develops them to the limit. Just like the plague, it reforges the links between what does and does not exist in material nature." (1974: 18)

Something similar happens with the images of trauma. The dramatization of trauma works on the senses of the audience, it “upsets our sensual tranquillity, releases our repressed subconscious, drives us to a kind of potential rebellion” (Artaud 1974: 19). It is not a secret that in our society, affected by mass media, traumatic experiences are re-lived every day on the screen. We are all familiar with trauma on a personal level since each one of us has lost a family member or has experienced any kind of separation or betrayal. Consequently, when a spectator sees/feels traumatic experience onstage, he/she is not a mere observer. Subconsciously, he/she is driven into the suffering of the characters.

At the end of this chapter, I discuss different types of trauma that are present in Beckett’s theatre, such as cultural/collective trauma, vicarious/secondary trauma and personal traumas.

The analysis of memory and trauma leads me to the theatrical techniques of embodiment of traumatic memories onstage or to the analysis of physical stage language of trauma in Beckett’s theatre. As far as theatrical analysis is concerned, my choice is to apply phenomenology studies and semiotics. Both phenomenological and semiotic approaches are of great help to analyse plays, as drama has a number of sign systems which do not operate in a linear mode but in a complex and simultaneously present system which unfolds in time and space. Bert States calls this approach a “binocular vision” as both approaches complement each other and view an object from two different angles: object as sign (semiotics), and object, as one perceives it through experience (phenomenology). Relevant critics in these two fields are: Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980), Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), and Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (1994). I use these critics, among others, in my analysis of Beckett’s plays.

In this chapter, I use theory on memory and trauma from the following sources:

Bergson, Henri’s *Matter and Memory* (1896) is one of the four main works by French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), defending a clear anti-reductionist

## *Chapter I*

position. He considered memory to be of a deeply spiritual nature; the brain serving the need of orienting present action by inserting relevant memories. Bergson distinguishes two different forms of memory. On the one hand, memories concerning habitude, replaying and repeating past actions, not strictly recognized as representing the past, but utilizing it for the purpose of present action. Pure memory, on the other hand, registers the past in the form of “image-remembrance”, representing the past, recognized as such. It is of a contemplative and fundamentally spiritual kind, and it is free. This is true memory. Bergson really distinguishes the spirit from the body, but as opposed to Descartes’ classical philosophy, the distinction resides in the temporal not in the spatial domain. The spirit is the abode of the past, the body of the present; the soul or spirit always anchored in the past, not residing in the present; lodged in the past and contemplating the present. Consciousness means, invariably, delaying reaction to stimuli, the interval accompanied by the conscious awareness that the spirit is anchored within the past. One takes conscience while being anchored in the past, in the light of the past, in view of appropriate action directed towards the immediate future. The articulation of time - past, present, future - finds place through the union of spirit and body. The more the spirit descends into the past, the more one becomes conscious. The more one acts automatically, the more one exists in the present, in the temporal domain of the body. And one always stays within one domain or the other.

*The Art of Memory* (1966), written by Frances A. Yates, dwells upon the problems of artificial memory from the point of view of mnemonics. In classical rhetoric, images and text were mapped onto virtual places to aid the memory of orators. Memory was enormously important to orators because they were expected to deliver long speeches with total accuracy. In fact, memory was of such value that there developed an “art of memory” designed to strengthen natural memory. Frances A. Yates explains that this artificial memory depended upon the recollection of images. Artificial memory was a kind of “inner writing” the orator reviewed while presenting a speech, observing the places and their contents, the images, and recovering the memories for things (the subject matter) that those images represented. Yates presents the development of the mnemonics method from *Ad Herennium* to the Renaissance Fludd’s theatre.

*The Self and Memory* (2004), edited by Beike R. Denise, Lampinen M. James, Behrend A. Douglas, deals with the concept of autobiographic memory. It is remarkable that past theories about the empirical study of the Self have ignored the fact that the self has a history. This history, which we now call autobiographical memory (memory of the events and facts of our lives), grounds the Self in a remembered reality and forms the content of identity. In this important and significant collection, Beike and her colleagues bring together definitive statements by leading autobiographical memory researchers that explore many aspects of the relations between memory and the self.

*Memory*, which is a collection of essays, edited by Patricia Fara and Karalyn Patterson (2006). This engaging volume explores how individuals and societies remember, forget and commemorate events of the past. The collection of eight essays takes an interdisciplinary approach to address the relationships between individual experience and collective memory, with leading experts from the arts and sciences. We might expect scientists to be concerned with studying just the mental and physical processes involved in remembering, and humanities scholars to be interested in the products of memory, such as books, statues and music. This collection exposes the falseness of such a dichotomy, illustrating the insights into memory, which can be gained by juxtaposing the complementary perspectives of specialists venturing beyond the normal boundaries of their disciplines. The authors come from backgrounds as diverse as psychoanalysis, creative writing, neuroscience, social history and medicine.

*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1998), written by Cathy Caruth. In this book, Professor Caruth proposes that in the widespread and bewildering experience of trauma in our century — both in its occurrence and in our attempt to understand it — we can recognize the possibility of a history no longer based on simple models of straightforward experience and reference. Through the notion of trauma, she contends, we come to a new understanding that permits history to arise where immediate understanding is impossible. In her wide-ranging discussion, Caruth engages Freud's theory of trauma as outlined in *Moses and Monotheism* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; the notion of reference and the figure of the falling body in de Man, Kleist, and Kant; the narratives of personal

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catastrophe in *Hiroshima mon amour*; and the traumatic address in Lecompte's reinterpretation of Freud's narrative of the dream of the burning child. This work examines the links between the languages of literature and psychoanalysis, in terms of their uses in the analysis of trauma in the 20th century.

*Trauma. Culture. The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005) by E. Ann Kaplan. In *Trauma Culture*, Kaplan explores the relationship between the impact of trauma on individuals and on entire cultures and nations. Arguing that humans possess a compelling need to draw meaning from personal experience and to communicate what happens to others, she examines the artistic, literary, and cinematic forms that are often used to bridge the individual and collective experiences. Case studies, including Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, Marguerite Duras's *La Douleur*, Sarah Kofman's *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, and Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries*, reveal how empathy can be fostered without the sensationalistic element that typifies the media. From World War II to 9/11, this passionate study eloquently navigates the contentious debates surrounding trauma theory and persuasively advocates the responsible sharing and translating of catastrophe.

*Remembering Trauma* (2003) written by Richard J. McNally. *Remembering Trauma* bluntly challenges some of the most contested and controversial issues in the study of trauma and its effect on memory and deflates the many myths and illusions that are still obscuring our understanding of memory and trauma. Survivors rarely forget trauma, unless there is physical damage to the brain. And the intense emotions experienced by people during a traumatic or stressful event enhance the memory for central aspects of the experience rather than making them subject to amnesia. Another contested issue in the field of trauma that McNally challenges in *Remembering Trauma* is that of false memories. McNally also touches on other controversies surrounding the field of trauma and memory, such as the PTSD debate.

## 1.1. An Overview of Current Theories on Memory and Trauma

Memory is considered by many critics to be one of the main themes of Beckett's theatre. Samuel Beckett manifested his interest in memory in his essay on *Proust* (1931), where he discusses the notion of Time as well as the workings of voluntary and involuntary memories, and I suppose, it is not a mere coincidence that memory plays such an important role in his works. His interest in memory and Psychology is also of common knowledge. James Knowlson in *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (1997: 235, 253, 260) mentions that Samuel Beckett himself had an astonishing memory, practically photographic. Knowlson also writes about Beckett's capacity to learn long literary texts by heart, and even remember the smallest detail in a painting (Samuel Beckett was greatly interested in art), not to mention his prodigious capacity for other languages (Italian, French, German). Samuel Beckett, however, does not treat the theme of memory as pure mnemotecnics in his plays, since involuntary memory is very much present and important in his works. As Ruby Cohn writes, "for Beckett involuntary memory is purge, causing evacuation of regrets" (1976: 115).

In Beckett's drama we can find mostly individual and not collective memories, as his characters "have few social contacts, their collective<sup>4</sup> and social memories are only of minor significance" (Kozdon 2005: 5). According to Sabine Kozdon, the only play that deals with collective memory is *Happy Days* (2005: 115). In her research, she dwells upon the use of quotations from general literature. Overall there are 14 references; among them five are attributed to the writings of William Shakespeare. From my point of view, Winnie uses her "fading" knowledge of culture in order to protect or shield her own painful memories. Universal literature is a shelter for her: her "classics" help her to pass the time.

Furthermore, Beckett's later plays<sup>5</sup> are referred to as memory-plays. Beckett's characters are lonely elderly people telling stories at the dawn of their lives, thus they expect nothing from the future and recall everything from their past.

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<sup>4</sup> The term "collective memory" was first made by Maurice Halbwachs in 1920.

<sup>5</sup> *Play, Not I, Footfalls, That Time, Rockaby, Ohio Impromptu*, etc.

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“In the autobiographical memories of the elderly, which Beckett constructs with such insightful sensitivity, the capacity for recall, particularly of childhood and adolescent memories, increases and changes. These reminiscences then play an active and integrative role in the construction of a coherent self-narrative during the course of retrospective life-review.” (MacDonald Brown 2005: 20)

It has been pointed out that Beckett’s characters are not donned with perfect memories, old age and brain dysfunctions, such as dementia, amnesia, and even Alzheimer<sup>6</sup> seem to affect their memories. I believe, staging characters with poor and failing memories only adds humanity to Beckett’s characters. “But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is in us”, says Vladimir in *WFG* (73). It is obvious that a spectator may identify his/her own self with the process of aging, normally feared by the majority.

“Beckett will not let us exalt man so easily. Man remains stuck in the mud, dust, or shit, and no glorifications of his feelings can extract him. Man has compassion for the human condition because he feels sorry for himself within it; universal suffering is self-referential.” (Paine 1981: 46)

As far as I know, the significance of memory in Beckett’s work has been analysed by many critics since 1960<sup>7</sup>: Katherine Worth, Linda Ben-Zvi, Enoch Brater, Ruby Cohn, S.E. Gontarski<sup>8</sup>, Rosemary Pountney, Antonia Rodriguez-Gago and others point out the importance of memory in his drama. Moreover, although, all these critics agree with the key role of memory in Beckett’s theatre, there are a few book-length studies on this subject.

The books that helped me most in better understanding this theme are Jeannette Malkin’s *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama*, Sabine Kozdon’s *Memory in Samuel Beckett’s Plays. A Psychological Approach*; and the articles published by Ulrika

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<sup>6</sup> MacDonald Brown in her thesis “Yesterday’s Deformities: A Discussion of the Role of Memory and Discourse in the Plays of Samuel Beckett” proves that Estragon shows the early symptoms of Alzheimer disease (52-54).

<sup>7</sup> Sabine Kozdon (2005) enumerates the following studies on the subject: Leo Geerts, “Samuel Beckett vertaald: De dramatiek van herinnering”, *Deutsche-Warande en Belfort: Tijdschrift voor Letterkunde en Geestesleven* 112 (1967), Sandra M. Gilbert, “All the Dead Voices”: A Study of Krapp’s Last Tape”, *Drama Survey* 6 (1968), Roman Hayman, *Samuel Beckett, Contemporary Playwrights* (London: Heinemann, 1970), etc.

<sup>8</sup> Gontarski S.E. directed the thesis of Dustin Anderson, “Their Synaptic Selves: Memory and Language in Beckett and Joyce”. The thesis was defended in 2006.

Maude “The Body of Memory: Beckett and Merleau-Ponty”<sup>9</sup>, and by my thesis advisor, Antonia Rodriguez-Gago, especially her essay: “The Embodiment of Memory (and Forgetting) in Beckett’s Late Women’s Plays”<sup>10</sup>.

Malkin focuses her research on repressed memories in postmodern theatre. Kozdon discusses memory and forgetting in elderly people and backs up her investigation with psychological explanations, while Maude is more interested in the relation between the body and memory or how memories are inscribed in the bodies of Beckett’s characters. Rodriguez-Gago focuses her article on corporeal and incorporeal elements that serve as memory-containers. She discusses memory in the light of Juan Luis Vives’ theory on memory and forgetting. Though memory discussion has multi-level approaches in the abovementioned research, a phenomenological approach is often used for the analysis of Beckett’s drama.

Jeannette Malkin points out the importance of memory in postmodernism, especially in the theatre: “The ‘space’ of memory, its circulations and echoings, fit naturally into the spatial art of theatre” (Malkin 1999: I). For Malkin, theatre is a perfect vehicle for memory: she considers memory as a subject, theatre as an object and postmodernism as a form to inscribe memory, due to the fact that postmodernism is bound up with remembering and forgetting. It seems to me, that the main preoccupation of our time is with the excessive flow of information, that we consider all too important to forget, thus, no wonder, new forms of information storing appear on the market (computer, pen-drives, I-Pods to store music, etc.). Although, we try to keep all this valuable information and knowledge, sometimes we also want to get rid of some of our life experiences, the ones that obscure our lives. I could compare this ardent desire to “store” all new data in our memory to the period of Enlightenment, which Malkin describes as “coherent progressive memories with importance in the present” (1999: 7). Henry Bergson states this model of memory as the most influential for a human mind. But as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, human memory has two faces: smiling and cheery brightened up by knowledge, and gloomy and distorted, clouded by our repressed past.

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Lane’s (ed.) 2002. *Beckett and Philosophy*.

<sup>10</sup> Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.) 2003. *Drawing in Beckett: Portraits, Performances and Cultural Contexts*.



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And it is rather disputable which of the two memories is more influential. I will discuss this later in section 1.2.

Probably, due to over-storage of information or our reluctance to remember, memory tends to be disruptive and even unreliable. And memory disconnectedness is the main motif of postmodern theatre. Malkin states that there was a shift from historical to psychological memory and from social to individual, consequently from objective message to its subjective reaction. The postmodern playwrights try to explore the psyche of their characters or better to say, the subconscious psyche, where traumatic memories become the sole protagonists. In connection to the latter Malkin stresses the importance of Freud's ideas in postmodern theatre:

“With Freud the theatre of memory moved inward, beyond the imagination, into the psyche; and its drama was played out between repression, symbolic encodings, and therapeutic retrieval.” (1999: 5)

It seems that what the characters try to repress and erase from their memories defines their present. But since the bitter memories are well-hidden, their recall resembles flashbacks, and their main characteristic is fragmentation. For Beckett's characters, their presence is “a constant replay of memoried moments through ghostly figments” (Malkin 1999: 39). No wonder, Beckett's later plays are referred to in this book as memory theatre.

“Memory theatre might be doubly defined as a theatre that imitates conflicted and sometimes repressed or erased memories of a shared past, and as a theatre that initiates processes of remembrance through practices of repetition, conflation, regression, through recurrent scenes, involuntary voice, echoing, overlap, and simultaneity.” (Malkin 1999: 8)

Sabine Kozdon applied the term “life review”<sup>11</sup> to Beckett's characters. Due to the length of her definition, I will sum it up as following: a protagonist who is on the edge of death tries to narrate and review past events from his perspective; these memories “often take on the shape of a search or a quest for meaning” (Kozdon 2005: 233). She argues that all of his characters are mentally sane people, although with poor memories due to their age. Kozdon deals with the different ways of forgetting according

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<sup>11</sup> Sabine Kozdon 2005: 232.

to modern psychological research and applies them to Beckett's characters. For example, she singles out short-term memory in *Waiting for Godot*, and attributes it to the effects of frustration: "The characters' forgetfulness in *WFG* may be interpreted as a means helping them to avoid having to tackle their frustrating situation."<sup>12</sup> Since according to Horst Breuer, there are three reactions to frustration (fear, aggression and regression), Kozdon states that Vladimir and Estragon tend to behave in a childish manner, as a type of regression, she arrives to the conclusion, that taking into consideration Beckett's interest and knowledge of Psychology, "not only the representation of memory in Beckett's early plays, but also in his later plays is surprisingly realistic."<sup>13</sup>

Although, the term "life review" could fit well with some of Beckett's plays, such as *That Time*, for example, I doubt very much that any of Beckett's characters are faced with a quest for meaning in their lives. "Make sense who may – I switch off" (467), says Bam in *What Where*. I believe that Beckett's characters are there onstage not for a life review, but for pure theatrical existence. They are not even defined as characters: their oversized clothes, ghostly appearance and low voices (in his later plays) resemble more a non-solid holograms projected from the past than "real people" preoccupied with their life successes and failures. Besides, there is no character in Beckett's plays who may boast with being a success, since for this playwright life is a failure *per se*, and we should only try "to fail better".

In postmodern theatre, language ceases to be the only vehicle of meaning, as Beckett writes in *Company*, speech is "mere ejaculation of air". Language, as well as his characters' memories, are falling to bits. There is no stable Self who would pursue the quest for meaning. I think since Beckett's characters are fragmented on all levels, the search for meaning could be out of question for them. It takes his characters a lot of effort to simply exist onstage, and, probably, their only desire is not to be seen, some of them (W1, W2, M in *Play* and Mouth in *Not I*) are simply craving for darkness.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 92.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 236.

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“Given that most of their recollections are painful, they [Beckett’s characters] would rather forget than remember or, in theatrical terms, they would rather remain invisible in darkness and silence, than visible on stage talking under the spotlight.” (Rodriguez-Gago 2003: 8)

Since language ceases to be the only signifier of meaning, voice and image gain prominence. Samuel Beckett was always interested in images and voices, he even mentioned his fascination with disembodied voices “coming out of the dark”, the cellar of our memory. All the critics coincide that Beckett’s theatre is practically populated with ghostly voices from the past haunting the present. Each character possesses more than one voice; these voices can belong to their past selves or can be fragments of their consciousness. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon create a poetic metaphor for all these voices, the air is pregnant with:

**ESTRAGON:** All the dead voices.

**VLADIMIR:** They make a noise like wings.

**ESTRAGON:** Like leaves.

**VLADIMIR:** Like sand.

**ESTRAGON:** Like leaves.

[*Silence.*]

**VLADIMIR:** They all speak to each other.

**ESTRAGON:** Each one to itself. (58)

These voices, which murmur and rustle, belong to the past of Beckett’s characters: “to have lived is not enough for them” (58). They are compelled to tell stories of their life/lives. Thus, in Beckett’s drama, the process of remembering acquires new quality: “recall appears to arise from a specific subject, that subject is him/herself fractured, “falling to bits”, and placed at a remove from the “remembering” voice(s)” (Malkin 1999: 7). This multiple-voiced recall characterizes later Beckett’s plays: all the memory voices are fragmented in time and even in space. In *Krapp’s Last Tape*, for example, older Krapp listens to his past memories contained in various tapes, and in *That Time* the protagonist listens to the three voices of his memory, which come from different places in the theatre. Richard Lane in the preface to *Beckett and Philosophy* (2002) even makes a distinction of the three voices, which are present in Beckett’s drama: inner voices, present voices and repressed voices. In the same book, Gary

Banham<sup>14</sup> defines voices as sonic images and mentions that space in Beckett's drama is always pregnant with sounds and voices: voices, which are still there to be heard. "All these dead voices"<sup>15</sup> constitute Beckett's "boundless void"<sup>16</sup>. Rodriguez-Gago states that all these disembodied voices are "the aural traces of memory" (2003: 15). Malkin even goes further and refers to Beckett's voices as time-conflators: "his voices, remembering or remembered voices, develop in, cut through, and often conflate time" (1999: 38).

An image is another vehicle of memory in Beckett's theatre: it prevails over language in his plays. Striking images, such as a head suspended in air in *That Time*, or the heads in urns in *Play*, or a woman being progressively buried in a mound of earth in *Happy Days*, work on the senses of the audience and make these plays memorable. Malkin writes:

"The images function as memory triggers, evoking the sense and sensations of the plays, the 'nerves', rather than the words or stories. It is through the image – rather than through any plot line or character development – that we intuit the complexity of these dramas of absence and fragmentedness." (1999: 41)

The techniques of postmodern theatre to embody memory, according to Malkin, are repetition, conflation, regression, echoing, overlapping and simultaneity. All of them are present in Beckett's plays (as will be shown in Chapters II, III, IV, V and VI). Beckett's critics coincide on the extreme fragmentation of his plays. The principle "less is more" could be applied to all his plays: short dialogues, scarce stage decoration, and body fragmentation (mouth – *Not I*, head – *That Time*, *Play*, etc.). Ulrika Maude discusses how memory could be inscribed in the mutilated bodies of Beckett's characters, taking into consideration that the material body "forms the ultimate foundation of identity" (Maude 2002: 108). We exist because we have our bodies that communicate with the world that surrounds us. For example, May in *Footfalls* knows that she exists due to the sound of her footsteps, produced by her feet. Consequently, the recognition of our own bodies is a part of our identity. But what happens if we lose one part of the body? Will our identity remain? Do our bodies have memory? The concept

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<sup>14</sup> Gary Banham 2002. "Cinders: Derrida with Beckett". Ed. Lane, R. *Beckett and Philosophy*.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Beckett *Waiting for Godot*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Beckett *Worstword Ho*.

“phantom-limb” of Merleau-Ponty, which Maude applies to body-memory is worth mentioning. It was noted by doctors, for example in World War II, that those patients with amputated limbs still complained of pain or itching in the non-existent body part. It seemed that psychologically an amputated limb was still present. Maude states that a body can be viewed on two levels: a habit body and an actual body. And sometimes a habit body is trapped in the past:

“We are dealing here with a bodily memory, an organic intelligence, whose applicability reaches far beyond the experiences of mutilation. We are dealing with a phenomenon akin to repression, in which a traumatic occurrence leaves the subject forever trapped in a past future which is no longer accessible to him/her.” (Maude 2002: 111)

And Maude arrives to the conclusion that the “phantom-limb” may function as an involuntary memory, which cannot be rejected since it forms part of the character’s identity. These memories are evoked by emotions and sensations of their past, for example the black rubber ball in *KLT*, works on this “phantom-limb” level. Though the ball is non-existent in the present, Krapp remembers its touch, and the sensations that it produces bring on the memory of his mother’s death.

The majority of Beckett’s characters are dealing with actual phantom-limb experiences triggered by “body’s own recollection of sensory experience” (2002: 112), stresses Maude. Rodriguez-Gago also states that Beckett’s characters are “visual and aural embodiments of obsessive memories” (2003: 2). Thus, the body may be the corporeal container of memory onstage. Although besides the body, the stage itself and the physical language of the stage may be memory containers. Since everything onstage (props, lighting, costumes, etc.) speaks its own dramatic language, Beckett uses all stage elements to embody the main themes of his works.

All postmodern playwrights, Samuel Beckett among them, tend to represent the subconscious reality of their characters onstage. The plays are staged inside the skull, thus it is not only the characters’ speeches, which gain importance, but also the whole stage that mirrors their emotions and their memories. Antonia Rodriguez-Gago draws our attention to the hallucinatory quality of the stage and the effects of light and darkness that embody the characters’ memories. Her idea of striking memory images

and voices stored inside different *loci* is the one that prompted this research. According to Rodriguez-Gago, past memories may be kept in corporeal containers onstage: the ashbins in *Endgame*, the tapes in *KLT*, the urns in *Play*, and the mound in *Happy Days*. Sabine Kozdon also comments upon the significance of ashbins in *Endgame* as memory containers:

“Nag and Nell, who often live in the past, personify recollections in the head. When they are kept in closed containers, this implies that their memories become less distinct or that Hamm tries to repress them.” (2005: 112)

Consequently, all these past memories are there onstage before our eyes waiting for the characters to rescue them from oblivion. Furthermore, the characters are both repulsed and compelled to tell them. The process of “revolving it all” becomes the core of their existence.

Jeanette Malkin argues in her book that the entire set of Beckett’s later plays can be treated as a “series of memory perspectives and postures that hold ‘open-ended’ dialogues with each other and with an audience composed of remembering observers” (1999: 43). It looks like all these plays investigate memory from different organs of remembrance: ear, tape, mouth. Beckett splits the body on purpose, probably, with the aim to show the impossibility of perceiving completely one’s own self. The characters in his plays are conversing with ghost voices or voices of their former selves, nevertheless, their identities are always fragmented and they are unable to achieve unity. I believe that this unity may never be achieved, because “unity” as such is positive, and Beckett perceives life as a failure, thus his characters are composed of different failed identities, which are tormented inside one “still living” body.

## **1.2. On Memory and Identity**

“La memoria es una de las características humanas más importantes. Porque tenemos memoria podemos, digámoslo así, rescatar el pasado del olvido, integrarlo de tal manera que contemos con él y, en tanto que lo retenemos, abrir una posibilidad nueva. La memoria nos permite acumular experiencia.” (Polo 1998: 50)

Memory is one of the main characteristics of human beings, since it makes us the way we are. Obviously, it influences not only our present but also our future, thus we should not underestimate its importance. Our experiences shape our present personality and influence our present and future decisions. We construct our identities upon the canvas of our memory. Happy memories make us optimistic and open to new experiences; sad and traumatic memories shape our negative attitude towards the future and make us introverted and bitter.

However, what is Memory? We cannot touch it as it lacks physicality, and though our experiences are stored there, they are not always accessible. Memory is not a computer with files or a book to look up at will; it is something more complicated alive and shape-changing, since we are able to manipulate it according to our present state of mind. Besides some memories get vague with time and fall in the bottomless abyss of oblivion, and other memories leave vestiges that are indestructible, and by means of which they can be recalled as long as life endures.

All the abovementioned reasons make memory an interesting field of study from different angles: philosophical, psychological, neurological, historical and social. I will dwell upon memory from a philosophical point of view, but also taking into account recent research in Psychology on memory. I think that recent research on memory helps to form and provide evidence for memory mechanisms. Obviously, the field or research is too large, since memory has been one of the burning themes for more than 2000 years, thus I decided to limit my theoretical chapter on memory to the relation between memory and identity, memory and emotion, and the way memories are stored in our brain. The relation between memory and negative emotion leads us to trauma. I am going to apply the theory on memory and trauma to Beckett's theatre, my major interest lies in the embodiment of voices and spaces of painful memories in drama.

### **1.2.1. The Roots of Memory: Images and *locus* of Memory**

“Memory is a sensitive part of the soul which takes the images of sense impressions; it therefore belongs to the same part of the soul as imagination, but it also per accidents in the intellectual part since the abstracting intellect works in it on the phantasmata.” (Yates 1966: 71)

It is not the goal of this thesis to study the historical development of studies on memory, but I think it is important to mention the pioneers in these studies and analyse briefly their achievements in the art of memory, which have relevance to the current research. I believe that mnemonics, as an art of memory, influenced postmodern theatre, which I will prove hereinafter. Memory *per se* is the protagonist of many postmodern plays. Mnemonics as method is relevant to me, since I believe that Samuel Beckett stages memory according to it. Obviously, this method has its history and, discussing the history of memory, I follow Yates’ theory in this field, while I try to demonstrate its presence in Beckett’s drama.

The history of memory begins in ancient Greece. According to written records, the Greeks invented the art of memory, which afterwards they passed to the Romans. Memory was essential in that time as writing was not developed. People could count only on their memory skills to remember. The art of memory belonged to the field of Rhetoric, as it was an essential skill for an orator to remember long speeches, or poetry, this is called mnemotecnics<sup>17</sup>. Simonides of Ceos (556-468 B.C) was the one who invented it. Furthermore, Quintilian, Cicero, Capella, St. Augustine, Boncompagno, Alberto Magnus and Thomas Aquinas made further research of memory and mnemotecnics. Obviously, the memory they deal with is artificial memory, not natural memory. According to Yates, “the natural memory is that which is engrafted in our minds, born simultaneously with thought. The artificial memory is a memory strengthened or confirmed by training”<sup>18</sup>. As I intend to deal with natural memory in this research, mnemotecnics may seem to be of little importance. However, my interest

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<sup>17</sup> In the ancient Greece Mnemosune (1000 BCE) was the goddess of Memory and the mother of all the Muses (muse means “one who remembers”). From her name we take the words “memory”, “mnemonic” and “mnemonist”. She was considered to be one of the most powerful goddesses of all the time. Out of Mnemosune come the Muses, her daughters, all of whom had a science or an art to protect. Thus, metaphorically, the sciences and the art arise from memory.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 5.



in it is due to the fact that all these philosophers were trying to produce a method to make memories lasting in the brain. Thus, I will analyse mnemotecnics from the perspective of long-term memory, or what memories may be the lasting ones.

Mnemotecnics as such, used by Simonides of Ceos, was based on spacio-visual memory. It is essential to the current research to have a look at this system, since with time, it has not changed drastically. This system is based on 1) images and 2) spaces of memory. Both are valid in the light of the theatre discussion.

Simonides of Ceos advised his pupils to train memory by imagining a certain building and filling it with the things or striking images one needs to remember. The images stood for events in his technique, and what was crucial about those images was their unforgettable quality that played on the senses of a person. The main rule for the images was their sharpness, novelty and sometimes violence, since their objective was to awaken memory. It was later specified in *Ad Herennium*:

“We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness [...] Or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that too will assure our remembering them more readily...”<sup>19</sup>

In mnemotecnics images prevail over words. Simonides of Ceos writes that the sense of sight prevails over the rest in memory. Furthermore, he makes a clear distinction between *memoria verborum* (memory for words) and *memoria rerum* (memory for images). The latter is based on images; since all of the abovementioned philosophers advise to substitute memory for words and for images. These images should be made according to the laws of association and contiguity. Consequently, an image should trigger a corresponding word or an event. For example, for poison the author of *Ad Herennium* proposed to imagine a cup. Simonides of Ceos stresses that only striking images last in memory. To make an image striking the author advises to add novel, comic or violent quality to it. And Beckett's theatre is practically based on

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

striking and bizarre images, such as heads suspended in the air, bodies imprisoned in urns or ashbins. They are not, perhaps pleasant for the eye, but their bizarre quality makes them lasting in our memories.

Both Aquinas and Aristotle point out the key role of imagination in the invention of images. Aristotle wrote on memory:

“Memory [...] belongs to the same part of the soul as the imagination; it is a collection of mental pictures from sense impressions but with a time element added, for the mental images of memory are not from perception of the things present but of things past.”<sup>20</sup>

Besides, Aristotle adds the importance of the work of the five senses in the conjunction of an image, since “recollection is recovery of knowledge or sensation which one had before”<sup>21</sup>. It was evident even in that time that there is a very clear link between our sensory perception of an event and memory. Later I will discuss the importance of different types of emotion, which makes memories lasting. In his treatise *De anima*, Aristotle states that perception, based on the work of the five senses, is first treated by the faculty of imagination. Furthermore, the images formed become the material of intellectual faculty. Thus, imagination works as an intermediate between perception and thought. This theory was developed later by Henri Bergson.

Images play a crucial role in Beckett’s theatre. It has been said that Beckett felt “more at home in the company of painters than that of writers”. No wonder, he started to experiment with stage images: their corporeality, spatiality, even with their absence and the effect that they could produce. The stage in Beckett’s plays is turned into a visual field, or “seeing-place” (Garner, Stanton B. 1994: 4), it is not a theatre of action. His characters are very much concerned with being perceived: “Is anyone looking at me?” (314), “Am I as much as ... being seen?” (317). The man in *Play* defines the audience as “...that you are ...mere eye. Just looking. At my face. On and off” (317). And it is perception plays an essential role in decoding theatre images:

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

## Chapter I

“In their increasingly pictorial use of performance space, the late plays reveal a deepening interest not only in the stage as visual place, but also in the phenomenology of vision, and the living body that underlines them both.” (Garner, Stanton B. 1994: 85)

The images that Beckett creates onstage look more like sculptures or paintings unique in their nature and impossible to forget. It seems that he destroys the boundary between drama and painting. In some of his plays the audience see three-dimensional statues onstage, since only the lips of the characters are moving in *Play, A Piece of Monologue* and *Not I*; and in *That Time* the immobile head only half-smiles at the end of the play. Beckett’s later plays “are filled with references to eyes and to the shapes”<sup>22</sup>, that is why the question of perception and the constitution of meaning is vital in his plays. The process of perception is constituted by an act of seeing and decoding of a stage image which has a lot to do with the “arrangements of objects, colours, shapes, movements and sizes, but, perhaps first of all, an interplay of directed tensions”, as well as it “depends on memories or experiences we’ve had with a particular object” (Arnheim 1974: 117). Memories and experiences are very important in decoding a certain image. So, when Marek Kedzierski states in his essay “The Space of Absence: Image and Voice in Beckett’s Later Plays”, that “we have not yet reached the satisfactory level of collective understanding of these enigmatic pieces [later plays]” (1999: 116), I think, it is very difficult, not to say impossible, to speak about *the satisfactory level of collective understanding*, as experiences and memories are not collective but individual. The understanding of an image is quite subjective; it is also based on the cultural background of a person, his age and education. Garner, Stanton B. also points out the importance of imagination in the decoding of a stage image.

Furthermore, all the theoreticians coincide that to strengthen memory it is important to repeat memories time and again. Repetition works as a sort of chisel that engraves the memory in our consciousness. Malkin also points out the importance of repetition in postmodern theatre. Beckett’s characters are obsessed with repetition of their memories: they are re-reading books (*Ohio Impromptu*), or re-listening to tapes, which contain their memories (*Krapp’s Last Tape*), or re-telling the same stories (*Happy Days, Embers, Endgame*). Albertus Magnus advised the students to repeat the memorised texts in privacy and obscurity:

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

## *On Memory and Trauma*

“Those wishing to reminiscence withdraw from the public light into obscure privacy: because in the public light the images of sensible things are scattered and their movement is confused. In obscurity, however, they are unified and moved in order.” (qtd. in Yates 1966: 68)

In the Middle Ages, Martianus Capella develops this idea and writes in *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*:

“... [memories] should not be read out in a loud voice, but meditated upon with a murmur. And it is obviously better to exercise the memory by night, rather than by day, when silence spreading far and wide aids us, so that the attention is not drawn outward by senses.”<sup>23</sup>

These ideas captured my attention, since they insist on darkness and isolation to be used for a better memory. Many of Beckett’s plays are staged in semi-darkness; this darkness may be discussed later as an intensifier of personal memory. Rodriguez-Gago writes about the stage darkness in Beckett’s theatre, that it “is the house of memory containing fragmented and ghostly images some of which are embodied in performance, forced by the stage light, and others will remain hidden or forgotten in the dark waiting, perhaps, to be rescued in a different time and at a different place” (2003: 4).

The rules for creating images are still relevant nowadays in modern art, media and theatre among them. Visual theory has developed through time, but its foundations, made by the Greeks, remain the same. Yates writes, “the art of memory was a creator of imagery which must surely have flowed out into creative works of art and literature” (1966: 91). Striking images inhabit postmodern theatre, movies, current advertisements and TV.

I am going to dwell upon the other component part of mnemotecnics method: the invention of places (*loci* or *topoi*<sup>24</sup>) where one has to place the images. The architecture of *loci* is as crucial to long-term memory as the images, since it gives sequence and order to the memory one needs to remember. These *loci* were very important to preserve memory information, they are like wax tablets, which remain when what is written on them has been effaced and are ready to be written again. Simonides of Ceos advised his

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

<sup>24</sup> *Topoi* in Greek, and *loci* in Latin mean “places”.

students to imagine a building and memorize all the rooms in it. This imagined building was the space afterwards to be filled with images. It was always crucial for students to make a virtual tour through this building in order to memorize it well, besides it was also important to mark the fifth room with some novel quality. Moreover, there were several important rules in the mental formation of the *loci*:

- They should be neither brightly lit nor too dark.
- All the *loci* should be very vivid and as spacious as possible.
- All the *loci* should be four-dimensional (Tullius).
- Thomas Aquinas added another rule to *loci*: they should be a well-known place from childhood<sup>25</sup> or an unfamiliar place.

Consequently, we can call these *loci* background images of a certain landscape, which later on in my thesis I parallel with the stage, since the stage is a place, which holds the characters' memories in Beckett's plays.

St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, beautifully describes memory as *spacious fields*, which behold the *treasures of innumerable things*, brought by the senses of perception. According to St. Augustine, memory is divided into compartments:

“Behold in the plains, and caves, and caverns of memory, innumerable and innumerably full of innumerable kinds of things, either as images, as all bodies; or by actual presence, as the arts; or by certain notions and impressions, as the affections of the mind, which, even when the mind doth not feel, the memory retaineth, while yet whatsoever is in the memory is also in the mind – over all these do I run, I fly; I drive on this side and that, as far as I can, and there is no end.” (qted. in Yates 1966: 47)

Although very poetic in nature, this description goes further in time. St. Augustine does not only speak of different *loci* of memory, but he also describes them

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<sup>25</sup> I suppose Aquinas was the first philosopher who stresses that childhood memories are life-lasting. Later William James (1890) pointed out that the memories of childhood which persist in old age can hardly be compared with the events of the day or hour which are forgotten, for these latter are trivial once repeated things, whilst “the childish reminiscences have been wrought into us during the retrospective hours of our intervening life”. (qted. in an internet resource developed by Christopher D. Green, York University, Toronto, Ontario, <http://psychclassics.asu.edu>)

as plains, caves and caverns. This idea shows that he already was proposing that not all memories are stored equally, that by *plains* of memories he speaks about easily accessible memories, *caves* may stand for memories distant in time, and *caverns*, probably, hold obscure and painful memories that we want to forget, but our mind *doth retaineth*.

Surprisingly, I came across Beckett's comparison of memory to a cave in *Cascando*: "what's in his head... a hole... a shelter.. a hollow.. in the dunes...a vague memory... in his head... of a cave.. he goes down... no more trees.. no more bank.. he's changed.... [*Silence.*]" (298). This beautifully created image resonates with St. Augustine's perception of memory. For Beckett, some memories lie deep in our mind, and they are not easy to access to, although the process of "going down" leads to nothingness, to silence and to the lack of self-recognition.

While the theory of images remained almost the same through history, the theory of *loci* was changing all the time. If in ancient Greece, a fantasy building was advised to be constructed in our minds, later on there were other theories on the selection of places. Peter of Ravenna in his treatise *Phoenix, sive artificiosa memoria* (1491) advised to imagine an unfrequented church. And a church is taken for the onstage *locus* in *Footfalls*, created both by the sound of church bells chiming and by May's reference to a church.

Another idea for these places was to imagine the letters of the ABC or twelve signs of the Zodiac. Samuel Beckett in *That Time* also names the three voices of memory with ABC letters. Furthermore, the pupil of Aquinas and Cicero, Romberch introduced a novel idea to imagine such places as Heaven, Hell and Earthly Heaven in the form of spheres. In the Middle Ages memory started to gain religious and ethical importance. And a gothic cathedral was suggested as a *locus* by Dominican friars. The learned Dominican friars wanted to absorb the learning of memory into the church. Thus, the *loci* of Hell, Purgatory, Earthly Heaven and Heaven had two roles. Artaud suggests these kinds of images for modern theatre: "I propose a theatre where violent physical images pulverize, mesmerize the audience's sensibilities, caught in the drama as if in a vortex of higher forces" (1974: 63).

## Chapter I

Dante in his *Divine Comedy* used the idea of *loci*, since his Inferno is a kind of memory *locus*, and each of the places in Hell corresponds to the different sins committed on earth. Another feature of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is its circular nature. Dante gave a spherical form to his Heaven, Purgatory and Hell. For example, Hell consists of nine circles (nine being the number of eternity). That brings again to my mind Beckett's play *Footfalls*, since May is always walking nine steps along the perimeter of the stage. And Krapp on counting his boxes of tapes shouts: "nine! good God! . . . seven . . . ah! the little rascal!" (216). Both numbers may refer to their symbolic significance. On saying number "nine", Krapp is, perhaps surprised that these boxes would never end, and on saying number "seven", Krapp links it to the number of the divine, or God, since "seven" is considered to be a biblical number. Obviously, the next association for him is "the little rascal", which he refers to the grandeur of his younger self's aspirations.

The author of *Divina Commedia* (1307-21) invites the reader to make a virtual pilgrimage through those places. Besides, he uses the spacio-visual method of mnemonics to make them lasting in memory, since images, *loci* and their order gain extreme importance in his work.

### C XVIII

"There is a place within the depths of hell  
Call'd Malebolge, all of rock dark-stain'd  
With hue ferruginous, e'en as the steep  
That round it circling winds. Right in the midst  
Of that abominable region, yawns  
A spacious gulf profound, whereof the frame  
Due time shall tell. The circle, that remains,  
Throughout its round, between the gulf and base  
Of the high craggy banks, successive forms  
Ten trenches, in its hollow bottom sunk." (Dante 1965: 73)

This place is in the 8<sup>th</sup> circle of Hell, where seducers and flatterers are punished. This place is a poetic *locus*, since it creates in our mind a certain landscape for a further staging of action. Dante makes it visual and spacious coloured with the predominance of a circular shape. But here I would like to point out other characteristics of this *locus* –

its soundscape and movement. Dante adds another memorable feature that is its acoustic quality. The circling winds make it audible and more terrible, since their movement combined with the movement of water, makes the place look like a living prison. Thus, he creates a secondary *locus* – an acoustic one, which adds threatening atmosphere. Beckett in his theatre also uses sound as a *locus* of memory (*Embers, All That Fall, Footfalls, etc.*).

Another point that I would like to mention is that in Dante's Hell and Purgatory not only the images influence a reader, but also the set of environmental characteristics of the *loci* that make the suffering more intense, such as light, seemed time's immobility, high temperatures and the condition of being imprisoned or trapped. Beckett applies some of these characteristics to his plays, for example, extreme light, torturing his characters in *Play*, or time, which seems to be frozen in *Waiting for Godot*. Furthermore, Beckett exploits the condition of being trapped to an extreme. W1, W2 and M are undoubtedly immobilized in the urns, and in *The Lost Ones* characters are imprisoned in a cylinder without any possibility to break out. On top of these, the majority of Beckett's characters are obviously not comfortable onstage: Estragon's boots are killing him, Vladimir suffers from poor bladder, Pozzo loses his eyesight, etc.

It is well known that Beckett was an arduous reader, and Dante's *Divina Commedia* was among his favourite books. Knowlson writes that he always carried this book and made notes in it. His love for Dante can be also proved since there are many references to Dante in his poems and his stories, for example "Dante and the Lobster" (1934) or in his essay on "Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce" (1929). Obviously, Beckett was interested in Dante's work and also in the forms and shapes of Dante's *loci*. For example, in his essay "Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce" Beckett contrasts the Florentine's conical model with the spherical nature of Joyce's Dubliner's purgatory.

In *Divina Commedia*, Dante created a paradigm against which Beckett repeatedly measures his personal view of life. This is inevitable given the enormous interval between his medieval certainties, with their ethical, eschatological and cosmological superstructure, and the post-Cartesian "world collapsing endlessly" of which Beckett writes about. Above all, however, Dante provides Beckett with



landscapes and images, which function as analogues of the often-tenuous situations and experiences that he describes. The image of the Wrathful in the Marsh of the Styx, for example, whose sighs make the surface of the water bubble, or Cavalcanti entombed to his chin, appear to stand behind the geography of *How It Is* and the *mise en scène* of *Play* respectively, while the figure of Belacqua indolently resting on a boulder's shadow as a recurrent motif in almost all the novels and plays. Beckett's prose *The Lost Ones* is totally Dantesque in its imagery of Hell and its cylinder organization. Thus, some of Dante's imagery and *loci* are present in Beckett's works.

The art of memory declined due to the invention of printing:

“Medieval scholasticism had taken up the art of memory, and so did the main philosophical movement of the Renaissance, the Neoplatonic movement. Through Renaissance Neoplatonism, with its Hermetic core, the art of memory was once more transformed, this time into Hermetic or occult art, and in this form it continued to take a central place in a central European tradition.” (Yates 1966: 128)

The most important representatives of Hermetic or Occult memory are Giulio Camillo, Giordano Bruno, and Robert Fludd. According to Yates, the difference between Medieval memory and Renaissance memory lies in the fact that a medieval man was to use his low faculty of imagination in order to form corporeal associations to help his memory; and a Renaissance man believed that he had divine powers, “and he can form a magic memory through which he grasps the world, reflecting the divine macrocosm of his divine *mens*.”<sup>26</sup>

I am not going to deal in detail upon each of these philosophers, because I have not found a lot of relation with my topic of research. Nevertheless, I suppose that it is important to mention, that with Camillo, memory gained another level of understanding. Giulio Camillo built the Theatre of Memory commissioned by the King of France in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The wooden theatre itself was the essence of the memory of humanity with the sun as the centre of its gravity. The Sun and the light from the sun have importance in the modern theatre. The light is used not only as the source of the stage illumination, but it acquires new roles in postmodern theatre. It may become another character (*Play*)

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 172.

and it may be used as a technical device of theatrical body “mutilation”, etc. Artaud writes: “In the theatre, as in the plague, there is a kind of strange sun, an unusually bright light by which the difficult, even the impossible suddenly appears to be our natural medium” (1974: 21). Thus, the light may be the source of the divine, which uncovers the Truth for man, and at the same time it may be transformed into the instrument of torture. Beckett’s characters reject the divine providence, “Damn the sun”, says Clov in *Endgame* (107), not only because the sun obstructs his vision of the horizon, but also because Clov cannot accept the divine providence since it is practically the end of their world. And the light as torturer is presented in *Play*.

Camillo’s theatre also held images, statues and boxes with ancient scripts. There was a solitary spectator’s seat on the stage. This theatre was a system of memory images aimed at stirring emotions. Camillo makes memory the main protagonist of the universe, and besides he introduces audience onstage. The idea of a solitary spectator alone with the knowledge of humanity and his own memory is still relevant nowadays. We are all surrounded by people; nevertheless we are alone in our memory microcosm. Besides, though Camillo wants to stress the divinity of man, the effect of the one seat in the centre of the stage may be also overwhelmingly painful, since a man becomes a sole protagonist and “exposes” himself to the world. Beckett also places a solitary character onstage, listening to the voices of his memories in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Eh Joe*.

In conclusion, I would like to say that these historic traditions of memory have a lot to do with modern and postmodern theatre, and mnemotecnics has a certain relevance in Artaud’s theory on theatre. This memory method influenced arts, literature and theatre, since it deals with visuality and perception as such. Form and content are equally important in this memory system, content as striking images of our imagination, and form as sequenced *loci*.

It is also important to mention, that mnemonics is still used nowadays by the psychologists in reference to memory storage, which only proves its validity. Nowadays psychologists make a distinction between the encoding mnemonic (the images that one creates in our brains) and the organizational mnemonic (*loci*) construction, that encodes the images in a specific order. This mnemonic system is used by Baddeley in his works

memory theory<sup>27</sup> (Appendix 1). This system inherits many of the features of the mnemonics methods. It is formed by three components: visuospatial sketch, phonological loop and central executive. The phonological loop can be associated with *memoria verborum*, and visuospatial sketchpad with *memoria rerum*. Both system codes are processed by a central executive, which transmits the encoded information to LTM (long-term memory). This system has won the appreciation of many psychologists all over the world and is used in recent investigations on memory processes.

“The working memory model proposed by Baddeley and Hitch (Baddeley, 1986; Baddeley and Hitch, 1974) interprets human memory not only as a system capable of retaining information but also as a structure able to organize, manipulate, and transform long-term stored material as well as sensory inputs.” (Logie and Michel 2001: 30)

*Imagery, Language and Visuo-Spatial Thinking* (Michel, Logie, Cornoldi, De Vega, Engelkamp (eds.) 2001) discuss the importance of this model to LTM. The discussion of image storage is centred in the background and sensations<sup>28</sup>. They stress the storage processes, like inscribing an image or a figure against a certain background. Thus, Michel, Logie, Cornoldi, De Vega, Engelkamp point out that memory images should be activated through different processes like zooming-in, for example. The effect of zooming-in is also another characteristic of Beckett’s drama; it is used in his television play *Eh Joe* with the camera eye performing this function, for instance. Another technique that Beckett uses as zooming-in is the language in his plays, when one fragment of memory is repeated with additional information by a character.

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<sup>27</sup> Baddeley, Alan D. 1997. *Human Memory: Theory and Practice*. 2d revised ed. Hove: Psychology Press.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2003 (October). “Working Memory: Looking back and Looking Forward”. *Nature Reviews. Neuroscience*, 4: 829-839.

<sup>28</sup>“The generation and maintenance of a mental image involves not only storage processes, but also *active* processes. The quality and/or quantity of these processes can vary according to the nature of the task both between images and within an image. Three different, though partially overlapping, aspects of an image can be used to explain this last point. First, images, like percepts, can be organised (without voluntary intervention of the participant) into a figure and a background. The figure is more activated than the background, but the background remains included in the representation. Second, an attentional window (Kosslyn, 1980) can emphasise and improve the quality of the representation of certain parts of the image, even if the other parts remain present. Third, this process can be made highly selective by ‘zooming in’ on some parts of the image while excluding other parts from the buffer.” (Michel, Logie, Cornoldi, De Vega, Engelkamp (eds.) 2001: 5)

Memory architecture of *loci* influenced the theories of memory storage, since the Greeks extended the system of *topoi* from a purely mental construct into a physical embodiment where places literally become buildings or settings. Consequently, places and settings can become the triggers of memories and not only their containers. Quintilian stated:

“... when we return to a place after considerable absence, we not merely recognize the place itself, but remember things we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before.”

(qted. in Small 1997: 97)

I decided to organize the chapters of my thesis according to the visuospatial method and analyse, on the one hand, the physical language of the stage as a type of *locus*, and, on the other hand, stage bodies and voices as different types of images. The role of the central executive belongs to both: the language as the translator of memories and also to the audience who process the information of the plays.

Besides, I will try to draw the reader's attention to the following characteristics: Light and Darkness, the relevance of images distortion, obsession with forms, the presence of Hell and Purgatory *loci* and the importance of repetition and zooming-in effect in Beckett's theatre. Beckett uses all these devices in order to re-create traumatic memory onstage. Furthermore, I believe that these qualities helped to create the aesthetics of trauma in postmodern theatre.

### **1.2.2. The Essence of Memory. Memory and Duration.**

“What Memory is. Memory is a glorious and admirable gift of nature by which we recall past things, we embrace present things, and we contemplate future things through their likeness to past things.” (Boncompagno, qted. in Yates 1966: 58)

With the invention of printing, artificial memory lost its importance and natural memory started to gain prominence. The foundations for natural memory were already laid by such philosophers as Simonides of Ceos, Aristotle, Plato, St. Thomas de Aquinas, etc.,

whom I discussed in the previous section. The author who has more relevance to me in the discussion of natural memory and the constitution of identity is Henri Bergson<sup>29</sup>. I want to base my discussion of memory on Henri Bergson's *Memoria y Vida*. In this book one of the themes that he discusses is the role of perception in the elaboration of images. Bergson, born in 1859, anticipates many of the modern philosophers, since he describes the brain as an incarnated configurer of symbol sounds. Bergson's interconnected description of sensation to image and to memory is still valid nowadays.

In Bergson's essay, I found answers for numerous questions that I had before writing this thesis. What is the role of memory in our lives? Is it possible to live without memory? What is the relation between memory and Time? What is the relation between the act of remembering and perception? How do bodily disabilities affect our memory? All of these questions are relevant not only to Philosophy but also to theatre, and Beckett's theatre is not an exception. I base my discussion of memory in Beckett's plays mainly on the theory of Henri Bergson, although I also use the ideas on memory of other philosophers, such as St. Augustine, William James, Leonardo Polo; and psychologists, such as Beike, Lampinen, and Behrend (*The Self and Memory*), as well as Samuel Beckett's ideas on memory (*Proust*). Beike, Lampinen, Behrend's work provides a very interesting research on identity and autobiographical memory.

In order to understand how memory works, we have to situate a human being in Time, since memory is the experience of things past. Nevertheless, St. Augustine in his *Confessions* (book 11) stated that past, present and future are interconnected:

“... see that all time past is forced to move on by the incoming future; that the future follows from the past; and that all, past and future, is created and issues out of that which is forever present.” (Chapter XI)

Thus, the materiality of present time is made tangible only through past time, St. Augustine defines memory as “the time present of things past” (Chapter XX), by this he makes memory important not only for the present, but also for the future.

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<sup>29</sup> The teachings of Bergson on memory have been already discussed by many, the recent research was done by Dustin Anderson in his thesis “Their Synaptic Selves: Memory and Language in Beckett and Joyce” (Florida State University, College of Arts and Sciences, fall 2006), supervised by S.E. Gontarski.

A human being is preconditioned to change from his/her birth, since nothing stays the same for him/her. Since the moment of birth, time influences one's physical growth and psychological maturity. We are changing states all the time: "La verdad es que se cambia sin cesar, y el estado mismo ya es un cambio" (Bergson 2004: 14). In *Endgame*, Hamm describes this change as "But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (97). The idea is comical and sad at the same time, Hamm tries to sum up physical as well as psychological changes in our lives. And though the transition of one state to the other is gradual, one psychological state does not always stay the same, and in essence this gradual transition is composed of different states of existence.

"Pero la discontinuidad de sus apariciones destaca sobre la continuidad de un fondo sobre el que se dibujan y al que deben los intervalos mismos que les separan: son los golpes de timbal que estallan de cuando en cuando la sinfonía. Nuestra atención se fija en ellos porque le interesan más, pero cada uno de ellos es llevado por la masa fluida de nuestra existencia psicológica completa." <sup>30</sup>

Bergson's quotation can be related to Beckett's discussion of memory and habit in his essay *Proust*. "Continuidad de un fondo" is like the cancer of time, which has to do with habit and memory. We get up every day and perform the same routines: have breakfast, go to work, come back home, etc. If you are asked to remember all the days of your life, they will probably mingle in your everyday chores. Consequently, "the individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from a vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multi-coloured by the phenomenon of its hours" (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 15). Obviously, the monotony of life and old age can only contribute to the failing memories of Beckett's characters. In Act II of *WFG*, Estragon forgets all about what has happened in the first act, and Pozzo is not even able to remember having met Vladimir and Estragon "yesterday". The flow of time is not perceived in the same way by these characters.

Our bodies, as well as our minds are projected in time, and the present moment is practically non-existent as it passes to the past. According to St. Augustine, the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

present does not exist since it passes into the past rapidly. We have only the past and the future. And the domain of our memory is, obviously, our past. We are made of body and mind: materiality and spirituality at the same time. Paradoxically, there is an eternal duel going on in ourselves, since our material body is fixed in time and space and our spirit/mind is free, or mobile. Being free, our spirit/mind is extensible in time and space.

“Veo como las imágenes exteriores influyen sobre la imagen que yo llamo mi cuerpo: le transmiten movimiento. Y también veo como este cuerpo influye en las imágenes exteriores: les restituye movimiento. Mi cuerpo es, por tanto, en el conjunto del mundo material, una imagen que actúa como las demás imágenes, recibiendo y dando movimiento, con esta única diferencia quizá: que mi cuerpo parece escoger, en cierta medida, la forma de devolver lo que recibe.” (Bergson 2004: 85)

Thus, the absence of full theatrical bodies in Beckett’s plays (*Play* – three heads in urns; *That Time* – a floating head; *Happy Days* – Winnie half-buried in the mound, etc.) may be a device to intensify the spirituality of these characters or the intensifier of their past. Body disappears from stage and memory becomes the main protagonist. For instance, in *That Time* a spectator sees onstage only a head enveloped in darkness. The head is immobile, but the voices of memory, coming from different angles of the theatre “move” the character in time. These voices, which seemingly belong to the Listener’s youth, maturity and old age, make the audience travel in his time-line, thus duration, mobility and freedom are taken to an extreme, since there is no body restriction. These voices can be taken as certain landmarks in the chronology of the character’s life; they constitute the character’s “authentic” memory (discussed in Chapter IV).

It is also important to point out, that it is the material body, which provides sensorial information for our brain. Due to our senses, we perceive the external world. However, with certain bodily disabilities, our perception level decreases, and that changes our attitude to the external world, and affects our self and our identity.

“Teóricamente no es inconcebible que la materia puede ser percibida sin la ayuda de un sistema nervioso, sin órganos de los sentidos; pero es prácticamente imposible, porque una percepción de este género no serviría de nada.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

Old age, blindness, different organ amputation, dysfunctions of nervous system lead to the decrease of certain sensorial perception. Here comes into view Adler's theory<sup>32</sup> of organic-psychic compensation. According to Adler, organ inferiority leads to nervous superstructure of compensation, which affects a person's psyche. A person who is, for example blind or deaf, feels his inferiority in comparison to other people and develops special traits of character to combat this complex. Obviously, his memory will be affected by this. All his reminiscences are centred on such memories that prove his superiority and feed his ego-consciousness. This theory will be discussed later in relation to traumatic memories. It is not the goal of my thesis to analyse the consequences of these disabilities, nevertheless, I will give an example from Beckett's drama. It is perhaps important to mention that Beckett's world is actually inhabited by handicap aging characters: blind, lame, deaf people. Although, I think that Beckett, perhaps was merely staging man's impotence. Hamm in *Endgame* and Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* (Act II) are blind and they need another character to provide them with the outer world information, which is later stored in their memories. But, enveloped in darkness, they lose the sense of orientation and time, thus chronological landmarks are absent and their past memories, when they were able to see, are more colourful and vivid.

Merleau-Ponty's theory of phantom-limb, discussed by Ulrika Maude (2006), can be brought in here. Beckett's characters become trapped in the sensations of their past: a sense of perception, which was once lost, operates on the level of involuntary memory. According to Merleau-Ponty, the absent body parts or present incapacities may revive the memories or fantasies of other identities when the body was whole and healthy. They become the triggers of involuntary memory.

When a character is blind, time stays frozen for him, since he is unable to see the change of days and nights. And time measurement is extremely important for our memory, which stores the events in the time of their occurrence. St. Augustine writes

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<sup>32</sup> Adler, Alfred 1921. *Neurotic Constitution*. The theory of organ-psyche compensation is discussed in the connection to neuroses, but I believe, that it is valid for the discussion of Beckett's characters, since the majority of them are sick aging people. There is also proof in Knowlson's biography *Damned to Fame* that Beckett read Adler. I will develop this theory later in other chapters.



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about the measurement of time and proposes to count the time according to our own motion:

“I once heard a learned man say that the motions of the sun, moon, and stars constituted time; and I did not agree. For why should not the motions of all bodies constitute time? What if the lights of heaven should cease, and a potter’s wheel still turn round: would there be no time by which we might measure those rotations and say either that it turned at equal intervals, or, if it moved now more slowly and now more quickly, that some rotations were longer and others shorter? And while we were saying this, would we not also be speaking in time?” (Chapter XXIII)

The idea of motion is created in Beckett’s work through two devices. One is the use of the Present Continuous tense by his characters, and the other is that the majority of his characters are on the move or making a journey “going on”. Beckett’s heroes, in his early works, ride trains, trams, bicycles, auto-cycles; they walk with the help of sticks and crutches; they crawl through leaves and mud and rest in ditches. All of this is part of an intricate metaphor in which travelling or simply moving may represent mental progress, or the process of moving through the moments of a life. Very often, it represents all two and unites them, giving the sense of a subtle, faintly perceptible, but very important mental process. In Beckett’s later works (probably, starting with *Happy Days*), his characters crave for immobility, since Beckett fixes them to one stage spot. “What a curse mobility!”(158), says Winnie. Comically, she herself is a stationary character, like W1, W2 and M (in *Play*). In the light of the discussed theory of motion, their immobility may be understood as an attempt to capture a present moment, although, in its essence, it is a failure. Even being fixed in one spot, time affects the characters from within: the earth gradually claims Winnie, and the urns claim W1, W2, M. Both the urns and the mound of earth may be metaphors for Time made tangible. Clov says in *Endgame*, “Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap” (93).

St. Augustine’s idea of counting time according to the transition of bodies leads us to Bergson’s idea of duration, and the relation between quality and quantity. For Bergson, past moments fuse into each other and their duration produces a qualitative and quantitative changes. The example of a bell tolling that he gives in *Memoria y Vida* (2004: 16) reminds me very much of the hoof beats in *Embers*. Henry asks Ada: “Can a

horse mark time?” (257). For Bergson, the duration of the bell tolling is both quantitative and qualitative, since the number of chimes may be perceived not only as the rhythmical strokes of a bell, but also the number of strokes is transformed into a musical image of Time quantity. Thus, “la duración se presenta así a la conciencia inmediata y conserva esta forma mientras no ceda el puesto a una representación simbólica, sacada de la extensión” (Bergson 2004: 17). According to Bergson, we take reality for a symbol, for example, the sound of a bell for Time: “La conciencia, atormentada por un insaciable deseo de distinguir, substituye el símbolo por la realidad, o no percibe la realidad más que a través del símbolo”<sup>33</sup>.

In the shortest of his plays, *Breath*, Beckett manages to transform the rhythmical breathing into the metaphor for “life”. The breathing fuses with the stage light and is framed by two cries. Obviously, in such a short duration of a play, the only thing that matters is the duration of breathing. On the quantitative level, it has no relevance, but on the qualitative one, breathing and light with the periods of silence is equated to Life.

Duration is absolutely everything in this life, as our life is a process of permanent change: there is no present moment. Every human being is faced with his past, close past and future. The interconnection between the past and the future represents mobility; consequently, the duration is taken as a type of freedom. In *Creative Mind*, Bergson illustrates duration’s quality by an image of two spools with a tape winding between them (1928: 164-5). The past seems to accumulate and the future decreases with every instant of our lives. This spooling image shows the mobility of the present into the past, with the future still to come. It also points out the mobility of time. By this spooling image Bergson creates an image model for memory, the similar image that Beckett uses in *KLT*, since Krapp is winding and unwinding his past life onstage, and the image of the tapes represents his memory.

“Nuestra duración no es un instante que reemplaza a otro instante; no habrá entonces nunca más que presente, y no prolongación del pasado en lo actual, ni evolución, ni duración concreta [...] Desde el momento en que el pasado crece incesantemente, se conserva también de modo indefinido. La memoria no es una facultad de clasificar los recuerdos en un cajón o de inscribirlos en un registro.” (Bergson 2004: 55)

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

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Bergson also points out that a human being conserves in memory important events that can influence his present and his future. Experience of the past helps us to construct our future. He equals the mechanism of memory's selectivity to a camera, which immortalises an event, but it is stored only in a virtual form in our brain (2004: 57). This type of memory is rather weak and can be forgotten rapidly, unless attention brings it forward when we need it, thus it brings it from obscurity to light. The past event is processed according to our present state of mind; our perception gives it form, colours, and even odours. For Bergson, image *per se* is immobile and only perception and attention transform it into reality. Beckett in *Proust* also discusses memory as "obviously conditioned by perception" (1931: 30). He states that "we can only remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which Habit does not possess the key"<sup>34</sup>. I suppose that Beckett rejects the idea of memory as the engine of our future in his theatre, since the future is a repetition with variation of the past for his characters. Thus, memory takes on an artistic visual form, which stirs the imagination of his audience; furthermore, the importance of the image is elevated to the extreme. For Beckett in *Proust* the fragile unconscious memories may constitute the essence of Self (*Proust* 1931: 31).

Bergson was not the first one to point out the relationship between memory via Image and via Perception. St. Augustine, for instance, calls memory a "secret place" (*Confessions*, Chapter XVII), and again, he stresses the importance of images in the reconstruction of our past experiences:

"Although we tell of past things as true, they are drawn out of the memory--not the things themselves, which have already passed, but words constructed from the images of the perceptions which were formed in the mind, like footprints in their passage through the senses. My childhood, for instance, which is no longer, still exists in time past, which does not now exist. But when I call to mind its image and speak of it, I see it in the present because it is still in my memory." (Chapter XVIII)

These images are intensified by our sensations.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 31.

According to William James<sup>35</sup> sensations outlast for some time the objective stimulus that occasioned them. This phenomenon is the base of “after-images”. If we open our eyes for some time and look at the scene, when we close them, we will see this scene in ghostly light as through a dark screen, and we will be able even to read the details of the scene. But these after-images do not stay stable in our mind. Since memory is mobile, these images undergo changes on their further retrieval. Hanna Pishwa writes that:

“Mental images are structures similar to our mental representation, that is, they are not stored pictures. They differ from the latter in being eligible for transformations, which are, however, restricted in so far as some parts must remain stable.” (2006: 12)

Beckett’s characters’ memories are always wandering and unstable. In the majority of the plays, remembering of a concrete image goes in circles and with every reference to the same memory-image, a character adds “additional memory” or invents a story. For example, Mouth, on remembering “that April morning” scene, remembers more every time she tries to reconstruct this day. The Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue* uses the same technique on zooming-in the image of his “loved ones” (as discussed in Chapter VI).

The past lives in our memories through images, and the repetition of memories make our experience stronger. This idea was later confirmed by Roediger (1974). He stresses the importance of continuous retrieval as the intensifier of memory for a specific item.

“The act of recall strengthens the representation of an item in memory, which means that on future attempts to retrieve additional items, the ones already recalled will be retrieved again to the exclusion of new items.” (qted. in Nairne 2007: 2)

This idea may be closely linked to Beckett’s characters remembering or inventing the stories of their lives. It seems that like small children they want to tell their memories again and again. For instance, the Listener in *Ohio Impromptu* listens to the reading of the same story, which presumably is his own, as if trying to learn it by

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<sup>35</sup> An internet resource developed by Christopher D. Green, York University, Toronto, Ontario, <http://psychclassics.asu.edu>.

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heart or to recall it. Does it probably mean that he wants to trigger off other past memories and the story is incomplete? Since memory is always fragmented in Beckett's plays, the answer is not easy to provide, and there may be more than one answer. The re-reading of the book not only makes the Listener re-live through his memory again, but it also may make him suffer. Thus, there may be a certain trauma for him. And this story may be also invented by him in order to create a new colourful memory. But, taking into consideration the acute likeness of the Reader and the Listener, and the fact that there is only one hat on the table, my hypothesis is that unlike in other Beckett's plays, the Reader itself constitutes the image of a ghost voice from the Listener's past, who is controlled by the Listener, and thus embodies the process of voluntary remembering.

There is always a difference in intensity between perception and memory in time, as present perception is always stronger. In Beckett's theatre, his characters tend to live through their past lives again and again, but, paradoxically, their memories are not made stronger, since for Beckett a pure memory image is involuntary triggered by a present situation. Thus, the past emerges sensually and carries a character back in time. It is important to mention here, that for Proust via Bergson some objects are memory containers or triggers. At the beginning of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, he speaks of certain experiences of his childhood, when such objects as "a cloud, a triangle, a bell tower, a flower, a pebble" brought a sense of *duty* to him, he considered them a symbolic language that he ought to decipher. Later on in *Swann's Way*, he writes:

"The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not expect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die." (1993: 45)

Beckett also seems to enclose some of his characters' memories in objects. In *Happy Days*, for instance, Winnie's bag contains numerous objects, such as a toothbrush, a mirror, spectacles, a revolver, etc., which she uses not only to pass the time, but these objects trigger her memories as well.

## *On Memory and Trauma*

“[Pause. She opens eyes, puts on spectacles, fiddles with hat.] Oh the happy memories! [...] My first ball! [Long pause.] My second ball! [Long pause, closed eyes.] My first kiss!”  
(142)

It seems to me that the spectacles and the hat are used by Winnie as memory intensifiers.

Beckett rejects memory in the form of an album of photographs, “merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed from our anxiety and opportunism” (1931: 32-33). For him, habit destroys memory. And it is habit, which reigns in Beckett’s dramatic world: his characters in *WFG* or *Endgame*, for example, perform their usual activities onstage: Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for mysterious Godot; Clov is observing the horizon; Estragon is playing with his boots (taking them off and putting them on) and Didi is playing with his hat. For Beckett’s characters every day looks the same. Boredom and habit continuously destroy his characters’ fragile aging memories. “Life is habit” (1931: 19), writes Beckett in *Proust*.

Bergson and Beckett, signal out two main types of memory: “habit memory” (Bergson) or voluntary memory (Beckett), which, through repetition, establishes certain automatic behaviours; and “pure memory”<sup>36</sup> (Bergson) or “involuntary memory” (Beckett), which contains unconscious personal memories, registered on a sensorial level. The moment of pure memory does not happen often in Beckett’s drama. For example, in *Play*, all the characters try to remember this something, repeating their lives over and over again, but since they cannot reconstruct the memory which is vital for them, they are condemned to talk incessantly. Thus, voluntary memory is used as a shield from more painful involuntary memory (analysed in Chapter V).

To conclude, memory plays a vital part in Beckett’s theatre to create his characters since it contains their past experiences, which are intensified by perception and later “brought” into the present through attention. Memory is mobile in Beckett’s theatre, while the body is fixed in the present onstage environment. And with Time made physically tangible, his characters are rooted in their past. Due to the aging of their memories, they need to constantly re-tell their memories, often re-constructing

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<sup>36</sup> For Bergson’s type of memory see Appendix 2.

them with an element of fiction, thus imagination comes into view. Story-telling becomes one of the most potent devices to narrate memories in Beckett's plays. Voluntary memory is already present onstage through his characters' routines, but involuntary memory is the most difficult for his characters to get at. Unlike voluntary memory, involuntary memory cannot be retracted on will, and needs to be triggered from forgetting. In Beckett's plays memory triggers can be varied, from an object, sound, etc. to a particular *locus*.

### 1.2.3. Memory Constructs Identity

The question of identity is extremely important for my research since our past accommodates different identities, which affect our present state. The composition of identities belongs to the research on autobiographic memory<sup>37</sup> (ABM). Thus in this section I will dwell upon ABM and its mechanisms.

Since our memory is mobile and one past moment emerges into another, a person is in need of chronological landmarks in order to remember and to order his past events. According to Bergson, we have a certain necessity for fixation, or establishing "points", in order to feel secure and stable. Our past is the sequence of different identities or past consciences, which are all stored in our memory and constitute our general/present identity. In connection with this, Bergson defines two types of memories, which affect the formation of our identities: present memory, which affects our present actions; and authentic memory, which stores the chronology of time and images.

"En efecto, para que un recuerdo reaparezca a la conciencia es preciso que descienda de las alturas de la memoria pura hasta el punto preciso en que se cumpla la acción. En otros términos, el llamamiento al que responde el recuerdo parte del presente, y es de los elementos sensori-motores de la acción presente de los que el recuerdo recibe al calor que da la vida." (Bergson 2004: 96)

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<sup>37</sup> ABM is one type of memory. There are 250 types of memories in total (Appendix 2). This classification was published in *The Foundations of Remembering* in the essay "Roddy Roedigger's Memory" by Nairne, James (2007: 50).

The unity of identities, as well as present and authentic memories, is extremely important for one's personality. It permits us to integrate in our environment and establish coherent relation in the duration. Descartes wrote: "I think therefore I am... I remember therefore I am". According to Bergson, it is our autobiographic memory (later referred as ABM)<sup>38</sup> that defines our self-concept, since recollections of ourselves in the context of a past play a critical role in our understanding and conceptualization of who we are today (2004: 45). Psychologists have long recognized the intimate and reciprocal association between ABM and self-identity (James, 1890/1950, Singer and Salovey, 1993). For example, Klein (2001) noted that the self is a product of individual's personal memories, while at the same time a sense of a temporally extended self is a logical prerequisite of ABM. "The reciprocal nature of memory is again illustrated when a lack of self-identity appears to disrupt memory and in turn, memory deficits disturb one's sense of self" (Cameron, Wilson, Ross<sup>39</sup> 2004: 208). They demonstrate in their article that, for instance, we feel very far away from our past selves when they performed poorly, in order to maintain our self-esteem. Recent past selves are experienced as a part of a current self.

Consequently, the main role of ABM is to provide the continuity of the Self. Many people keep diaries in order to be able to remember past events. Diary keeping is considered to be a device not only to strengthen our personal memory, but also to organize it in time. In Beckett's theatre, it is Krapp who tries to organize his past with the means of a tape-recorder to store his memories. But instead of ordering his memories, he scatters his tapes all over his room during the play, thus it is difficult for him to find the correct tape. Paradoxically, instead of keeping his Self in time – he seems to disorder it.

In their book *The Self and Memory*, Beike, Lampinen, Behrend define that ABM has three-tiered structure. It deals with: 1) lifetime periods; 2) general events; 3) specific events. Obviously, memory is not a passive tape-recorder, thus it selects the material to be stored as already has been signalled up by Leonardo Polo. ABM helps to locate and define the Self within an on-going life-story that, simultaneously, is strongly oriented

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<sup>38</sup> Other terms for ABM are personal or episodic memories.

<sup>39</sup> Beike, Lampinen, Behrend (eds.) 2004. "Autobiographic Memory and Self-Assessment": 207-227.



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toward future goals. Some remembering episodes are more central to self-definition than are others.

“It is clear that events about the self, particularly those that are personally consequential, transition defining, or otherwise distinctive, are best remembered autobiographically.”  
(Howe “Early Memory, Early Self and the Emergence of Autobiographical Memory” 2004: 58)

In the quotation on page 30, Bergson states that the continuity of states may be interrupted by “los golpes de timbal que estallan de cuando en cuando la sinfonía”. He, probably, refers to particular episodes of our lives that mark the transition from one state to another, or self-defining memories. Beckett defines them as “the periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations” (1931: 19). For Beckett, these periods are normally painful, “mysterious and fertile”, since they replace “the boredom of living by the suffering of being” (1931: 19). Only when an individual is taken out of his daily routine, he is capable of seeing himself as he is. Beckett connects these moments of change with suffering and strong emotions.

Emotion has been always pointed out as an intensifier of memory. Ancient Greeks advised to construct memory images, which can wake up strong sensations. Nevertheless, there are two opposite theories on the question of the relation between memory and emotion<sup>40</sup> in literature. One is linked to T.S. Eliot who defended the idea that memories emerge in tranquillity. He said that when we forget the emotion, it is easier to reconstruct our memories. And another one is linked to William Wordsworth, who insisted that memory always arouses emotion, and emotional recall guarantees memory truthfulness. These theories seem to deal with two types of memories: voluntary and involuntary. Beckett was interested in the workings of involuntary memory, since for him it is: “the best accumulated slyly and painfully and patiently under the nose of our vulgarity” (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 31). For instance, Estragon, who continuously demonstrates his poor memory for names and events, surprisingly, still remembers some proper names (The Dead Sea (11, 92-93), the Rhone (49)). Therefore, these places are linked with his emotional memory, since the Dead Sea was the place of

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<sup>40</sup> Both theories are discussed in Beike, Lampinen, Behrend (eds.) 2004. *The Self and Memory*. Beike, Kleinknecht, Wirth-Beaumont “How Emotional and Non-emotional Memories Define the Self”: 141-161.

his honeymoon, and the Rhone is the site of his longed-for oblivion. Only emotion maintains these names alive in his long-term memory.

“We cannot exclude the possibility that long-term memory can maintain to some extent the sensory properties of a stimulus. Cases of involuntary memories being primed by re-exposure to the same sensations experienced during learning suggest that the memory pattern code can in some way be related to memories for specific sensory information.”  
(Michel, Logie, Cornoldi, De Vega, Engelkamp (eds.) 2001: 3)

Involuntary memory presents greater interest for me, since the memories I want to discuss are the traumatic ones, and they resurface again and again accompanied by strong emotions. But are they lasting ones? Freud, for example, wrote about a “fading effect”: emotional reaction to a memory fades with time. He believed it was maladaptive to let the feelings of the past pervade decisions in the present.

There was psychological research, conducted after Lincoln’s assassination<sup>41</sup>, which proves that strong emotion influences the duration of memory, or is one of the main factors which preserve the events in LTM (Long-Term Memory).<sup>42</sup> This type of memory is called vivid memory.

“... simplemente se encuentra allí, a punto para aparecer con todo detalle a la más leve insinuación. Es como nuestro sistema nervioso tomase una instantánea de los sonidos, visiones, olores, tiempo, clima emocional e incluso las posturas corporales que experimentamos en ciertos momentos.” (Benderley 1982: 71)<sup>43</sup>

This type of events are emotionally charged, and form part of self-defining memories. Brown and Kulik (1977) stress that these memories normally occur in the moment of surprise and shock, consequently they arouse immediate response from a person, and these types of memories have both biological and personal importance. Obviously, they arouse significant emotion upon recall, as well<sup>40</sup>. The conclusion was that emotion makes memories lasting in time. Besides, as the result of this research,

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<sup>41</sup> This research was described in *Psicologia*, Papalia, Wendkos 2005: 219.

<sup>42</sup> 179 middle-aged and elderly people were asked about their location and activity when they learnt that Lincoln had been assassinated (Colegrove, 1899). Thirty-three years after, the same investigator carried out the questionnaire again. Surprisingly, 127 people were able to give the whole description, even remembering the exact time of that day, their location and the identity of the reporter breaking the news.

<sup>43</sup> Qted. in Papalia, Wendkos 2005: 219.

Brown and Kulik defined this type of remembering (place, activity, informant, own affect and aftermath) as flashbulb memories. The term “flashbulb memories” is applied to the analysis of repressed memories in Beckett’s theatre in the forthcoming chapters.

Both negative and positive emotions influence the duration of memories, since they make them lasting or transfer them to LTM (Long-Term Memory). These memories should be “negotiated” on the level of self-identity, or adapted to one’s personality. This leads us to the discussion of open and closed memories<sup>40</sup>. The question of open and closed memories has to do with our acceptance and integration or non-integration of past events in our identities. Closed memories are formed by the events assimilated by us and recorded consciously in our memories, while open memories retain the events not assimilated by us, due to their incomprehensibility, and normally these events are retained on the subconscious level. “Open” memories are always linked to traumatic memories and identity disruption, and “closed” memories are linked to the chronological construction of our ABM.

“Thus, each person has many memories in which effect has faded, and some in which the effect is retained. We refer to the former as closed memories, and the latter as open memories.” (Beike, Kleinknecht, Wirth-Beaumont 2004: 144)

Closed memories are considered positive, since an individual has integrated them in his identity, and they form part of his emotional response to his own actions. I think we can apply Freud’s “fading effect” theory to this type of memories. Closed memories lose their emotional colouring after having been integrated in our own identity. We link these events with our development as people, and they are also linked to other similar events of our lives.

“Another theory places emotion not in implicit memory, but in a schematized form. While a memory is fresh, it is possible to recollect emotional experience and its intensity. As time passes, however, a perceiver comes to rely more and more on schemas about emotion as the source of information about what he or she (must have) felt.”<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, open memories are evaluated as negative, because a person has not achieved their full understanding in the light of his/her identity, and they still puzzle or

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

trouble him/her. Open memories can lead to diachronic disunity experience, when we alienate our past selves and “do not feel the same person any more”<sup>45</sup>. Beike, Kleinknecht and Wirth-Beaumont consider them highly emotional and disturbing for one’s identity. For instance, in *Eh Joe*, the character’s head is inhabited by voice/s from the past that keep on telling him about a girl who presumably committed suicide because of his betrayal. Thus, the character is unable to confront this event of his past, and the Voice does not cease to sound in his head. Another example of an open memory may be found in *Embers*. The play itself is centred on Henry’s traumatic consciousness: it seems that he cannot grasp his father’s possible suicide. And though, his father is already dead, he keeps on evoking his voice, embodied in the voice of the sea, trying to find answers. Henry wants to be with his father and the sea sound triggers painful memories. Henry’s obsession with the sea sound is analysed in Chapter III.

These are clear examples of open memories in Beckett’s theatre, since no understanding of them is reached by the characters of his plays. In a letter sent to McGreevy, Beckett writes: “I shake at the thought of the ordeal you have been through. At least you are through it. You mustn’t give up. Putting down memories is enough to make anyone crack.”<sup>46</sup> Open memories will be dealt with in my subchapter on trauma.

Both open and closed memories may be self-defining. Dan Mc Adams<sup>47</sup> describes self-defining memories, as normally vivid, affectively charged, repetitive, linked to other similar memories, and related to an important unresolved theme or enduring concern in an individual’s life (2004: 104). Thus, the questions of sight and emotion are raised through the term of vividness since it is a feature of self-defining memories. In addition, open memories are normally not linked to other similar events from our past; they have repetitive pattern and are very sharp in images and even rich in sounds and sometimes in smells. These memories are not integrated into person’s identity and they keep emerging in the present in the form of flashbacks and personal nightmares as well as obsessions. Closed memories, on the contrary, are not often

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<sup>45</sup> Lampinen, Odegard, Leding 2004. “Diachronic Disunity” in Beike, Lampinen, Behrend (eds.) *The Self and Memory*. 2004: 227-255.

<sup>46</sup> Beckett’s handwritten correspondence with Tom MacGreevy housed in the Archives of Trinity College, Dublin. Quoted in Brown “Yesterday’s Deformities: A Discussion of the Role of Memory and Discourse in the Plays of Samuel Beckett” (doctoral thesis). 2005: 199.

<sup>47</sup> “Redemptive Self: Narrative Identity in America Today” in Beike, Lampinen, Behrend (eds.). 2004: 95-117.

emotionally charged and vivid since they have already been assimilated into one's identity and stored verbally in our memories, thus they are easily accessible in the present. This leads us to the discussion of language in relation to memory.

Language plays a special role in memory retrieval, even though not all memories are linguistic. Many memories are encoded in the form of images and sometimes sounds (*memoria rerum*). Consequently, language performs the role of a translator of a conversion of non-linguistic elements (images, sounds, smells, sensations, etc.) that stand for entities, into words. Probably, that is the reason that many memories are not accurate, since it is not an easy task sometimes to find the correct word for a specific sensation or emotion. When some past event is not "translated" into words (not processed by a phonological loop<sup>48</sup>), it is not retained by our memory for a long time. Non-linguistic memories tend to fade with time if they are not narrated; consequently "the original memory trace begins to lose its cohesion and distinctiveness, and fades into the background noise of the memory traces" (Howe 2004: 57).

Many psychologists and psychoanalysts stress the importance of narration of memories. It is as we share our personal stories with others, they take on coherence and meaning and become part of our individual life-story. The importance of social interaction has been always pointed out in the emergence of ABM. Voice starts to take on a very important role. Verbalizing our memories makes them coherent and real to others. Caruth discusses in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) the importance to have a witness to listen to our story in the light of the survivors of the concentration camps. It was crucial for the prisoners to give voice to their sufferings since if they died before telling others of their ordeals, their memory would die with them.

Voice is a form of power, which makes others listen to us. Thus, who is given voice is given authority. This can be applied to Beckett's theatre as well. Practically all of his characters, although craving for darkness, want to be heard and to be seen. Winnie opens the second act of *Happy Days* saying: "Someone is looking at me still. [Pause.] Caring for me still. [Pause.] That is what I find so wonderful. [Pause.] Eyes on

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<sup>48</sup> For Baddeley's model of working memory see Appendix 1.

my eyes” (160). Both to be seen and to be heard are vital for Beckett’s characters. They need an audience to listen to their stories. Even in *Not I* Mouth has a silent Auditor who listens to her story.

“... through talking about the events with others, memories take on a canonical narrative form. Through telling and retelling of what happened, memories become stories, and as we reinterpret and reevaluate these stories, they become stories about us. In the absence of the ability to talk about certain events, such as abuse, it may be difficult to create a meaningful account of what happened.” (Fivush 2004: 89)

But, according to the abovementioned characteristics of open memories, they are the most difficult to tell. These memories, being recorded in the form of images, sensations or/and sounds, are rather complicated in narration. Besides, if these memory fragments are painful for us, we try to “silence” them or force them out of our conscience. Thus, when at last we start talking about them, there is no coherence in our narrative, since we are trying to reinterpret *memoria rerum* into words. Presumably, it is not very easy to find words for the memories that we keep hidden even from our own consciousness (open memories). “Words fail, there are times when even they fail” (147), says Winnie in *Happy Days*. Nevertheless, since “psychologically closed events have been put into one’s past; open events have not” (Skowronski, Walker, Betz<sup>49</sup> 2004: 200), therefore, open memories do not cease to influence one’s identity. Open memories lose the authoritative voice (the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular) in their narration, a person remembers them in fragments, and each fragment takes on a different voice.

Consequently, one authoritative voice may multiply in different uncontrollable voices in reconstructing open memories, these voices belonging to multiple past personalities. Sometimes those voices can belong to other people, like in *Eh Joe*. These memories do not fit in our organized self-perception, since they have been alien to our consciousness, therefore, they may lead to disrupted personality and sense of unreality. This will be dealt with later in relation to trauma.

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<sup>49</sup> “Who Was I That Happened? The Timekeeping Self in Autobiographical Memory” in Beike, Lampinen, Behrend (eds.). 2004: 181-207.

## Chapter I

“In the absence of a meaningful organization through which to understand our experiences, we may not be able to integrate those experiences into our self-understanding. This, in return, may lead to a fragmented sense of self.” (Fivush 2004: 89)

The stories/memories that we choose to tell are selected by us. Identity is a product of choice – we are the things we want to remember. And in some aspect, we are the creators of our life-story. In Beckett’s plays the problem of an identity is raised to an extreme, his characters are painfully trying to order their fragmented scattered memories in time to prove their past existence. They are incessantly telling stories from their past as though “translating” and “re-translating” their memories in words. I would even say that Beckett’s characters present a certain memory crisis, since they are unable to order their memories in time and those memories lose an authoritative voice and acquire multiplicity of voices. Therefore, the past is disorganised and not chronologically linked and the present is not registered in their memories as they are still trying to come to terms with their past.

“Identity is an odd word for identity. After all, it does not consist in our being identical from one period of time to another. Rather it involves a sense of continuity, a sense that despite change, the self persists. It is a sense that the person now is numerically identical with the person in the past, despite being qualitatively different from that person. Identity is an attitude taken toward a constant state of flux.” (Lampinen, Odegard, Leding 2004: 245)

### 1.3. Trauma Re-constructs Identity

The discussion of the relation between autobiographic memory (ABM) and negative emotion, inevitably, leads us to trauma. Trauma as such does not have a very long history as, for example, memory. This word originates from the Greek and its direct translation is *wound*. Sigmund Freud suggests in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) that trauma is a wound inflicted not on the body but on the mind. As far as the theory of trauma is concerned, Sigmund Freud was the first one to provide theoretical as well as practical research on this phenomenon in his essay “On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena” (1893), and in his later works, for example *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). His first encounter with trauma was due

to his treatment of hysteria<sup>50</sup> in women, later on he tried to understand the workings of trauma in the soldiers who survived World War I. Besides, it was his work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), which brought trauma to other level - cultural trauma or the trauma of the whole nation.

The study of trauma *per se* gained extreme importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The explanations could be various, but I suppose, that the two World Wars with the use of all-destructing weapons and the consequent insecurity and vulnerability of a human life are the bottom reasons, since violence brings about the rupture in the understanding of reality. Much has been written on the trauma of the Holocaust, the war in Iraq and recent terrorists' attacks, as for example 11-S. Recently there has been also a lot of research done on personal trauma, especially childhood abuse, rape, etc.

There are three different types of trauma: violent, such as a shocking event, which involves violence (violent trauma may be both cultural and individual); quiet trauma, as the trauma of aging, abandonment or loss, for example, and vicarious trauma<sup>51</sup> or secondary trauma – the trauma of a listener or an observer, which has become rather vital with the use of mass media: Internet, TV and newspaper. We see too often on TV the programmes connected with natural disasters or wars with violent images of human suffering. These images affect our senses and trouble our perception of the outside world. I will dwell upon all these types of trauma in this chapter.

Trauma as such influenced postmodern theatre and Samuel Beckett's theatre in particular, as this author had his own encounter with trauma/s. His participation in the French Resistance is well documented by Knowlson, as well as his prompt escape from the Nazis. His friend Alfred Peron, who was arrested and died in a concentration camp, had recruited Samuel Beckett to the Resistance movement. Beckett was a member of the cell "Gloria SMH<sup>52</sup>", and he played an active part in helping people to escape from the Nazi regime. It was Beckett's responsibility as a secretary of the cell to get reports photographed and work on false identity cards. And because of the betrayal of one

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<sup>50</sup> Alfred Adler and Otto Rank use the term "neurosis" or "neuroses".

<sup>51</sup> This term is used by Kaplan in *Trauma. Culture. The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005).

<sup>52</sup> SMH stands for His Majesty's Service.



member of the cell, Beckett and Suzanne had a very close escape from arrest. They had to hide from the Gestapo in Roussillon (1942-45). Obviously, the life was hard for them there: food was a constant preoccupation, hard work on the farm and extreme cold and unbearable heat. Besides, they lived in continuous tension, because the Gestapo was looking for them. Consequently, Beckett was not a mere observer of trauma, but an active sufferer. Undoubtedly, these experiences influenced his work.

The years that Beckett spent in London from 1933 to 1935, he went through psychoanalysis himself. In numerous letters<sup>53</sup> to his friend, Thomas McGreevy, Beckett wrote about his experiences in psychotherapy with Dr. Wilfred Ruprecht Bion. During these sessions with Bion, Beckett dredged up painful memories in an effort to alleviate his depression and psychosomatic symptoms. He, therefore, had first-hand experience in traumatic repression, and further recall of traumatic memories and he was well acquainted with psychoanalysis and the theory of trauma.

Knowlson comments in *Damned to Fame* that Beckett:

“... also read the lengthy, somewhat indigestible Freudian *Papers on Psychoanalysis* by Ernst Jones (whom he called “Erogenous Jones”) on which he took twenty pages of single-spaced, type-written notes, and books by Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, Karin Stephens, Wilhelm Stekel and a commentary of Freud (whom he called “Freudchen”), entitled “Treatment of Neuroses”. Beckett’s notes, discovered in a trunk in the cellar after his death, reveal the depth of his interest and the intensity of his personal involvement. [He typed out] the characteristics of anxiety, neurosis and hysteria described by Freud.” (Knowlson 1997: 178)

Beckett’s interest in Psychology and psychoanalysis found its way into Beckett’s *Psychology Notes*, which show his study of those subjects. It seems that Beckett himself developed the symptoms of neuroses: “Beckett presented himself to Bion with severe anxiety symptoms, which he described in his opening session: a bursting, apparently arrhythmic heart, night sweats, shudders, panic, breathlessness, and, at its most severe, total paralysis.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> These letters are housed in Trinity College Archives, Dublin.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

A recent book by Feldman<sup>55</sup>, based on the unpublished Beckett's material and correspondence, only proves Samuel Beckett's interest and studies of Psychology, psychoanalysis and mental illnesses. The majority of these notes were written between 1932 and 1936, obviously, prompted by Beckett's sessions with Bion. Feldman points out that there are 54 pages of intensive study of Psychology, which, probably, took Beckett ten months to complete. At that time, Beckett was fighting neuroses, and the notes may be considered as "an attempt to diagnose his psychological maladies during this time" (Feldman 2006: 79). Later on Beckett would use them as a material for his writing. In *Psychology Notes*, Beckett demonstrated his deep interest in the unconscious, mental diseases and troubled psyche:

"A number of other summarized passages point to Beckett's interest in those psychologically imperceptible parts of mental reality: repressed memories, dreams, psychoanalytic symbols, preconscious thoughts and so on." (Feldman 2006: 108)

It is not my aim here to dwell upon the contents of those notes; nevertheless, they provide a solid proof that "a comprehensive and empirical scrutiny of Beckett's gravitation towards psychoanalysis is now possible"<sup>56</sup>. Although I consider that applying only the method of psychoanalysis to Beckett's work is, perhaps a very narrow and reductive approach, since this writer was so knowledgeable in many spheres of human knowledge.

Finally, I want to mention that creative writing itself is a means to cure trauma, as a traumatized person has this compulsive desire to tell/write about his experiences. Here I would like to suggest, that for Beckett his writing was, probably, therapeutic in nature. S. J. Coen in his *Book Review Essays: Reading Memories of Childhood*, points out that Samuel Beckett "was excited (Oppenheim<sup>57</sup>), as his mother deteriorated towards death, that, in his writing, he could draw on bad feelings" (2009: 147). Obviously, this has to do with the general theory of trauma and its cure. As I have already mentioned before, narrating is a vital tool to face traumatic experiences and

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<sup>55</sup> Feldman, Matthew 2006. *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's "Interwar Notes"*. London, New York: Continuum Press.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 84.

<sup>57</sup> Oppenheim 2008. "Life as Trauma, art as mastery: Samuel Beckett and the urgency of writing". *Contemp Psychoanal*, 44: 419-42.

assimilate them on a conscious level. Coen proposes that “It is appealing to believe that creative work helps to master trauma and pain without necessarily transforming it” (2009: 145). Katherine Worth also supports this idea:

“Beckett touches the springs of our sympathy by being exceptionally ready to expose his most intimate memories. Probably, no other playwright has made such bold, continuous, and self-lacerating use of his own life...” (1999: 77)

Although a spectator may certainly find autobiographic references in Beckett’s theatre, he/she should never forget that Beckett used his life experiences as a raw material and, in a certain way, he manipulated it in order to create something artistically new onstage. Worth writes that “His [Beckett’s] memories were, he said himself, ‘obsessional’ but in his theatre they take on a wonderfully vivid, independent life which allows them to seem everybody’s” (1999: 13).

### 1.3.1. Memory and Negative Emotion: What is Trauma?

“...trauma is not only an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival.” (Caruth 1996: 58)

I would like to start this section with a definition of trauma, which I find very enlightening and important to the current analysis. Caruth defines trauma in her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, as:

“The wound of the mind – the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world – is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that [...] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.” (1996: 4)

This definition points to a very complex nature of trauma. The complexity of this phenomenon is due to the fact that three different realities are always present in trauma: Past via Present and via Future, joined by identity as such. What is more, a traumatic experience affects further interaction between a person and his environment,

alienating him/her from his/her past identity. So it is evident from this definition that trauma does not only belong to the past but also to the present and to the future. “The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after” (Laub 1992: 69). And, although, I do not completely agree with this definition, since a traumatized person always has a “before” and an “after”, I would like to point to the cyclic nature of trauma that Laub brings into view. This eternal trauma cycle, in form, has a lot to do with Beckett’s drama. His plays have a never-ending quality; we even have an impression that his characters will not stop talking with the fall of the curtain. For example in *Not I*, we hear the buzzing of the voices even before the curtain rises and after it falls.

Another quality of trauma is that it is not integrated into a person’s ABM, thus it inevitably creates a gap in a conscious memory, and its further acceptance is gradual through continuous repetition or re-enactments that can occur in real world through verbalization of a traumatic event, which can haunt a person in the form of nightmares or fantasies. In *WFG*, Estragon complains of continuous beatings during the night. At night the subconscious emerges in our dreams and makes us remember. Probably, Estragon was really not beaten, but dreamt of an event that had happened to him once and was not accepted on a conscious level. Obviously, he does not bear any signs of beating the following day, so there is still the possibility that all those beatings are simply his nightmares or anxiety dreams<sup>58</sup> due to a previous trauma.

Furthermore, I would like to deal with the relation between a traumatic event and some changes in a person’s identity. As I have already discussed in this chapter about memory and Self, identity is the product of choice, a person is the things he wants to remember about himself, and, obviously, we are the creators of our own life-story or ABM. But some memories are more central to self-definition than others, which are called self-defining. Self-defining memories can be both open and closed, and traumatic memories belong to open memories, as they are highly emotional and influence the self negatively. According to Bergson, memory is gradual succession of the identities in

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<sup>58</sup> Freud made a connection between the dreams and the Unconscious. According to him and later Rank and Young, dreams represent our repressed unconscious. He stated that there are several types of dreams, such as anxiety dreams, wish dreams, “punishment” dreams, etc. All of these dreams have to do with the trauma of birth, later discussed by Otto Rank in his book *The Trauma of Birth*.

time. But when a traumatic experience occurs, it modifies the present identity drastically to a point of erasing of the present identity and depriving it of its links to the previous identities. A person becomes uprooted from his own self/ves. A vivid example of an open memory in Beckett's theatre is Mouth's logorrhoea in *Not I*. Mouth's speech is quite incoherent, fragmented and even alienated, since Mouth substitutes the first person singular by the third person singular, talking about herself. The experience itself is rather disturbing and shocking, and the use of the third person singular points to the going-on negotiation of these events in adopting them to the narration about Mouth's life, not to some impersonal "she". Disembodied Mouth is unable to order her experiences into her ABM. Here, Adler's theory of organ compensation comes to my mind: does Beckett overstress a mouth in order to show that Mouth has kept her mouth shut for a very long period and this is the first time when she actually speaks about her tormented past? I think that may be one of the reasons of presenting such a grotesque "figure" onstage.

According to McNally<sup>59</sup>, verbal diarrhoea is a symptom of dissociative identity disorder. A patient needs to vomit his/her story of the worst in order to feel free and to face his/her past. So Mouth is "hanging on the words" (379): on the impossible task to narrate or to be silent. Obviously, this story (never told before) is very difficult to tell, since it has been repressed, and one has to relive it in order to "translate" emotions and images into words. Coming to understand one's own past repressed identities emerges through "flashbulb memories"<sup>60</sup> (Brown and Kulik 1977) and "screen-memories"<sup>61</sup> (this term is used by Freud).

Undoubtedly, Mouth starts the narrative from the moment of her birth or even before it: "...out into this world...this world...tiny little thing...before its time..." (376). Consequently, she is there to tell the story of her life and, perhaps to understand her own self.

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<sup>59</sup> See McNally 2003. *Remembering Trauma*.

<sup>60</sup> For definition see Brief Glossary of Psychology Terminology.

<sup>61</sup> For definition see Brief Glossary of Psychology Terminology

“As modern neurobiologists point out, the repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be retraumatizing; if not life-threatening, it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration.” (Caruth 1996: 63)

According to many psychologists, a patient has to face his/her trauma through his/her own narration and repetition of disturbing experience. Although, those repetitions may affect a patient’s sanity, since a traumatic experience is already repressed in the person’s subconscious and he/she is both obsessed and repelled to tell it. It seems that the subconscious is constantly leaking into consciousness, like a persistent background noise that one cannot avoid. Mouth defines it as “buzzing”, since mental images are not easy to translate into coherent narrative: “what?...the buzzing?...yes... all dead still but for the buzzing...when suddenly she realized...words were-...what?...who?... no!... she!...”(379). Mouth cannot come to terms, not only with what she wants to tell, but even with the pronoun “I”, which is lacking in her discourse. Images come to her mind in the form of flashes; the verb “flash” is constantly repeated in her narrative, which we can associate with “water” and with “light”. Although the character is unable to tell it all and the end of her speech is again the beginning: “April morning...face in the grass...nothing but the larks...pick it up-“ (383). In Chapter VI, I analyse the type of trauma Mouth is trying to repress.

There is clear evidence that the “I” affected by trauma changes abruptly, a traumatically changed personality is too different from the previous identities, thus a person loses his/her past identity without developing a new one, moreover, his past memories may be modified due to personality rupture. It seems that his/her reaction to reality is also affected by trauma, as one can cease to be familiar with one’s usual surroundings. Consequently, trauma can remodel both identity and reality.

Another point to mention is incomprehensibility of trauma at the moment of its occurrence. A person’s mind does not register the event properly and normally stores it on the subconscious level. According to recent neuropsychological research, van der Volk and Otto van der Hart (1991) argue that trauma is a special form of memory; they stated that in trauma the event has effect only, not meaning. It produces emotions – terror, fear, shock – but perhaps above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. Strong negative emotions that a person experiences in trauma affect their further storage

in the brain. Only the sensation sector of the brain – amygdala – is active during the trauma occurrence. The cerebral cortex (rational thought) remains shut because the effect is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain. As the result of this, traumatic memories are not linguistic, as a victim has not vocalized them. They may be stored in images, smells or just in sensations. A person is not able to narrate his/her trauma instantly, as he/she has not meditated it yet. Phil Mollon writes that “traumatic experience may be encoded as sensori-motor and affective memories (visual images, sensations, emotions and motor acts) rather than as episodic and narrative autobiographical memories” (2002: 28). Van der Volk and van der Hart (1991) also argue that traumatic experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level, or to be put into words, thus it is prone to be stored on a somatosensory or an iconic level in the form of sensations, behavioural re-enactments, nightmare and flashbacks. It seems that in trauma, emotion plays a major role; it is more important how we feel the event than the event itself. Kaplan defines trauma as narration without narrativity, “that is without the ordered sequence leading to a determined end we associate with narratives” (2005: 65). But what happens when we are unable to narrate our past experience?

“The self is unified across time because we are motivated and able to create a story, a narrative that ties different aspect of the self together over time. The self is unified through memory and the processes of narrative reconstruction. (Lampinen, Odegard, Leding 2004: 229)

The self is always the centre of narrative gravity, a person is always more interested in his past and in his relation with time and the world around. However, in trauma, all these relations are destroyed. The impossibility to narrate the event in coherent words leads to unreal existence and the loss of identity, as well as the sense of time. It seems to me that all these features of trauma are physically inscribed in Beckett’s stage. For Artaud, the physical stage language has a beauty of its own, and its aim is to have the same “intellectual effectiveness as spoken language” (1974: 51). I think that Beckett has made a revolution in the theatre aesthetics of staging trauma. In the majority of his plays, the stage has a hallucinatory dream-like quality. Scarcity of objects, strange lighting, deformed bodies or just body parts, voices coming from the void and darkness, the grey-white clothing of his characters are only some of the features that surprise the audience. Some of his later plays, like *That Time* and *Play*,

look more like black and white photographs, due to the immobility of his characters. Beckett creates another reality in his theatre, different from what a spectator is used to see.

The storage of striking violent images in the memory of a traumatized person reminds me very much of mnemonics (discussed in the present chapter). The only difference is that mnemotecnics is a voluntary method to remember, but in the case of trauma, it is stored in the subconscious, thus the memory is involuntary. Traumatic images stored on the subconscious level are more difficult to forget or to erase and tend to penetrate into the conscious level. Paradoxically, we try to repress our traumas, but we are doomed to relive them. Furthermore, the storage of images in trauma is always accompanied by emotions and sensations. Without any doubt, these memories are stable and recurrent in time. For instance, the Voice in *Eh Joe* never stops reminding the character of the presumably “forgotten” dead ones, “on and off”. The Voice is merciless and is constantly troubling Joe, since his face is very tense and his eyes wide open. The Voice (whether real or not) is his personal torturer, as the Light in *Play*.

Another point of Caruth’s definition, which is worth discussing, is the relation between trauma and the perception of time. As it has already been mentioned before, it is extremely important to create chronological landmarks for ABM, these landmarks are the periods of transition in our identity, which place us in time, and provide a unity. But traumatic experience and understanding, as well as accepting trauma, may be not only distanced in time, but exist outside these temporal landmarks. Cameron, Wilson and Ross in *The Self and Memory* (2004) discuss the importance of these temporal landmarks in our memories. By a temporal landmark, they mean the capability of a person to place the event in his/her personal history or ABM. “Temporal landmarks tend to form when events are both experienced in time and have personal significance” (Cameron, Wilson, Ross “Autobiographical Memory and Self-Assessment” 2004: 201). But when a traumatic event occurs, a person is not able to store this event coherently in his/her memory/brain, thus he/she is unable to locate it in time or to create the temporal landmark for it. That may be another reason for the disruption of self.



Furthermore, there is also a special link between the ability to locate the events temporally in one's life and self-concept. We feel very far away from our past selves that performed poorly, in order to maintain our self-esteem. Moreover, a diachronic disunity experience (when we do not feel the same person any more) alienates our past selves from our current self and changes our self-perception. Krapp, for instance, is there onstage to listen to his tapes or the stories of his life, but he picks "passages at random" (218) to listen to and not in their chronological order. Perhaps, he tries to alienate himself from his young self and a self who has failed as a writer. Krapp ironically calls his work "opus .... magnum" (218), and it seems that the only thing that "remains of all that misery", as he calls his life, is "a girl in a shabby green coat on the railway-station platform" (218).

The period when a person is unable to face a traumatic experience is called "incubation period" or latency<sup>62</sup>. "The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself" (Caruth 1996: 17). It was demonstrated that during this period of time a victim experiences the first symptoms, which were called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (later referred as PTSD<sup>63</sup>). Symptoms of PTSD can be various, but normally they are characterised by the lack of coherence, when a person is unable to narrate the sequence of an event and always demonstrates lack for words. As the result of this, traumatic memories are fragmented and patchy in narration. In addition, they may have an involuntary and hallucinatory quality, being evoked not by conscious and deliberate attempts to recall but by unwelcome associations. Caruth states in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), that trauma is normally characterised by the voices of recall. That means that even after the loss of a loved one, a person may still hear him/her in her mind. This point is very important to the current discourse, but I will deal with it later in this section.

Another symptom of trauma may be the failure of personalization, when a person tries to tell his/her story not in the first person singular but in the third person

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<sup>62</sup> This term was invented by Sigmund Freud in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895, Vol. 2).

<sup>63</sup> The term PTSD was introduced in 1984 by the American Psychologic Association in their *Diagnostic Manual*.

singular. In many cases a woman speaking about childhood abuse is telling her experience like an observer, saying “she” all the time instead of “I”, due to the fact that the event was too painful, that is better to re-live it as an observer than as a protagonist. This phenomenon is called dissociation. We have a clear example of dissociation in *Not I*, where Mouth is unable to speak in the first person singular. The woman in *Rockaby* is also constantly denying the “I” discourse, describing her present situation of “going to and fro” (436) in the third person singular. Consequently, trauma disturbs one’s psyche, a subject lives in a hallucinatory present, mechanically performing his/her responsibilities but too overwhelmed even to think.

Freud observed as well behavioural re-enactments in the victims of trauma, when a traumatized person acts out a traumatic event subconsciously. For example, an old woman after hearing a car backfire outdoors started to shut all the windows ordering her family to hide. Obviously, she did not remember anything after this episode, but later it was discovered that she had lived through air raids as a child. Thus, the event was registered in her brain only on a sensory level, and the sound of the car backfire brought on her strange behaviour. Mollon writes:

“If a traumatic experience is not processed into autobiographic memory, then it is not available to intentional and explicit recall. This kind of memory cannot easily be described in words – it is not verbally accessible. Instead it may be situationally provoked – flashback images, or reactions of anxiety or other emotions associated with the experience are evoked by situations or circumstances that bear some similarity or link to the original traumatic one.” (2002: 30)

In *Footfalls*, for example, May is walking nine steps rhythmically across the stage all the time throughout the performance, which seems to me a behavioural re-enactment of a trauma. Each step is one meter wide, the audience hear “clearly audible rhythmic tread” (399). The trauma is metaphorically inscribed in the number of steps she is making incessantly. I have already mentioned in the first part of this chapter, that nine may be the symbol of eternity. Nevertheless, there may be another explanation, related to trauma. Since the beginning of time, the humanity has been obsessed with numbers and their symbolism. Our life is centred on numbers. For example, we are born

on a certain date, which we celebrate every year. We live according to numbers: dates, hours, years, etc. Therefore, numbers are symbolically important in human's life.

“En las mujeres que se pueden analizar durante el embarazo, y hasta la época del parto, se encuentra que los períodos del tiempo, y sobre todo los números, se relacionan con el embarazo y el nacimiento (meses, años, niños, hermanos y hermanas, etc.) Se comprueba entonces que los días del nacimiento tienen un papel particular y, además, que sobre ellos descansan la mayor parte de los análisis en los que uno se sirve del procedimiento consistente en invitar al sujeto a que diga los primeros números que le pasen por la cabeza. Es porque la serie de los nueve números (meses de embarazo), que se encuentran en el inconsciente, en lugar de estar en relación con nuestro sistema de cálculo solar, corresponde al sistema numérico del ‘calendario natura’, de la misma manera que vemos, en la mitología, los números sagrados oscilar entre 7, 9, 10.” (Rank 1961: 85)

Consequently, we can understand that May's nine steps may mean 9 months in her mother's womb, or simply the state of her “not being born” (Jung). That, perhaps, explains the absence of her mother onstage and her first words: “Mother. [*Pause. No louder.*] Mother” (399). Another probable meaning of May's incessant walking can be her re-enactment of the trauma of birth – physical separation from her mother. May is reliving this traumatic separation or the loss of her mother, consequently her own security by pacing. There is a very high probability that May's mother is dead, and she is left there, in this world, with her mother's voice talking in her head. The figure of “mother” was discussed by Freud, Rank, Bion, etc.: all of them agree in its importance for the future development of a child and his/her mental stability. According to Wilfred Bion, for example, mother's “thinking ability”<sup>64</sup> could contain and process the undirected anxieties of a child<sup>65</sup> and later hand them in transformed into the feeling that a child can manage. Mother is a link between a child and the outer world, thus her loss can destabilize a child and impede his/her future maturity. Consequently, this loss is exceedingly traumatic.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Chapter 3), Sigmund Freud describes the occurrence of traumatic memories. The pattern of sufferings is persistent and comes in the form of nightmares, and painful re-enactments totally outside the control of the

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<sup>64</sup> “alpha elements”

<sup>65</sup> “beta elements”

victim. Freud gives an example of a romantic love story told by Tasso in *Gerusalemme Liberata*. When Tancred accidentally kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel, after the funeral he goes into a magic forest and stabs a tree with his sword. Unexpectedly, blood runs from this tree, which seems to hold the soul of his beloved one, and her voice tells him that he has wounded her again. The second episode with the tree actually repeats the event, but on the other level. It seems that the knight cannot control the voice and the visual image, the catastrophe is replayed in his head again and again. Freud calls this experience “traumatic neurosis”, later called PTSD. If we take into consideration Baddeley’s model of working memory (Appendix 1), we can clearly see that the voice and image encodings are made by different systems. A voice is processed by the phonological loop and an image - by the visuospatial sketchpad. Since the decoding is done in different systems, taking into consideration that experience is traumatic, voice and image are not united in the central executive, thus the retrieval is made by parts. Consequently, a voice is disembodied, or the recall is done by multiple voices.

I would like to draw attention to the voice of a dead person that Tancred, the knight hears. It seems that imaginary voice or voices can inhabit a person and intensify the traumatic recall. The voices in the head of a person may both intensify trauma, adding nightmarish existence, and trigger the recall. Richard Sennet, in his essay “Disturbing memories”, highlights the roles of voices in the reconstruction of one’s past. He writes “... the story of what happened depends not on a single narrator, but rather on a plurality of contending voices speaking to one another” (2006: 14). Nevertheless, if a person cannot reconstruct his past he becomes restless and de-centred. In this case, the voices grow stronger in his/her head, and start to influence his/her present condition. For instance, in *Eh Joe*, the character’s existence is not only perturbed by the Voice and by the camera, but it strongly affects his present state of self-imprisonment. It seems to me that Joe consciously makes a refuge for himself, shutting the windows and the door. The importance of voice or voices as characters in postmodern theatre has already been mentioned. In Beckett’s plays, the disembodied voices are many and their roles can be different, but they normally belong to the characters’ past.

Another point to bear in mind is the repetitive quality of the traumatic event, which seems to be out of control of any person. *Play* may be understood on the level of this repetition-compulsion (though this compulsion is exterior). The characters are doomed to talk about their past lives time and again, tortured by the inquisitive spotlight. We presume that they are dead. The heads in the urns repeat their stories or better to say one story of betrayal in three different voices. And though each of the voices is sure of his/her narrated version, all of them understand that there should be something else to tell, something else that is forgotten or repressed by all of them.

**Chorus** (w1, w2, m): Yes, strange, darkness best, and the darker the worst, till all dark, then all well, for the time, but it will come, the thing will come, the thing is there.... (307)

**W 1** : Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth? (313)

In the first quotation, all the characters are talking about “it” or “the thing” that may be taken for a certain inaccessible memory repressed in the dark or in their subconscious. All of them coincide that this particular memory does exist, but, I believe, that this memory is so painful or shameful that they do not have other alternative as to be tortured by the Light, since this particular memory is hidden deep in their minds (discussed in Chapter V).

Freud speculates on the matter of repetition-compulsion and paradoxically relates it to a survival. He suggests that at first the mind or our consciousness tries to protect our sanity, due to the power of the negative emotions that are impossible to grasp. These shocking emotions present a threat to our bodies realized *one moment too late*. And from time to time, these emotions leak through the fragile barrier between our consciousness and the subconscious. Freud suggests that these repetitions of trauma can be equalled to a *fort-da*<sup>66</sup> game, which his grandson used to play with a spool, re-enacting the departure and return of his mother. As he was unable to put it into words, the confrontation was made on the game level in his case:

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<sup>66</sup> *Fort* – meaning “gone”, and *da* - meaning “here”.

## *On Memory and Trauma*

“I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play ‘gone’ with them. This, then, was a complete game - disappearance and return.”  
(qtd. in Caruth 1996: 66)

A similar *fort-da* game was described by Krapp while he was playing: throwing a ball to a dog. The first time this ball was mentioned when he listened to the tape about his mother’s death. Beckett was familiar with Freud’s work, thus this ball may create strong associations with the loss of his mother, and the later acceptance of this loss, as he gives this “small old, black, hard, solid rubber ball” to the dog. From my point of view, this noun has so many descriptive adjectives, because Krapp wants to express the inexpressible – the death and loss of a loved one.

Trauma may affect a person in many ways: obsession, the need and at the same time the impossibility to talk it over, acute solitude, and impossibility to put it into words, losing the grip on reality, disorientation and the feeling of being uprooted. Fragments, hallucination and flashbacks are modes trauma often adopts. And as chronological time is not observed, due to the lack of temporal landmarks, the narration could go back and forth in time and integrate fantasies, as fantasies form an important part of facing trauma. Dickstein, Riba, Oldham in their book, *Repressed Memories* (2005), define traumatic memories as:

1. Traumatic memories are composed of images, sensations, and affective and behavioural states.
2. Traumatic memories are inflexible and invariant over time.
3. Traumatic memories cannot be evoked at will but are automatically elicited under specific circumstances reminiscent of the original event; once one element of the memory is stimulated, the retrieval floodgates open, and the other elements are recalled (re-experienced).
4. Traumatic memories are non-linguistical, thus difficult to decode using language.
5. Traumatic memories are open, thus not faced by an individual. The effect of alienation may occur.
6. Traumatic memories take time to remember. (2005: 26)

It is important to point out that postmodern theatre integrates many characteristics of trauma, such as fragmentation, repetition, the rupture between language and reality, etc. Jeanette Malkin writes:

## Chapter I

“Postmodernism is crucially bound with agendas of remembrance and forgetting, serving, at least in part, to re-call the past from repression of from its canonized ‘shape’ in order to renegotiate the traumas, oppressions, and exclusions of the past.” (1999: 1)

To sum this section up, I would like to point out the most common symptoms of trauma<sup>67</sup>. They are common effects or conditions that may occur following a traumatic event. Sometimes these responses can be delayed for months or even years after the event. Often, people do not even initially associate their symptoms with the precipitating trauma. The following are symptoms that may result from a more commonplace, unresolved trauma, especially if there were earlier overwhelming life experiences. These symptoms are rather interesting to the current research, since Beckett’s characters display them onstage, although some of them are used for comic effects. These symptoms are the following:

### **Physical**

- Eating disturbances (more or less than usual)
- Sleep disturbances (more or less than usual)
- Sexual dysfunction
- Low energy
- Chronic, unexplained pain

### **Emotional**

- Depression, spontaneous crying, despair and hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Fearfulness
- Compulsive and obsessive behaviours
- Feeling out of control
- Irritability, angry and resentment
- Emotional numbness
- Withdrawal from normal routine and relationships

### **Cognitive**

- Memory lapses, especially about the trauma

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<sup>67</sup> Electronic resource [www.healingresources.info/emotional\\_trauma\\_overview.htm](http://www.healingresources.info/emotional_trauma_overview.htm), consulted in July 2010.

## *On Memory and Trauma*

- Difficulty making decisions
- Decreased ability to concentrate
- Feeling distracted

The following additional symptoms of emotional trauma are commonly associated with a severe precipitating event, such as a natural disaster, exposure to war, rape, assault, violent crime, major car or airplane crashes, or child abuse. Extreme symptoms can also occur as a delayed reaction to the traumatic event.

### **Re-experiencing the Trauma**

- intrusive thoughts
- flashbacks or nightmares
- sudden floods of emotions or images related to the traumatic event

### **Emotional Numbing and Avoidance**

- amnesia
- avoidance of situations that resemble the initial event
- detachment
- depression
- guilt feelings
- grief reactions
- an altered sense of time
- hyper-vigilance, jumpiness, an extreme sense of being “on guard”
- overreactions, including sudden unprovoked anger
- general anxiety
- obsessions with death

The possible effects of emotional trauma are various. Even unrecognized, emotional trauma can create lasting difficulties in an individual's life. One way to determine whether an emotional or psychological trauma has occurred, perhaps even early in life before language or conscious awareness were in place, is to look at the kinds of recurring problems one might be experiencing. These can serve as clues to an earlier situation that caused a dysregulation in the structure or function of the brain.



**Common personal and behavioural effects of emotional trauma:**

- substance abuse
- compulsive behaviour patterns
- self-destructive and impulsive behaviour
- uncontrollable reactive thoughts
- inability to make healthy professional or lifestyle choices
- dissociative symptoms (“splitting off” parts of the self)
- feelings of ineffectiveness, shame, despair, hopelessness
- feeling permanently damaged
- a loss of previously sustained beliefs

**Common effects of emotional trauma on interpersonal relationships:**

- inability to maintain close relationships or choose appropriate friends and mates
- sexual problems
- hostility
- arguments with family members, employers or co-workers
- social withdrawal
- feeling constantly threatened

The symptoms underlined are displayed by Beckett’s characters, which will be discussed in the following chapters. Moreover, symptoms of trauma may be the indicators of identity change.

### **1.3.2. Trauma in Beckett’s Plays**

“...trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.” (Caruth 1996: 4)

As far as types of trauma are concerned, there may be five distinct types. According to Deidre Barret (Kaplan 2005: 5), trauma may be violent or quiet, cultural or personal and vicarious. Nevertheless, the boundary between these five types is very fragile. Cultural trauma, for example, may be assimilated by a human being as a personal one. If one is

caught amidst a war, which is cultural trauma *per se*, and projects it into his life through the loss of loved ones or a wound, cultural trauma is transformed into a personal one. Besides, if one tells it later to another person, the same trauma is turned into a vicarious one.

Recently I have watched the Argentinean movie “El Secreto de Sus Ojos” (directed by Juan Jose Campanella), which can illustrate my point. The title deals with the importance of sight, or actually witnessing. It seems to me that “eyes” give us the clue to the main theme of the movie. The eyes close-ups are frequent in this film, and they are the eyes that betray the murderer. The protagonist, Ricardo Darin, is a member of the Court of Justice in Buenos Aires in 1960s, who investigates a rape of an unknown to him woman. Obviously, he is only a witness of another crime; nevertheless, he gets deeply involved in the case. All his life he tries to do justice to the victim, and he even writes a book about this investigation when he retires. Thus, the vicarious trauma of rape is turned into a personal trauma, which haunts the protagonist all his life. He is unable to get rid of his insomnia and frequent nightmares. The past scenes of his life emerge through his dreams and become his reality. Consequently, the line between vicarious and personal traumas is blurred in this movie. In addition, the past and the present are interlinked in the film; it seems that the past scenes emerge into the present and the present into the past. And it is the past that holds the key to the protagonist’s future.

As far as Beckett’s plays are concerned, some of these types of trauma are present on his stage. Although it is very important to comment, that Samuel Beckett deals with them artistically, more than intellectually. These traumas are inscribed not only in the text of his plays, but they are also embodied in the physical stage language.

The first type of trauma I am going to deal with is **vicarious trauma** or the trauma of witnessing. Laub proposes that:

“All media response should be seen as at most vicarious trauma, not as experiencing trauma itself. Even then, in some cases vicarious trauma may be a misnomer, since spectators do not feel the protagonist’s trauma. They feel the pain evoked by empathy – arousing mechanisms interacting with their own traumatic experiences.” (1992: 90)

That is why another name for this type of trauma is secondary. Secondary trauma occurs when someone listens empathically to another person's account of an event where one's individual's life was threatened. Exposure to trauma victims can cause well-meaning people (even mental health professionals) to become overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, shame, rage, and a sense that the world is not a safe place (ontological insecurity). People who habitually hear about the horrific experiences of others can develop PTSD<sup>68</sup>-like symptoms such as suppressing emotions, nightmares, problems making decisions, apathy, social isolation, fatigue, and health related stress reactions.

In theatre, since it deals with images, visuality may strongly affect a spectator and create a violent response on a sensorial level. Once a play is staged, the audience are wholly involved in the performance, enveloped by darkness. The whole play becomes a personal experience. Violent or unpleasant images onstage may forever be engraved in the spectator's memory, and retrieved on associating them with real life episodes. All the senses of the spectator are involved in the process of watching and a spectator elaborates an emotional response to the play. Besides, according to mnemonics, images are remembered better than words, so the visulaity of the play is retained by a spectator's mind.

In Beckett's theatre, vicarious trauma sometimes affects both a character onstage and the audience. The example is *Not I*, where we have Mouth incessantly talking onstage, the image is shocking *per se*, and a mute Auditor who is unable to help her. Beckett's staging directions are the following:

*“AUDITOR, downstage audience left, tall standing figure, sex undeterminable, enveloped from head to foot in loose black djellaba, with hood, fully faintly lit, standing on invisible podium about 4 feet high shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across stage intent on. MOUTH, dead still throughout but for four brief movements where indicated.”*  
(373)

This image of the Auditor or Listener is worth analysing since it appears like a mystical figure onstage. The figure is sexless, so any spectator may feel identified with

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<sup>68</sup> Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

it. Besides, this entity occupies a prominent position onstage but on some distance from Mouth, which may mean that he is not the character of her story, but simply an Auditor of her story. The faint illumination of this figure may signal his/her ghost quality.

Beckett provides a silent listener to Mouth. The Auditor is affected by Mouth's verbal diarrhea; at the same time, he/she is unable to help her. The four helpless movements of raising hands occur after Mouth's words: "who?...no!...she?.." (377, 379, 381, 382). As if the Auditor is deeply troubled by Mouth's dissociation from her own story (the use of the third person singular) and her repetitive negation of Self. Rosemary Pountey defines these hand movements as "helpless compassion" (1988: 47). Ruby Cohn comments on the visually striking opposition between fully illuminated Mouth and the Auditor in the shadow. She attributes to the Auditor the role of Mouth's "confessor, accuser, or alter ego" (1988: 316). And though his/her meanings may be various, I suppose its function onstage is to represent the audience or the audience's vicarious trauma of witnessing. Dori Laub confirms the abovementioned, stating that "By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma himself" (1992: 57).

Another type of trauma I would like to dwell upon briefly is **cultural trauma**. The name itself points to a type of trauma experienced by many people at the same time, for example the Holocaust or the World Wars. This type of trauma affects the whole generation of people and, definitely, changes their lives and mentality. For example, the terrorist attack on 9/11 affected the mentality of all American people; none escaped its brutal effects. Again it was Sigmund Freud who wrote about cultural trauma effect in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. At the beginning of the book, Freud writes about the unavoidable and overwhelming imposition of historical events on the psyche. Freud dwells upon the war neurosis, providing the examples of the cases of soldiers from World War I.

"Memory-theatre like postmodern thought, contains the marks and traces of cultural discourses and historical remains – but torn out of context, ungrounded, returned in the shape of dreams." (Malkin 1999: 8)

I do not think that Samuel Beckett deals with cultural trauma *per se*, but elements of this type of trauma found their way in some of his plays. Knowlson documents in detail all the hardships that Beckett went through in occupied France (Knowlson 1997: 303-14). But the worst for Beckett was his constant waiting and hiding in Roussillon (1942-5), listening to the BBC news. And as far as drama is concerned, *Waiting for Godot* and *Catastrophe* bear some of the characteristics of this historical/cultural trauma.

Enoch Brater in our Modern Drama Seminar at the UAM (May, 2003) delivered a lecture on the “Globalization of Godot” where he stressed the realistic approach to the play *WFG*, he pointed out the fact that actually the process of waiting in the play may have to do with Beckett’s stay/hiding at Roussillon. The physical stage language points to scarcity and lessness. A bare stage with a bare tree, which may be a false symbol of hope, constant lack of food (turnips, radishes, carrots), and the characters’ continuous worry about it: all points to the period of time, when Beckett was in Vaucluse in France under the Nazis’ occupation. Even the first language, the play was written in, is French; the language which Beckett probably associated with the occupation among other reasons.

Another play I want to deal with in relation to cultural/historical trauma is *Catastrophe*. This play was written in 1982, forty years after the war. This play, unlike other Beckett’s plays, was written with the special goal of supporting the Czech dissident writer, Václav Havel. The image of the Protagonist may be probably “borrowed” from Walpole’s novel *Judith Paris*, read by Beckett in Roussillon (Knowlson 1997: 327). The image of “the baited bear” is the key one in this book. “It presents an image of suffering, wilfully inflicted on a vulnerable, old, captive creature” (Knowlson 1997: 327) <sup>69</sup>. Beckett uses this image which is closely linked with his readings during World War II. Probably, by this he drives the connection between the two situations, which were oppressive *per se*. I may even forward the idea that in this

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<sup>69</sup> “Then the bear began quietly to realize that he was in the middle of his enemies. Carefully, with that same caution, he moved his head to look for his master, and when he saw him held with his coat torn and his brown breast bare he began to be angry [...] But with his anger there rose also slowly his sadness and his bewilderment. He shuffled with his feet; his paw rose and fell again. He began to roll his head. Then he tried to break from his chain, and when he found that he could not, he jerked his head towards his master. Then again rubbed the drops of blood from his nose.” (Walpole, qtd. in Knowlson 1977: 327)

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image he pictures his own self, hiding but at the same time fighting in his own way against the Nazis (even in Roussillon Beckett participated in Roussillon's resistance group, hiding explosives and helping people to escape the regime).

The play *Catastrophe* is rather realistic in its staging. Beckett states that it is the lost part of a rehearsal. There are only three characters onstage: the Director, his female assistant, and the Protagonist. Another character, Luke, who is in charge of lighting, is offstage. All characters' names have abbreviations in the text (D, A, P, L), which, probably, add a universal quality to them. The most striking image is that of P (the Protagonist), who is elevated on a platform:

*"P midstage standing on a black block 18 inches high. Black wide-brimmed hat. Black dressing-gown to ankles. Barefoot: head bowed. Hands in pockets. Age and physique unimportant."* (457)

This image points to suffering: the character is standing on a high platform and he is exposed for public scrutiny, black colour certainly points to mourning and death, bare feet visible to the audience may arouse the association of the concentration camps in World War II, since the prisoners had to enter barefoot in gas chambers, etc. D mentions that he wants "the stalls to see the feet" (457). D treats him with real cruelty trying to alter his appearance as if he were raw material. He even undresses him, leaving P stand in ash-grey pyjamas. The whole image is that of submission, only crippled hands in fists suggest that he is still able to resist. Perhaps, it is interesting to mention that Beckett himself had crippled hands, because he suffered from a thickening of deep tissue that passes from palm to fingers, causing the hands to claw.

P is mute during the whole play, since the possession of voice means authority and P is deprived of it. P looks more like a statue, than a human being. L directs the light on P, making his suffering even more intense. In this play, Beckett stages human manipulation in dictatorial states. No opposition is permitted or even expected from P. Obviously, the cultural trauma, the system-induced trauma, is there onstage inscribed in the Protagonist's body.

However, the final tableau changes it all:

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“*[Fade out of light on the body. Light on head alone. Long pause.]*”

**D:** Terrific! He’ll have them all on their feet. I can hear it from here.

*[Pause. Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies. Long pause. Fade-out of light on face.]*” (461)

This last gesture may be considered as a triumphant turning point. The head itself was totally covered by a brimmed hat during the whole performance, I think it is easier to humiliate a person, when we do not see his face. The Director rejects the Assistant’s proposal to show P’s face before, as if he were afraid: “What next? Raise his head? Where do you think we are? In Patagonia?<sup>70</sup>” (460). Lowered head is the symbol of submission. And here I would like to parallel the end of the play to a quotation from *Judith Paris*:

“Something very grand entered into him, the grandeur of all captured and ill-treated things. He lifted his head and stared from under his jutting brows at the crowd, and was at once, with that single movement, finer than all of them.” (Walpole, qtd. in Knowlson 1997: 327)

It can be clearly seen that these two situations (the fight of a bear, and P’s silent fight) are similar, though Beckett as always applies the rule “less is more”, permitting the audience to interpret this gesture of defiance: the defiance against the regime, or injustice, or human cruelty. Consequently, Beckett adds universality to cultural trauma. He does not criticize one particular historical event, but goes further and rebels against the human essence that causes it, for example, oppression or violence.

Another type of trauma, which is present on Beckett’s theatre, is **personal trauma**, which may be quiet or violent. Beckett’s plays are impregnated with this type of trauma, there is no single play that escapes it. Katherine Worth writes:

“Torments within individual psyche – schizophrenic breakdowns, compulsive disorders, depressions – have been seen as the hell of our time. Beckett drew on his own neuroses and experience of analysis to reach into this dark region, but we all have access to it, if only through ordinary anxieties, glooms, and nightmares.” (1999: 7)

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<sup>70</sup> The reference to Patagonia has to do with Videla’s dictatorship regime in Argentina.

## *On Memory and Trauma*

Personal trauma may be caused by many events, the list is very long, so I will try to divide it in two major groups: emotional and physical trauma. Both of them affect our psyche and our inner and outer perception, at the same time changing our attitude and behaviour. These types of trauma may be inflicted by:

- sexual abuse
- physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- trauma of loss
- serious illnesses, which affect our health
- old age
- neglect
- natural disasters
- forced displacement
- war/ terrorist/ political violence
- traumatic grief/separation
- system-induced trauma
- suicide of a loved one

I think there is no point in dealing with each one of these factors separately, so I would like to signal only the traumas which are present in Beckett's theatre. Among them, there are: the trauma of sexual abuse (*Not I, Happy Days*), the trauma of neglect (*Endgame*), the trauma of aging (and minor illnesses) is present in all of Beckett's plays, the trauma of devastation, perhaps after an atomic war (*Endgame*), traumatic grief and the trauma of loss (*KLT, Ohio Impromptu, Company, etc.*), and the last one, which gains prominence on Beckett's stage, is the suicide of a loved one (*Embers, Eh Joe*). Besides, Beckett creates another type of trauma in his theatre the trauma of frustration and failure. All of these traumas change Beckett's characters, there is a big gap between their previous identities and the ones that emerge after trauma, *KLT* is a vivid example: an old aging character onstage, who has failed as a writer and has lost



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his love. In the present Krapp is “in his den” and in his “old rags” (217) listening to the stories of his life and bitterly commenting upon them. He does not approve of his younger selves: “Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that” (222). I will discuss Krapp’s identity disrapture in Chapter II.

Hereinafter, I will deal with the trauma of aging, the trauma of failure, and finally with a very specific type of trauma, which forms the cornerstone of Beckett’s theatre: the trauma of birth. I will analyse in more detail other types of trauma as well in Chapters II, III, IV, V and IV, since they are central to this research.

**The trauma of aging** is relevant in Beckett’s work. There are practically no young characters in his theatre, the exception may be the boy in *WFG*, who is a secondary character. Old age is merciless with our body and mind, which are in degeneration and decay. I think that Beckett has an acute interest in experimenting with elderly people, who are prone to illnesses and handicaps. He himself experienced the process of aging early, since his diseases were numerous. Among them were palpitations, spasms, suffocations, sebaceous cysts on the anus, eczema, herpes on the face, etc. Knowlson states “Beckett never lost his long-standing curiosity about medical matters, anything abnormal, unusual or macabre fascinated him” (1997: 668). On February-October 1935 Beckett paid frequent visits to Bethlem Royal Hospital, so he was quite familiar with medical terms and the symptoms of diseases, especially mental ones.

Beckett wonderfully presents onstage the physicality of an aging body. In his earlier plays, his characters possess different types of ailments, for example, Vladimir has a weak bladder and Clov is lame. Pozzo (Act II) and Hamm are blind, besides Hamm is paralytic, bound to a wheel chair, etc. So pure existence for Beckett’s elderly characters is difficult, everyday routines are more than they could bear. Estragon has problems putting his boots on, and Hamm is in constant dependence on Clov for performing all the daily chores. They are on the extremity of despair; their old aging bodies do not want to go on, but still they go on. “On... [...] on!” (253) says Henry in *Embers*, as though trying to order his body to continue. Hamm continuously inquires

Clov about his eyes and legs in *Endgame*, the only answer that Clov gives is “bad” (95, 110), though he can still move, dragging his old legs. Winnie also complains of her “old eyes” (140). The spectator can feel the corporeality of the characters’ bodies through their language and movements. In *WFG*, Beckett creates one enigmatic moment, when the four characters collapse on the floor and cannot rise. It seems that they have forgotten the habit of locomotion. Gontarski in “Recovering Beckett’s Bergsonism” (2008: 103) attributes it to a neurological lapse. The characters consciously try to remember how to get up; using their voluntary memories, but their final success is in a matter of inattention. It seems that in the old age Beckett’s characters forget how to perform essential bodily functions, and there is a clear evidence of a reverse to childhood. Nevertheless, there may be another explanation. According to Dickstein, Riba and Oldham (2005), there are two types of memory: explicit memory (declarative memory), which refers to the ability to consciously recall facts or events, and implicit memory (procedural memory), which refers to behavioural knowledge of a skill (bicycle riding) without recalling how he/she learnt it, or an adult who has an affective reaction are demonstrating implicit memories in the absence of explicit recall. Those types of memories are supported by different areas of the brain. Consequently, that points to malfunctioning or the failure of implicit memory of the four characters.

Besides, with age our sight and sense of hearing fail as well. Koga and Morand (1923) proved visual and acuity declines with age<sup>71</sup>. Consequently, the elderly need more time to form the response.

**Nagg:** Can you see me?

**Nell:** Hardly. And you?

**Nagg:** What?

**Nell:** Can you see me?

**Nagg:** Hardly.

**Nell:** So much the better, so much the better.

**Nagg:** Don’t say that. [*Pause.*] Our sight has failed.

Nell: Yes.

[*Pause. They turn away from each other.* ]

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<sup>71</sup> Surprenant and Farley 2007. “A Brief History of Memory and Aging” in Nairne (ed.) *The Foundations of Remembering. Essays in Honor of Henry L. Roediger, III.* New York and Hove: Psychology Press, Taylor and Francis Group.

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**Nagg:** Can you hear me?

**Nell:** Yes. And you?

**Nagg:** Yes. [*Pause.*] Our hearing hasn't failed.

**Nell:** Our what?

**Nagg:** Our hearing.

**Nell:** No. [*Pause.*] Have you anything else to say to me?

**Nagg:** Do you remember –

**Nell:** No. (99)

The situation is comical *per se*, Beckett manages to present in one simple dialogue the theme of age and body decay with bitter irony.

All the bodily dysfunctions attribute to Beckett's characters' fading memories and forgetfulness. According to Bergson, perception is vital for good construction of our memories. But how is elderly perception formed, when the senses fail? As memory constitutes Self, fragmented bodies only add to disruptive and shattered identities. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud deals with the trauma of aging. Though aging could be viewed as common trauma, it affects a person's identity as with aging a person becomes vulnerable and dependent.

In "A Brief History of Memory and Aging"<sup>72</sup> Surprenant and Farley provide a general overview on the studies of memory in elderly people. The first philosopher to study the workings of memory was Aristotle, who formed an encoding deficit hypothesis in elderly people: the information does not make a firm impression on the minds of old people. Another interesting theory was elaborated by Nicolas Tetens (1936-1807)<sup>73</sup>. According to Tetens, a major problem in memory performance of older people is not one of storing memory trace but one of retrieval, that on reaching "enveloped" memory material or making it conscious. In elderly people the ideas are not forgotten, they are just enveloped by other ideas. And an old person needs to go through different memories in his brain in order to reach the one he is looking for. That

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<sup>72</sup> Nairne J.S. 2007. *The Foundations of Remembering. Essays in Honor of Henry L. Roediger, III*. New York and Hove: Psychology Press, Taylor and Francis Group.

<sup>73</sup> Tetens was a professor of physics and metaphysics as well as philosophy and mathematics in Bitzow and Kiel in Germany. He is described as a founding father of developmental psychology and as an early empirical psychologist.

is the reason why the elderly people sometimes talk incessantly about things that are not relevant to the conversation.

“Thus the ideas, as well as children of our youth, often die before us; and our minds represent to us those tombs, to which we are fast approaching; where, though the brass and marble remain, yet the inscriptions are effaced by time, and the imagery moulders away. The pictures drawn in our minds are laid in fading colours; and, if not sometimes refreshed, vanish and disappear.” (Locke 1993: 38)

In Beckett’s drama, it is the present moment, which is pictured with blurred colours: white, grey and black colours are abundant on his stage. These colours create not only ghostly images, but also black-and-white images of the absent memory of his aging characters. Their past memories are more vivid and colourful.

In *The Seven Sins of Memory* (2001), Schacter deals with the most common failures of memory in the elderly people. He divides memory malfunctions in transience, absent-mindedness, blocking, misattribution, suggestibility, bias and persistence (2001: 4), analysed further on in the relation to Beckett’s characters’ memories. Transience, absent-mindedness and blocking are sins of omission, when a person fails to bring to mind a desired fact. Transience is the general term for the failure of memory; and misattribution, suggestibility, bias and persistence are sins of commission: some form of memory is present, but it is either incorrect or unwanted.

It seems that Beckett’s characters possess all of these “sins”. **Blocking** (when we fail to retrieve the information we are desperately searching for) is the most common one. Examples are numerous, but I will provide only some.

“Unlike memory failures resulting from transience, the information has not faded from your memory: it is lurking somewhere, seemingly poised to spring to mind with more prodding, but remains just out of reach when needed.” (Schacter 2001: 62)

It is stated that proper names and abstract nouns are first to be forgotten by the elderly people. Hamm forgets the name of a Greek philosopher in: “Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of ... [*he hesitates*]... that old Greek...” (126). And Krapp forgets the meaning of the word “equinox”. Another variation of

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blocking is “on the tip of the tongue”, when the word is somewhere there, but we cannot remember it. It has to do with Tetens’ theory, that the elderly people have problems with retrieving information. Vladimir sometimes has difficulty finding the exact word: “One is supposed to have been saved and the other ... [*He searches for the contrary of saved.*] ... damned” (14). Estragon cannot remember the man they were picking grapes for: “But we were there together, I could swear to it. Picking grapes for a man called ... [*He snaps his fingers.*] ... can’t think of the name of the man at a place called ... [*snaps his fingers*] ... can’t think of the name of the place, do you not remember” (55). Winnie confuses the names of “Shower” with “Cooker” (156), for example, since she is unable to remember the correct name. It should be very frustrating and annoying not to remember the names and places one connects our memories to. Furthermore, it adds to the person’s realization that memory flexibility is not forever. And there may also appear fear of having forgotten something vitally important to oneself. The threat of forgetting starts to haunt an old person. In her article “The Embodiment of Memory (and Forgetting) in Beckett’s Late Women Plays”, Antonia Rodriguez-Gago presents Vives’ ideas on forgetting and applies them to Beckett’s aging characters:

“Vive’s ideas on forgetting, or misremembering, may sound very postmodern and his description of the problems old people have to remember certainly recalls the way Beckett’s old characters perceive and enact memory and it also echoes their impatient and continuous searching for someone or something they are unable to find and, therefore, their narrations are often left unfinished, and their images remain veiled or fragmented.” (2003: 9)

When the elderly people start forgetting names and places, this may be a symptom of the episodic memory failure. Episodic memory forms part of ABM, thus failure of this type of memory affects the chronological order of our past events and attributes to the discontinuity of self.

“Los recuerdos episódicos están normalmente relacionados con un lugar y un momento específicos, y a menudo incluyen una representación de uno mismo como participante u observador.” (Fillenbaum 1973: 78)

**Misattribution** is also frequent with Beckett’s characters, when they assign a memory to the wrong source, thus mixing real event with a fantasy. Winnie is prone to

this. In Act II, Winnie speaks in detail of little Mildred who was frightened by a mouse when she was playing with her doll one morning (163, 165). It is very uncertain whether her narrative is fictitious or belongs to her own past, since Winnie's physical appearance onstage parallels that of a doll: both wear a pearl necklace and a hat, and their eyes open and close (163).

**Absent-mindedness** is another of the symptoms of memory failure; it involves a breakdown at the interface between attention and memory. Here I could provide an example of Estragon, who does not recognize his own boots, left onstage in Act I:

**Estragon:** They're not mine.

**Vladimir:** [*Stupefied.*] Not yours!

**Estragon:** Mine were black. These are brown.

**Vladimir:** You're sure yours were black?

**Estragon:** Well, they were a kind of grey.

**Vladimir:** And these are brown? Show.

**Estragon:** [*Picking up a boot.*] Well, they're a kind of green. (63)

Estragon's uncertainty about the colour of his own boots is obvious, may be due to the lack of attention towards his items of footwear; or maybe to create more uncertainty about their meeting place.

All these symptoms of memory failure have to do with the weakening of STM (short-term memory) of the elderly people. In Beckett's plays, his characters are routine-trapped, their "yesterdays" are the same as "todays" and "tomorrows", since nothing exciting happens. This uneventfulness only contributes to the blurring of their present with their past. Besides, with the failure of attention, they are unable to record the present happenings. Time itself becomes insignificant for them. Hamm, for example, asks: "What month are we?" (124). By this, Beckett creates the sense of time lapse or total suspension. Duration itself is represented only through continuous movement and by present continuous tenses. These convert his characters into ghosts of the past or simple entities – containers of their fading memories.

"For Bergson, it is memory that permits the existence of consciousness, in turn, supports the idea of self, but in a state of constant becoming. The self is itself memory, and is thus

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experimented as a spatialized break in the flow of *durée*, at each instant presents a new image of self to consciousness.” (Gontarski 1993: 100)

In Beckett’s theatre, his characters are unable to constitute present selves due to their faded STM, absence of attention and the lack of the perception of time. Kozdon attributes forgetting to dullness: “According to Freud, forgetting is a cause to dullness which must be revealed in psychoanalysis: you try to avoid dullness by forgetting whatever is unpleasant or irritating to you” (2005: 16). I would even go further and suggest that Beckett’s characters may experience the sense of shame due to the loss of their identities and memory. Thus, they seek refuge in the time they still remember. Nagg and Nell, for example, remember the episode when they “crashed and lost their shanks” on the road to Sedan (100). This memory makes them laugh. Winnie also remembers her first ball, though she cannot remember the name of a certain Mr Johnston or Johnstone, though she vividly recollects his “tawny moustache” (142-43), etc. Obviously, the selectivity of memories in the elderly people has to do with the landmarks of their ABM. They tend to remember the events that changed their personalities in their youth, due to strong storage processes and constant repetition. However, these recollections sometimes are difficult to reproduce because of the failure of language and the sins of omission.

Besides, with the failure of memory, there is also the failure of language, which makes it too difficult a task to remember. Words also cease to provide meaning, an example of that could be Lucky’s speech in *WFG*. Furthermore, memory in Beckett’s characters is also fragmented and comes in flashbacks and the chronological order of ABM is not preserved. For example, the voices (ABC) do not come in chronological succession to the Listener’s head in *That Time*.

The important thing to mention here is that memories are sometimes triggered by the onstage objects in Beckett’s characters. The elderly people rely on their personal possessions, since they form part of their daily routines and help them to remember. Laura Kamptner points out the importance of objects for the old people:

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“Possessions function to maintain one’s sense of self by being concrete reminders of experiences, events, roles, relationships, and values that are important components of one’s lifelong sense of self.” (1989: 175)

Objects become symbols of their past, and manipulation with them as well as telling stories about them gives a sense of security to the elderly, the objects remind them of their past youth and prove their existence. The most vivid example of this, that I have found in Beckett’s plays, is Winnie’s bag. Winnie gladly manipulates the objects from her bag and comments upon them. For example, her gun, Browning, makes her remember the day when Willie wanted to shoot himself (151). This memory is unpleasant, and Winnie puts it away in disgust and then she turns to her bag as provider of diversion and movement.

“There is of course the bag. [*Looking at the bag.*] The bag. [*Back front.*] Could I enumerate its contents? [*Pause.*] No. [*Pause.*] Could I, if some kind person were to come along and ask, What have you all got in that big black bag, Winnie? Give an exhaustive answer? [*Pause.*] No. [*Pause.*] The depths in particular, who knows what treasures. [*Pause.*] What comforts. [*Turns to look at the bag.*] Yes, there is the bag. [*Back front.*] But something tells me, Do not overdo the bag, Winnie, make use of it of course, let it help you ... along, when stuck, by all means, but cast your mind forward, Winnie, to the time when words must fail – [*She closes the eyes, pause, opens the eyes.*] and do not overdo the bag.” (151)

“A big, black bag” may be understood on a metaphorical level in this play. Since the objects she picks up from her bag trigger her memories, both pleasant and unpleasant, and bring about an emotional response, the bag in itself may be taken for an aging memory. On the one hand, Winnie’s bag seems fathomless, and on the other hand, even she is unaware of its real content. The objects are picked at random; Winnie cannot select the objects she wants at the moment, so their choice is totally dependent on chance. Nevertheless, Winnie is afraid to “overdo” the bag, probably, because there are some objects that may alter her Self or she is afraid that her bag may disappear one day and she will be unable to use it. Besides, the colour of the bag is black, so there may be a certain connection with the subconscious.

Another “sin” of aging memory is *bias*, which reflects the powerful influence of our current knowledge or beliefs on how we remember the past, it has to do with our



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changed attitude towards an event from our memory. It may be the signal of a transformed former identity and distancing oneself from the past.

“We do not record our experiences the way a camera records them. Our memories work differently. We extract key elements from our experiences and store them. We then recreate or reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them. Sometimes, in the process of reconstructing we add feelings, beliefs, or even knowledge we obtained after the experience. In other words, we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them emotions or knowledge we acquired after the event.” (Schacter 2001: 9)

An example of bias in Beckett’s theatre may be Krapp’s attitude to his former selves. The fact that called my attention is that Krapp uses the third person pronouns when he refers to his former selves. Rolf Breuer discusses this paradox in Krapp:

“On the one hand, there is one Krapp who is present in three phases of his life; on the other hand, there are three Krapps. Krapp himself is aware of this conflicting nature of things, for sometimes he speaks of himself in the first person and sometimes in the third person (for example, p. 218). In the one case he understands himself as one Self in three phases, in the other case he understands himself as three Selves.” (1993: 564-5)

And the last “sin” of memory, discussed by Schacter, is *persistence*, which has a lot to do with trauma and repressed memories. Persistence entails repeated recall of disturbing information or events that we would prefer to banish from our minds altogether: remembering what we cannot forget, even though we wish that we could.

“Traumatic memories can be so overwhelming that it is only natural to try to avoid reexperiencing them. Paradoxically, however, attempting to avoid remembering a trauma may only increase the long-term likelihood of persistently remembering it.” (Schacter 2001: 10)

I have already provided the example of the revolver from *Happy Days*. The situation of pure curiosity leads Winnie to remember something, which she has been repressing, and on finding this memory, her exclamation “You again” (151) proves that this memory is recurring in her mind. Besides, she obstinately refuses to call the revolver by its name, first she refers to it as “thing” and then as “Browning”, which may be both the label of the revolver, or the name of the Victorian poet, Robert Browning, or

Elizabeth Browning, who was an invalid by birth. Another quality of the revolver is its weight, which may be understood also on a metonymical level, since repressed memories are difficult to face and to sustain. Moreover, a revolver may have sexual connotations. In his book *The Trauma of Birth* (1961), Otto Rank related arms and weapons not only to masculine genital organs, but also to men's authority:

“Una multitud de inventos aspiran a reforzar la autoridad paterna, así como ciertas manifestaciones de la civilización, que ya conocemos, aspiran a asegurar de continuo la protección contra la madre. Se trata, más particularmente, de las invenciones de útiles y de armas, que por su forma imitan, unas y otras, al órgano sexual masculino, destinado, mucho tiempo antes de toda civilización, en virtud de la evolución biológica, a penetrar en la frágil materia femenina (madre).“ (1961: 96)

Consequently, the revolver as such may be a constant reminder of Winnie's repressed memories and of her being deprived of love-making given her situation.

Another example of persistence may be found in *Endgame*. Although this memory is never mentioned by Hamm, the results of it are projected into his relationship with Clov. The memory, I am interested in, is told by Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, and though presented in a comical form; the memory is deeply disturbing, since it has to do with child's neglect. When Hamm as a baby used to be frightened at night, Nagg and Nell let him cry and put him out of earshot so that he didn't disturb their sleep (119). This memory is deeply buried in Hamm's mind, but visible hostility towards his parents is evident in the play. Hamm reproaches them for having fathered him and Nagg states that he would have never done this if he had known it would be Hamm (116). Furthermore, both parents' figures are kept in ashbins; Clov takes care of them and opens the bins on Hamm's order; and there is no physical contact between Hamm and his progenitors. Nagg and Nell in a certain sense may represent Hamm's repressed memories kept in shut containers and his reluctance to speak of his childhood, since they are Nagg and Nell who enlighten the audience on their son's childhood.

To sum up this section, I would like to say that aging may be considered as trauma, since it is accompanied by a certain loss of identity and Self, due to fading

memory and degenerating bodies. The fading of episodic memory, consequently ABM, and implicit memory, affects one's perception of Self. "The failure of memory results from the failure of being" (2008: 22), writes D. Anderson in his dissertation. And it is true to some extent with the elderly people.

Another type of trauma I want to dwell upon is **the trauma of failure**, which is quite evident in Beckett's work. I believe that this trauma has to do with several major aspects of his drama: the absurdity of his dramatic world, the loneliness of his characters, the impossibility to love and to be loved and the failure of language to present experiences, especially those of suffering. As the result of this trauma, Beckett's characters withdraw from the world, finding shelter in their everyday routines, or/and shutting themselves in their rooms (*Endgame, KLT, Eh Joe*). They do not consider that the future holds something good for them. No special plans for tomorrow are made with the exception, perhaps in *WFG*, Didi and Gogo make an appointment with Godot by the tree to continue their fruitless "waiting". Beckett's characters are not looking forward to the future, just the opposite, they are always looking back.

Success is impossible in the absurd world created by this playwright, a world that was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophic ideas.

"I am reading Schopenhauer [...] But I am not reading philosophy, nor caring whether he is right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician. An intellectual definition of unhappiness – the greatest that have ever been attempted - is worth the examination of one who is interested in Leopardi and Proust rather than Carducci and Barrés." (from Beckett's correspondence with Tom McGreevy. Qted. in MacDonald Brown's dissertation "Yesterday's Deformities. A Discussion of the Role of Memory and Discourse in the Plays of Samuel Beckett" 2005: 10)

Life according to Schopenhauer could only be seen as a tragedy:

"... if we survey it as a whole and in general [...] But gone through in detail, it has a character of a comedy. For the deeds and vexations of the day, the restless irritation of the moment, the desires and fears of the week, the mishaps of every hour, are all through chance, which is ever bent upon some jest, scenes of a comedy. But the never-satisfied wishes, the frustrated efforts, the hopes unmercifully crushed by fate, the unfortunate errors of the whole life, with increasing suffering and death at the end, are always a tragedy. Thus,

as if fate would add derision to the misery of existence, our life must contain all the woes of tragedy, and yet we cannot even assert the dignity of tragic characters, but in the broad detail of life must inevitably be the foolish characters of a comedy.” (Edman 1982: 58)

Schopenhauer’s particular characterization of the world as will and representation is also frightening and pandemonic: he maintains that the world as it is in itself (sometimes he crucially adds, “for us”) is an endless striving and blinding impulse with no end in view, devoid of knowledge, lawless, absolutely free, entirely self-determining and almighty. “You’re on earth, there’s no cure for that!” (126), says Hamm. Within Schopenhauer’s vision of the world as will, there is no God to be comprehended, and the world is conceived of as being utterly meaningless. Life is also presented as meaningless in Beckett’s plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, Didi and Gogo want to repent of having “been born”. In *Endgame*, Hamm declares that “the end is in the beginning and yet you go on” (127).

Being in the world is presented by Beckett as a condition of eternal frustration and suffering, as an endless striving for nothing in particular. It is a world far beyond any labels of good and evil. Hopelessness and fruitless struggle at the end leads to habit and boredom, which “must be considered as the most tolerable because the most durable of human evils” (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 28). Beckett’s characters are not heroes, thus, they submit to the absurdity of their existence, and fill their lives with meaningless routines to pass the time and feel themselves alive: Krapp is listening to his tapes, Hamm is telling stories, Didi and Gogo are waiting, etc. Nevertheless, all of them “go on”.

No wonder, the characters in Beckett’s plays do not know what to do, they are bored with their whole existence and only want to “kill the time” the best they can. In *Endgame*, the life of Clov and Hamm is grey, based on certain ritual actions such as looking through the window with a magnifying glass, asking for pain-killers, telling stories, etc. And in the boredom of their existence some of Beckett’s characters blame their surroundings and are longing to change their lives and escape.

“The dramatic discourse of home is articulated through two main principles, which structure the plot as well as the plays’ accounts of subjectivity and identity: a victimage of

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location and a heroism of departure. The former principle defines place as the protagonist's fundamental problem, leading her or him to a recognition of the need for (if not an actual enactment of) the latter." (Chaudhuri 1997: XXI)

Place as a problem is a recurrent feature in Beckett's drama. His characters are never comfortable in their environment. The concept of a comfortable home is absent. I believe that Willie in *Happy Days* is willing to leave his "home" or to escape his miserable life. Clov tries to leave Hamm's house at the end of *Endgame*, though the audience will never know whether he manages to leave or not, due to the inconclusiveness of the final tableau. Sometimes this desire to leave is bound with the absurd in Beckett's drama, as some of his characters not only want to escape from the stage - but to vanish forever as M, W1, and W2 in *Play*. Unfortunately, his characters are unable to leave, and have to be there: onstage victims of their environment. "There is nothing funnier than unhappiness" (101), says Nell in *Endgame*. The failure to leave affects/lowers their self-esteem, since we want to forget or repress the situation, when we perform poorly.

Another feature that contributes to the trauma of failure is loneliness of Beckett's characters. In *Play*, this solitude and lack of contact come to an extreme: though the urns are touching one another, the characters are not aware of the other characters' presence on stage. W2 from *Play* asks the same question: "Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?" (314).

Another technique that Beckett uses to show solitude is to have only one character in many of his plays such as *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Eh Joe*, *Footfalls*, *Rockaby*. Beckett thinks that "every human being is condemned to irremediable solitude" (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 63) and so each one of his characters has to suffer alone in this world. As an attempt to "fight" this loneliness, his characters try to conjure other voices, or invent stories, or interact with objects of their environment.

Another reason for his characters' loneliness is the impossibility of possession in love. It is common thinking that when in love two people are united and can understand each other; love can make a person complete, and love can inspire great deeds; love

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gives a person hope for the future. In Beckett's plays, love can only coexist with dissatisfaction and, consequently, with suffering. His characters are doomed to loneliness, and there is no remedy for it.

Lack of understanding is another of the features of Beckett's characters. Even when there are two or more characters onstage, there are unable or unwilling to understand each other. For instance, when Vladimir wakes Estragon up, because he feels lonely:

**Estragon:** [*restored to the horror of his situation.*] I was asleep! [*Despairingly.*] Why will you never let me sleep?

**Vladimir:** I felt lonely.

**Estragon:** I had a dream.

**Vladimir:** Don't tell me!

**Estragon:** I dreamt that—

**Vladimir:** DON'T TELL ME!

**Estragon:** [*Gesture toward the universe.*] This one is enough for you? [*Silence.*] It's not nice of you, Didi. **Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?**

**Vladimir:** Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that.

**Estragon:** [*Coldly.*] There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us to part.

(17)

Estragon is not happy with the fact of being woken up by Didi, who was in need of his company. In return, Estragon wants to tell his nightmares instead of listening to his companion. Unfortunately, we never know about the content of his nightmares. But, Vladimir is not interested or simply afraid to listen to them. On the one hand, Vladimir represents rational side in this play, thus "nightmares" for him are just irrational nonsense. But on the other hand, he is not willing to communicate with Estragon or to learn something painful and unpleasant since nightmares are characteristic of troubled psyche, and point to repressed memories. It is evident that there is failure of understanding and communication between them. That is the reason why Estragon's feelings are hurt and he suggests parting, although it may be a simple threat, since he always comes back.

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Furthermore, there is no special hint in Beckett's texts to the professions of his characters; they seem to be totally uprooted from society's roles. His characters do not speak about their past ambitions and occupations, only Krapp mentions his failure as a writer. Feelings of neglect and rejection lead to the trauma of failure. The major failure that all Beckett's characters seem to have is the failure of ending: "And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to ... to end" (93), says Hamm in *Endgame*. All of them are craving for eternal silence and verbal void, which are impossible to achieve. Beckett's characters equate silence and darkness with non-existence:

"and were the voice to cease quite at last, the old ceasing voice, it would not be true, as it is not true that it speaks, it can't speak, it can't cease." (Beckett *Texts for Nothing* 1995: 154)

"you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on." (Beckett *The Unnamable* 1958: 414)

All Beckett's characters are placed in a difficult situation and try to "go on" as best as they can. So death does not claim Beckett's characters, and the playwright denies them the right to commit suicide: Didi and Gogo try to hang themselves, but in vain, the bough won't support their weight (18-9). So his characters exist on stage or in his novels, haunted by the ghosts of their fading memories.

This inevitably leads us to another type of trauma: **the trauma of birth** (Otto Rank 1961) and its opposite **the presymbolic dread** and **the trauma of death**. I am going to discuss the trauma of birth, according to Otto Rank's work. There is clear evidence that Samuel Beckett has read Rank as Knowlson stated in *Damned to Fame* (1997: 178).

"Parece que el sentimiento de angustia primitivo que acompaña el nacimiento y cuya actividad se manifiesta durante toda la vida hasta la muerte, que separa el individuo de esta segunda madre en que se ha convertido para él el mundo exterior, es desde el comienzo, no una simple expresión de trastornos fisiológicos (dificultades respiratorias, estrechez, angustia) sufridos por el recién nacido, sino que adquiere un carácter afectivo, en el sentido psíquico del término, como consecuencia de la transformación de una situación voluptuosa al máximo en una situación en exceso penosa." (Rank 1961:169-170)

Trauma for Rank is present in every person's life since the moment of birth. "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries"(84), says Vladimir in *WFG*, thus uniting both traumas of birth and death. In *The Trauma of Birth*, Otto Rank points out an extremely painful moment of a child on leaving the mother's womb, which is associated with pain, separation and even seeing the light. The first symptom that he dwells upon is the anxiety of breathing. The memory of breathing, obviously belongs to our implicit memory, since no one teaches us how to breathe (this information is genetically encoded in our brain), nevertheless, we are born with this breathing anxiety and even in our adult life, this fear may resurrect, especially after some lung diseases. "Breathing" may be substituted by "living", the theme of Beckett's short play *Breath*. As soon as a man is born he/she is old enough to die:

*"2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.*

*3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold about five seconds."*  
(369)

This short play stages the essence and brevity of every man's life. Framed by silence and crying, it only points to two painful moments of birth and death, as well as to suffering. The scene "littered with miscellaneous rubbish" (369) only emphasizes the absurdity of coming into existence.

Beckett commented about one of his experiences connected with his childhood memories at a session with Wilfred Bion:

"I used to lie down on the couch and try to go back in my past... I think it helped me at least to control the panic. I certainly came with extraordinary memories of being in a womb. Intrauterine memories. I remember feeling trapped, of being imprisoned and unable to escape, of crying to be let out but no one could hear, no one was listening. I remember being in pain but being unable to do anything about it. I used to go back to my digs and write notes on what had happened, on what I'd come up with..." (Knowlson 1997: 177)



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According to Freud, some memories may be engraved in a human's brain and repressed for a very long time, there is a certain difficulty on their retrieval, but their authenticity should not be doubted. The above quote may be one of these memories. Beckett explains with vivid clarity the trauma of birth: its pain, insecurity, helplessness, and the sensation of being trapped.

Following Otto Rank's theory, I would like to dwell upon the light/darkness phenomenon in relation to the trauma of birth, which becomes vitally important in Beckett's theatre. On being born our eyes start to perceive light, which is symbolically negative for Rank, while darkness is positive. This idea confronts the general symbolism of light and darkness. According to Rank, coming into the world is suffering and loss, and even darkness is comfortable and pleasant, since it is linked with protection and security. To provide evidence for this, Rank quotes Nietzsche's ideas, which are parallel to Schopenhauer's philosophy.

“El criterio correcto que debe servir de base al juicio que formulamos sobre cada hombre es éste: el hombre es, hablando propiamente, un ser que no debería existir, pero que expía su existencia con sufrimiento de todo género y con la muerte. ¿Qué puede esperarse de un ser tal? ¿No somos todos pecadores condenados a muerte? Expiamos nuestra existencia con la vida primeramente, y después con la muerte.” (Nietzsche, qted in Rank 1961: 154-55)

Therefore, Rank associates darkness with a cosy warm maternal womb/uterus. And light, with the painful trauma of separation from the mother's body. In reference to this idea, many of Beckett's characters, for instance in *Play*, are complaining of light and are craving for darkness. And Krapp says that “with all this darkness around me I feel less alone” (217). Although darkness, meaning lack of “light”, is not the solution for them. Hamm in *Endgame*, who is in darkness, since he is blind, talks about “his darkness” as a disadvantage and constantly asks Clov to report to him any changes in the “outside”.

This autumn (2009), I went to see *Fin de Partida* in “El teatro de la puerta estrecha” (Madrid). The play was directed by Rodolfo Cortizo and quite surprisingly the actors who played Hamm and Clov were women. But the thing that really attracted my attention was the peculiar lighting onstage. Hamm was set in the centre of the stage,

wearing dark sunglasses. There was a lamp above Hamm's head, which produced dim light. Thus, Hamm was illuminated from above, and the vision created was of an exhibit at the museum. Paradoxically, Hamm, complaining of his blindness was the one who received this don of light. Hamm, in contrast to the majority of Beckett's characters, is craving for his sight or light, and he is denied it all the time. But in this production, the light was always there above him: his head was bathing in light during all the performance. So the darkness desired by Beckett's characters is something different just to the absence of light. They are craving for the comfort of non-existence, or for the security of mother's womb.

Another reason for the trauma of birth is the separation from the mother. The mother-figure for nine months gives a baby security, food and warmth: all physical needs are sated in the intrauterine form. Besides, the mother is the major referent for the child during his/her infancy. The British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion theorized about how mother's 'thinking ability' ('alpha elements'), "could contain and process the raw material, the so called "beta elements", the undirected anxieties and sensations of the infant, and hand them back translated into manageable feelings to the baby" (Mitchell J. 1998: 96). Consequently, a person develops a very strong link with his mother, and depends on her both physically and emotionally. Mother attachment, which, on the one hand, rests on the protection given by the mother (womb), on the other hand, is due to the fear of her, caused ultimately by the trauma of birth (Rank 1961: 90).

Rank suggests that during the whole life a human being has a "return-to-mother" desire, which may be demonstrated in his games, his envy and at the same time feeling of guilt towards the father, in his enjoyment of libido "infant" functions, such as sucking, eating, defecation, even sleep becomes something desirable, since it may be associated with pre-natal situation. Games, such as hide-and-seek, or rhythmical games of hopping and swinging; "simply represent the rhythm felt in the embryonic state"<sup>74</sup>. Beckett's characters are quite fond of playing onstage, for example Vladimir and Estragon "do the tree", Winnie plays with her objects taking them from and then putting them into the bag, and the essence of return is inscribed in Beckett's *Come and Go*, where three female characters continuously exchange their places onstage talking

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

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secretly to one another about the other's imminent death as a consequence of a disease. Hamm (*Endgame*) even goes further and returns his own parents, Nagg and Nell, to a pre-natal situation, accommodating them in two closed containers, which may resemble wombs. Moreover, Hamm's parents' behaviour is purely infantile: their only preoccupations are with food, and they enjoy sucking on a biscuit, and with the change of sawdust. And *Rockaby* is actually based on the rhythmic movement of the rocking chair, which resembles the comforting lulling movement inside the womb. The spotlight, which is at first directed on the old woman's face, in the duration of the play is "swaying [her face] in and out of light" (432), as though returning her to the pleasurable darkness of the non-existence of mother's womb. And at the end of the play the final fade out returns the whole figure to the darkness. Her desire to join her mother is granted to her:

“rock her off  
stop her eyes  
fuck life  
stop her yes  
rock her off  
rock her off [*Together: echo of 'rock her off', coming to rest of rock, slow fade out.*]”  
(442)

Paradoxically in the trauma of birth, death is pleasurable *per se*. I think that Beckett's characters' relation with “death” or “extinguishing” is better understood through Rank's theory. Otto Rank bases his explanation on the fact already pointed out by Freud, who noticed that children refer to “dead people” as temporarily absent or separated, that leads us again to the trauma of birth. A child accepts “death” consciously, but on a subconscious level he identifies it with the primal separation from his mother. Thus, death is seen as a kind of another return to the mother or to the mother's womb.

Rank points out that funeral ceremonies have a special importance in every culture; the burial of a person itself is symbolic, since the dead person is laid into a coffin; which in many ways resembles an “artificial” mother's womb (small, dark). In Greek culture, urns were used for burial, and this was used by Beckett in *Play*, and the ashbins in *Endgame*, though similar to urns, are a more comical image of the mother's

womb, since they have to do with “rubbish”. Rank also states that the trauma of loss forms part of the trauma of birth:

“Cuando se pierde a una persona próxima, cualquiera que sea su sexo, esta separación despierta el recuerdo de la separación inicial de la madre; a la tarea dolorosa, que consiste en desprender la libido de esta persona, cuya expresión ha reconocido Freud en el duelo, corresponde a una repetición psíquica del trauma del nacimiento.” (Rank 1961: 37)

The trauma of loss may be accompanied both by mourning, and by the feeling of envy, since the dead person has “returned”. With every loss, there is a repetition of the trauma of separation, and since we have to live through many deaths of the people we love, the trauma of birth takes on a circular quality. The agonizing circularity of birth-death brings on continuous anxiety in a person.

“Parece que el sentimiento de angustia primitivo que acompaña el nacimiento y cuya actividad se manifiesta durante toda la vida hasta la muerte, que separa el individuo de esta segunda madre en que se ha convertido para él el mundo exterior, es desde el comienzo, no una simple expresión de trastornos fisiológicos (dificultades respiratorias, estrechez, angustia) sufridos por el recién nacido, sino que adquiere un carácter afectivo, en el sentido psíquico del término, como consecuencia de la transformación de una situación voluptuosa al máximo en una situación en exceso penosa.”<sup>75</sup>

Consequently, the fear of death has to do with the fear of the pain and anxiety of the process of being born. Beckett’s plays take this agonizing circular pattern of the trauma of birth. The “circle” as a form, is present in his theatre, this has been discussed by many critics, such as Worth, Gontarski, Ben-Zvi, etc. It is created through language repetitions, actions, and the use of the Present Continuous tense. In *WFG*, for example, Act II is a repetition with variations of Act I. In *Play*, the sound of the voices starts before the rise of the curtain and continues after its fall, etc. All these create the continuity of the trauma of birth in life. Although death, since it is connected with birth, is also present onstage. Hamm, for example, hails death: “It will be the end and there I’ll be, wondering what can have brought it on and wondering what can have [*He hesitates.*] ...why it was so long coming” (126).

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 169-70.

Many of Beckett's characters also think that birth was the death for them: "Birth was the death of him. Again. Words are few. Dying too. Birth was the death of him. Ghastly grinning ever since. Up at the lid to come. In cradle and crib" (*A Piece of Monologue*, 425). Beckett creates images of death visually and lyrically in his theatre. The image of the three characters in urns, planted in darkness (*Play*) is a visual example of death and its negation. Beckett wrote in *Proust*, that "the negation of time and Death, the negation of Death because the negation of Time. Death is dead because time is dead" (1931: 75). And he presents death as something prolonged through the existence of human beings, however, at the same time death "would be a termination but not a conclusion"<sup>76</sup>. His characters in *Play* are presumably dead and vanishing in front of the eyes of the audience. They are sinking deeper and deeper inside their tombs, and their faces have acquired the material quality of the urns. Nevertheless, they still continue to be.

This playwright recreates onstage a libido condition, similar to a mother's womb, which gives his characters false feeling of security and control over their lives. Living is dying slowly and painfully in every Beckett's play. "Death" association is evoked through language, visual images, his characters' immobility, music, stage physical language and silences. "The whole universe stinks of corpses" (114), says Hamm. I will deal with "death" images in Beckett's plays in Chapters II, III, IV, V and VI.

In conclusion, I would like to state that memory and trauma are "protagonists" in Beckett's plays. Old age and the fading of memory only contribute to the discussed traumas. Since trauma leads to the fragmentation of memory, omissions and disruption of personality, Beckett creates an interesting scope of characters to analyse. The major types of personal traumas are present in his plays: the trauma of birth/death, the trauma of aging, the trauma of failure, the trauma of loss and mourning. Hereinafter I will discuss his plays in detail in connection with these traumas.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 68.



## **CHAPTER II**

# **Painful Memory Spaces: In the Womb/Tomb of a Room**





## CHAPTER II

### Painful Memory Spaces: In the Womb/Tomb of a Room

The stage language will be the matter of discussion in this chapter. I will focus my analysis on the memory space/*locus* of a room in Samuel Beckett's theatre. The room as setting is always the traumatized images' container in Beckett's theatre, which makes it interesting for the analysis in relation to different types of trauma. The room can be related to a character on a very private level. Besides, as the room is a closed space, having walls as frontiers, it can reflect such features as imprisonment, or shelter. For all its convincing realism, the room also has all enveloping, claustrophobic psychic climate, especially when characters' movements are restricted by the room boundaries. Moreover, when a character imprisons himself inside the room, he isolates himself from the outer world and presents catatonic symptoms that point to neuroses or trauma. Beckett creates out of those rooms a painful childhood home, which contains his characters' nightmares, obsessions and inner conflicts. The room as setting was chosen by Beckett in four of his plays: *Eleutheria*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Eh Joe*<sup>77</sup>.

The plays selected for further analysis are *Endgame* (1957) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). In the first section of the current chapter, I will analyse *Endgame* in relation to the trauma of separation and the progenitor's guilt. The elements for my further analysis will be the room itself, props, "behavioural re-enactments", or recurrent blockings that point to this trauma; and finally, I will end my discussion with the analysis of Hamm's "chronicle" in relation to the trauma of the progenitor's guilt.

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<sup>77</sup> *Eh Joe* will be analysed in Chapter IV in relation to the multiplicity of traumatic voices. Nevertheless, a room, as staging, will be discussed briefly in the abovementioned chapter.

*Krapp's Last Tape*, analysed in the second section, is also staged in a room, but it is different from *Endgame*, since there is only one actor onstage. So the catatonic symptoms are taken to an extreme there. The character is left face-to-face with his own self/ves and memory. So, I will base my discussion on Krapp's turning points or chronological landmarks of his memory and the presence of different and separate selves onstage. The trauma of loss and failure will be the core issue of my analysis. Moreover, the objects in this play are analysed as potential memory-triggers.

## **2.1. *Endgame*: The Trauma of Filial Guilt and Separation**

### **2.1.1. Stage Characteristics: a Concept of Painful Home**

It is impossible to discuss trauma in *Endgame* without stage analysis, since Beckett already makes the initial tableau pregnant with the potential of painful memories. This room is actually Hamm's home, where he presumably has lived all his life. For instance, "bare interior" could point to affection-less childhood and austere upbringing. Thus, this room, no matter how bare it is, may contain some of his memories and it may be a potential memory trigger.

*"Bare interior.*

*Grey Light. Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn.*

*Front right, a door. Hanging near door, its face to wall, a picture.*

*Front left, touching each other, covered with an old sheet, two ashbins.*

*Centre, in an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet, Hamm.*

*Motionless by the door, his eyes fixed on Hamm, Clov. Very red face.*

*Brief tableau." (92)*

This is the initial tableau that the audience see, the play is set indoors. Many critics emphasize its resemblance to a skull<sup>78</sup>. Consequently, Ruben Rabinovitz claims that Beckett's protagonists can be interpreted as thoughts, impulses, fantasies and

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<sup>78</sup> Brienza 1982. "Imagination Dead Imagine: The Microcosm of the Mind". *Journal of Beckett's Studies*, 8: 61-75.

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memories<sup>79</sup> (1987: 59). For example, Rabinovitz suggests that Nagg and Nell may personify repressed memories, thus they are kept in closed containers; and when Hamm orders Clov to “chuck it in the sea!” (103), actually, he wants to get rid of this type of memory. And we, as audience, are invited into the deeper world of characters’ psyche. Paul Lawley states:

“It needs to be emphasized that the central image of *Endgame*, resonant and pregnant as it is, has for its origin and core a particular psychological condition, of which the skull-like appearance of the stage-picture serves as a permanent and teasing reminder. The play presents the end of the mind in apocalyptic terms.” (1979: 49)

Moreover, the stage itself presents mind and memory in ruins. Onstage everything is running out. But the scarcity of objects only bares what lies underneath: the skull or the unresolved conflicts and repressed, entombed memories, of the characters’ (Hamm and Clov’s) past.

Ruby Cohn points out the apocalyptic reference as well, and parallels it to crucifixion. She suggests that the crucifixion is present not only through the names of the characters (a hammer and three nails<sup>80</sup>), but in the initial tableau as well: Hamm’s face is covered by a handkerchief with blood, which may be taken for a veronica. Furthermore, the two windows opening on the sea and the earth may have the resonations with the Book of Revelations. Like two witnesses<sup>81</sup>, Hamm and Clov are condemned to await the arrival of the two beasts: one from the sea and another from the earth (Book of Revelation 13). In Hamm and Clov’s case, the “beasts” are not coming in the form of monsters, as both characters have their private immaterial “beasts”, which are their memories devouring them alive.

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<sup>79</sup> Rabinovitz 1987. “The Self Contained: Beckett’s Fiction in the 1960s” in Acheson and Arthur (eds.) *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*. Houndmills: McMillan.

<sup>80</sup> “Hamm a truncated Hammer, French *clou* or Clov, German *Nagel*, abridged to Nagg, and Nell punning on English *nail*.” (Cohn 2001: 226)

<sup>81</sup> Revelation 11 introduces two witnesses, who are described as “the two olive trees and the two lamp that stand before the Lord of the earth”. They will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronology\\_of\\_Revelation#The\\_Two\\_Witnesses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronology_of_Revelation#The_Two_Witnesses), consulted 7.11.2010)

A characteristic, which only emphasizes this psychological state of entombment, is the contrast between the inside and the outside. The only view to the outside is permitted through two small “high-up” windows, which are opened only by Clov. Though to access them Clov needs a ladder. The outside is devastated and still: no waves, no wind, and “corpsed” (106). Thus, the room may actually be a basement or a shelter, half under the ground, “we are down in the hole” (111), says Hamm. That may mean that the characters are practically buried in earth or entombed alive, the references to “earth” being various in the text. The stage environment goes in parallel with the state of their “authentic”/natural memories, the traces of which are hidden underneath the solid rock of their everyday routines.

The walls are the fragile frontier between the outside (Hamm: “outside here it’s death” (96)) and Hamm refers to inside as “Old wall! [*Pause.*] Beyond is the other hell. [*Pause. Violently.*] Closer! Closer!...” (104). It seems that for Hamm, the landscape of hell is present everywhere, both in the outside and in the inside. Hellish outside may be mirrored by the traumatic inside, and though sheltered, neither Hamm nor Clov can find a way to escape their memories.

Hamm has a strange relation with the outside. He is interested whether there are any changes in the horizon, but at the same time he gets agitated talking about it. He tries to experience the outside world from inside, e.g. feel the sun on his face from the open window. But the outside is alien to him:

**Hamm:** I was never there. [*Pause.*] Clov!

**Clov:** [*Turning towards Hamm, exasperated.*] What is it?

**Hamm:** I was never there.

**Clov:** Lucky you. [*He looks out of the window.*]

**Hamm:** Absent, always. It all happened without me. I do not know what’s happened.

[*Pause.*] Do you know what’s happened? [*Pause.*] Clov!

**Clov:** [*Turning towards Hamm, exasperated.*] Do you want me to look at this muckheap, yes or no?

**Hamm:** Answer me first.

**Clov:** What?

**Hamm:** Do you know what’s happened?

**Clov:** When? Where?

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**Hamm:** [*Violently.*] When! What's happened? Use your head, can't you! What has happened?

**Clov:** What for Christ's sake does it matter? (128)

Presumably, Hamm does not know or pretends that he is unaware of what happened outside or this memory is blanked because of its traumatic nature. But his confession "I was never there" points to the nature of repressed memories, as in the run of the play, he remembers how the outside used to be. So either he is lying, or he is stubbornly refusing to admit what actually happened, or there are gaps in his memory. It seems that Clov tries to avoid answering this question, since "when" and "where" are empty words in their remaining world. All days are the same and "where" may refer only to their already entombed world with no exit so far. Nevertheless, the spatial *locus* of the room does not allow the characters to forget about what has happened; presumably, the action takes place after some kind of devastation. This event is not mentioned in the play, but there are various references to the death of nature and death of all human beings on earth, although, the characters avoid this topic of conversation. This trauma is only inscribed in the physical stage language. Austere decoration of the room, scarce physical contact between the characters, seclusion due to the absence of an exit, two small windows high above the stage, etc. – these elements give me reasons to develop the idea of painful memories which are engraved in this kind of stage-space.

Beckett stressed that there should be only one door, leading to Clov's kitchen (Worth 1999: 35). The kitchen is off-stage and it is Clov's dominium: "Ten feet by ten feet by ten feet.... Nice dimensions. Nice proportions" (Clov, 93). It is the place where Clov goes, "to look at the wall" and think, and also to chase and kill the rat. The existence of only one door makes me think, that there is actually no way out of this room, "family room", so all Clov's intentions to leave are fruitless or just another type of a game, or a false threat. Consequently, there is no escape from their room nor from their situation of dependence. So, this room has a claustrophobic and ghastly quality. Worth calls this room "one of his most haunting spaces" (1999: 34). And it creates an all-enveloping psychic climate, since "there is an oppressive impact from the unvarying grey light and the refusal to ordinary comfort" (Worth 1999: 35).

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This “family room”, which contains three generations, has a painful home concept, since all the characters are practically imprisoned together, doomed to listen to each other’s stories, to complain of pains and lack of food and simply to exist. Being united by family links, old memories emerge from time to time in the grey light of the present. Many critics equalled it to the womb/tomb image, due to the stage characteristics. Only the room keeps the family members together in one place: it is their beginning and their end. But there is no physical unity between the characters. Even though the ashbins are placed very close to each other, Nagg cannot touch Nell; and on her asking to scratch her back, Nagg suggest her rubbing over the rim. Clov does not touch Hamm, only at the beginning of the play to take off his sheet. Through all the play we have Hamm’s obsessive orders to Clov: not to stand behind his back, because “you give me the shivers” (105, 107, 124), as though Clov is a kind of a ghost from his past.

Paul Lawley also stresses the importance of the stage to accommodate language, driving the parallel between the refuge of language and the “room” as a refuge:

“When we look at the stage-set of *Endgame* we are looking at a visual image of the function of language in the play. In a world in which invention, fictional creation, is (as we have seen) always tending to become absolute and all forms tend towards abstraction, language, the only remaining creative medium, ceases to function as a medium, a tool or instrument for organizing and making sense of the perceptions of an external world, and becomes instead a separate self-sufficient structure in the midst of the alien environment. It is fitting, then, that the stage-picture of *Endgame* should represent a ‘refuge’.” (1979: 12)

Consequently, the room as setting in *Endgame* may mean on different levels: tomb/womb, prison, Hell, a skull, “imprisoned” or repressed memories, shelter/refuge, etc. Moreover, according to Cohn the stage also presents in itself “anti-creation” image (227).

### 2.1.2. Props as Symbols of the Trauma of Separation

“...objects are parts of that cluster of appurtenances in which it is hard to separate the human and the non-human. And though people talk at them and to them and about them, they stay silent. In a way, they have a life of their own.” (Hardy 1999: 146)

In *Endgame*, there are scarce props onstage. Among them: a stepladder, biscuits, non-existent painkillers, a handkerchief that covers Hamm’s face, a toy-dog, an alarm-clock, a gaff, a whistle, which is in Hamm’s possession, and a telescope.

Two objects that I found important in the light of my memory/trauma discussion are the alarm-clock and the toy-dog. Both objects lose their conventional meanings in *Endgame*, and create other layers of understanding, as the functions attributed to them are various.

The alarm-clock is one of the props in the play, which on the sign level, acquires multiple functions. The presentation of the alarm-clock is rather peculiar. Firstly, it is created verbally as a bright idea by Clov, later on, the alarm-clock is set off in the kitchen, and the audience only hear a brief ring. It seems that Hamm cannot hear it. Finally, Clov brings it onstage and starts to manipulate it physically – setting it off for everybody to hear:

**Hamm:** What are you doing?

**Clov:** Having an idea. [*He paces.*] Ah! [*He halts.*]

**Hamm:** What a brain! [*Pause.*] Well?

**Clov:** Wait! [*He meditates. Not very convinced.*] Yes... [*He raises his head.*] I have it! I set the alarm. [*Pause.*]

**Clov:** I’ll go and see. [*Exit Clov. Brief ring of alarm offstage. Enter Clov with alarm-clock. He holds it against Hamm’s ear and releases alarm. They listen to it ringing to the end. Pause.*] Fit to wake the dead! Did you hear it?

**Hamm:** Vaguely.

**Clov:** The end is terrific! (114-115)

The introduction of this prop onstage is done brilliantly by Beckett. First, the clock is mentioned verbally, and then it is materialized onstage through its sound. I think that in this case all the elements of prominence are used to focus the attention on

this object. Nevertheless, this alarm-clock is deprived of its usage: to remind us of something important, or to wake us up. In this play, the alarm-clock is used to pass or to kill the time because of boredom, as Clov and Hamm do not know what to do. Clov has the magnificent idea of playing with the alarm-clock, thus it is used as entertainment or a toy to kill the time: through its manipulation, Clov makes it sound. No wonder that afterwards both characters listen attentively until the clock finishes ringing. Both Hamm and Clov are afraid of silence, and the ringing of the clock occupies the soundscape of the play for some brief time, giving the characters some rest from speaking. The shrill ringing of the clock is the only sound heard by the audience, thus it adds another voice onstage and it is a rather unpleasant one due to its acoustic characteristics. At the same time, it breaks the monotony of the onstage action or non-action. Clov is actually playing with time, setting the alarm-clock off. He points to its extraordinary quality “to wake the dead”, which is an ironic remark. Another meaning to Clov’s manipulation with the alarm-clock can be his reminding Hamm of his desire to leave. Clov sets the alarm-clock to inform Hamm that he has left. In this meaning, both characters are acting out the trauma of separation, and eventually of death, because with Clov absent, nobody will take care of Hamm’s physical needs. The enacting of the future trauma of separation, gives time for both characters to suffer it before its actual occurrence. That is why Hamm’s final comment is “The end is terrific”, probably referring not only to the sound of the alarm-clock, but perhaps to his own end/death.

Further on in the play, Hamm makes Clov set the alarm-clock to wake Nagg up. There can be two good reasons to do this: pure comedy or to check whether he is still alive. This game is very childish in nature, but it seems that both characters enjoy it, as it helps them to carry on with their conversation and to pass the time. The importance of games was pointed out by Freud, who claimed that games, especially childish ones, are the acts of reliving of the trauma of separation.

The alarm-clock remains onstage till the end of the play. However, Clov cannot find a proper place for it, probably due to its uselessness. Consequently, once the alarm-clock is used as a toy to play with, they do not need it any more: there is nothing important in their lives to look for and to remind them of. It probably becomes an uncomfortable object for Clov, thus Clov’s fidgeting with the alarm-clock are constant:



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**Clov:** Yes. But now it's empty. [*Pause. Clov starts to move about the room. He is looking for a place to put down the alarm-clock.*]

**Hamm** [*soft*]: What'll I do? [*Pause. In a scream.*] What'll I do? [*Clov sees the picture, takes it down, stands it on the floor with its face to the wall, hangs up the alarm-clock in its place.*] What are you doing?

**Clov:** Winding up. (127)

The place that Clov finds fit for the alarm-clock is the wall: he removes the picture and hangs the alarm-clock instead. The action is very symbolic in nature, since a work of art is replaced by a mechanic device. This place can seem rather bizarre and comical for a clock. Pictures are hung on the walls to be admired. Probably, Clov hangs the alarm-clock on the wall in order to point out its rarity, since it is now a museum piece due to its uselessness. Moreover, placing the alarm-clock on the wall may be also viewed as a symbolic gesture to make the separation tangible and dooming for both characters. Hamm and Clov are playing with their separation in a way, but by hanging the alarm-clock on the wall, Clov makes the possibility of future separation physically present and menacing.

At the same time, the alarm-clock is still a potential reminder of time passing for both characters. Clov's playing with the alarm-clock irritates Hamm, as he shouts "What are you doing?" and Clov's answer is very unclear: the words "winding up" can mean several things. Obviously, the first meaning that comes to our minds is "make the clock work", but I think that this meaning lies on the surface because of Clov's manipulation with the clock. Clov does not want the clock to tell the time, he just exhibits it for everybody to see, consequently "winding up" can mean "to irritate" or "to disturb" Hamm, or just "to finish", which is Clov's hidden desire. Moreover, the simple manipulation with the clock adds more meanings to this dialogue.

The alarm-clock does not hang on the wall for long. When Clov looks through the window, and informs Hamm of "a potential procreator", he looks at the alarm-clock and changes its place again:

**Hamm:** It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more. [*Pause.*]

**Clov:** Lucky for you. [*He goes towards door.*]

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**Hamm:** Leave me the gaff. [*Clov gives him the gaff, goes towards door, halts, looks at alarm-clock, takes it down, looks round for a better place to put it, goes to bins, puts it on lid of Nagg's bin. Pause.*]

**Clov:** I'll leave you. [*He goes towards door.*] (131)

Again, the alarm-clock gains prominence in the play. This time Clov decides to change its place after having seen a little boy outside, when he himself is on the edge of leaving Hamm. He places it on Nagg's bin: to play another practical joke on him and to wake him up or, perhaps Clov just wants to get rid of it, so he leaves it on the ashbin. The alarm-clock on Nagg's ashbin may acquire another meaning in the play, since it draws our attention to Hamm's father who has actually failed Hamm. There is no affection bond between them, only the room ties them together. Nagg is unable even to listen to Hamm's stories and pops up out of the ashbin only to satisfy his material needs. Thus, the position of the alarm-clock on the lid of his ashbin doubles the sense of loss and separation. Consequently, the alarm-clock in this play is not a device to tell time or to remind people of something important. It is just a mechanical toy and a symbol of separation.

Another object, which gains prominence in the text, is the toy-dog. The dog is mentioned at the beginning of the play:

**Hamm:** My father?

[*Pause.*]

My mother?

[*Pause.*]

My... dog?

[*Pause.*]

Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer. But does that mean their sufferings equal mine? No doubt. (93)

The dog occupies the third place in the list of Hamm's preferences; its connection with his parents is obvious. The dog is certainly linked to Hamm's childhood trauma (see Chapter I, 1.3.2.), since Hamm experienced the trauma of loss (in this case his parents' love) early in his childhood, he is probably unable to feel "love", several times in the play he speaks about his heart as a "big sore" (107). His parents

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only gave him a worthless life of suffering, thus the dog means the only affection bond for him. The dog is mentioned 6 times in the text: at the very beginning, in the middle (twice) and at the very end.

Normally Hamm asks for the dog, when Clov speaks about his leaving him, so the dog takes on the role of a pacifier, which brings us again to the trauma of birth. It seems to me that Clov's threat to leave Hamm triggers some other abandonment in his life, and he desperately needs to calm himself. Freud claimed that the centre of any trauma is a motivated unconsciousness. "In this case, the traumatic event may trigger early traumatic happenings, already perhaps mingled with fantasy, and shape how the current event is experienced" (Freud, qtd. in Kaplan 2005: 33).

Hamm cannot see the toy-dog due to his blindness and he is fond of handling it, but the dog is a monstrosity to the audience:

**Clov:** ... I'll leave you.

**Hamm:** Is my dog ready?

**Clov:** He lacks a leg.

**Hamm:** Is he silky?

**Clov:** He's kind of a Pomeranian.

**Hamm:** Go and get him.

**Clov:** He lacks a leg.

**Hamm:** Go and get him! [*Exit Clov.*] We're getting on. [*Enter Clov holding by one of its three legs a black toy dog.*]

**Clov:** Your dogs are here. [*He hands the dog to Hamm who feels it, fondles it.*]

**Hamm:** He's white, isn't he?

**Clov:** Nearly.

**Hamm:** What do you mean, nearly? Is he white or isn't he?

**Clov:** He isn't. [*Pause.*]

**Hamm:** You've forgotten the sex.

**Clov:** (*vexed*) But he isn't finished. The sex goes on at the end. [*Pause.*]

**Hamm:** You haven't put on his ribbon.

**Clov:** (*angrily*) But he isn't finished, I tell you! First you finish your dog and then you put on his ribbon! [*Pause.*]

**Hamm:** Can he stand?

**Clov:** I don't know.

**Hamm:** Try. [*He hands the dog to Clov who places it on the ground.*] Well?

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**Clov:** Wait! [*He squats down and tries to get the dog to stand on its three legs, fails, lets it go. The dog falls on its side.*]

**Hamm:** (*impatiently*) Well?

**Clov:** He's standing.

**Hamm:** [*groping for the dog*] Where? Where is he? [*Clov holds up the dog in a standing position.*]

**Clov:** There. [*He takes Hamm's hand and guides it towards the dog's head.*]

**Hamm:** [*his hand on the dog's head*] Is he gazing at me?

**Clov:** Yes.

**Hamm:** (*proudly*) As if he were asking me to take him for a walk?

**Clov:** If you like.

**Hamm:** (*as before*) Or as if he were begging me for a bone. [*He withdraws his hand.*]

Leave him like that, standing there imploring me. [*Clov straightens up. The dog falls on its side.*]

**Clov:** I'll leave you. (111-112)

This long dialogue is framed by Clov's threat to leave Hamm and the latter demands the dog, perhaps to keep him company. The dog does not resemble a toy at all: Pomeranian<sup>82</sup>, three-legged, black, and sexless. "Pomeranian" dog has certain associations to royalty (and Hamm likes to think he is the King of this small universe). As a dog, it is useless, since it cannot bark to defend his owner, it does not have any voice and it even cannot stand on its legs. Besides, it is not finished and it is deformed. However, this dog is vital for Hamm. On the one hand, he wants the dog to have mobility and sight, just the things he lacks, as an extension for his paralysed body. On the other hand, he wants the dog to depend on him, for example to take it for a walk. Furthermore, the dog may substitute audience: to gaze at him and to listen to his stories. Being sexless is essential for Hamm, as the dog does not present the threat as a future procreator. Another of the dog's functions is to return Hamm to a pleasurable

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<sup>82</sup> The **Pomeranian** (often known as a Pom, or more humorously, Pom Pom) is a breed of dog of the Spitz type, named for the Pomerania region in Central Europe (today part of eastern Germany and northern Poland). Classed as a toy dog breed because of its small size. The breed was made popular by a number of royal owners during the 17th and 18th centuries. Queen Victoria owned a particularly small Pomeranian, and consequently the smaller variety became universally popular. Pomeranians respond well to firm, consistent obedience training, but otherwise will do what they please. They are known to bark defensively in response to any outside noise. Overall the pomeranian is a sturdy, healthy dog ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)). Schopenhauer's dog was "pomeranian" as well, so it adds a touch of irony to Hamm's owning one.

childhood. Every child wants to have a dog for company. And Hamm, probably, tries to modify his earlier childhood memory, holding and playing with that dog. Nevertheless, he does not want to give him a bone, as he withdraws his hand from the dog on this sentence. “Feeding” remembers Hamm of the scarcity of the food onstage and “eating” is also related to living and thus to perpetual suffering.

Another time when Hamm asks for the dog, is when Clov refuses to kiss him. The dog again emerges as a symbol of affection substitution. The dog may be also taken as a momentary shield from his suffering, a “happy moment” in his dreary life.

“On exposure to extreme terror, even mature people have protest and despair responses (anger and grief, intrusion and numbing) that make them turn toward the nearest available source of comfort to return to a state of both psychological and physiologic calm.” (Read 2000: 24)

### 2.1.3. Behavioural Re-enactments as Trauma-Triggers

Freud observed that sometimes the physicalizing of trauma may occur through behavioural re-enactments. The victims of trauma may perform mechanized repeated actions. Repetition itself lies in the essence of trauma.

In *Endgame*, I can signal out the following behavioural re-enactments:

1. At the beginning of the play Clov mechanically goes first to the left window, then to the right window, he forgets the stepladder, returns, drags it to the window left, then he climbs his stepladder, draws the curtains and looks out of the windows (93, 128).
2. Hamm’s taking off his glasses and wiping them with his unfolded handkerchief (93,133).
3. Clov’s “comings” and “goings”.

All of these actions happen during the play at least twice. None of them seems to have any special purpose. These movements look like a certain kind of ritual, pointing

to the characters' traumatic and absurd existence. Hereinafter, I will attempt to analyse their possible meanings in relation to trauma.

1. Clov systematically forgets the ladder, and makes too many steps, dragging his old feet in order to look out of the window. On the one hand, he may be delaying to look out of the window, because of a possibility of a change to the worst; and on the other hand, he may be simply playing and passing the time.

As far as Clov's ritual at looking in the window is concerned, here it is important to mention, that it is only Clov, who maintains a contact with the outer world, as it is his duty to perform the function of vision for Hamm. Hugh Kenner's observation is well known: when Clov draws the curtains, says Kenner, "this is so plainly a metaphor for waking up that we fancy the stage, with its high peepholes, to be the inside of an immense skull" (1973: 155). Clov demonstrates a permanent interest in the devastated world around them. This interest is a premonition for his departure.

Although Hamm is also interested in the changes of the outer world, he gets agitated talking about them; the explanation for it may be the threat of Clov's departure. There may be another reason for the "ladder" ceremony": the outside world, perhaps brings to the characters' memories of how it used to be before the event that brought about all this change, which should be traumatic in its essence. The outside is always a constant reminder of the abrupt change in the characters' lives; it contains the memories of their past lives. In the story about a madman, Hamm re-creates the world how it used to be. Of course, it is difficult to say whether it is other of his fantasy stories or past reality, but the vision is certainly alive in his memory. Thus, the contrast between a richly fertile past and the devastated present is an important factor in the play: it emerges powerfully, if briefly, in Hamm's evocation of the landscape he showed the mad painter: "Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness" (113).

2. Hamm's wiping his glasses is absurd, since he is blind and it doesn't matter to him whether they are dirty or not. This manipulation with the handkerchief, probably, is the operation of his "procedural" memory, the hands remember the action, which Hamm used to perform ("wiping his glasses"), when he still could see. And it may remind him of his "lost sight" as well. Throughout the play there are many references to his desire to see again. On his recounting of dreams, he mentions that he could see there. Wiping of glasses, after waking up, may mean that it is the prolongation of his sleep and he wants to check whether he is awake. Besides, it may be a kind of ritual to delay his other waking-up or another day to come.
  
3. Clov's appearing and disappearing into the kitchen only creates movement and the sound of dragging feet. The kitchen has already lost its meaning as no provisions are left there. When Hamm asks him "What are you doing?", Clov says "I come ... and go" (109). Here we are made witnesses to another *fort-da* game. It seems that Clov's "come and go" is a game that may prepare Hamm for Clov's further disappearance. This constant movement inscribes the physicality of this trauma onstage. This trauma is made audible to Hamm through the sound of Clov's dragging feet. Hamm is aware of this sound: that's why he gets irritated when Clov instead of wearing slippers puts the boots on, thus making his steps sound louder:

**Hamm:** (*Irritable.*) What's wrong with your feet?

**Clov:** My feet?

**Hamm:** Tramp! Tramp!

**Clov:** I must have put my boots.

**Hamm:** Your slippers were hurting you? [*Pause.*]

**Clov:** I'll leave you.

**Hamm:** No! (120)

The sound of Clov's dragging feet also creates duration and the acoustic image of time passing. In addition, it may be read on a Biblical level as well, since "coming and going" on earth was God's punishment for Adam and Eve. This reading is valid, since biblical references are interwoven in the play.

So, all these actions may take on the form of behavioural re-enactments of the trauma of some kind of catastrophe, the trauma of lost sight, and the trauma of separation.

#### **2.1.4. Repressed Memory, the Trauma of Separation and Progenitors' Guilt**

Memory may be considered a protagonist in *Endgame*. Four characters, entombed in the family room, are constantly speaking, occupying the verbal soundscape of the play. There is little action, nothing seems to happen, but “something is taking its course” (98). The central position in the play is occupied by Hamm who is the centre of his small universe. Hamm is always worried about centrality of his position, wanting to dominate the rest of the characters. That is the reason why his memory is vital in the play. His memory/ies is/are interconnected with the rest of the characters. The centrality of his position gives him the voice of authority in the narration. He is speaking most during the play and others have to listen.

Hamm's own self-esteem is very high, and there is visible ego-centricity in his narration. He is the main character and the whole story revolves around him. The Self is always the centre of narration's gravity, and we construct our ABM and our self, with “I” as the engine of our personal history, “... memory is biased towards maintaining not necessarily a favourable but, more importantly, a consistent image of the self” (Mollon 2002: 39).

So Hamm does not remember anything negative about his life. At the beginning of the play, Hamm comments: “the bigger a man is the fuller he is” (93). Clov's attitude towards Hamm is different: several times he comments about his cruelty. Cruelty towards himself: the episode with Clov's bicycle; and towards another person: Mother Pegg's death was presumably Hamm's fault. But Hamm does not remember this. His selective memory only retains the episodes of his life when he performed well according to his standards, of course. Hamm's perhaps erroneous perception leads me to



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the idea, that there should be something in his past that greatly disturbs him. The whole development of the play points to the strange nature of Hamm-Clov relationship, they are mutually dependent. Who is Clov? A servant? An adopted son? A guarding angel? The fact that Clov stays by Hamm's side troubles both: "Why do you stay with me?", asks Hamm, Clov answers back: "Why do you keep me?" (95). The question is slightly changed afterwards: Clov: "Why I always obey you?" (129). This idea resonates through the whole play. The question may be understood as "why am I here?", which becomes Clov's obsessive thought. Though Hamm does not answer him truthfully: "The old questions... The old answers" (101, 110), says he. Clov is not satisfied with "All life long the same questions, the same answers" (94). He intuitively understands that there is something else there; something on the edge of his subconscious tells him, that the whole truth is to be revealed, which may be another reason that keeps him from leaving Hamm.

Hamm hides something from Clov, something that has echoes through the whole play. A certain reconstruction of this repressed memory is possible, since through the whole performance, pieces of fragmented memory referring to Clov's presence in this room, are emerging. These memories are fragmented and may only be retrieved by parts. Hereinafter, I will attempt to discuss the nature of this repressed memory, or "the old questions and the old answers" (98), as Hamm calls it. I am mostly interested in Hamm's memory since it controls the memory landscapes of the four characters. The cyclic nature of "the old questions and the old answers" resembles the perpetual change of days "it's the end of the day like any other day" (98), when nothing happens. At the same time "the old answers" keep the narration and the play going, since when the truthful answer is given that will be the end. The concept of leaving is also knitted in the text, the word "leave" is actually repeated 23 times through the text of the play, as though it is the eternal menace for Hamm and Clov.

Hamm's memories of himself are not well-defined. It seems to me that he wants to hide/bury them in the middle of his stories. The grains of truth are scattered in them, and one may figure out his real story only through the repetition of the same ideas and verbal references. "The stories through which we shape memory in turn prompt us to

recall some images or facts, while consigning others to the neutral dustbin” (Sennet 2006: 13).

Time (its duration) to Hamm is of little importance and he does not remember “when” things happened, probably, due to aging amnesia or due to his inability to face his real memories. Thus, his story-telling may serve as a shield to hide the real memory traces. Like a painter, Hamm plays with his memory and re-constructs it in order to present another image of his past self. Fantasizing with memory was pointed out by Freud as a technique of repression. “He [Freud] discovered traumatic events to be the source of repression, and repression to be expressed through a blanking out of memory.”<sup>83</sup>

Hamm’s own memory is very chaotic, chronological landmarks are practically absent. Clov sarcastically refers to his story/ies as a “chronicle”. It seems that order is not on top of Hamm’s priority list, he is even afraid of order: when Clov starts picking up the objects from the floor to put everything in order, Hamm shouts at him to drop them (120). An action immediately performed by Clov. This fantasizing in recreating the story is signalled in the play by the changes in Hamm’s voice, which acquires narrative quality. He is like an actor impersonating many roles.

Hamm’s story is very important in my analysis, since there is an echoing of this story in the play, and these echoes will help me to develop Hamm-Clov relation and give a hypothesis on a type of repressed memory, which may be hidden behind the voluntary memory shield. Stories about the past may be interpreted as a certain type of memory, when a person has to face a certain event of the past he is unable to. So one turns to fiction, as narration in itself may be a powerful tool to change one’s history and make up a pleasant story.

“Memory is prone to error; we interpret and reinterpret and remix our perceptions of past events, interweaving memory and confabulation; autobiographical remembering is like telling ourselves a story - and the story may evolve and change.” (Mollon 2002: 20)

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

Consequently, one tends to fictionalize about one's past, mixing past events with fantasy of how those events could have been. Obviously, a person remembers only his best qualities and pictures him/herself as a kind of hero. On repeating those stories, the parts that are pure fiction tend to be changed by the narrator, but the grains of pure memories remain unchanged. Freud defined this type of stories, which are half-truth and half-fiction, "screen-memories". The main objective of such was to shield some painful memory. I will attempt to analyse Hamm's story or chronicle from this angle. His story is an obsession in itself, which Hamm is trying to vocalize all his life. However, many critics signalled out the use of Hamm's imagination and creativity in constructing this story, I tend to believe that there is more to it, than just a mere fiction. Hereinafter, I enclose the whole story, since it will be analysed in detail and it is impossible to perform this analysis without the whole text:

**Hamm:** One! Silence! [*Pause.*] Where was I? [*Pause. Gloomily.*] It's finished, we're finished. [*Pause.*] Nearly finished. [*Pause.*] There'll be no more speech. [*Pause.*] Something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles. [*Stifled hilarity of Nagg.*] Splash, splash, always on the same spot. [*Pause.*] Perhaps it's a little vein. [*Pause.*] A little artery. [*Pause. More animated.*] Enough of that, it's story time, where was I? [*Pause. Narrative tone.*] The man came crawling towards me, on his belly. Pale, wonderfully pale and thin, he seemed on the point of— [*Pause. Normal tone.*] No, I've done that bit. [*Pause. Narrative tone.*] I calmly filled my pipe—the meerschaum, lit it with... let us say a vesta, drew a few puffs. Aah! [*Pause.*] Well, what is it you want? [*Pause.*] It was an extraordinarily bitter day, I remember, zero by the thermometer. But considering it was Christmas Eve there was nothing... extra-ordinary about that. Seasonable weather, for once in a way. [*Pause.*] Well, what ill wind blows you my way? He raised his face to me, black with mingled dirt and tears. [*Pause. Normal tone.*] That should do it. [*Narrative tone.*] No, no, don't look at me, don't look at me. He dropped his eyes and mumbled something, apologies I presume. [*Pause.*] I'm a busy man, you know, the final touches, before the festivities, you know what it is. [*Pause. Forcibly.*] Come on now, what is the object of this invasion? [*Pause.*] It was a glorious bright day, I remember, fifty by the heliometer, but already the sun was sinking down into the... down among the dead. [*Normal voice.*] Nicely put, that. [*Narrative tone.*] Come on now, come on, present your petition and let me resume my labors. [*Pause. Normal tone.*] There's English for you. Ah well... [*Narrative tone.*] It was then he took the plunge. It's my little one, he said. Tsstss, a little one, that's bad. My little boy, he said, as if the sex mattered. Where did he come from? He named the hole. A good half-day, on horse. What are you insinuating? That the place is still inhabited? No, no, not a soul, except himself and the child—assuming he existed. Good. I enquired about the

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situation at Kov, beyond the gulf. Not a sinner. Good. And you expect me to believe you have left your little one back there, all alone, and alive into the bargain? Come now! [Pause.] It was a howling day, I remember, a hundred by the anemometer. The wind was tearing up the dead pines and sweeping them... away. [Pause. Normal tone.] A feeble bit, that. [Narrative tone.] Come on, man, speak up, what is it you want from me, I have to put up my holly. [Pause.] Well to make it short it finally transpired that what he wanted from me was... bread for his brat? Bread? But I have no bread, it doesn't agree with me. Good. Then perhaps a little corn? [Pause. Normal tone.] That should do it. [Narrative tone.] Corn, yes, I have corn, it's true, in my granaries<sup>84</sup>. But use your head. I give you some corn, a pound, a pound and a half, you bring it back to your child and you make him—if he's still alive—a nice pot of porridge. [Nagg reacts.] a nice pot and a half of porridge, full of nourishment. Good. The colours come back into his little cheeks—perhaps. And then? [Pause.] I lost patience. (Violently.) Use your head, can't you, use your head. You're on earth, there's no cure for that! [Pause.] It was an exceedingly dry day, I remember, zero by the hygrometer. Ideal weather, for my lumbago. [Pause. Violently.] But what in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in the spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you? [Pause.] Gradually I cooled down, sufficiently at least to ask him how long he had taken on the way. Three whole days. Good. In what condition he had left the child. Deep in sleep. [Forcibly.] But deep in what sleep, deep in what sleep already? [Pause.] Well to make it short I finally offered to take him into my service. He had touched a chord. And then I imagined already that I wasn't much longer for this world. [He laughs. Pause.] Well? [Pause.] Well? Here if you were careful you might die a nice natural death, in peace and comfort. [Pause.] Well? [Pause.] In the end he asked me would I consent to take in the child as well—if he were still alive. [Pause.] It was the moment I was waiting for. [Pause.] Would I consent to take in the child... [Pause.] I can see him still, down on his knees, his hands flat on the ground, glaring at me with his mad eyes, in defiance of my wishes. [Pause. Normal tone.] I'll soon have finished with this story. [Pause.] Unless I bring in other characters. [Pause.] But where would I find them? [Pause.] Where would I look for them? [Pause. He whistles. Enter Clov.] (116-118)

This is the longest speech in the whole play, and it creates a certain climax. The narration itself is interrupted by 34 pauses that Hamm makes in order to take his breath or to think, or to remember, or not to remember. His reaction to his story also changes from gloomily to hilarious, then to animated, and to violent. The emotional response is important, since it means that it is not a pure narration, “something is taking its course”

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<sup>84</sup> Perhaps, here there is a literary reference to John Keats' poem “La Belle Dame Sans Mercy”, “the squirrel's granary is full and the harvest's done...”, which points to the season of autumn in the text.

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in Hamm's head. "Something dripping in my head since the fontanelles" may be a visual image of memory, which has to do with Freud's repressed primal trauma, which starts when a person is born. This memory, though not a verbal one, starts functioning in early childhood and is encoded in images. The verbal image of "fontanelles" also has to do with the beatings of a heart or pulse of the "foetus", which directly points to "living". Another probable reference to unlock memories or to shield them may be Hamm's repetitive words "use your head", which he utters violently, probably dissatisfied with his result of creation or being angry with himself that he cannot remember. The impression is that he has a dialogue with his other self, who does not obey him. Fantasizing is audible in this dialogue, since Hamm changes his voice to a narrative tone as though he is rehearsing onstage. It is a monologue in essence, his only listener is Nagg (his father), bribed with a sugar-plum, since Clov is in the kitchen. This is rather symbolic as he tries to re-create a story of his accepting of a child into their family in the presence of his biological father.

The climax of the story is the arrival of a small boy to his household. Hamm creates his own self as an all-powerful master, who can bestow mercy or condemn to death. His egocentricity is extreme, but there is some truth in it, since we also learn from a dialogue between Clov and Hamm, that Hamm has a lot of vassals, and Clov had to inspect his paupers on foot or by horse (96). But the narration gets rather inaccurate when Hamm tries to talk about "when". Here I want to mention, that to fix time is the most difficult thing for Hamm, he can never place an event that happened to him in time. When Hamm told the story about the engraver, Clov asks him when it actually happened; the answer that Hamm gives is rather vague: "Oh way back, way back, you weren't in the land of the living" (114). On other occasion, when Clov informs him that he oiled his castors yesterday, Hamm's reaction to the word "yesterday" is actually vehement. Probably, blind people do not perceive the change of days, or, perhaps time itself is insignificant to Hamm, or he is simply afraid to put his own self in time and to create a real chronicle in his head.

So, when Hamm starts talking about the time/season/weather, he makes four false starts. He places the action in:

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1. It was an extra-ordinarily bitter day, I remember, zero by the thermometer. But considering it was Christmas Eve there was nothing... extra-ordinary about that. Seasonable weather, for once in a way.
2. It was a glorious bright day, I remember, fifty by the heliometer, but already the sun was sinking down into the... down among the dead.
3. It was a howling day, I remember, a hundred by the anemometer. The wind was tearing up the dead pines and sweeping them... away.
4. It was an exceedingly dry day, I remember, zero by the hygrometer. Ideal weather, for my lumbago. ... But what in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in the spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again?

The usage of the four technical devices to “measure” different weather conditions does not speak in favour of Hamm’s creativity. The effect may be rather comical, since it seems that the device dictates the weather, and not the other way round. It can also point to Hamm’s failed perception, due to his physiological disabilities. At the same time it shows, as far as the techniques of a writer/story-teller are concerned, his failure to create a decent passage about the weather. Besides, the false starts create the atmosphere of uncertainty and instability of the whole narration. Hamm tries to point to the four seasons. The first start, definitely, points to winter, since Christmas is mentioned; the second one - to summer, since it is very hot; the third one - to autumn, since we have a “howling wind”, and later in the text the reference to “full granary”; and the last one - to spring, a dry day, and the season itself is mentioned. The mentioning of the four seasons recreates an eternal cycle of change, but Hamm manipulates the order in this cycle: summer goes after winter, and the last season mentioned is spring. Obviously, one of spring’s literary symbolisms is “birth”. And “birth” is important to the current discussion.

Hamm creates another character in his story, a faceless man crawling on his belly to ask for his help. This character may be a figment of Hamm’s imagination. Later in the text there is an echo to this man.

**Hamm:** I’ll tell you how it goes. He comes crawling on his belly –

**Clov:** Who?

**Hamm:** What?

**Clov:** Who do you mean, he?

**Hamm:** Who do I mean! Yet another.

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**Clov:** Ah him! I wasn't sure.

**Hamm:** Crawling on his belly, whining for bread for his brat. He's offered a job as a gardener. Before – [*Clov bursts out laughing.*] What is there so funny about that?

**Clov:** A job as a gardener!

**Hamm:** Is that what tickles you?

**Clov:** It must be that.

**Hamm:** It wouldn't be the bread?

**Clov:** Or the brat. [*Pause.*] (121)

Clov is interested in the story, or in the origin of this man. But Hamm as always evades his persistent questions, trying to create another of his characters, using poetic words like “whining”. However, Clov does not believe the story, since the job “gardener” is mentioned (quite useless in a devastated and extinguishing world). Hamm himself proves the fictitious nature of this man-figure. But the dialogue goes further, impersonal “it” that tickles may have reference not only to the gardener, but also to the whole situation of a brat accepted by Hamm in his household. The “brat” may be Clov himself, and that is the reason of his interest in the story. Besides, the mentioning of “bread” may be biblical. It is obvious that Hamm wanted the boy from the very start, and was manipulating the situation to possess him. But my reading of this story, in connection to “spring” as “birth” and Hamm’s comment that the boy was fast asleep (“But deep in what sleep, deep in what sleep already?”), is that the child had not been born yet, he was still in the womb. According, to Rank’s symbolism of sleep, “sleep” may mean intrauterine state.

“Este comportamiento [sueño] es particularmente interesante, no solamente porque prueba que el sueño fisiológico que existe de un extremo al otro de la serie animal debe ser considerado como equivalente a un retorno pasajero al seno materno ...” (Rank 1961: 39)

Thus, the whole story may be Hamm’s preparation for a child/his son to be born, and I would even go further and suggest that it might have been in spring.

I believe that the only image which proves to be truthful in Hamm’s story is the image of a small boy, as the references to him are various in the play (120, 121, 130). Through the whole text we have allusions to this situation.

**Clov:** I’ll leave you, I have things to do.

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**Hamm:** Do you remember when you came here?

**Clov:** No. Too small, you told me.

**Hamm:** Do you remember your father?

**Clov:** (*Wearily.*) Same answer. [*Pause.*] You asked me these questions millions of times.

**Hamm:** I love the old questions. [*With fervour.*] Ah the old questions, the old answers, there is nothing like them! [*Pause.*] **It was I was a father to you.** (110)

Hamm does not want Clov to leave him that is why he ignites his interest in his past: the past that Clov is unaware of, but is very interested to learn about. This past belongs to his memory, and, probably, without it his identity is not complete. But Hamm is playing with Clov, making him weary. The last sentence in the dialogue is cunningly knitted, twice past verb “was” is repeated, the first time it refers to personal “it”, and the second time to Hamm. What does Hamm want to tell or to hide?

Another reference to a “tiny boy” appears later in the text:

**Hamm:** ... Before accepting with gratitude he asks if he may have his little boy with him.

**Clov:** What age?

**Hamm:** Oh tiny.

**Clov:** He would have climbed the trees.

**Hamm:** All the little odd jobs.

**Clov:** And then he would have grown up.

**Hamm:** Very likely. [*Pause.*]

**Clov:** Keep going, can't you, keep going!

**Hamm:** That's all. I stopped there. (122)

Again Clov seems very interested, since Hamm does not specify the age of the boy, only saying that he was tiny, like Clov when he came to live with Hamm (mentioned earlier in the current analysis). So he wants to “fish out” the truth from Hamm.

Clov demonstrates better ABM during the play. He remembers well that he never had a bicycle (a traumatic memory for a small child); this type of memory is episodic. He also remembers that he loved Hamm, affective memory. Moreover, he is the one who performs all the chores in this house, so his procedural memory is not



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faulty. He does not remember when he came to the household that means he was a baby, unable to form linguistic memories.

I will forward a hypothesis here, based on the given evidence: from my point of view, Hamm is Clov's real father. The memory he is trying to repress all the time. Only once, he admits to his own self this truth:

“There I'll be, in the old refuge, alone against the silence and ... [*he hesitates*] ... stillness. If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with. [*Pause.*] I'll have called my father and I'll have called my ... [*he hesitates*] ... my son.” (126)

Though Hamm speaks in the Future Perfect trying to create some future complete situation, he betrays his well-hidden memory: that Clov is his real son. Hesitation before uttering this word is important, since it gives him time to think, and it points that there is truth in his words. While Hamm creates stories he never hesitates, he just makes a pause. In this case, the hesitation means emotion.

Hamm's obstinate refusal to tell Clov the truth is understandable, if we take into consideration Hamm's relation with his father. Though, Hamm wanted a boy, he repeats his father's mistakes, and in a way fails Clov. Hamm may actually refer to his own self, when he exclaims “accursed progenitor” and “accursed fornicator” (96). Yes, he taught Clov everything he knew: words. But he failed to teach him to love. Twice in the play, Clov refuses to kiss him, or to have physical contact with him. That infuriates Hamm and he asks for his dog. And also twice in the play, Hamm asks him for forgiveness (95, 98). The trauma of failure haunts him as well as the trauma of future loss. Although, Hamm is aware that he has lost him long ago, that is why he treats him cruelly and wants him to be like himself: deprived of sight and lonely in the “infinite emptiness” (109), but at the same time he is craving for Clov's acceptance.

When Clov, at the end of the play, spots a small boy outside, Hamm says: “If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. And if he doesn't ... [*Pause.*]”. Later on his words sound absurd: “It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more [*Pause.*]” (131). Surprisingly, the image of a small boy gives certainty to Hamm

that this is the end. Here we have the end of a dramatic cycle. The image of a boy, on the one hand, may trigger his memory about Clov's birth, but on the other hand, he sees it as an omen of death. One boy comes – the other goes. The cycle is completed, the birth/death cycle.

Another memory that is echoing in the play is the memory of Mother Pegg. The memory comes out of the blue and fades to be resurrected later in the dialogue, like the memory of a small boy. This memory is important. First, Hamm asks if Mother Pegg's "light is on" (112). Clov is shocked at the question and reminds Hamm that "she's extinguished". Both use euphemisms referring to her death. But Hamm goes further and asks whether she's buried. Rather strange, since Hamm does not seem to worry about other people, and later on he asks Clov whether he will bury him. Why does he equal himself to her? Why is she important? Hamm's reminiscence of her is that "she was bonny once, like a flower in the field. And a great one for the men!" (112). Hamm actually hints to a possible relation with her. Hamm remembers her young, since he knew her young. And her image evokes pleasant memories in Hamm. Later in the text, it is Clov who accuses Hamm of her death:

**Clov:** (*Harshly.*) When old Mother Peggy asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? [*Pause.*] You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness. (129)

Clov, paradoxically, remembers her old, and there is hatred towards Hamm in his words. It seems that Hamm's memory about Mother Pegg's death was somehow erased, probably, due to its unpleasantness and the sense of guilt. So both characters retain memories about her, both pleasant and disturbing. Moreover, the name "mother" is used only in connection to this character. Hamm does not call Nell "mother". That makes me think that somehow, Mother Pegg may, perhaps be Clov's real mother, this would explain Hamm's worries about her burial, as his own wish to be buried by Clov.

In both, the story and the memories of Mother Pegg, there are strong biblical allusions to Matthew's Gospel. In the fictional story, the image of bread and of son is made prominent:

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“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew, 7:9)

And Hamm’s words:

“Well to make it short it finally transpired that what he wanted from me was... bread for his brat? Bread? But I have no bread, it doesn’t agree with me. Good. Then perhaps a little corn?” (Hamm’s story, 117)

The image of “bread” and “brat” is created again, when Hamm asks Clov whether it is the bread that “tickles” Clov. Again Beckett makes allusions to possible Hamm’s parentage to Clov, since Hamm couldn’t but feed Clov. Ironically, instead of “bread” he gives him corn as substitution. Bread has allusions to “manna”, thus Hamm refuses to give him bread or spiritual upbringing.

As explication for Mother Pegg’s death, Beckett uses a parable of the ten virgins from the Bible:

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.” (Matthew, 25)

Hamm failed Mother Pegg, as he didn’t give her something important to die peacefully. “Darkness” has its reference to “hell”. Another association to the Apocalypse is created through Mother Pegg’s sudden death in the middle of darkness.

Hamm is envisioned like a bridegroom or the Master. It was in his power to help her, and he is quite aware of it:

**Hamm:** You weep, and weep, for nothing, so as not to laugh, and little by little... you begin to grieve. [*He folds the handkerchief, puts it back in his pocket, raises his head.*] All those I might have helped. [*Pause.*] Helped! [*Pause.*] Saved. [*Pause.*] Saved! [*Pause.*] The place was crawling with them [*Pause. Violently.*] Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! [*Pause.*] Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbour as yourself! [*Pause. Calmer.*] When it wasn't bread they wanted it was crumpets. [*Pause. Violently.*] Out of my sight and back to your petting parties! [*Pause.*] All that, all that! [*Pause.*] Not even a real dog! [*Calmer.*] (125)

Hamm's guilt is shown through the wide range of emotions, his mood changes quickly from calm to violent; it looks as though he tries to give excuses for his past self. Although he does not mention Mother Pegg's name, there are allusion to her, since he didn't save her. This repressed memory resurfaces at the end of the play, it seems that Hamm is able to weep and to grieve. Again we have the words "use your head" as empirical order for his memory. The traumas of guilt and failure lie deep down in Hamm's psyche, and Clov's imminent departure triggers his other hopeless memories. Again, the monologue is full of the previous biblical allusions that echo from other parts of the play: "bread", "crumpets", and the commandment to love your neighbours. All of these allusions may have to do with spiritual rules of life in order to gain Heaven. Paradoxically, the image of Heaven is created linguistically by Clov and Hamm. Clov, on directing the telescope towards auditorium, exclaims: "I see... a multitude ... in transports... of joy" (106), which may be an ironic allusion to the audience as well. But the idea is discarded later in the text, when Clov says that everything is "corpsed", this refers to the outside world, which also mirrors their "inside" situation. And Hamm speaks about his personal heaven, when he is able to run, to make love, to go into the woods (100). But Nagg laughs at him. So any type of future and after-life are non-existent in the play, there is no hope. And even though, Clov is unable to leave Hamm, due to the absence of exit to the outside (I have already mentioned that there is only one door leading to Clov's kitchen), the trauma of separation will be re-enacted by both of them till the end of their days.

In conclusion, I would like to say, that the stage parallels the main theme of the play. Repressed or entombed memories hidden in Hamm's stories resemble the spatial *locus* of a half-buried refuge in the middle of nowhere. The room is both womb and tomb of their memories. The trauma of leaving/separation is played against appearance and disappearance of the characters' memories. Besides, a story-telling device creates a powerful shield against the unwanted memories, entombed deep in Hamm's "big sore"/heart.

Clov's words at the end of the play are:

"I say to myself – sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you – one day. I say to myself – sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go – one day." (132)

The construction of this paragraph is cyclic, as well as the trauma of birth and death and a constant *fort-da* game inscribed in the play. But the impersonal "them" may refer not only to the characters of *Endgame*, but also to those repressed memories that anchor Clov to Hamm.

## **2.2. *Krapp's Last Tape*: The Trauma of Self Disruption**

### **2.2.1. Characteristics: Self-imprisonment and Social Withdrawal**

Another play where the landscape of the room is significantly related to the protagonist's memory is *Krapp's Last Tape*. In contrast to *Endgame*, Beckett reduced his characters to one, Krapp, thereby presupposing a monologue in this play. However, as always with this playwright, it is not entirely true: the other "character" presented onstage is a mechanical device, a tape-recorder, which becomes Krapp's partner and eventually takes on the role of another character in the play.

*Painful Memory Spaces: in the Womb/Tomb of a Room*

For such a short play, the amount of criticism it has generated is astonishing. The play has been discussed from many different points of view: philosophical, autobiographical, psychological, phenomenological, etc. Since memory is the main protagonist of the play, Proust's idea of involuntary memory and ABM are relevant, as well as Time and its duration, memory and habit, etc. I will analyse different ideas about memory in this play, although the core of my discussion is the self-disruption of Krapp's identity, which has to do with trauma. Again, I provide evidence that the stage itself embodies Krapp's memories and the on-going conflict, which those memories trigger in the present Krapp, and vice versa.

"We ought to remember that Beckett is not interested in human relations as such but in human ontology, in the status of the stripped, isolated self beneath social elaboration. It is the requirement of the stage that there be at least duality, tension, demanding otherness, that turns his plays away from his nearly solipsistic interior monologues of his novels." (Gilman 1995: 256)

Tension is created even in the title of the play. *Krapp's Last Tape* suggests finality, death may claim Krapp very soon and he will be unable to celebrate another of his birthdays, or, it is more probable that Krapp will give up this business of recording his memories, as another failure in his life. The name "Krapp" has strong associations with excremental processes. And here Beckett does not fail our first impressions, since we see a body in its physical and intellectual decline in a limited stage space.

Krapp's "den" is presented to the audience in the form of a room:

*"A late evening in the future. Krapp's den. Front centre a small table, the two drawers of which open towards audience. Sitting at the table, facing front, i.e. across from the drawers, a wearish old man: Krapp.....*  
*Laborious walk. On the table a tape-recorder with microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes. Table and immediately adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of stage in darkness."* (215)

The first stage direction should capture our attention. The words "in the future" do not sit well with Beckett, although the play has to do with time-travel, the direction of this journey is to the "past", but not to the future. The explanation was given by

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Beckett himself. During the rehearsals for his Berlin production in 1969, the playwright specified that Krapp had been recording tapes on his birthdays for 45 years (45 tapes in all)<sup>85</sup>. Taking into consideration the novelty of this mechanical device at that time, it would have been impossible for Krapp to accumulate so many tapes. An early manuscript of this play dates the “future” exactly to April 1986, Beckett’s 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Worth “Past into Future: from *Krapp’s Last Tape* to *Breath*” 1987: 19-20). But later autobiographical reference was decreased in the subsequent manuscripts of the play. And though there are still some autobiographical details in *KLT*, such as the “girl in a shabby green coat” (218), who was inspired by Samuel Beckett’s cousin Peggy Sinclair (Knowlson 1997: 443), they are irrelevant to my discussion on memory and trauma in this play.

“Personal elements cannot simply be pinned down, then, to comfortable real-life equivalences. They convey more universal feelings of yearning or loss, nostalgia or regret, aspiration or failure.” (Knowlson 1997: 445)

The setting of this play reminds us of Camillo’s Memory Theatre in its essence: one spectator/Krapp (in this case the Listener), in the memory building of his room, surrounded by boxes of his memories, supposedly containing his past selves. The image of boxes is created not only by the wooden drawers of his table, which open towards the audience, but also the tapes/spools may be the metonymic image of these boxes. It seems to me that Beckett intentionally creates a parallel with mnemonics since searching for a specific memory is Krapp’s objective. Mnemonics has to do with voluntary storage of memories, and Krapp has developed an obsession with numbers and statistics: “Statistics. Seventeen hundred hours, out of the preceding eight thousand odd, consumed on licensed premises alone” (218). Krapp uses numbers in order to maintain certain equilibrium between the surface order of storage of his tapes and chaotic content of his memories. The memory he decides to listen to is number *FIVE*. According to Simonides of Ceos and Fludd, the fifth memory *locus* contains the most important memories for the rememberer. Somehow Beckett applied the form of mnemonics to the stage of *KLT*. And the whole play seems to be an on-going experiment with memory, forgetfulness, and the essence of Self in the labyrinth of the past.

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<sup>85</sup> Knowlson (ed.) 1993. *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, 3: 53.

The imprisonment of Krapp is absolute; the room is the place where he used to create his “opus magnum” – his study, his refuge and his memory, all in one. The room is the witness to his aspirations and his loneliness. The character has withdrawn himself from the outer world to an extreme: there are no windows and no door which communicate with the outside. Krapp is totally uninterested in the world beyond the walls of his room, and he displays catatonic symptoms.

“Y el estupor catatónico, que representa la negación del mundo exterior, ¿no simbolizaría un retorno al útero materno? Tengo la impresión de que estos síntomas catatónicos, de los que se puede decir que están entre los más graves, representan el último refugio de una psique que renuncia hasta las funciones más primitivas del yo y se refugia enteramente en el estado fetal primero, en el período de la lactancia ...” (Rank 1961: 74)

Rank links catatonic stupor to the trauma of birth. A person finds a false refuge from the outer life, only engrossed in his own psychic world and only preoccupied with maintaining his bodily functions, such as eating, drinking, etc. This libido state seems a regression to the intrauterine state. In the case of Krapp, locked inside his own psyche, this return is visible only in mental regression; physically his body is inevitably aging. Krapp is “very near-sighted” and “hard of hearing” (215), besides it is difficult for him to move, which points to physical deterioration.

Another characteristic of a “room”, according to Rank, is that it may symbolize female genitals (German “Frauenzimmer”)<sup>86</sup>. This symbol may be applied to Krapp’s “den”, as in his memories there are certain comments about his sexual life and the majority of his memories revolve around women. The stroking of a banana at the beginning of the play also has strong sexual connotations. Moreover, in the play Krapp first starts talking about Fanny, a prostitute who provides her services to him.

The only door is backstage (in darkness), which leads to Krapp’s kitchen. When Krapp goes there we hear the “loud pop of cork” and the sound of drinking (216).

On the stage-space there is only a table and a chair set centre-stage, which are brightly illuminated. The rest of the stage is in darkness. The stage directions mention

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 88.



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that it is late evening. The only objects on the table are cardboard boxes with tapes and a tape-recorder. Krapp, sitting audience-front, looks rather shabby and dirty, and he seems to be part of the stage environment at first. But on at closer examination, one might have other associations:

*“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. Surprisingly pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed. White face, purple nose. Disordered grey hair. Unshaven.”* (215)

In this stage direction Krapp looks very comical. Even Krapp’s clothes parallel the stage environment: the contrast of black waistcoat and trousers with a dirty white pair of boots and a white shirt with no collar. Four capacious pockets of his waistcoat contain more objects, such as keys, bananas and an envelope. Here I can draw a certain parallelism with Winnie’s “capacious black bag”, as the pockets, apart from tapes, contain objects from his past, triggering past routines and memories.

Krapp not only resembles a clown, but he starts acting as one when he practically slips on a banana peel. So how can the audience take this character seriously? Malkin points out that Krapp may be “a metaphor for a man, as a clown, but for minimalism he is a distinct character” (1999: 24) since he is onstage in a definite environment.

The contrast of Light and Darkness has been discussed by many critics. In comparison to *Endgame* with its grey lighting, *KLT* presents two different zones on stage.

*“Samuel Beckett reinvents the three-tiered stage of the medieval mystery plays – Heaven, Earth, and Hell – with the aid of electricity. Often his technique is extravagantly minimalistic, ‘wasting’ large areas of stage to produce icons of light in surrounding dark.”*  
(Worth 1999: 42)

But the stage darkness is defined by stage light, which creates another dimension, a certain no-man’s land, or a perfect set for a landscape of nothingness. “Beckett said that it wasn’t until he fully acknowledged and tapped his own darkness

that he began to write as he should.”<sup>87</sup> By “darkness” here, I understand a new stage dimension that Beckett presents in his plays. He uses darkness in different ways, one of which could be a way to define light, and another one is to show the subconscious world of his characters. Rodriguez-Gago describes this phenomenon as:

“Los espacios escénicos semi-vacíos de las primeras piezas se transforman en su teatro último en un oscuro escénico casi total, y en esta escena en semi-penumbra la luz, principal elemento creativo, pinta o esculpe el cuerpo entero, o fragmentado, de unos personajes que no hacen sino escuchar o emitir voces....” (2000: 290)

It is important to note that it was Krapp himself who installed the lamp above the table: “The new light above my table is a great improvement. With all the darkness round me I feel less alone” (217). Krapp likes to pace in the light zone, but he also rushes from time to time into the dark zone backstage for a drink, for example. The dark zone may mean many things. The light can create two levels of reality: one seen by us – the reality of old Krapp onstage, - and the other reality of the young Krapp we hear on the tape, which has a connection with the subconscious and the void. But Krapp’s obsession with alcohol makes the dark zone in the play pleasant for him, a place where he can calm himself down and where he is not seen. It is a refuge-in-the-refuge. Taking into consideration Worth’s quote, the dark zone may also be Krapp’s personal Hell, the hell of his obsessions and non-fulfilled resolutions. Although if we apply the connection between darkness and a mother’s womb, we may understand this invisible dark room as his connection with libido state and, furthermore, the physical presence of the trauma of birth onstage. Consequently, darkness may be taken for security and pleasure zone for Krapp,

Antonia Rodriguez-Gago in “The Embodiment of Memory (and Forgetting) in Beckett’s Late Women’s Plays” provides another explanation for the darkness zone, she writes that “the intensity of stage darkness is witness to how much of the past has already been forgotten by the rememberer” (2003: 39). Thus, the zone of darkness may be interpreted in this play as Krapp’s forgotten memories. James Knowlson’s in *Light and Darkness in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, in connection to *KLT*, dwells on the dialectic of conventional understanding of light as “reason” and dark as “soul or spirit”.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 44.

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The conflict of Light and Darkness is both internal and external in Krapp and the physical stage *locus* only affirms this contradiction. The Light/Darkness conflict may be understood on the level of memory as well, since Krapp cannot negotiate any agreement with his past selves, and this finds its way into his language. The spaces of Light/Darkness are also created by verbal images: black ball (217, 220), black nurse (217, 219) with “black perambulator” (217, 219), “black plumage” of a bird (219), etc. and “fire” (223), “sun blazing” (221), light (222), Bianca’s name, Christmas (223), etc. Young Krapp separates the dark zone from the light one on purpose, since he wants to rise above the dark side of his nature and free his light of knowledge and understanding. But this attempt is doomed, because darkness is also part of Krapp. Darkness is a sensual part of a man’s nature; in the play women belong to darkness and Krapp cannot get rid of his memories of them.

The memories of Krapp’s dark/sensual side are the strongest. The two sides were/are always at war in him: his irrational being and his rational one. There are references in his memories to midnight and storm, as though Krapp has been living through this conflict all his life. In a certain way, this conflict splits his relations with his own self and the world around him. This maximalist approach to Light and Darkness is another feature of Krapp’s reverse to childhood, since children have the same attitude towards black and white, or good and evil.

“It is evident that the play’s central action is not one of separating but of trying to understand and reconcile opposing elements and this tendency affects not only the material properties but, most significantly, the central character/s.” (Rodriguez-Gago 2007: 205)

Paradoxically, this youth maximalism is entrapped in Krapp’s aging body. We see an old husk of a man at the end of his life, listening to the memories of his youth. Rodriguez-Gago stresses the importance of the acoustic elements, which signal out Krapp’s condition: “cracked voice”, “laborious walking” accompanied by heavy breathing, coughing, salivating<sup>88</sup>. All these actions stress the materiality of the onstage body. These elements also create the dramatic tension between the young voice on the tape and Krapp’s present condition. The present Krapp is the physical evidence, but at the same time the negation, of his own younger selves.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 207.

### **2.2.2. Tape-recorder: a Prop and a Character**

A tape-recorder occupies a central place in the play, and as I have already mentioned, constitutes another character. It has its own voice – the voice of memory. And paradoxically, this voice says more than the present onstage Krapp. Krapp becomes the witness and an active listener of his younger selves. This device was quite novel for that time (1958). And Beckett was in a way experimenting with a voice coming from the dark, from outside the body.

The tape-recorder's functions are various in the play. It may be a metaphor for memory. At the moment of its recording, the memory was voluntary and crucial for Krapp, who probably selected which episodes of his life to record. But some of those memories lost their importance with time, and Krapp laughs at his own boisterous young voice, saying "Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp" (218). The tape-recorder also substitutes a diary for Krapp, especially taking into consideration that Krapp's catalogues are very neat: each tape belongs to its own place and is properly labelled, e.g. "Mother at rest at last... Black ball" (217). The tape-recorder is a powerful device to make memory physical and tangible.

"No longer elusive or diffusive, memory seems self-contained, redeemable, very present, depending for its 'use' on finding the right reel, twisting the right levers, locating the desired section on tape." (Malkin 1999: 44)

Malkin also suggests that the image of two spools may be interpreted as an image of St. Augustine's ideas on time: the running of time-future into time-past. Moreover, Kozdon "points out that Krapp's age, 69 years, typographically resembles the shape of the spools on the recorder (69)" (2005: 161).

In her article "The Spear of Telephus in *Krapp's Last Tape*", Irit Degani-Raz discusses the tape-recorder in this play as "a damaging tool capable not only of distorting memory but even of corrupting the original event itself" (2008: 191). Her discussion is based on the myth of Telephus, who was wounded by Achilles' spear. The spear in itself proved not only to be the tool of destruction, but the remedy as well. Degani-Raz applies the duality of the spear to a possible duality of the tape-recorder in

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this play: the duality between the technological and the human, the rational and the irrational. She signals out the regressive aspect of progress and applies it to this play. As a conclusion she underlines that:

“The tape-recorder, which has the ability to capture moments of Krapp’s past and embodies the promise of healing his longing for a lost paradise, is at the same time that which turns Krapp’s past into an object of control and manipulation by Krapp himself.”<sup>89</sup>

“The tape-recorder’s capability to repeat the most precious moments is at the same time that which nullifies these moments by depriving them of their uniqueness and values.”<sup>90</sup>

I agree on the whole with the hypothesis stated, though I would like to mention that the technological regression of the tape-recorder’s use may be paralleled with Krapp’s regression into youth and childhood, and the regression of his memory. This function mirrors the body on stage. The tape-recorder, whether we like it or not, is a metaphor for Krapp’s former selves and memory, as well as the on-going conflict between his rational and irrational sides. In this play, Beckett separates memory from the body: a man onstage is listening to his own memories recorded in the past. So, the tape-recorder makes memory physically present in the play, a memory which may be touched and re-wound at will. The mechanical and “rational” tape-recorder is actually Krapp himself isolated in his pure state. The character is face-to-face with his physical memory contemplating his own self/ves onstage, fixed in space and time; the body is listening to the voice/s from the past.

“For Krapp the past is the only occupation of the present, all that fills it. And this is because time is what ‘doesn’t pass but piles up all about you’, so that you are simultaneously what you have been at different periods and there is no beginning and or end.” (Gilman 1995: 259)

Like the “grain upon grain” image in *Endgame*, the tapes in *KLT* and the visual image of the mound in *Happy Days* represent time and duration.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 193.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 193.

### **2.2.3. Movements and Objects as Memory-Triggers**

Just as in *Endgame*, there are behavioural re-enactments in *Krapp's Last Tape*. It seems that Beckett's characters imprisoned in the womb/tomb of the room are doomed to repeat the same actions. Obviously, these actions may be discussed in the light of habits and routines; nevertheless, the characters are obsessed with re-enacting them and they may be considered memory-triggers. *Krapp's Last Tape* starts with Krapp taking an envelope and a bunch of keys from his pocket; these actions precede his words and are made prominent in the play. The act of recording is preceded by Krapp's constant movements as, perhaps an attempt to postpone the recording, or to get started, since old people usually need to settle themselves down before doing something important. In fact, some of the actions at the beginning of the play seem to form part of Krapp's recording ritual. Although this time he is not able to record anything. After consulting his envelope at the beginning of the play Krapp says, "Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now?" (221). So all these rituals, instead of helping Krapp to record, only serve to trigger his other memories.

Twice in the play Krapp inspects the content of his pockets, preceded by looking at his watch: "fumbles in his pockets, takes out the envelope, puts it back, fumbles, takes out a small bunch of keys" (215, 221). Old Krapp possesses a very old-fashioned silver watch with a chain. The fact that the watch is attached to his waistcoat may give the audience the impression that Krapp is chained to time, or that he is his prisoner. Nevertheless, he does not use the watch to tell time, since his tapes or spools are used mainly as reminders of his past. Like the alarm-clock in *Endgame*, Krapp's watch takes on other functions. During the play, Krapp consults his watch three times. First before speaking, when he fidgets restlessly at the table, he looks at his watch and then takes an envelope out of his pocket. This action seems rather mechanical – he does it for the sake of movement. Although later in the play, Krapp uses this watch before going to the kitchen to have a drink. Twice in the play, after having consulted his watch Krapp goes for a drink. This sequence of actions is a routine. He may use this watch as a reminder of his drinking habits. Normally we consult time to take some medicine, such as pills, which is supposed to be taken at regular intervals of time. Krapp looks like a man with heavy drinking habits, thus he needs alcohol to cheer him up and make him

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live through the day. Besides, Krapp may be afraid of the passing of time, since a watch is a “time container”, that could be another explanation of his excess of drinking. Looking at his watch may also mean that, although Krapp has isolated himself from the world, his bodily actions remember a past routine, consulting the time. Routines form part of our hectic life-style. They remind us that Krapp used to be there in the world with other people in the past. Nevertheless, the watch ceases to measure time in this play, this function is passed on to the tapes accumulated around Krapp.

The manipulation of the objects found in his pockets probably has to do with Krapp’s nervousness and a certain ceremony before sitting down to listen and to record. The objects in his pockets may be considered toys that Krapp likes to play with to pass the time. Rodriguez-Gago comments that those objects and his daily routines may be memory-triggers as well: “His senses seem to take him back to the past more faithfully than his intellect; his pacing and the taste of his bananas have helped him to remember the year of the tape to which he wants to listen” (2007: 206).

The objects, such as an envelope and some bananas, are important in the play. Both objects link old Krapp to younger Krapps, as he was always fond of eating bananas, and an envelope is mentioned by the young Krapp on the tape and old Krapp also has an envelope in his pocket. Thus, the envelope too gains importance, when it is referred to verbally by 39-year-old Krapp: “Jotted down a few notes, on the back of an envelope” (217). Before starting to record, Krapp writes down the things that he wants to record. The envelope contains the memory episodes which Krapp considers important, thus it is turned into a memory object as well as a memory-trigger in the play.

Another routine which forms a link between his past and his present is his addiction to bananas. The banana ritual is repeated three times during the play (215, 216, 221). Krapp has a stock of them in his pockets and in his drawers. Eating bananas is a much stronger addiction for him than drinking. There is no evidence that Krapp is hungry, but peeling and sucking a banana gives him real physical pleasure and calms him. Krapp’s banana peeling reminds us of the phrase from *WFG* that “people are bloody ignorant apes”, since they are chained to their habits as “the ballast that chains

the dog to his vomit” (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 19). Besides, this routine may help remind Krapp of his past tapes, especially the one he wants to listen to and to record. The taste and touch of a banana may form part of Krapp’s sensorial memory:

*“...unlocks second drawer, takes out a second large banana, peers at it, locks drawer, puts back his keys in his pocket, turns, advances to the edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, tosses skin into pit, puts an end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him. Finally he has an idea, puts banana in his waistcoat pocket, the end emerging, and goes with all the speed he can muster backstage into darkness.”* (215)

The taste of banana makes Krapp freeze for a moment, and his “staring vacuously” may represent his silent remembering. A banana as such has strong sexual connotations, and perhaps in Krapp’s case it may serve as a reminder of his sensual or erotic past. It is interesting that after peeling it, Krapp rushes into his dark zone backstage.

A retreat to backstage is repeated three times in the play (216, 219, 221). The dark zone of his kitchen is a refuge for Krapp; there he is not seen by the audience and there he can drink. Krapp’s frequent visits backstage are always associated with his strong habit of drinking. His “firm” resolution “to drink less” (218) is not violated onstage, but happens in the secluded place in the dark. Alcohol helps Krapp to keep going on and even stimulates his singing. The latter reminds him of his past: “Did I sing as a boy? No. [*Pause.*] Did I ever sing? No” (218). Krapp cannot control his habit of drinking nor can he control his visits to the kitchen. Moreover, darkness in this play may be an intensifier of Krapp’s emotional memory. This idea was used by Capella (discussed in Chapter I) as a mnemonic technique. Besides, darkness may be considered Krapp’s companion.

Krapp, though an ego-centric character, is unable to control his own behavioural re-enactments, which signal his troubled psyche. Like Hamm, he is the centre of his universe: “I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to ... [*hesitates*] ... me. [*Pause.*] Krapp” (217). But Krapp’s universe is empty, “not a soul” (217), he is his own



Narrator and Listener; and his restlessness and dissatisfaction are embodied in his movements.

#### **2.2.4. Chronological Landmarks in Krapp's Memory: Emergence of Different Selves**

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett makes memory processes visible and tangible on stage. Memory is extended in time, and Bergson's idea of memory's mobility and body immobility is enacted, as well as the changeability of the Self through time. Krapp lives the life that he has consciously chosen. His sacrifice of senses in favour of intellect makes him now a bitter and disillusioned man. Sometimes wrong choices lead us to trauma and depression. But constant obsessive recall only worsens our self-esteem. Although Roedigger states that constant recall makes memory stronger, I do not think that this is Krapp's case. This character demonstrates his forgetfulness upon reading the label of the fifth tape of his catalogue and this fact makes him suffer, since he perceives the importance of the memory kept in this tape and, in order to release his frustration, Krapp rushes backstage for a drink.

“Krapp's fight against forgetting is usually followed by movement and by his business with objects. One could say that an act of forgetting opens the play, starts the action, and moves it forward, leading thus to the progressive re-figuring of stage-body.” (Rodriguez-Gago 2007: 208)

I focus my discussion on the reason for this forgetting. Krapp is an old man with a fading memory; his senses of perception are failing; besides he is hooked on alcohol, which diminishes his memory. Nevertheless, an old person is prone to forget proper names and the names of locations, but some specific events of one's life are never forgotten, since they constitute the landmarks of our ABM. In the case of Krapp, he seems even to forget the events that form part of his self-identity: his mother's death (217), or the decision that actually changed his life (220), which was to abandon his love in order to write his “opus magnum”.

The key events in Krapp's life that I would like to analyse hereinafter are three self-defining memories, which constitute the landmarks of his life; the memories, which may still be open and may cause his suffering: "The grain, now what I wonder do I mean by that, I mean ... [*hesitates*] ...I suppose I mean those things worth having them when all the dust has – when all my dust has settled" (217). These "grains", which he tries to separate from the "husk" when he was young, are really these important memories or landmarks which influenced, and are still influencing, him.

The act of forgetting may only point to his subconscious refusal to face these events. And the suffering from listening is self-inflicted by Krapp conscientiously in order to face his memories again and again, as the act of listening to them is compulsive and obsessive in its essence. Solitude and the withdrawal from the outside world are only the symptoms of Krapp's impossibility to assimilate these memories. Krapp tries to shield himself subconsciously from them by his obsessions with numbers, forgotten words and drinking. Another device is his dissociation with his other selves, the result of which is self-disruption. The trauma of loss in this play leads to his trauma of failure and as a result – the regression to childhood's mentality in the womb of the room. Nevertheless, Krapp has not reconciled himself with the mistakes of his past: "Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God it's over" (218). Krapp seems to be unable to accept his own past selves; probably, he does not feel the same person any more. The date when he records and listens to his tapes is very significant, as it is the "awful occasion" (217) of his birthday. Thus, the trauma of birth is made audible in the play.

Beckett applies three different techniques to present repressed memories in this play, which are 1) forgetting or memory blocking, 2) omission and 3) repetition compulsion, each of them has to do with a specific type of trauma.

The first memory I would like to deal with is the traumatic memory of loss, or death of a loved one. This memory lies very deep in Krapp's subconscious, and at first (on reading the label on the tape) Krapp is not able to remember: "Mother at rest at last ... Hm... The black ball..." (219). At the moment of silent remembering Krapp stares blankly in front of him. He seems to be incapable of facing his mother's death at the age of 69 even though he says "wishing she were gone" (219), these words may be taken as

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a verbal protection from his strong feelings of loss, which stress his suffering and his agony. Krapp does not want pity, he is actually afraid of it, since all his life he has tried to avoid his dark irrational side. However, the feeling of deep loss emerges in the episode of his mother's death:

“ – bench by the weir from where I could see her window. There I sat, in the biting wind, wishing she were gone. [*Pause.*] Hardly a soul, just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs. I got to know them quite well - oh by appearance of course I mean! 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 into 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 policeman. ... 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.” (220)

The first thing that is of major interest to my discussion is that the real event is not narrated; the memory of his mother's death is created through images like “the blind went down” (which was a custom in Ireland when someone died) and it is “All over and done with”. According to van der Volk a traumatic event is not stored in episodic memory; its recording is done on a sensory-motor level through images, sensations and emotions (1991: 52). The same happens in this narration: Krapp is remembering the environment and his sensations mostly; even “the biting wind” refers to the turmoil in his mind. The whole narration creates the unreality of time, since it is suspended and on-going, like a vicious traumatic circle.

The verbal image of people walking about that evening, “infants, old men, dogs”, may be an allusion to the road of life and the death-birth cycle, as “infants and old men” appear together in that sentence. Krapp is alone, “hardly a soul” most probably refers to Krapp's solitude in his pain, but life goes on. For a traumatized person the hardest thing is to face the mobility of life when a person he loves dies.

Krapp seems to be suspended in time, as this traumatic event makes life itself incomprehensible and unreal. There is a moment when we think that Krapp will actually tell us what happened (“I was there when –“), but the memory does not come or is simply blocked. That is the reason why he switches off and broods; this brooding may be understood as a moment of silent remembering. It means that Krapp is still undergoing a process of mourning. The pain of this loss was unbearable, and difficult to talk about, it seems that there was a special union between Krapp and his mother.

Probably, Krapp’s mother’s death after a long illness was an agony for Krapp. Moreover, a person develops the feeling of guilt and shame when he is awaiting death to stop the mutual suffering. It was a long illness, due to the fact that Krapp was waiting “on a bench” and got to know all the passers-by. He was especially attracted by “a white nurse with a black perambulator”: again, the contrast of black and white creates tension in his narration and the image itself may be understood as an image of birth and death which always go together in this life.

Unsurprisingly, Krapp remembers only the *locus* of his mother’s death: “the house by the canal”. This is a very common reaction of trying to protect one’s own consciousness from a traumatic experience: the event (what) is blocked and the circumstances surrounding the event (where and how) are remembered. The mind subconsciously develops techniques to isolate the pain. On switching the tape, Krapp gets interested in the word “viudity”: this is another shielding technique to divert the mind from a traumatic event. Consequently, forgetting may be seen as a protection from the traumatic recall and a means of survival.

The moment of his mother’s death, I believe, coincides with his evocation of a black ball and a white dog. Again, Beckett creates a contrast of white/black colours. In this particular case, white/black is a signal of the eternal cycle of death/birth, if we understand it as Freud’s *fort-da* game. It is important that Krapp gives the ball to the dog forever as though he wants to block the pain of this loss. The quality of the ball (“a small, old, black, hard, solid, rubber ball”) may be the visual and tangible image of his pain and loss, which Krapp claims he will feel it in his hand “until his dying day”. Ulrika Maude in her article “The Body of Memory: Beckett and Merleau-Ponty”

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suggests “the full impact of the memory of the mother’s death is hence truly activated not by the written note on the ledger which does not result even in the voluntary memory .... but by the tactile sensations” (2002: 116) of this ball. The ball in itself becomes a memory-trigger, on touching this object or on mentioning it Krapp remembers his mother’s death.

The narration of trauma normally helps a person to assimilate it, but this does not happen in Krapp’s case. He becomes a simple witness to his own pain, as he is compelled to listen to it, and he does not utter a word after having listened to this memory, probably, he is still unable to talk about it. So it is one of his open memories, one of his “bleeding wounds”. Normally, when a person assimilates the event, he is able to talk freely about it. This may be the reason of Krapp’s self-disruption. This memory belongs to one of his fragmented selves, still suspended in time. Charles R. Lyons calls this other selves a “hypothetical self”.

“Beckett’s particular strategy of representing consciousness clarifies the irredeemable gap between the event and the perception of the event, the wider gap between the event and its reconstitution in language, and the implicit distance between this verbal reconstruction and actual memory.” (Lyons 2002:99)

This distance of time also plays a vital role for his self-disintegration, since Krapp tries to alienate himself from his former perception of himself in order not to feel the pain and the loss. The act of switching off the taper-recorder may be seen as blocking of the memory of his mother’s death and its subsequent forgetting.

Another memory that I consider an important landmark in Krapp’s life is what young Krapp considers a turning point of “a sudden vision” (220). The memory itself is fragmentary, since Krapp switches it off immediately when it comes up in the tape. He remembers it, but this “vision” is unpleasant to him now.

“It is not surprising that the narrative trajectory of the story converges not on revelation but omission, the undisclosed epiphany of ‘that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty’ (60).” (Begam 2002: 27)

That decision has to do with his fire, his imagination, and his decision to replace “darkness” for light:

“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. This 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 of impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again.*] ...” (220)

The memory is fragmented by Krapp, who switches off the tape-recorder. His refusal to listen to it creates tension, and ignites the audience’s interest in this memory fragment. There is again a false start to tell this memory, and even though it is recorded on tape, the audience is not allowed to listen to it. This event was recorded when Krapp was 39 years old. But 69-year-old Krapp obstinately refuses to listen to. This memory deals with the important decision he took on “that memorable night in March”. “Memorable” sounds very sarcastic, since Krapp does not want to listen to this episode; however, its importance lies in his refusal to remember. His reluctance only emphasizes that he is not indifferent to this memory; and that there is a negative emotion involved. This event happened in the evening against the acoustic background of “howling wind”; the wind may be associated with Krapp’s transition period contained in this memory, with his eternal conflict between “light” and “darkness” and with the images of “the fire that set it alight” referring to “vision”.

“Krapp at 39 remarks ‘clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most – 69’, and if, as the interrupted passage seems to imply, darkness alone grants access to ‘authentic’ being, then it is significant that the entire stage is dark, with the notable exception of Krapp himself.” (Begam 2002: 27)

Intellect and senses have been always at war in Krapp, he cannot reconcile them. And though his intellect won once in his life, in his present Krapp does not approve of his decision. Young Krapp seems to be ashamed of his dark side, but old Krapp prefers to listen to the love episode. By the act of switching off the memory of sudden “vision” mechanically, Krapp switches off his own hypothetical self, who is distant not only in

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time but also in spirit. The reason is that old Krapp now does no longer believe in the power of his imagination or creativity, as the young Krapp does.

But the memory that Krapp wants to listen to follows the memory of his “vision”, this is the memory of “the girl in the punt”. The reproduction of this memory suggests the repetition-compulsion technique: Krapp listens to it three times, although each time he starts listening to it at a different part. The impossibility to rewind this memory mechanically directly to its beginning has to do with the mental processes of remembering, since our brain is not a diary. Sometimes we cannot recall the memory we are searching for in our brain. So we remember it by separate parts or images, or sounds. In this case, Krapp first listens to the end of his love episode: starting with “my face in her breasts ...” (220), then he listens to the whole memory scene (221), and the third time he starts in the middle of the story “gooseberries, she said ...” and he listens till the end of it (223). This sequence is important, as it creates a circular form of remembering and the end is only the beginning of Krapp’s suffering.

“The fractured memory of ‘farewell to love’, replayed in three separate fragments, interrupted by additional pieces of Krapp’s past, refracted through Krapp’s present personality and his own attempts at recording, does finally coalesce into a story and a history that reflect poignantly on Krapp’s present loneliness.” (Malkin 1999: 33)

Memory processes are not simple; memory traces are buried underneath other memories. In the case of the memory about “a girl in the punt”, it was narrated after the memory about “the vision at last”. These memories are interdependent, since young Krapp’s decision to dedicate his life to writing prompted their separation. And though young Krapp was sure of the decision taken, old Krapp thinks that it was perhaps a mistake. And, probably, he needs to listen to this memory again in order to understand his other self. The present Krapp operates as an Opener to his memories, “attempting to recover an anterior self which remains stubbornly obscure” (Begam 2002: 27).

The way Krapp manipulates this memory points to its traumatic quality: a repetitive quality of the recall and a regression of the narration, which goes back and forth, as well as an integration of fantasies and the fragmentation of this memory is achieved by the manipulation of the tape. The trauma quality has to do with the trauma

of loss and Krapp's present solitude. Moreover, we can hear regret in his voice. The memory is very romantic in essence:

"Here I end - [*Krapp switches off, winds tape back, switches on again.*] – upper lake, with the punt, bathed off the bank, then pushed out in the stream and drifted. She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hand under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and asked her how she came by it. 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 after a few moments – [*Pause.*] – after a few moments she did, but her 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 across 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. [*Pause.*] Past midnight. Never knew –" (221)

This memory is here framed in closure: it starts with the words "Here I end" and finishes with "Past midnight. Never knew-". As always with Beckett closure gives way to openness, the openness to Krapp's most important memory. The whole memory deals with the girl that Krapp has sacrificed for his "opus magnum", and this memory moment is Krapp's farewell to her and, probably, to love in general: "I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on...". Again there is the duel between the decision taken on "that memorable March at night" and the physical unity with this girl. Imagination or desire? What wins? Paradoxically, both lose, since Krapp is alone now, regretting his lost opportunities and his wrong choices.

"Romantic old Krapp ('drowned in dreams') seems to believe that a moment of intense passion is superior and more lasting than the fire of the intellect that replaced it."  
(Rodriguez-Gago 2007: 211)

Although the evocation of "a girl in the punt" memory is unique, there is a certain parallelism with the memory of his mother's death. Both are mourned by Krapp, and both memories are centred in the figure of a woman he loved and lost. Although his mother died, and this girl was abandoned by him willingly. Thus, Krapp, who is mourning his love lost, at the same time may feel guilty and frustrated with his other self. Time is unredeemable for old Krapp, there is no return for him, but by listening to



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this memory, he is reliving it again. However, the memory of love takes us to other world and other time and to other Krapp.

The girl is not fully described, her image is recreated through two significant details: the scratch on her thigh and her eyes. The word “gooseberries” may have unravel Krapp’s memory since this detail helps his memory afresh. This word has reminded me of Chekhov’s short story<sup>91</sup> of the same title which also deals with the main character’s unhappiness, failure and quest for fulfillment. Nikolai, sacrificed all his life to grow gooseberries, but his gooseberries tasted “sour and unripe”. Nikolai reminds me of Krapp who sacrificed his own life for a quest for the higher understanding of imagination, the understanding that he did not achieve and is still groping for in the darkness of his traumatic memories.

The girl’s eyes are another important feature in Krapp’s description. They are just slits at first, given to the “glare”, and he desperately wants her to look at him. Krapp is/was always attracted by women’s eyes: “Not much about her, apart from a tribute to her eyes. Very warm. I suddenly saw them again. [*Pause.*] Incomparable!” (218), he says in a different episode. “Eyes” are the mirror of the soul, perhaps that is the reason why Krapp begs “a girl in the punt” to be “let in” both spiritually and physically, paradoxically, when the decision to break up has already been taken. “Let in” also signals sexual intercourse, and together with the gentle movement of the boat up and down, we may understand that they were making love. The girl opens the eyes only when Krapp shields them from the blazing sun, creating a shadow, or a zone of darkness and sensuality.

The word “shadow” has many echoes through the play. Krapp uses it in the song, whose words cannot remember at first:

“Now the day is over,  
Night is drawing nigh-igh,

---

<sup>91</sup> *Gooseberries* was written towards the end of Chekhov’s life and was first published as the middle story of *The Little Trilogy* in 1898. We see that the author examines two of his favorite themes within this tale: social injustice and the quest for fulfillment.

Shadows –“ (219)<sup>92</sup>

Surprisingly, the song he is singing is a church hymn, sung at the evening service. He learnt this song being a child, and it takes him back to his childhood years and to his mother, the painful moment of his mother’s death, thus it constitutes a repressed memory. Furthermore, the full lyrics of the song deal with “going to bed” ritual, which may also be understood on another metaphorical level of “death” (“sweet repose”). The song deals with the opposition of light and darkness, which may be paralleled to Krapp’s interior conflict discussed above. The song might also refer to his present situation: “Comfort those who suffer, watching late in pain”. In addition, it hints at the desirable “return-to-the-mother” state impossible in Krapp’s present situation. Consequently, it is cut abruptly the first time he tries to sing it. Krapp remembers it after saying “like when I was in short trousers” (222), which is a reference to himself as a child, and he finishes the song almost inaudibly:

“Shadows – [*coughing, then most inaudible*] –

Of the evening

Steal across the sky. “ (222)

---

<sup>92</sup> *Words:* Sabine Baring-Gould, in *The Church Times*, February 16, 1867. *Music:* Merriall, Joseph Barnby, 1868. Hymn #654 from *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Text: Proverbs 3:24. These are the full lyrics of the song:

Now the day is over,  
Night is drawing nigh,  
Shadows of the evening  
Steal across the sky.

Comfort those who suffer,  
Watching late in pain;  
Those who plan some evil  
From their sin restrain.

Now the darkness gathers,  
Stars begin to peep,  
Birds, and beasts and flowers  
Soon will be asleep.

Through the long night watches  
May Thine angels spread  
Their white wings above me,  
Watching round my bed.

Jesus, give the weary  
Calm and sweet repose;  
With Thy tenderest blessing  
May mine eyelids close.

When the morning wakens,  
Then may I arise  
Pure, and fresh, and sinless  
In Thy holy eyes.

Grant to little children  
Visions bright of Thee;  
Guard the sailors tossing  
On the deep, blue sea.

Glory to the Father,  
Glory to the Son,  
And to Thee, blest Spirit,  
While all ages run.

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I will conclude by arguing that darkness and “shadows” do not only refer to Krapp’s sensual side and his subconscious, they also remind him of his childhood, his mother, and of his past in general. Krapp’s darkness is inhabited by the shadows from his past, which “materialize” in his present, while he is listening to the tapes. “Be again, be again” (223) is a tiresome business for disillusioned Krapp.

The last tableau of this play shifts the memory/tape immobility to tape running silently, and Krapp instead of being mobile onstage is turned into a motionless statue “staring before him” (223). The roles have been changed and this image of Krapp becomes the posture of the memory of other hypothetical self.



**CHAPTER III**  
**Rhythmical Sounds as *Loci* for Painful Memories**



## CHAPTER III

### Rhythmical Sounds as *Loci* for Painful Memories

This chapter deals with sounds as an acoustic background for memory. As I have already discussed in Chapter I, memories are not necessarily stored against some physical environment. Some memories are stored acoustically. We may remember while listening to classical music, for instance. On hearing a piece of music, we will retrieve a previously encoded memory. According to Fillenbaum, we create a certain visual maps in our brains: “algunos de éstos se transforman en el cerebro en el código acústico – una especie de eco silencioso que parece que hace más fácil poder recordar” (1973: 72). The sound overall is not a memory, but only a potential acoustic trigger. The landscapes of traumatic memories may take on different shapes in Beckett’s theatre.

There are many examples of acoustic *loci* in Beckett’s theatre, especially the sound of the sea in *Embers* (1959) and the sound of the footsteps in *Footfalls* (1975). Other example is the dragging of feet in *All That Falls*, etc. In all those plays, it is the sound that functions both as a traumatic memory-trigger and the background of a specific memory. The sound of Clov’s dragging feet, for instance, is the trigger of the trauma of separation in *Endgame* (already discussed in Chapter II).

The present chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I discuss the sound of the sea in relation to the trauma of loss. I will argue that the sound of the sea takes on the role of Henry’s father and haunts him, reviving his worst memories. In the second part of this chapter, the play analysed is *Footfalls*. The sound of May’s steps becomes vital for her onstage existence. Her mother’s memories are inscribed against this sound, which is the metaphor for her life. Here the trauma of birth and death comes in view, as well as the trauma of not growing-up.

### **3.1. Multiplicity of Traumatic Voices of the Sea in *Embers***

“Something which is a highly coloured allusion to physical impressions of nature recaptures them on a sensory level, the sound itself being only a nostalgic image of something else, a kind of magic state where feelings have become so sensitive they are suitable for visitation by the mind.” (Artaud 1974: 45)

The memory *locus* I discuss further on is the sound of the sea in the radio play *Endgame*. The sea sound is transformed in this play into something else: alien, disturbing and haunting. Its obsessive quality leads me to develop the discussion on trauma. The memory, analysed further, obviously belongs to a traumatic type, since the main character’s understanding is not achieved, thus there is an obsessive recall of the *locus* of the sea as a means to reconcile the past. The information, Henry is searching for, is connected with the sound of the sea, which may be both the landscape of the memory and the memory itself. The event that Henry needs to remember has not been recorded verbally in his brain (the phonological loop information is absent); there are only references to visuospatial sketchpad (the sound and the image of the sea created verbally). Moreover, it seems that the trauma of loss is woven into the sound of the sea in this play. Clas Zilliacus comments in his essay on *Embers*:

“The play is not only verbal. The verbal layer serves a specific function within the totality of the play. This function is not primarily to tell a specific story, it is to tell any story, in order to drown the sound of the sea.” (1976: 78)

The sound of a non-naturalistic nature, that fills the air space practically in all the pauses, does not serve only the purpose of a background noise – among various functions of this sound in the play, one of them is to create a landscape of traumatic memories and also the trauma of loss in itself.

According to Knowlson’s biography, the “sea” seems to be always in the background of Beckett’s life. Samuel Beckett was quite familiar with the sea. Born in Dublin, he lived there until 1927. The sea in Beckett’s life has associations with his father, with his romances and with death. His childhood memories are very important, too. He used to take long walks with his father near the sea. And it was his father who



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taught him to swim and to dive from the rocks. Therefore, his father's death was a terrible blow for Beckett:

“After my father's death I had trouble psychologically. The bad years were between when I had to crawl home in 1932 and after my father's death in 1933. I'll tell you how it was. I was walking down Dawson street. And I felt I couldn't go on. It was a strange experience I can't really describe. I found I couldn't go on moving.” (Knowlson 1997: 167)

The cemetery, where his father and later on his mother, May, and his brother Frank (who died of cancer) are buried, is facing the harbour. Beckett used to take his mother to the cemetery and watch her taking care of his father's grave; afterwards he was coming to Ireland only for funerals. Many times in his life he went on vacation with Suzanne to the seaside (Morocco, Portugal, etc.). That vacation was necessary due to his bad health, so he was trying to recover from bustling Paris life and from his work. Thus, other associations with the sea may be bad health and rest. Unsurprisingly, the *locus* of the sea in *Embers* functions on many levels, and some of the autobiographical details are made prominent in this play. The sound for the radio play productions (1986, 2001) was actually recorded in Ireland. Samuel Beckett could describe the location: Killiney Beach, near the Foxrock house in which Beckett spent his youth.

Samuel Beckett wrote various radio-plays during his life and he was normally against staging of these plays. In comparison with stage, radio has special features that he was interested in. Beckett was quite fascinated by radio, because it is inhabited by “disembodied voices” and “the whole thing is coming out of the dark”. Besides radio permits “private conversation” with the listener intensifying his/her emotions, thus it could be converted into one-audience theatre. Actually, the “stage” in radio-plays is the audience's mind and the message is carried only by sounds (human voice or non-human noises). And deprived of his/her sight, a listener discovers a great potential for seeing with the eye of the mind. In this radio-play sounds of different nature help the listener to enter into the private universe of Henry's mind, mingling internal and external realities. The play is practically staged in Henry's mind, where memories take on not only the voices of different people, but also the sounds of non-human nature (sea sound, hooves, clashing of the stones, piano, drips of water, and “boots on shingle”), which may be considered as memories and memory-triggers.

Hereinafter, I propose that the sound of the sea has a double function in relation to memory and trauma: it is an obsessive memory background and traumatic memory *per se*. In order to demonstrate the abovementioned I will focus my discussion of the sea sound in *Embers* on the following points:

- The acoustic quality of the sound of the sea
- The sea as obsession-compulsion syndrome
- The trauma of loss and filial guilt

### **3.1.1. The Voice of the Sea**

The quality of this sound is very peculiar and it would be very difficult for the listener to identify it as the sound of the sea, because the sound is very mechanical and metallic: it was created by Desmond Briscoe and consists of natural-sounding rustling of waves against pebbles, to which a clearly synthetic, organ-like note has been added. Henry introduces us to this sound:

“I say that the sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. [*Pause. - SEA*]”- I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn’t see what it was you wouldn’t know what it was. [*Pause. - SEA*]” (253)

It is an absurd statement because it is impossible for the audience to “see” the “sea” (this pun was mentioned by M. Perloff 1999: 169). The “sea” is “audible throughout what follows whenever pause indicated” (253) and in this play there are 236 pauses. Taking into consideration that the duration of the play is 45 minutes, the sea sound is audible for approximately 10 minutes of the play. Marjorie Perloff writes in her essay on Acoustic Art (1999), that in *Embers* the sound of the sea is the “dominant voice” in the play. Thus, this sound has a “body” of its own participating through the whole play not only as a background but obviously as something else much more important, which is my objective to analyse in this section. The acoustic “visuality” in a radio-play is created by the sequence of sounds and a radio-play finishes when all the sounds die, and in this play it is the sound of the sea, which is the last to go. Besides,

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this sound is the only “real” sound (here I mean the sound that is not created intentionally by Henry’s imagination), as other sounds are created by Henry intentionally in his mind, the sea sound is the only sound that he cannot command or control: “On. [*Sea. Voice louder.*], On! (.....) Stop. [*Boots on shingle. As he goes, louder.*] Stop! [*He halts. Sea little louder.*]” (253).

The sound of the sea has different verbal descriptions through the play: Henry characterizes it as “unlike the sound of the sea”(253), “lips and claws” (258), “old grave” (258), “sucking” (261), “not a sound” (264). All Henry’s descriptions lead us to the understanding, that this sound is unpleasant and even unnatural for him and it may stand for a kind of an imaginative monster, created by a child; or a cemetery, which is trying to suck Henry; and/or the void, which is as frightening as the rest of the associations. But what is more the sea sound is an obsession for Henry. Nevertheless, Ada’s perception of this sound is different: “...it is a lovely peaceful gentle soothing sound “ (260), “all is as quite as a grave” (261), “not a sound” (261). That only means that Henry has developed his own perception of the sound. Moreover, they coincide only in one characteristic of this sound or, better say, its lack of any sound, which points to the void, and furthermore to Henry’s imagining it.

Another acoustic characteristic of the sound of the sea is its being monotonous; it gets louder only 7 times in the duration of the play. Probably, it is the monotony, which serves as an element of torture that makes Henry speak all the time in order to drown it. He is unable to contain his verbal diarrhoea, even talking in the bathroom (260), and Ada is the one who says that “There must be something wrong with your brain”(260), since Henry cannot but listen to the sound of the sea, which becomes his mental torturer. Artaud pointed out the importance of the human mind: it “believes what it sees and does what it believes; that is the secret of fascination” (1974: 18). And for Henry this sound is as real as breathing.

Mental torture was considered to be the worst in the times of the Inquisition: when a drip of water was administered at regular intervals, the prisoners went mad and preferred suicide to this archetype of torture. But in Henry’s case a suicide is out of the question, he is doomed to invent his never-ending stories at the *water’s edge*, because

he is still trying to achieve the understanding of his father's disappearance. Artaud points out that "There can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show. In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body"<sup>93</sup>.

As the Light in *Play*, the sea sound in *Embers* contains a certain element of cruelty, which torments the character producing a certain turmoil in his mind, and the question "Why life?" (261) remains without answer. And though Henry is an A-character, a listener will not fail to associate his mental agitation with one of his own. Thus the "gap between life and theatre"<sup>94</sup> is breached.

### **3.1.2. The Sea as Obsession-Compulsion Syndrome**

All these acoustic characteristics of the sea sound point to it being Henry's obsession. He wants to escape it but at the same time he is unable to live without it. Moreover, Henry may present an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which is characterised by uncontrollable intrusive thoughts and actions. The term *obsession* refers to images, ideas, or words that force themselves into the subject's consciousness against their will, and which momentarily deprive them of the ability to think and sometimes even to act, and the sea sound seems to be Henry's inescapable "reality". The term is derived from the Latin *obsidere*, which means "to sit before", "to lay siege to", and figuratively "to control an audience", which Henry is doing to a perfection, sitting at the water's edge of his memory, trying to subdue the sea sound. From this the noun *obsidio* is derived, which means "detention", or "captivity", and figuratively "a pressing danger". And it seems that Henry is captivated by the sea sound, since he is constantly referring to it in the duration of the play.

"Obsessions as defined as thoughts or impulses which are distressful, persistent and recurrent. These thoughts or impulses must not just be worries or real life-problems. The person must be aware that these thoughts or impulses are only a product of his/her

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 84.

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imagination and they must be actively trying to suppress, ignore, or neutralize them with other actions. 'Compulsions' must show repetitive behaviour, physical or mental, that cannot be controlled.' (Davis 2008: 11)

Henry's voice is actually inscribed against the background noise of the sea, since it is heard in between the pauses, filled in by the sea sound. Thus there are two counterparts in the play: Henry's voice is opposed to the voice of the sea. Clas Zilliacus writes in his essay on broadcasting that "...the sea which goads Henry on by surfacing in every one of them (the pauses), achieves the dignity of *dramatis persona*" (1976: 77). And the sea sound becomes another voice/character, which undermines Henry's authority in the play. Probably, that is one of the reasons why Henry does everything in his power to damp the sea sound: evoking other characters (Ada, Addie); introducing other sounds, such as hooves (but they die rapidly away), clashing the stones (a sound of a violent nature), slamming the door, imagining Addie's piano classes, and amplifying a drip of water. These sounds do not last long and the sound of the sea wins. Moreover, the sea sound is the only sound in the play, which escapes Henry's control.

The sea seems to be an inescapable presence for Henry. Seven times in the play he wants to drive the attention of the listener to this sound: "Listen to it!" (253, 253, 255, 255, 258, 258, 261), making him/her participant in his private nightmare. But the most extraordinary the fact that in Henry's vocabulary there are many words connected with water: "a drip" (255), "a washout" (256), "coming for a dip" (256), "babbling" (255), "roaring prayers" (260) - it sounds like the roaring sound of the sea, "became immersed" (261), "plumber" (264). These words he uses in different contexts and not only with reference to the sea, thus the "water" language finds its way into his speech. Moreover, it seems that "water" motif has penetrated his mind. And since we can only hear Henry's voice, Henry himself is already devoured by water, and his voice is a ghostly presence of his existence.

Henry's obsession with the sea goes further than just a simple repetition of some idea, for him the "sea" is his life. Davis writes that "obsession isn't simply a medical category; it is a category of existence" (2008: 12). Later on in the play, Henry questions his life on the brink of it (258), but it is impossible for him to give a clear answer, so he laughs at all the questions except the last one: "Some old grave I cannot tear myself

from? [*Pause – SEA*]” (258). The words “tear from” are very characteristic when we speak about something that attracts and frightens us at the same time. Ada does not understand Henry’s “relation” with the sea sound, but her questions help the listener to understand it: “[*Pause.*] And if you hate it why don’t you keep away from it? Why are you always coming down here? [*Pause.*]” (260). Henry is unable to provide the explanation; the relation with the sea sound is more emotional than rational in his life. Obsession has been always considered the dark side of human nature, which leads to fantasy. In Henry’s case, he tries to create stories, which may be taken for screen-memories, discussed further on in this chapter in connection to the trauma of filial guilt. Consequently, Henry’s feeling towards the sea is a paradox: it is not only the obsession that he drives from it but also inspiration (his stories); and the fear of it is mixed with admiration: “I’m like you in that (like father), can’t stay away from it, but I never go in, no, I think the last time I went in was with you. [*Pause.*]” (254).

According to Davis, obsession falls into three categories: aggressive, blasphemous and sexual (singled out by Freud<sup>95</sup>). Both aggressive and sexual categories are present in Henry’s treatment of the sound. By aggressive, I understand the mental torture that Henry has to suffer. It seems that there is certain symbiosis between Henry and the sea, as though both cannot stand each other, but they have to co-exist. And sexual connotations are present in Henry’s description of the sea sound as “lips and claws”. Besides, in the conversation with Ada, Henry exultantly cries “Darling!” (260), the sea gets rough and Ada cries out as well. The scene actually reminds us of love foreplay. The amplification of Ada’s cry together with the sound of the sea may be considered as a climax.

It was Sigmund Freud, however, in his description of obsessional neuroses in “Heredity and Aetiology of the Neuroses” (1896a: 141-156), who considered obsession to be a symptom that is part of a larger clinical picture, the symptom that serves as a compromise and has an economic function. “Obsessive ideas . . . are nothing but reproaches addressed by the subject to himself because of anticipated sexual pleasure, but these reproaches are disfigured by an unconscious psychic process of transformation

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<sup>95</sup> Freud, Sigmund, (1896a). “Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses”. *SE*, volume 3: 141-156.  
—— (1909d). “Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis”. *SE*, volume 10: 151-318.

and substitution” (Freud 1896: 143). Moreover, the sea sound for Henry may be considered as a symptom on a much broader scale. This sound, perhaps, unifies all his fears and doubts into one inescapable reality. The sea sound agglomerates or contains other voices/people and other sounds. And on existential level it may be taken for Henry’s whole life.

For Freud the notion of *Zwang* (compulsion) assumed a much broader and more fundamental meaning than that which he gave it in the clinical picture of obsessional neuroses. It reflects what is most radical in the drive:

“In the mental unconscious, we can recognize the supremacy of a repetition-compulsion arising from libidinal emotions that are most likely dependent on the most intimate nature of drives that are sufficiently powerful to place themselves above the pleasure principle, lending certain aspects of psychic life their demoniacal character.”<sup>96</sup>

And this discussion of obsession leads us to the most traumatic of Henry’s memories: the death of his father. The sea sound actually embodies this memory, thus making Henry dependable on it; it is as a kind of the key which would help Henry to unlock the mystery of his father’s “disappearance”. And this is the main reason of the sea sound haunting Henry’s mind, or vice versa, Henry’s haunting the sea.

### 3.1.3. Open Wound: the Trauma of Loss and Filial Guilt

“Obsessive ideas frequently involve contamination, dirt, diseases, germs, real/imagined trauma, or some type of frightening/unpleasant theme. These obsessive thoughts frequently lead to compulsive behaviours as the person tries to prevent or change some dreaded event.” (Davis 2008: 8)

The current discussion in the light of obsession leads us to trauma. And for Henry it is the sound of the sea, which triggers and at the same time holds the key to this trauma. The sea sound is the grave of his memory as well as the lost key to his trauma. The main character of *Embers*, Henry, haunted by his memories, is capable of evoking

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

different people and even sounds of non-human nature, but he cannot control the sea sound. The obsession with this sound is extremely strong as his major desire is to “drown” this sound or simply to repress it. Henry says that, “I once went to Switzerland to get away from the cursed thing and never stopped all the time I was there” (254). Nevertheless, Henry seemed to reach a kind of symbiosis with the sea sound since the sea reacts to Henry’s words and echoes the rhythm of his “pulse beatings”, as well as it fills in the pauses when he breathes.

The sea has been extremely important in Henry’s life. It seems that major events of his life are connected with it: all his life he lived on “the brink of it”; Henry even admits that “Perhaps I should have gone into the merchant navy” (261); presumably his father got drowned in the sea; he had his first sexual relation with Ada on the sea shore and there is a probability that they conceived their daughter, Addie, near the sea. All these transform the sea into Henry’s memory, or the landmarks of his ABM. His memories are not pleasant at all, and they have a nightmarish quality, especially the ones connected with his daughter, Addie. Her piano classes drive Henry mad. But the real reason may have to do with the trauma of birth, since Henry says that they “dragged her into the world” (259), and refers to her as a “horrid little creature, wish to God we’d never had her” (256). The memory of her daughter is traumatic, since for Henry his daughter may symbolize the continuation of his own self.

Henry is an old man, judging by the sound of his voice, he could be approximately 70 years old. And at this age people tend to analyse their life a lot. But the elderly people’s memory tends to become less precise (discussed in Chapter I in the relation with the trauma of aging). Memory is getting older together with a person’s body. And the speech can signal what is happening in a person’s mind. Elderly people use a lot of repetitions in speech as they cannot remember the things properly and need to remind themselves constantly of the event they are talking about; elderly people cut the sentences abruptly as during the act of remembering they could easily forget, what they are speaking about. So the act of recollection is not always exact, in the majority of cases it is very subjective coloured by old person’s imagination, especially on recalling the memories of traumatic nature. Henry is not an exception, he is compelled to tell one story, which is interesting to analyse in the light of trauma.



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“...recuerdos traumáticos como éstos son recuperados, se analizan y se piensan en ellos una y otra vez. [...] No obstante, si se examina, gran parte de la información no es precisa.”  
(Fillenbaum 1973: 79)

In *Embers* like in *Endgame* Henry's story-telling takes on the form of a screen-memory, which may be discussed not only as a fictional story, or a device to drown the sound of the sea, but also as a possible reconstruction/recreation of his father's death, since Henry has not negotiated the fact of his father's death into his memory. This also points to trauma and the disrapture of his identity, obsession-compulsion being one of the symptoms of it. The process of mourning is still going on in Henry. And Bolton-Holloway story is an attempt to narrate it and to give voice to his trauma. Moreover, it helps Henry to survive his father's disappearance/death/suicide:

“I used to need anyone, just to myself, stories, there was a great one about an old fellow called Bolton, I never finished it, I never finished any of them, I never finished anything, everything always went on forever.” (254)

This story narration presents all the features of trauma in speech, according to Jeanette Malkin's definition of traumatic language in postmodern theatre (1999: 8): 1) it has a cyclic nature and is full of repetitions; 2) it is highly fragmented and full of false starts; 3) the story is unstable, since Henry slightly changes it the second time he tells it; 4) it is full of omissions, Henry never states the reason of doctor's visit to Bolton and we never know the content of his black bag; 5) there is always a regression to the beginning, due to the fact that Henry is afraid of its end. He tries to finish it twice, but with no success; 6) the story has echoing through the whole play (“white world”, “no sound”, “embers”); 7) it lacks the authority of voice (the first person singular), which is a means of alienation. The story itself has echoes with his main memory or its omission – the secret that the sea keeps or the secret of his father's death. Henry creates two characters: “an old fellow, called Bolton” (254) and presumably a doctor, Holloway. Ada alludes to Holloway in the play when she talks about Henry's “madness”: “There's something wrong with your brain, you ought to see Holloway, he's still alive, isn't he?” (260). So, fiction and reality are mixed up in his story, and this gives me reason to suggest that this memory is a screen-memory: half-fiction and half-truth. The fictional character of Henry's story, Bolton, may have some reference to his father-image.

“Bolton” comes from “bolt” (bolt of lightning) and bears “light” connotations. That may have two levels of understanding: on the one hand, Henry mentions that his father “always loved light” (253), and on the other hand, connecting him to light means that he is still alive for Henry. This death/life tension is knitted into the whole story. There is an on-going Light/Darkness conflict in Henry, like in Krapp. The Light/Darkness conflict in Beckett’s work has connection with troubled self or selves. Nevertheless, if for Krapp Light represents “imagination, creativity” and Darkness – “sensuality, subconscious”; for Henry it is different, Light may be associated with “life” and Darkness with “death”. “Black, white, black, white, maddening thing” (264), says Henry, as though he refers to the birth/death circle, and comings and goings in this world of trouble. This tension is present from the very beginning of the story:

“Bolton! [*Pause. Louder.*] Bolton! [*Pause.*] There before the fire. [*Pause.*] Before the fire with all the shutters. ... no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn and the light, no light, only the light of the fire, sitting there in the ... no, standing, standing there on the hearth-rug in the dark before the fire with his arms on the chimney-piece and his head on his arms, standing there waiting in the dark before the fire in his old red dressing-gown and no sound in the house of any kind, only the sound of the fire [...] an old man in great trouble.” (254)

The first thing, which is important, is the evocation of Bolton is the same as an attempt to evoke his father or the sea sound in the beginning of the play. Bolton, as a fictional character or as a mirror-image of his father, does not respond. The beginning of the story has false starts and self-corrections, as though Henry is writing it on the page or/and he is unsure of what he wants to say. These processes also have to do with painting and remembering, when one tries to rescue a long-forgotten image from one’s memory, he retrieves it by parts. Zooming-in is another technique, which is used when we want to remember. And Henry is acoustically recalling/carving the image of an old man in a red dressing-gown, standing next to the fire. The entire story has many references to negation, closure and, consequently, death, but Henry, as though pitying Bolton refuses him the right to death in his story. For instance, he changes the word “shutters” (in Ireland there is a custom to draw the shutters when someone dies) instantly to “hangings”; “no light” is transformed into “only the light of the fire” and Henry changes Bolton’s position from “sitting” to “standing” as though Bolton still has

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strength to go on. The ambiguity of “an old man in great trouble” may be considered as an omission or Henry’s unwillingness to talk about Bolton’s physical state. We may only guess about the reason of the doctor’s visit at night. The time of the day only points to the urgency of this visit, and accentuated by Bolton’s “PLEASE!” (255, 264 - several times), repeated through the whole play. The plea is left unanswered. Bolton is craving for a shot, but not anaesthetic to calm his presumable pain: “‘If it’s an injection you want, Bolton, let down your trousers and I’ll give you one, I have a panhysterectomy at nine,’ meaning of course the anaesthetic” (263). The shot, Bolton is asking for, is probably the one to end his life, he does not want to ease his physical/mental pain, he wants to quit any pain forever. Holloway obstinately refuses him: “We’ve had it before, Bolton, don’t ask me to go through it again” (264).

As any writer, Henry is especially interested in the re/creation of details of the background setting upon which he places Bolton and Holloway, both are rather stable a character in his story, Henry does not change their description; it is the setting that is continuously transformed by him, as though he is unsatisfied with it:

“bright winter’s night, snow everywhere, bitter cold, White world, cedar boughs bending under load...” (254)

“not a sound, fire dying, White beam from the window, ghastly scene, wishes to God he hadn’t come, no good, fire out, bitter cold, great trouble, White world, not a sound, no good.” (256)

“Fire out, bitter cold, white world, great trouble, not a sound.” (263)

Henry makes the description more and more minimalistic every time he tells the story. At the end there is no eloquence in his narration as in the beginning, probably as everything is extinguishing in his story, Henry tries to accelerate the passing of time, and, consequently, the end. This story has a special link with his father’s death; it may also be considered as Henry’s memory-trigger. Every time after the narration of this story Henry remembers his father, so gradually the story stops being fiction and is turned into his memory:

“... looking out, white world, great trouble, not a sound, only the embers, sound of dying, dying glow, Holloway, Bolton, Bolton, Holloway, old men, great trouble, white world, not a sound. [*Pause.*] Listen to it [*SEA!*] Close your eyes and listen to it [...] Father! [*Pause.*]

## *Rhythmical Sounds as Loci for Painful Memories*

*Agitated.*] Stories, stories, years and years of stories, till the need came on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone, a stranger, to talk to, imagine he hears me, years of that, and then, now, for someone... who knew me, in the old days, anyone, to be with me, imagine he hears me, what I am, now. (255)

In this speech, Bolton, the sea sound and Henry's father are turned into one character by Henry. They seem to be interlinked in his memory, thus we have the memory of association: on remembering/talking about one character, the other two appear. The second time, Henry tries to tell the story; he desperately calls "Father!" (264), his plea is answered by the sound of the sea. Henry's plea to evoke his father and Bolton's begging "PLEASE!", framed by the sea sound, are desperate cries for help, both are left unanswered and without any possible closure in the play.

So what is special about Henry's story? Why is he telling it time and again? Story-telling seems to be a device to shield some important memories in Beckett's plays, not only a device to pass the time: Hamm in *Endgame* and Henry in *Embers* are telling the same story again and again. Both stories are open and the characters slightly modify them every time they narrate their stories. They are not telling them in the first person singular, distancing themselves from the actions of their stories. Moreover, both get agitated while telling them. And the stories trigger their memories, which they are unable to narrate. Besides, both stories are unstable and fragmented. These are the features in common, but I suppose that in these two plays story-telling has different functions. In *Endgame*, Hamm is telling his story as though unwilling to admit the truth; and Henry is obsessed with the story, as well as he is obsessed with the sea-sound, because he wants to "visualize" his father's death. Henry needs to "record" his father's death visually, thus he turns to fantasy for its better assimilation, "fantasy integration" being one of the symptoms of trauma. Henry is desperately looking for the answers to his main question: "What happened to his father?" And to make things worse for him, "we never found your body" (254); the body absence makes Henry's father still alive for him, another reason for his sufferings may be his failure at evoking his father's voice from the sea, which makes Henry doubt again about his whereabouts. Henry is aware of the gap in his memory: "The hole is still there after all these years!" (261), he says to Ada. This impossible hole in his memory is his obsession as well as the engine of his existence and story-telling.

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“Beckett’s particular strategy of representing consciousness clarifies the irredeemable gap between the event and the perception of the event, the wider the gap between the event and its reconstitution in language, and the implicit distance between this verbal reconstitution and actual memory.” (Lyons 2002: 99)

What intensifies Henry’s suffering is his relation with his father. As I have already mentioned in Chapter I, Beckett’s characters have a troubled relation with their progenitors, majorly in the light of the trauma of birth. Otto Rank points out that there is always a complicated father-son relation, since the father is considered to be a rival to the son (1961: 91). Henry is not an exception. He does not remember much about his father, or simply he does not want to remember and blocks certain unpleasant memories. His memories about his father are scattered and fragmented in the play. Actually, there are more holes/omissions, than real memories.

“Listen to the light now, you always loved light, not long past noon, and all the shore in shadow and the sea out as far as the island. [*Pause.*] You would never live this side of the bay, you wanted the sun on the water for that evening bathe you took once too often. But when I got your money I moved across, as perhaps you may know.” (253)

This fragment of memory is important, since it is the longest one in the play. Henry uses the pronoun “you” as a way to maintain a conversation with his father. He is desperately “trying to get him to be with me” (262). The sea again is made the protagonist; in Henry’s memory, his father is associated with the sea and the light. Besides, the words “when I got your money I moved across” remind me of the biblical parable of a prodigious son, with a slight difference that Henry returns to ask for his father’s forgiveness when the latter is dead. And the sea plays the role of his father surrogate, since in Henry’s memory his father lived near the sea and presumably died in the sea. Henry was not a good son, and he did not know his father well. Thus, when Henry says:

“Stories, stories, years and years of stories, till the need came on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone, a stranger, to talk to, imagine he hears me, years of that, and then, now, for someone... who knew me, in the old days, anyone, to be with me, imagine he hears me” (255)

Henry may refer to his father, who is a stranger to him. In his solitude he turns up for help to his progenitor, and there is much of the filial guilt in Henry, “My dear Bolton” (263), he says at the end of the play. Here I want to mention again the unique cry for help that Henry vocalizes in the name of Bolton and his own desperate evocation of his father. Henry might understand in his old age that his father was his origins and he wants to get to know him, but it is too late. There is much evidence in the text of the play that Henry sees his own self in a certain way as his father: Henry is as well as his father “an old man in great trouble”, he also cannot tear himself from the sea and he hates his daughter as his father hated him: “You wouldn’t know me now, you’d be sorry you ever had me, but you were that already, a washout, that’s the last I heard from you, a washout” (256). Henry, probably, cannot come to terms with this likeness. He sounds bitter and frustrated when talking about his father:

“Father! [*Pause.*] Tired of talking to you. [*Pause.*] That was always the way, walk all over the mountains with you talking and talking and then suddenly mum and home in misery and not a word to a soul for weeks, sulky little bastard, better off dead. [*Long pause.*]” (256)

This bit of memory points to Henry’s love-hatred relation with his father. Again he demonstrates obsession-compulsion syndrome: he calls his father “sulky little bastard” but at the same time he cannot tear himself from his memory. The main reason is that, for Henry, his father is still alive. In order to face his trauma of loss he needs to know how he died. That is why he tells stories and “interrogates” Ada. Is he looking for his fault in his father’s death? Is he actually guilty? I think that this thought is nagging at him. Henry does not remember or blocks the memory of the day when his father died. It seems that Ada holds the key to this mystery, since she was an outsider of their relation:

**Ada:** I suppose you have worn him out. [*Pause.*] You wore him out living and now you are wearing him out dead. [*Pause.*] The time will come when no one will talk to you any more. [*Pause.*] [...] You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours [...]

**Henry:** I cannot remember if he met you.

**Ada:** You know he met me.

**Henry:** No, Ada, I don’t know, I have forgotten almost everything connected with you.

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**Ada:** You weren't there. Just your mother and sister. I had called to fetch you as arranged. We were to go bathing together. [*Pause.*] (262)

It is Ada who starts "reconstructing" this memory for Henry. She only confirms that Henry was "wearing him [his father] out", the fact that Henry is aware of. But then Henry demonstrates his forgetfulness: he does not remember anything connected with Ada and he does not remember the day when his father died. These two types of forgetfulness are of different kinds. The first one, in connection with Ada, is due to his lack of motivation/attention, since he is indifferent to her or the memory of their relationship has been already integrated into his ABM; but his lack of memory of the day of his father's death is of other nature. His brain blocked this day, since it caused him great pain and, probably, guilt. This day presents a big gap in his memory and may be compared to a bleeding wound, which does not heal. There is only "before" and "after" his father's death. Something horrible happened and I suggest that Henry was the reason of this disaster. It is Ada, who tells him that "None of them knew where you were. Your bed had not been slept in. [...] Your father got up and went out slamming the door" (262). I suppose that Henry had had a fight with his father, and his absence at night was a kind of punishment to his father. This fight certainly took place at night. Henry does not remember anything about it, at least he tells Ada otherwise. Although some traces of this day maybe found in his Bolton-Holloway story:

"Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin, lashes gone, whole thing swimming, and the candle shaking in his head." (264)

"Candle shaking and glittering all over the place, lower now, old arm tired takes it in the other hand and holds it high again, that's it, that was always it, night, and the embers cold, and the glim shaking in **your** old fist, saying, Please! Please!" (264)

This seems like a real memory to me: Henry changes his story in what might have happened that night. The pronoun "your" gave me the clue, that he is actually talking about his father, since "you" is applied to his father during the play. The memory is fragmented and is shielded by his story, its traces are hardly perceptible, but after having narrated it, Henry again tries to evoke his father's voice. Juliet Mitchell writes that "Memory comes into being only after a trace which marks it: there is no thing, no event, no experience, feeling, to remember, there is only that present which an empty past brings into being" (1998: 99). And the story trace, especially his father's

eyes and his trembling head, makes Henry remember. Henry refused something, which his father asked him, and he feels guilty for it now. That may also be the reason that his father never answers him back, though Henry is sure that he is somewhere there.

“Who is beside me now? [Pause.] An old man, blind and foolish. [Pause.] My father, back from the dead, to be with me. [Pause.] As if he hadn’t died. [Pause.] No, simply, back from the dead, to be with me, in this strange place. [Pause.] Can he hear me? [Pause.] Yes, he must hear me. To answer me? [Pause.] No, he doesn’t answer me. [Pause.] Just be with me. [Pause.]” (253)

“Be with me” is rather biblical in nature. Tormented by memory and impossibility to come to terms with this memory, Henry does not want to go away. He cruelly punishes himself for what he did, though unable to remember. And the sea is his instrument of self-inflicted torture. In her essay “The Silence That is Not Silence: Acoustic Art in Samuel Beckett’s ‘Embers’” (1999), Marjorie Perloff suggests that the sea is an allegory of troubled memory, and, perhaps Henry’s filial guilt. The secret of his father’s death is haunting Henry. No wonder he gets very interested when Ada tries to remember the last time she saw his father, he even pushes her to speak: “Keep on, keep on! [Imploringly.] Keep it going, Ada, every syllable is a second gained” (162). But the only thing that she remembers is the stillness of his father’s whole body, “as if all the breath had left it” (263).

Since, Henry cannot make his father answer him, the sea embodies “Henry’s father ‘by means of metonymic sound images’” (Perloff 1999: 165). Lois Oppenheim writes in his essay “*Embers: An Interpretation*” that:

“... the function of the sea seems to be to help Henry come to terms with his father’s death by drowning, even, perhaps, with the fact of death itself. The sea is an inescapable presence that having claimed his father is like death, in the background, until the time comes to absorb Henry into itself.”(2000: 270)

It is difficult to disagree with the parallelism between “sea” and “death”, which has a lot to do with the literary symbolism of the sea, but the statement that “the sea helps Henry to come to terms with the death” of his father is erroneous, because the sea sound torments him with the questions he is incapable to answer as well as it stimulates



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his “filial guilt”. The fact that Henry cannot come to terms with his father’s death is obvious, and the sea sound only helps him **not** to forget his father’s death.

It is interesting to mention that the stillness of the posture of Henry’s father before his death, that greatly surprised Ada, is now “imitated” by Henry who is also seating motionless on the beach, probably, waiting for his death to come or for the sea to “suck” him. At the end of the play there are more pauses in comparison with the beginning, and as the pauses/sea tend to fill in the air space when Henry breathes, it may create an allusion that the sea tries to occupy Henry’s verbal air space substituting his words by its deadly voice. Meanwhile, Henry also seems to become part of it, as the sea sound drowns him mentally and verbally.

Antonin Artaud in his book *The Theatre and Its Double* (1974) writes that in drama not only words should be important, but also sounds, costumes, lighting should be of equal importance in transmitting of the message of the play to the audience. Thus sounds and light could be characters in drama. And in *Embers*, being a radio-play, sounds are as vital as the words. No wonder, Perloff calls this play “a battle of noises” (1999: 166). Personally, I could not imagine this play without the voice of the sea as it is crucial for the understanding of the whole piece, since the sea is both the memory-trigger and the *locus* of Henry’s fragmented memory.

### 3.2. Pacing as Memory Embodiment and Enactment: *Footfalls*

“Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Toward the door we never opened  
Into the rose garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind. “ (T.S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton”)

*Footfalls* staged in 1976, is one of the most “mysterious” plays of Samuel Beckett. No consensus has been reached so far on its meaning. Knowlson in *Frescoes of the Skull* writes about the general state of bewilderment after its premier (1979: 22). The image

that was engraved in the audience's mind is of a woman "grasping her body in a gesture of isolation and distress"<sup>97</sup> relentlessly pacing the stage. My further discourse is centred around the movement of pacing as a form and content of the play.

"For Beckett insists that the image of the woman pacing relentlessly up and down is central to the play. 'This was [my] basic conception...', Beckett commented, 'the text, the words were only built up around this picture'." <sup>98</sup>

In the performance of the play *Tritte* (in Germany), directed by Beckett, Hildergard Schmahl had problems with acting due to her total loss in the understanding of the play. Beckett insisted to her emphasizing on her footsteps: "Her most significant leap with the role coincided with her decision to make the primary ground for her performance physical and not psychic" (Kalb 1989: 64). Thus, the actress's taunt stiff body affected her articulation and opened her psyche "through calculated physical behaviour"<sup>99</sup>. The physicality of the play adds to it a claustrophobic and nightmarish quality and elevates it to other levels of understanding.

Pacing is not only a movement onstage, but also the content and the form. The play itself has to do with the troubled psyche of the onstage figure and the intention to construct her already deconstructed self. Fragmentation of speech, omissions, false starts, dissociation, echoing and overlapping: all point to the narration of repressed memories. The memories are "revolving" around her incessant movement. Pacing May is the authentic *locus* of this play since she and the strip of light on her feet are the only physical language onstage (the rest of the stage is enveloped in darkness). In this play, Beckett achieves a true fusion between the physicality of steps and memory. May is a trace of her other hypothetical self, as I discuss hereinafter.

As far as the construction of play is concerned, Ruby Cohn comments that Beckett divided the play into four main scenes: (1) Dying Mother; (2) Mother back; (Epilogue [changed to Appendix]); (4) Empty strip (2001: 335). All the scenes are marked by fade-outs and successively dimmer lights and successively fainter chimes.

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 64.

I propose to analyse this movement according to its main characteristics and relate it to different types of memory and its enactment. The features are the following:

- Lighting
- Acoustic quality
- The number of steps
- Geometrical forms of line and circle
- The echoes of the steps
- Rhythm
- Presence/absence tension

As far as lighting is concerned, Beckett's directions are the following: "*Lighting: dim, strongest at floor level, less on body least on head... Fade up to dim on strip. Rest in darkness...*" (399). **Lighting** in the play performs several roles. Firstly, it emphasizes May's steps "strongest floor level"; it directs the audience's attention towards pacing and makes it the central image of the play. Secondly, by directing stronger light on feet, it deconstructs the theatrical body. The feet stand out in comparison to the head in dimmer light. Thus, the split between a part of the body (feet) and mind (head) is visually achieved. Bergson outlined an eternal duel between our materiality and spirituality going on in ourselves. According to Bergson, our material body is fixed in time and space and our spirit, as well as our memory is free, thus mobile (2004: 60). Consequently, the incessant movement of the body and its deconstruction by the light may be an attempt to free the spirit and the memory from the cell of the body, and transport it to other realities of our subconscious mind.

The head itself is hardly visible and is practically "dissolved" in the darkness around the walking figure. The result of it is that "darkness" belongs to the head or to the mind. Darkness here may mean that the play is staged in the skull of May's mind, and the Mother's voice belongs to her head or to the reality that she evokes, like the voices in *Embers*; or that the repressed nature of her memories comes out from the darkness. Thirdly, the light limits the space of May's movements and in a way traps her inside the lit path. Consequently, we may interpret her pacing as of one imprisoned in a cell, in this case in the cell of her troubled psyche. And finally, lighting manages to

achieve a ghostly quality of the performance: “like moon through passing rack” (402). May herself is dressed in “tattered grey” long dress, and looks like an apparition onstage. Cohn writes that “The play’s power lies in the tattered gray tangle, where places, times and words are fused in a stage presence that revolves around absence” (2001: 337).

Katherine Worth outlined this ghostly quality and claimed that the whole impression is that “a ghost calls up a ghost” (1999: 106) in the play. This ghostly performance places this play in the rank of memory-plays, as May is a simple entity onstage: her present identity is absent, and her past identity is shrouded in continuous repetitions around several memory traces. Beckett also stated that “everything is cold and frost” (Brater 1987: 61) in this play. And the *dim* lighting actually creates the effect of coldness since it may be associated with that of a moon, the word used in the text.

Another important function of the stage light is that there are four fade-outs in the performance, which not only signal the end of the scene but also add an effect of “blinking out” of memory or of “memory shudder” and a shift to another piece of memory. Moreover, the light is gradually dimming in the run of the performance. Worth writes, “Beckett often dwells on the fading, making it a thing of unearthly sadness and beauty” (1999: 47). Besides of adding a poetic quality to the performance, this fading light also creates a linear direction of the play till May’s absence.

The main feature of this pacing is its **acoustic quality**. The steps are faintly audible and together with the dragging of a long garment, they constitute the soundscape of the play. It seems that the sound of the steps is essential for May, since “the motion alone is not enough” (401) for her. “This strip of floor, once was carpeted” (401), informs the offstage voice, but May insisted on taking the carpet away: “I must hear the feet, however faint they fall” (401). Here the question of self-perception may be raised. It has already been stated by many critics that the fall of the steps on the bare floor reaffirms May’s existence, since she perceives herself through this sound. According to Bergson, reality is mobility (Bergson 2004: 27), thus May perceives her own self only through the sound of her pacing, which is like breathing for her, and marks the pulse of her existence. Moreover, pacing becomes a symbol of her existence:

“La conciencia, atormentada por un insaciable deseo de distinguir, substituye el símbolo por la realidad, o no percibe la realidad más que a través de un símbolo” (Bergson 2004: 17).

The sound of May’s walking the stage constitutes the perception of her own self, and her pseudo-existence. Paradoxically, the actual sound of the steps proves her presence to the audience, since ghosts are not audible. May’s self-perception, however, is based in the physical sound of the steps. According to Bergson, “llega un momento en que el recuerdo, así reducido, se inserta tan bien en la percepción presente que no podría decirse donde termina la percepción, donde comienza el recuerdo”<sup>100</sup>. Thus, the sound of the steps may represent May’s memory, or the stream of her memory.

“Now was the day departing, and the air,  
Imbrown’d with shadows, from their toils releas’d  
All animals on earth; and I alone  
Prepar’d myself the conflict to sustain,  
Both of sad pity, and that perilous road,  
Which my unerring memory shall retrace.” (Dante, CII, 9)

Enoch Brater compared the image of May to “Dante’s damned” (1987: 52). And the scenic image in itself has Dante’s heritage not only in its visuality, but also in the obsession with **numbers**. Number “nine” gains symbolic meaning in this play: “One two three four five six seven eight nine wheel one two three four five six seven eight nine wheel” (400), says the Voice at the very beginning of the play, pointing out the importance of number nine verbally, as though the physical representation of this number is “not enough”. These nine steps in their essence make the “revolving” of the main action and the theme of the play acquire an obsessional quality. Knowlson points out its “ritualistic quality” and “strong fusion of past and present time” (1979: 224). Nevertheless, these nine steps also give other meanings to the play itself. Firstly, they make the image of time passing physical onstage: the quantity of steps visualizes the quality of time. There is a certain parallelism with Bergson’s quantity-quality complex. The quantity of steps makes “el tiempo por así decir materializado, el tiempo hecho cantidad por el desarrollo en el espacio” (Bergson 2004: 16). Moreover, the steps create

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

a “metronome”, an image suggested by Beckett (Worth 1988: 54). And as the spools in *KLK*, they make the present time reverse into past. Besides, the word “wheel” together with the revolving movement of May onstage creates a cyclic essence of Time. Moreover, the four fade-outs in the run of the play may be associated with the cyclic nature of the seasons. In the text of the play there are various references to seasons as such, for example the name of Mrs. Winter, the name May itself has a connection to the month of spring, Vespers, “late autumn Sunday evening” (402). Consequently, the steps may as well mark the change of seasons in this play. Time itself is forgotten by the entities onstage (May and the Voice), since both have forgotten their corresponding age.

**M:** What age am I now?

**V:** And I? [*Pause. No louder.*] And I?

**M:** Ninety.

**V:** So much?

**M:** Eighty-nine, ninety. (400)

So the steps mark the real time in the play, not words, like the sound of the hooves in *Embers*. Mother’s age “**ninety**” and “**eighty-nine**”, again draws our attention to the number of steps. Malkin stresses that “Bodily repetition that evokes a sense of timelessness, and thus of pastness incorporated in the present, is a theatrical device found in much postmodern theatre” (1999: 63).

So what may be the meaning of “nine” in this play? I will try to provide various answers, and all of them may be valid for this play. With the ghostly grotesque figure of May pacing the stage up and down, nine may refer to nine circles of Dante’s Hell; the medieval *locus* may be recreated adding a timeless quality to her movement. The revolving wheels were also made prominent in Ramon Lull’s system of memory, which was actually based on the concept of the figures of Art of God’s dignity (nine in total<sup>101</sup>) that were moving.

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<sup>101</sup> “The Divine Dignities form into triadic structures, reflected from them down through the whole creation; as causes they inform the whole creation through its elemental structure. An art based on them constructs a method by which ascent can be made on the ladder of creation to the Trinity as apex. [...] Divine Dignities: Deus, Angelus, Coelum, Hoomo, Imaginativa, Sensitiva, Vegetativa, Elementativa, Instrumentativa.” (Yates 1966: 179)

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“One of the figures consists of concentric circles, marked with the letter notation standing for the concepts, and when these wheels revolve, combinations of concepts are obtained.”  
(Yates 1966: 176)

These were revolutionary devices to represent the movement of the psyche, since all nine Divine Dignities influence a Man and help him to reach the understanding of his Ego. In the case of May, I think, all these questions are present but left unanswered, although the existential question, “Will you never have done .... revolving it all?” (400) is present in the play. Besides this question points to the existence of a repressed memory. The impersonal pronoun “it” refers to many things in the play: life, beginning, pacing, memory, grief, etc. Nevertheless, this question, taking into consideration May’s revolving onstage movement, is absurd, since it is “revolving” that she has been physically re-enacting all her life. When a verbal answer is non-existent, the physicality of movement is onstage, as evidence.

Again, “nine” as a number may hint at a type of trauma that kept May inside all her life: the trauma of birth. Nine are the months of gestation of a baby inside a mother, and nine are the months of total physical unity between the two. Feldman states that “Beckett’s notes on Rank are both more complete than on Adler and Stekel, and are more immediately associated with a longstanding interest in the caul” (2006: 107). Therefore, I can suggest that, metaphorically, May may be pacing her intrauterine time, in relation to this, the mother’s voice coming out of the darkness, points to their physiological unity or even symbiosis. Consequently, the whole stage may be taken as a womb. Although, paradoxically, it is the mother, who hears May in her “deep sleep” (399). There is a special shift of roles, as it should be the daughter who is supposed to be peacefully asleep inside the womb. Furthermore, May cannot “snatch” a bit of sleep; she is the one who presents the symptoms of Adler’s neurotic insomnia:

V: Does she sleep, it may be asked? Yes, some nights she does, in snatches, bows her poor head against the wall and snatches a little sleep. (401)

So, probably, May tries to recreate those nine pleasurable months in order to calm her troubled psyche, as a behavioral re-enactment of the trauma of birth. These nine steps may be also seen as Freudian “return-to-mother” desire; the steps visually

and acoustically link her to the womb memories. May wants to find her dead mother reversing the time to the womb of her memories, her beginning, and by this, forget her feeling of loss. Paradoxically, time is irreversible in this play with the dimming effect of the light and narrowing of the paces, it takes May to the tomb instead of the womb, the death-birth circle is present in May's rigid body with the expression of grief and pain. Thus, the Voice's pleading for forgiveness in the play (400), may be understood in relation to the trauma of birth/death, as forgiveness for having brought May into the world and forgiveness for having abandoned her in death. The words for forgiveness of parents to their children have been already discussed in relation to *Endgame* (Hamm - Clov) in Chapter II.

Beckett made this note in his *Psychology Notes*:

“Primal anxiety-effect at birth, which remains operative through life, right up to the final separation from the outer world (gradually become a second mother) at death, is from the very beginning not merely an expression of the new-born child's physiological injuries [...], but in consequences of the change from a highly pleasurable situation to an extremely painful one, acquires a psychological quality of feeling. (TCD MS 10971/8/36)” (Feldman 2006: 111)

The discussion of the trauma of birth leads us to daughter/mother relations. In this play, as well as in *Rockaby*, there is a fusion between both. It is important to note that mother is a disembodied character, embedded in darkness, since her voice comes from nowhere and it is her daughter who evokes her presence. May calls “Mother” twice (399) in the beginning of the play awakening her from her “deep sleep”. Immediately, we are presented to a very close bond between the two. “There is no sleep so deep I would not hear you there” (399), informs the voice. This “deep sleep” gives another perspective to the whole play: it looks as though May calls her from the dead. So the following dialogue may signify a reawakening of memories. It was May who had taken care of her dying mother: injecting her, positioning her, straightening her pillows, passing her bedpan, etc. The mutual dependence is stressed in this dialogue; the entities are interlinked and cannot survive one without the other. Their memories are mutually dependent as well: the Voice reconstructs May's memories, and May reconstructs the Voice's memory (e.g. May remembers her mother's age, and vice versa). Paradoxically,



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it is the Voice which answers her own question about “revolving it all” in the play. In the second part, which is a Voice’s monologue, there is a definite confusion, since the Voice at first starts speaking in the first person singular: “I walk here now” (401). The instability of pronouns fuses the Voice and May. Then the monologue rotates around May’s childhood memories:

V: She has not been out since girlhood. [Pause.] Not out since girlhood. [Pause.] Where is she, it may be asked. [Pause.] Why, in the old home, the same where she – [Pause.] Where it began. [Pause.] It all began. [Pause.] But this, this, when did this begin? [Pause.] When other girls of her age were out at ... lacrosse she was already here. [Pause.] ... I say the floor here, now bare, this strip of floor, once was carpeted, a deep pile. Till one night, while still little more than a child, she called her mother and said, Mother, there is not enough. The mother: Not enough? May – the child’s given name – May: Not enough.... (401)

The narration is very fragmented, full of repetitions and omissions of time of events. No age is mentioned here and we hear only oblique “once”, “more than a child” and the use of the past tense signals the event. Besides, the Voice is looking for correct words and makes false starts, like “the same where she –“. This memory is very inaccurate, and there is dissociation in the narration. The Voice does not admit its relation to the little girl, and the whole memory is told from a witness’s side. This points to some kind of repressed memory, the memory which was blanked out. The Voice itself cannot find the answer to the girl’s strange behaviour. Furthermore, the monologue is full of pauses and repetitions, which mean that the Voice/narrator is trying to tell the true memory and not a story-fantasy. It takes the Voice time to find the right and precise words, but as always with repressed memories, which are not recorded linguistically, the words do not come easily, and the narration is circular, starting with “I walk here now” and finishing with “It all” and the physicality of May’s continuous pacing till the second fade-out.

The theme of “night” runs through the whole story and is stressed by the darkness of the stage, which may point to the subconscious or “mental reality”, as Beckett used to call it. Beckett was greatly interested in the subconscious, in his *Psychology Notes*, there is one paragraph, where he defines its essence:

## *Rhythmical Sounds as Loci for Painful Memories*

“The unconscious, therefore, according to psychoanalysis, may be summed up as a region of mind the content of which is characterized by being (1) Repressed (2) Cognitive (3) Instinctive (4) Infantile (5) Unreasoning (6) Predominantly Sexual.” (qtd. in Feldman 2006: 98)

Some of the features of the unconscious, as repressed and infantile, are made visible in this play. All May’s repressed memories have to do with her childhood memories, as though she hasn’t grown up at all, the rest of her life has been incessant pacing since her girlhood, therefore, sexuality (womanhood) is totally excluded. This infantile being is present in all the memories, as though the umbilical cord between herself and her mother is still uncut. She seems to be in constant need of her mother’s womb for security or a shelter. Mothers give birth to daughters, and a daughter to other daughters and since life is considered as suffering in Beckett’s world: the mothers are responsible for “it all”. This is a probable reason why May has sacrificed her sexual maturity, choosing pacing as her physical shield. Adler writes:

“In girls, the longing for security is as a rule more pronounced analogy to the relation to the father ... The ‘uterine fantasy’ which is placed in the foreground by G. Grüner, I have also found employed by neurotics only when they wish to express that peace can be found only with the mother, [...] that is, the wish to return to the same state in which they were before birth. (The hermaphroditic progression backward.)” (1921: 148)

Consequently, it may be proposed that May’s relentless pacing represents her attempt to reach the final fusion with her mother. I can forward the idea that May is mostly absent and the presence of her mother is brought about onstage through the sound of May’s footfalls. This pseudo-fusion is achieved not only through pacing but also through language. May’s speech mirrors her mother’s in a narrative tone, dissociation, images, repetitions and the choice of vocabulary, which will be analysed further.

“The ‘footfalls’ of the title are themselves the acoustic traces of presence, yet as we know from Beckett’s biography, they represent the ‘presence’ not of the daughter but of the mother (origin, speech, foundation) who has been transformed into her opposite or other (copy, writing, contingency).” (Begam 2002: 131)

This leads the discussion to the **linear-cyclic structure** of the play. Definitely, the birth-death cycle is already there onstage. But the play contains both forms: a circle and a line, which has already been pointed out in this chapter. The cycle has a verbal reference in the play: “revolving it all”, and the line is marked by the dim light of the feet, and by its successive fading effect. This cyclic movement leads us to obsession and verbal repetition, discussed further on. Moreover, Enoch Brater figured out another geometrical form, made by May’s feet: prolonged number 8.

“From the lofty perspective we would see the racing on the stage floor of a tremendously elongated variation of the figure 8 turned on its size, the mathematician’s number for eternity.” (Brater 1987: 61)

That only confirms the idea of timelessness inscribed in the play’s movement. And though May is finite, her sufferings seem to have no end. Katherine Worth states, that this linear/circular path metaphorically means “a real-life journey” (1988: 93). Another interesting effect is that this symbolic path or journey has a distancing linear effect:

“The form of the play, therefore, becomes that of a series of circular revolutions, moving from one phase of absence to another, gradually fading away into less and less definition and moving towards silence, stillness and deepening darkness.” (Knowlson 1979: 226)

While May is pacing the floor, her steps produce **a faint echo**, which is paralleled in the text of the play. The echoes of her footfalls trigger the echoes of her memories. These traces of memories are very unstable, first paralleling the actual stage image; they serve as “mirrors” or, better say, “shattered mirrors”. Here Lacan’s idea of infant’s mirror-stage may be brought into view. “For Lacan, the unconscious developed as a language; the infant learning how to speak, came to see itself as a linguistic sign, and came to deal with itself as a social construction independent of its original self” (qtd. in Pattie 2000: 175). A child should recognize him/herself in the mirror as a separate being and this is a crucial stage in an infant’s development. May is still in the mirror-stage. As I have already noted she has not matured into a woman. A child in the mirror-stage imitates her mother. And the construction of May’s speech parallels her mother’s voice; they even use the same archaic vocabulary:

## *Rhythmical Sounds as Loci for Painful Memories*

**M:** But finally, raising her head and fixing Amy – the daughter’s given name ... (402-3)

**V:** May – the child’s given name... (401)

**V:** Will you never have done? [*Pause.*] Will you never have done ... revolving it all? (400)

**M:** Will you never have done ... revolving it all? (403)

**V:** ... in your poor mind.. (400)

**M:** ... His poor arm... (402)

Just as Clov uses “I use the words you taught me” (113), the same happens with May: she mirrors her mother’s language. The story, which May narrates in the third part, is a creative repressed memory, revolving around her childhood trauma, already narrated by her mother. Again, in this story there is a dialogue in her monologue, as though she is quoting from an invisible book, and the technique of dissociation is used. May even changes her name into Amy an anagram of May, in order to achieve a distancing effect.

The stage image also has verbal representation in both Mother’s monologue and May’s:

**V:** But let us watch her move, in silence. [*M paces. Towards end of second length.*] Watch how feat she wheels. [*M turns, paces. Synchronous with steps third length.*] Seven, eight, nine, wheel. (401)

**M:** The semblance. Faint, though by no means visible, in a certain light. [*Pause.*] Grey rather than white, a pale shade of grey. [*Pause.*] Tattered. [*Pause.*] A tangle of tatters. [*Pause.*] Watch it pass- [*Pause.*] – watch her pass before the candelabrum, how its flames, their light ... like moon through passing rack. [*Pause.*] Soon then after she was gone, as though never been there, began to walk, up and down, up and down, that poor arm. [*Pause.*] (402)

The mother’s voice wants to attract the attention of the invisible audience towards May’s pacing, as though taking pride in her daughter’s movement. And it is only her mother’s voice that counts May’s steps. I think that May is unaware of her nine steps, since it is an unconscious movement for her or a behavioral re-enactment. She describes it as “pass”.

In the second quote, which may be interesting in the relation to Lacan's mirror-stage, May makes a description of her own self, as though seen in a mirror. It seems that she has never seen her real self, and the effect of dissociation, together with the pronoun "it" in "watch it pass-", which finishes in a false start, as her mother's voice telling "the same where she-" (401) and then substituting "she" for "it", points to the ghostly quality of her figure and to May's lack of knowledge of her identity. And even her present self may be considered as her hypothetical self, a stranger.

The echoes of May's pacing also create poetic mirror images of her location and locomotion. There is a difference between Voice's monologue and May's story. For the mother's voice, "revolving it all" started in "the old home", and May gives us another version of its origins: "little church", although both confirm that it was at "nightfall" (401, 402). "When" and "where" form part of an episodic memory, and time and location are cornerstones for ABM (autobiographic memory). The fact that May recreates an episode of her memory, different from her mother's story, points to a possibility of her past identity. Obviously, it is a small piece of her consciousness, the one that she narrates in the third person, but it proves her separate existence at least for a small amount of time. The location of this memory is a little church, where she entered by "the north door" at nightfall. The church as a memory *locus* brings us to medieval times. The chimes throughout the whole play give evidence to the truthfulness of May's memory, and even recreate the *locus* of a church. The bells in church normally chime for God's worship or for a funeral service. Both events have references in the text: the church service in May's story and May's mourning for her mother.

Moreover, the image of a church awakens Biblical allusions in the text, developed further in May's narration with reference to the church service in Evensong. Knowlson compares May's walking in relation to Christian symbolism in her narration ("His poor arm"<sup>102</sup>, "lacrosse") to Christ's Calvary. It seems that May has her personal Calvary: "Beckett developed the figure of May as a tormented soul, in the world but not of it, suffering every day from some 'shudder of the mind'" (Knowlson 1979: 228).

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<sup>102</sup> Roman Catholic churches are built in the form of a cross, thus "His poor arm" image deals with May walking along the north gallery of the church. Katherine Worth also states, that in the north transept there is a bank of candles to light praying for the dead (1988: 68).

The beginning of May's monologue is a false start again: "Sequel. A little later, when she was quite forgotten, she began to- [*Pause.*] A little later, when as though she had never been, it never been, she began to walk. [*Pause.*]" (402). May's monologue is rather unstable, as though she is not only looking for precise words, but also doubts her own language, or her own memory, or even her own existence. Obviously, the spectator knows that the origin of this play was a strange mental case exposed by Carl Jung in the lecture, which Becket attended. Carl Jung explained the case of a girl, who thought that she had never been born (Knowlson 1988: 222). So May affirms and rejects her existence at the same time. Her strange negation that "she was not there" (403) at the church service together with the reference to the "Holy Ghost" (403) rejects her past existence, but the sound of footfalls reaffirms it.

"But as the play progresses, an extreme distancing effect occurs, so that we begin to doubt the physical presence of either woman. The two lives appear to set echoes which reverberate ever more faintly from section to section." (Worth 1988: 66-67)

The **rhythm** of May's pacing dictates her speed of uttering, her breathing, repetitions in speech, therefore, her whole onstage existence.

"The gap of repetition comes out because the play describes its own staging, seeming to insist on the dual nature, the dual place of every represented idea or narrative." (Connor 1988: 148)

The rhythm of this pacing marks May's words; every word coincides with her steps. Consequently, to the end of the play the tempo of delivery is lowered and we may feel her exhaustion and the "ceasing effect". The text is full of repetitions, which mirror the obsessive pacing and give a circular form to the narration.

**M:** [...] Amy: Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy it was? [*Pause.*] Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy this ... strange thing was you observed? [*Pause.*] (403)

The repetitive structure may be seen in this part of May's monologue. In both sentences, the grammar structure and words are similar, but after a small pause, May adds another bit of information, describing "this thing" as strange. The movement of the

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monologue leads us to a closure, but it never reaches it and no answers are given so far. May never admits what really happened during this church service, and the repetitive structure of her narrative is a perfect shield for her still open memory.

As Beckett explained, that the whole text was built around May's pacing; this pacing starts before the words and makes out of language her "confused companion". This movement evokes a memory and the words only try to create a "dual" reality and explain the inexplicable. Pacing splits and at the same time unifies May's fragmented memory.

"The dynamic relationship between scenic language and textual language turns the actor's body into an expressive instrument that stimulates the imagination of the Audience."  
(Brater 1987: 66)

Finally, May's pacing together with the moments of her onstage immobility and fade-outs create the dramatic **tension of presence/absence**, which is mirrored in the text by May's affirming her not being there. Fade-outs interrupt the perception of May's pacing the stage four times during the play. Apart from shifting time, they prepare the audience for the end of the play, or for May's definite absence. The final stage tableau is impressive in its imagery:

*[Pause. Fade out on strip. All in darkness.*  
*Pause.*  
*Chime even a little fainter still. Pause for echoes.*  
*Fade up to even a little less still on strip.*  
*No trace of May.*  
*Hold ten seconds.*  
*Fade out.] (403)*

The last thing that disappears from the stage is May's path, or her memory traces. However, the theatre is still impregnated with the echoes of her steps and the final chimes, which may be understood as a toll for her final absence. Her wish to be gone is granted, and her voice most probably has joined the darkness, achieving the complete unity with her mother. Although many spectators, who saw this play, affirm that even in her absence May is still present onstage. After three fade-outs, our eyes are

*Rhythmical Sounds as Loci for Painful Memories*

prepared to see May again, and our imagination conjures up an image of her still there onstage.

“... the play was visualized in terms of a composite, and specifically theatrical image, sounds and silence, repeated movement and total darkness, faint – and steadily diminishing – light and complete darkness supplying the various contrasting elements that were to be organized into a miniature and delicate drama which appears every bit as mysterious as the strange spectral figure of May herself.” (Knowlson 1979: 22)



**CHAPTER IV**  
**Disembodied Voices of Trauma**



## CHAPTER IV

### Disembodied Voices of Trauma

One of the major symptoms of trauma is the loss of the authoritative voice. Disconnectedness between body and voice points to the identity disruption and, consequently, to memory alienation. In his later plays, Beckett strips the body from voice, thus complicating the relationship between a character (body) and his memory and identity. Taking into consideration that in the theatre, the performative body is always made predominant onstage and a character is the focus of the audience's attention, since it possesses voice and is able to communicate through gestures and actions with the spectators. The lack of voice splits the audience's perception between the body onstage and the direction of the voice. Chabert writes that:

“In separating the voice from the face, Beckett effectively makes the act of listening a hearing of the voice by the body. The body becomes the sensitive receptacle upon which the voice engraves itself, a kind of human tape-recorder.” (1982: 27-28)

Although this approach is phenomenologically valid, I will base my discourse on treating the special relationship between body and voice in Beckett's theatre in its relation to memory, identity and trauma.

The voiceless characters are numerous in Beckett's plays (Joe in *Eh Joe*, the Auditor in *Not I*, the Listener in *Ohio Impromptu*, etc.). Beckett “gags” his characters, and the voice becomes autonomous entity in his plays. The voices coming from nowhere may be treated on many levels, among them I would like to mention that they may be the voices of memory, the voices of split identities and the voices of troubled consciousness. Some of Beckett's plays may be even interpreted like plays staged in a head.

I will analyse two of Beckett's plays in relation to voice in this chapter: *Eh Joe* and *That Time*. In the first play, I deal with a ghost voice from Joe's memory, which is his mental torturer, reviving his worst memories. And in the second part of this chapter, I deal with the three voices, splitting the character's identity. Thus, the major discussion is centred in ABM and chronological landmarks of the Listener's memory.

#### **4.1. "All the Dead Voices": Alien Voice/s Torturing the Mind in *Eh Joe***

As I have already stated disembodied voices become frequent entities/characters in Beckett's plays. Samuel Beckett started to experiment with voices in his radio-plays, and later he implemented this feature onstage. Although, this should be treated not only as a theatrical device, but also as a characteristic of the disrapture of self and the loss of identity, which leads us to trauma and memory.

"Samuel Beckett had been preoccupied with Jung's theory of multiple personalities, often manifest as voices, since he attended at least one of Jung's Tavistock Clinic lectures in London in the fall of 1935, a lecture about the lack of unity to consciousness. Aspects of consciousness, according to Jung, can become almost independent personalities and might even 'become visible or audible. They appear as visions, they speak in voices which are like the voices of definite people' (Jung, 80)." (qtd. in Gontarski 2001: 155)

Consequently, these disembodied voices may be treated as different layers of personality of his characters. I will now concentrate on the multiplicity of voices of trauma in Beckett's play for television *Eh Joe*. This play was first recorded on 13 April, 1966, and the first broadcast was done by BBC2 with Jack MacGowran as Joe, and Sian Phillipps as Voice. At least thirteen versions of this play have been preserved on tape making it Beckett's most produced teleplay.

The play is practically staged in the dark cellar of Joe's mind. MacGowran defined this play as "the most gruelling twenty-two minutes I have ever had in my life", and later he wrote that "It's really photographing the mind. It's the nearest perfect play

for television that you could come across, because the television camera photographs the mind better than anything else.”<sup>103</sup> The camera performs the role of an all-seeing eye and, in the duration of the play, it is zooming in between the Voice’s speeches and at the end of the play the camera dollies slowly in to the close-up of Joe’s face. Jeanette Malkin writes that “this short film sets up a context and frame for the study of obsessive introspection of unwilling memory” (1999: 37). In *Beyond Minimalism*, Brater points out a specific quality of this media, which attributes to Malkin’s opinion: “Beckett poeticizes the story of a mind turned inward upon itself by giving it a verbal language to match the progress of its visual statement” (1987: 86).

The background of *Eh Joe* is the room, where Joe traps himself, locking the door, drawing window curtains and even drawing hangings before the cupboard. This routine can be viewed as Freud’s behavioural re-enactment, or as a children’s ritual of looking for monsters before going to sleep or as an external protection from the intruders at night. At night the solitude comes to an extreme, and a person tends to remember. Joe is alone in the room with a dimly lit lamp, which he refuses to switch off, when the Voice starts: “No one can see you now ... No one can get at you now” (362). Nevertheless, the danger, Joe is afraid of, is not external but internal: it comes from within his head. The “internal intruder or intruders” are the Voices of his disturbed memory which started one June night and went “on and off” for years. The moment of their appearance coincides with the suicide of a girl seduced by him. It seems that Joe learnt about her death from an article in *The Independent*.

According to Caruth’s definition of trauma, dealt with in Chapter I, Joe has this “non-healable wound” of the mind. Joe’s life was drastically changed by this girl’s suicide, since the Voices have inhabited his mind since that June night, yet the voice we hear does not belong to this girl, as though Joe is trying to repress her memory. Besides, in the play, there are many references to Joe being a Catholic, thus it is rather difficult

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<sup>103</sup> MacGowran, J. 1995, qtd. in Levy, S. ‘*Eh Joe* and the Peephole Aesthetic’ in Kedzierski “Beckett and the (Un)Changing Image of the Mind” in *The Savage Eye / L’Oeil Fauve : New Essays on Beckett’s Television Plays*. Amsterdam, Atlanta, GA: Rodopi: 56.

for him to understand and accept suicide and this, probably, troubles him more. Joe feels indirectly responsible for it.

“Not all biblical quotations are doom-laden. The threatening voice in *Eh Joe* summons up images of faithful as well as faithless love. ‘Great love’, she says, apropos the dead girl: we may hear in the background saying, ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13).” (Worth 1988: 124)

Although it is important to add that Joe considered this girl special, since she was “spirit made light” (365, 366). The “light” quality is relevant to my discussion, as Joe himself is obsessively afraid of darkness in all of its symbolic meanings, light is always on in his room, and he seems to be frightened of death. Joe even uses euphuisms to avoid the word “to die”, substituting it by “expire” or “still”<sup>104</sup>. And the fact that he feels indirectly responsible for extinguishing this “spiritlight” (366) brings about his present suffering.

A person, who is incapable of assimilating past events on a conscious level, tries to distance him/herself from them. Caruth writes:

“The breach in the mind – the conscious awareness of the threat to life – is not caused by a pure quantity of stimulus, Freud suggests, but by ‘fright’, the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly.” (1996: 62)

It seems to me that Joe is trying to protect himself physically from his “mental thuggee”. Distancing and protection are enacted in this play in Joe’s “trapping routine” before going to bed. Moreover, Joe seeks the comfort of a bed, as “bed” may be associated with a cradle or with having sex, taking into consideration that Joe was a seducer; in both meanings the bed may be viewed as a kind of a shelter. However, it does not protect him, since the Voice does not possess a body and cannot be stopped by material obstacles.

The “bed” is evoked several times along the play. Joe’s “going to bed” routine has cyclic nature. First we see Joe sitting on the bed, then he goes to the window, then to the door, then to the carpet, and finally he sits on the edge of his bed. The bed starts

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<sup>104</sup> “... Isn’t that what you told me? ... Before we expire ... The odd word ...” (362)

to gain importance, Joe may be enacting Freud's "return-to-mother" trauma, if we understand "bed" as "cradle". The Voice makes reference to the bed in her very first speech: "Why don't you go to bed? ... What's wrong with that bed, Joe? ... You changed it, didn't you? ... Made no difference?" (362).

This reference deserves our attention, since Joe is already sitting on the edge of his bed; in the stage direction Beckett specified: "*Joe seen from front sitting on edge of bed, relaxed, eyes closed*" (361). So, which bed does the Voice refer to? Taking into consideration the English proverb "you made your bed; now lie in it", the Voice may actually refer to his present situation, when Joe has to bear the negative consequences of his wrongdoings. This meaning lies on the surface. Nevertheless, the word that attracts more attention is "edge", since this word is made prominent in the duration of the play several times. Joe, who is on the **edge** of his life, is sitting on the **edge** of the bed listening to the Voice, but at the same time this word is used in relation to the girl's sacrifice. She, as well as Joe, was "sitting on the **edge** of her bed in her lavender slip" (365), and later she "goes on down to the **edge** and lies down with her face in the wash..." (366). Three times she goes "down the garden and under the viaduct" (365, 366), three times Joe goes to the door, window, cupboard, and later both Joe (in the present) and she (in the past) return "home" (Joe to the comfort of his bed) and she to the "comfort" of forgetting (death). My hypothesis is that Joe is unconsciously re-enacting her suicide, though unable to reach its finality. And his actions anticipate the narrative. "It is the experience of waking into consciousness that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of trauma" (1996: 64), stresses Caruth.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Chapter 3), Sigmund Freud describes the occurrence of traumatic memories. The pattern of sufferings is persistent and comes in the form of nightmares, and painful re-enactments, totally outside the control of a victim. If we remember the Tasso's legend Freud refers to, in the abovementioned book (discussed Chapter I), we may single out the importance of outside voices, which may invade the head of a traumatized person. Those voices may be various, and they normally try to remember the episode or a part of person's life, when the traumatic event occurred. The traumatic event is not recorded consciously, thus a person is facing it by listening to those voices, which are difficult to control and are repetitive in

essence. Freud calls this experience “traumatic neuroses”, later called PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Hearing voices is one of the essential characteristics of trauma and, in this play, the Voice is trying to re-construct Joe’s painful memory.

Those voices construct and at the same time de-construct a person’s memory. By memory construction, I mean, that they trigger the recall of painful memories; and by memory deconstruction, I mean, that those voices may intensify trauma and add a nightmarish quality to a person’s existence, thus intensifying PTSD symptoms. Besides, we may understand those voices as different personalities entombed in a person’s mind, as Jung argues. When these de/construction processes take place, a person becomes restless and tries to avoid the real world. For example, Joe has imprisoned himself in his room and the only link with the outer world is a slut who comes to perform services for him from time to time.

Moreover, the impossibility to narrate those memories in the first person singular only points to their rejection, and, obviously, contributes to their cyclic nature. This cyclic nature is inscribed both physically and verbally in this play. Caruth writes that “The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself” (1996: 17). As Joe is unable to face his personal traumas; his latency may endure through all his life.

Joe’s absence of voice means on several levels. Authoritative voice goes hand in hand with a stable identity, a person who is capable of telling his own story is mentally healthy. Joe has definitely lost his voice: he is incapable of narration as he cannot come to terms with his own self or selves in this case. Furthermore, it may point to a blanked-out memory and/or forgetfulness. Joe is both interested in and scared of the Voice’s narration. His listening is attentive, he is trying to assimilate and at the same time reject what the Voice is telling him, and, consequently, no agreement with his own self may be reached. And, probably, there may be another meaning to his silence. His silence may be considered as a narrative, a narrative of his absent or hidden memory. Recently I



have seen “Incendies”, a production<sup>105</sup> by Wajdi Mouawad. The whole play has to do with memory and trauma. The main character, Jeanette, receives 500 tapes of her already dead mother recorded by a nurse at hospital. The nurse seemed to be interested in her mother’s 5 years of silence. Paradoxically, the only thing that the daughter hears on listening to the tapes is her mother’s breathing. But Jeanette says that silence is her narrative, her voice. I think the same may be applied to Joe, who desperately tries to “kill” the voices with his silence and refusal to answer. Moreover, Beckett creates tension between the sound of the Voice and Joe’s obstinate silence.

The female voice in the play *Eh, Joe* is the only voice that “inhabits” the play, since Joe does not utter a single word throughout the play, and, from my point of view, it is worth analysing it in relation to trauma. I would discuss this Voice from several angles:

- acoustic quality
- gender
- the Voice as a memory-narrator

Traumatic memories remain always on the subconscious level and they have a ghost quality, appearing and disappearing, thus making the world we live in seem unreal, and the Voice several times stresses the fact that all the voices came to Joe’s mind on and off. The Voice even questions Joe’s sanity: “You know that penny farthing hell, you call your mind... That where you think this is coming from, don’t you?” (362). Later in the play the Voice compares Joe to her other partner who was Joe’s complete opposite stressing that he was “preferable in all aspects... kinder... stronger .....SANE” (364), making the audience doubt Joe’s sanity. The Voice is actually hinting at the possibility that Joe is actually imagining the voices.

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<sup>105</sup> This Canadian play was staged in Matadero, Madrid. I watched the performance in October, 1, 2010. Wajdi Mouawad is both the author and the director of the play. Hermile Lebel, notary, presents the twins, Janine and Simon Marwan, with the last wishes of their mother, Nawal. The daughter must deliver an envelope to a father they believed had died a hero’s death, while the son must deliver another envelope to a brother whose existence they never suspected. The obscure circumstances of their birth can no longer remain a mystery. Travelling back to the war-torn country their mother had fled, they discover her true story and the difficult road that finally led to her reconciliation with her painful past.

The Voice in this teleplay has a hallucinatory **quality**: Beckett insisted on it being “*low, distinct, remote, little colour, absolutely steady rhythm, slightly slower than normal.*” The Voice seems to be coming from the grave, as well as other voices that were torturing Joe: the voices of his father and mother, and other voices of the ones who loved him.

The main characteristic of the Voice is its rhythm: the pauses between phrases should be 1 second long and between paragraphs 7 seconds long. Samuel Beckett wrote to Alan Schneider on 7 April 1996: “Voice should be whispered. A dead voice in his head. Minimum of colour. Attacking. Each sentence a knife going in, pause for withdrawal, then in again” (qtd. in Zarrilli 1997: 113). The pauses in the play may serve several purposes: they give Joe time to remember; they may also represent the passage of time like “grain upon grain” in *Endgame*, besides, they make the Voice sound like a machine and add a fragmentation quality to the Voice’s speech. In addition, these constant pauses may be the metaphor for drops of water. Billie Whitelaw mentioned that she delivered her lines in the form of Chinese water torture. While the Voice is speaking, it is difficult to ignore Joe’s face, since his listening gets more and more intense throughout the play: “*face: practically motionless throughout, eyes unblinking during paragraphs, impassive except in so far as it reflects mounting tension of listening*” (359). It is evident that the Voice makes him suffer.

As far as **gender** is concerned, the Voice seems to belong to one of his female lovers. The information that we get about the Voice’s past “idyll” with Joe is rather scarce. Again, as in *KLT*, the romance is placed close to water, presumably, a lake in a park. “Like those summer evenings in the Green... In the early days... Of our idyll... When we sat watching the ducks... Holding hands exchanging vows...” (363). It seems that Joe loved listening to her voice “like flint glass” (363), which he “could have listened to... for ever” (363). The last remark is rather sarcastic since Joe would listen to the haunting voice forever or “the whisper in your head... Me whispering at you in your head...” (364). Thus, the voice once pleasant for him in the past is transformed into his present private torturer.

The Voice is constantly craving for Joe's attention; it starts her speech, calling Joe's name. Joe tries to silence or to control her "whispering", "brain tired squeezing" (364), but without success. Gontarski in his essay "The Body in the Body of Beckett's Theatre" writes that "The woman's Voice that assails Joe seems a representation, an exteriorization of Joe's internal conflict.[...] Joe seems to have some sort of undeveloped or unborn opposite within him" (2001: 172). I think that it has more to do with Jung's theory of multiple personalities.

In Beckett's drama, the process of remembering acquires a new quality: "recall appears to arise from a specific subject, that subject is him/herself fractured, "falling to bits", and placed at a remove from the "remembering" voice(s)" (Malkin 1999: 7). Thus, this Voice may be a fragment of Joe's consciousness or disturbed memory. Besides, its characteristic being feminine may be another device of Joe's distancing himself from the events of his past, taking into consideration, that it is the woman's not Joe's voice who is talking to him, although not a stranger still she was a passer-by in his life; one of many seduced by him.

The process of narration is extremely important in the treatment of trauma. A person tells his story to a witness to come to terms with his memory. Paradoxically, in this play the roles are switched. Joe becomes a witness to his own painful memory. Thus, it is very difficult to talk about his assimilation of trauma. The switch of roles only makes Joe's wounds bleed.

**Narration** is always an important part of Beckett's plays; *Eh Joe* is not an exception, since again we have a silent listener (Joe) and a narrative Voice. There are nine speeches throughout this short play, as well as nine camera movements. The number nine may be connected to Dante's nine circles of Hell, and, therefore, to the passion of "Our Joe" as the Voice says. The latter rejects Joe's possibility of gaining "that old paradise you were always harping on..." (363). Furthermore, the Voice is not a Saint, a feature in common with Joe, speaking about paradise it says that it "is not for the likes of us" (363). So, the Voice itself hints that it is coming from hell, where Joe will "join us", using the pronoun in plural points to the multiplicity of voices (there are different voices in Joe's mind, but this is the one we hear in the play). The Voice uses

pronoun “us” several times. It seems to me that the Voice itself may contain other voices, or other memories. During the play it refers Joe to his other voices, other memories that ceased whispering in his head; “Throttling the dead in his head...” (363), says the Voice. Thus, the Voice may be guiding Joe through the labyrinth of his repressed memories, zooming in his most disturbing memories.

We may view nine camera movements and nine speeches in the light of mnemonics, although there is only one *locus* present: Joe or Joe’s mind. The zooming-in effect only makes us penetrate deeper into his memory. So, nine speeches with nine camera movements may be considered images created by the Voice whispering. In mnemonics the fifth *locus* was normally the most important for this method, and, it seems to me, that the fifth “speech” should be important to Joe, as it speaks about “your Lord”, so Joe’s spirituality or its absence:

“How’s your Lord these days? ... Still worth having? ... Still lapping it up? ... The passion of our Joe ... Wait till He starts talking to you ... When you’re done with yourself .. All your dead dead ... Sitting there in your foul old wrapper ... Very fair health for a man of your years ... Just that lump in your bubo ... Silence of the grave without the maggots ... To crown your labours ... Till one night ... ‘Thou fool thy soul’ ... Put your thugs on that... Eh Joe? ... Ever think of that? ... When He starts in on you ... When you’re done with yourself ... If you ever are.” (364)

The verbal images created in this speech are Dantesque in their nature, and Joe in his “foul old wrapper” reminds one of a dead man in a shroud. The language gets more and more aggressive and vehement with every word uttered. The Voice is actually spitting the words out. I suppose that Joe’s faith contributed to his trauma, since he believed or believes in God, but his hope to gain paradise is, perhaps lost. There is only the “silence of the grave” in store for him. This may be the reason of his unnatural freight of darkness, which triggers his memory of Hell. Ruby Cohn points out that “the text witnesses to a crisis of faith” (2001: 294).

Surprisingly, the voices of all these dead people eventually get extinguished in Joe’s head and there is a linear succession of voices, they do not talk at the same time, they come to Joe one by one and then go away. The only explanation that comes to my mind is that those voices ceased to exist due to the fact that Joe had assimilated those

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memories of his life. Since a traumatic experience once understood starts to form part of our present personality. And the assimilating of a traumatic event always goes hand in hand with its repetitive narration.

It seems that the most crucial bit of Joe's memory has to do with the suicide of a girl in "lavender slip", which belongs to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> movement of this teleplay. Seven and nine are biblical numbers, which have certain connection with God and Creation, as God created Earth in seven days; nine is the expression of the power of the Holy Spirit, not to mention that number nine is the number of times Jesus appeared to his apostles, besides it is also considered to be the number of Man (nine months of gestation), etc. Although in *Eh Joe* the memories of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> camera movements have to do with the greatest act of anti-creation: the girl's suicide. On a certain level, the girl's memory plays the role of Merleau-Ponty's "phantom-limb" theory. The Voice describes the moment of their separation with the image of Joe "bundling her into her Avoca sack...Her finger tumbling with her big horn buttons" (365), these scene may remind the audience of Joe already putting her into a coffin or of a burial ceremony, thus her suicide may be treated as a consequence of their separation.

Paradoxically, love seems to be the clue for the Voice's existence. Although the tone of the Voice is accusatory and it spits poison, it is constantly calling Joe's attention, the name "Joe" is pronounced 31 times during the whole play as though the Voice dreads not to be heard. The relation is rather violent *per se*, this Voice is Joe's personal torturer like the Light in *Play*, and it tortures Joe with his own memory or bits of his memory. It threatens Joe throughout the play with God's punishment and remembers the most painful details of the death of an anonymous girl "in lavender slip". And since the Voice presumably knows Joe well, it uses this knowledge to hurt him. All the memories are patchy and fragmentary; there is a collage of the fragments of the Voice's memory and the memory of the other girl. Besides, the Voice tends to play with the pronouns "I-she" and "my-her", which only adds to the instability of its identity. The constant quotes from the Bible make the Voice sound old.

The ninth speech, which may be considered Joe's personal Hell, is the most violent in language, although the Voice does not speak about herself, the whole speech

describes the girl's suicide. It seems to me that it is not the first time that the Voice is torturing Joe with verbal images, which in some way sound like director's stage instructions, as the sentences are getting more fragmented and precise at the same time. The opening directions "Warm summer night ... All sleeping ... Sitting on the edge of her bed in her lavender slip ..." (365) set the action in time and in place. The only description of the girl that we get is "her lavender slip", since Joe was quite familiar with it. The Voice masterfully plays with the word "slip"; in the run of the speech we have the following references:

"Sitting on the edge of her bed in her lavender **slip**..." (365)

"Gets out in the end and **slips** out as she is..." (365)

"Tears a strip from the **slip** and ties it round the scratch..." (366)

"**Slip** clinging the way the wet silk will..." (366)

We may suppose that the "slip", being an intimate item of clothing, is important because for Joe it stands for the act of love making. But in the run of the speech the slip is brutally torn in order to bandage her other wounds, the same happens to their feelings, which are destroyed. Besides the usage of "slip" as a verb means that her life is actually slipping away. The meanings of "slip" are various, among them is "the act of avoiding capture", "a young slim person", "a minor mistake due to lapses of memory, "a socially awkward act", "a woman's undergarment", "an artefact consisting of a narrow flat piece of material", "slickness", "pass out of one's memory", etc. A word with so many meanings is used on purpose by Beckett, as it creates other layers of meaning in the play. The associations that this word create in speech are uncountable, and this makes the text multilevel. It is used as a trigger of Joe's memory in the text, besides as an instrument of torture, a kind of Voice's weapon. "Slip" with the meaning of "slickness" has sexual connotations, but at the same time the characteristic of "wetness" also places the story close to the water, "Faint lap of the sea through the open window..." (365), and bears the association of slicker blood, which was trickling from the girl's hands. Furthermore, the word creates visually the escape of this girl from life and from suffering.

Another word that the Voice plays with is "cut":

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“Cut a long story short doesn’t work...” (366)

“Cut another long story short doesn’t work either...” (366)

This idiomatic expression, which refers to narration, is used literally: the girl was attempting to cut her veins or her life-story. In comparison to the word “slip”, the meaning “cut” is flat and narrows the understanding of the text. From time to time the speech is coloured by Voice’s vehement remarks, as though she is trying to take the revenge for both of them, her remark about the Gillette is excruciatingly cruel: “Gets out the Gillette ... The make you recommended for her body hair...” (366). The Voice is indirectly making Joe an active participant of this act, and attributes him the role of a “murderer”.

At the end of the play the Voice starts to lose its strength and gets fainter, but even this is used on purpose. Above inaudible whisper Joe can make out only a few words, signalled out by Beckett:

“... [*Voice drops to whisper, almost inaudible except words in italics.*] All right ... You’ve had the best ... Now *imagine* ... Before she goes ... Face in the cup ... Lips on a *stone* ... Taking Joe with her ... Light gone ... “*Joe Joe*” ... No sound ... To the *stones* ... Say it now, no one’ll hear you ... Say “Joe” it parts the *lips* ... *Imagine* the hands ... The *solitaire* ... Against a *stone* ... Imagine the *eyes* ... Spiritlight ... Month of June ... What year of your Lord? ... *Breasts* in the stone ... And the *hands* ... Before they go ... *Imagine* the hands ... What are they at? ... In the *stones* ... “ (366-7)

The words which are heard are: *Imagine, stone, Joe Joe, stones, lips, Imagine, solitaire, stone, Breasts, hands, Imagine, stones*. On the one hand, the Voice is trying to reconstruct the girl’s body in Joe’s memory. But on the other hand, it obviously recreates the moment of death when the breathing and live body is being transformed into a corpse – a stone. The Voice is appealing to Joe’s imagination to feel the grief and solitude of a person who is already doomed.

The reference to the stones may mean on various levels. Stones are used instead of flowers in Jewish burials, for example. In the Bible, an altar - the holy place where one makes offers to God - is no more than a pile of stones. When Abraham, following God’s instructions, binds his son Isaac for sacrifice, he does this on a stone, called Even

Hashtiyah, the “foundation stone of the world.” And the most sacred shrine in Judaism, after all, is a pile of stones - the wall of the second Temple burial ceremony. Moreover, the Voice may be recreating the girl’s burial ceremony, ancient in its nature, as well as it visualizes her as human sacrifice for love. Besides, people who committed suicides were never buried in the cemeteries, so the girl practically becomes part of nature separated from the rest of the world. Other aspects of the symbolic use of stone from Western Arnhem Land should also be briefly mentioned. First of all, stone is considered to be a “male” substance in many cultures, among them Indigenous North Americans, pre-Celtic peoples of the United Kingdom and other groups. In all of these regions, the earth is a symbol of fertility and femaleness because of the plant life it nurtures and supports (the idea that Otto Rank discusses in his book *The Trauma of Birth*). As a counterpart to earth’s more fragile produce, hard stone was perceived as a male phenomenon. The hardness of stone and the fact that it penetrates deep into the earth are obvious reasons for its adoption as a male symbol. Furthermore, the girl’s dying among the stones may be viewed as her final act of union with Joe, her fusion with him and his memory.

Finally, I would like to mention that linguistically the text may be considered as the language of “torture”. The verbs of mental thuggee are present throughout the play: “throttle, muzzle, spike, squeeze, tighten, silence, garrotte, finish, mum, strangle, stamp out, exterminate, kill, choke”, etc. They may refer to Joe’s constant struggle with the voices or his attempt to kill his own unpleasant memories. Beckett wrote in *The Expelled*:

“Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, or those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don’t there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little. That is to say, you must think of them for a while, every day several times a day, until they sink forever in mud. That’s an order.” (1958: 33)

We will never know whether Joe will be able to kill those voices or eventually they will drive him mad. The last direction: “*image fades but the voice continues whispering*” (367), only hints at the possibility that the Voice/s will always be there for Joe to listen to. The last words of the play are: “There’s love for you... Isn’t it, Joe? ...



Wasn't it Joe?... Eh, Joe?... Wouldn't you say?... Compared to us... Compared to Him... Eh, Joe?..."(367).

To conclude, I would like to say that the Voice of this play belongs to the traumatic fragmented memory. All of its characteristics point to a merciless torture till Joe joins the voices and till he "dries rotten at last" (362). The claustrophobic room environment and the movement of the camera towards Joe's face together with the narration, that starts with the memories of a jealous woman and finishes with the scene of the suicide, get deeper into Joe's memory, making him suffer and remember while the camera dollies into a close-up. But this remembering does not mean that he has accepted these memories, since he does not utter a word.

"The mind, dim and hushed like a sick-room, like a *chappelle ardent*, thronged with shades; the mind at last its own asylum [...]; the mind suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body, the glare of understanding switched off." ( Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, qtd. in Kedzierski 1999: 165)

Joe is alone in the room with his most traumatic memory and in constant conflict with his conscience, unable even to plead guilty. Deprived of any further heaven, his existence is already transformed into a personal hell of the voices of his once loved ones torturing him in the present. The only voice, which probably holds the key to his memory (the voice of the girl "in the lavender slip"), has abandoned him.

## 4.2. Autobiographic Memory Disruption: *That Time*

"I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing to another to say, that I am they." (Beckett, *Unnamable* 1958: 386)

*That Time* (1975) is another of Beckett's works where disembodied voices dominate the verbal landscape of the play. Beckett himself stated that this play is "on the very edge of what was possible in the theatre" (Knowlson 1997: 602), since the staging is only a small head suspended in the air about ten feet above the stage. As always with Beckett,

tension is created between a silent and practically still Listener and three voices coming from “nowhere”. Definitely, this is another of his memory-plays; even its title discloses the main topic: *That Time*, which becomes the protagonist of this short piece.

This play in a way has to do with Beckett’s memories, according to O’Brien. Early drafts include much biographical reminiscence, some of which still makes their way into the final version. Barrington’s Tower became Foley’s Folly (O’Brien 1986: 220) to capitalize on the alliteration, “the number 11 bus, [which] would only take him to the suburb of Clonskeagh leaving him with a five mile walk to” the folly<sup>106</sup> and the “Doric terminus” is the boarded up Harcourt Street railway terminus in Dublin<sup>107</sup>. The Portrait Gallery, Library and Post Office suggest London where Beckett lived for two years in the thirties.

Knowlson points out the connection of this play with the Biblical engraving of Job by William Blake (1979: 206), and Enoch Brater notes that the title may have some reference to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 46 “Against that time, if ever that time come” (1987: 50). Nonetheless, the major themes of this play deal with Time and autobiographical memory (especially ABM landmarks), since the voices which are coming to Listener’s head are the voices of/from his past. The title has a double meaning, referring to a specific period of time and also to Time in general. This is clear from the French translation Beckett made, where there is no word which conveys this duplicity of meaning, and although he opted for *Cette Foix* as the title in French, he translated ‘time’ as ‘fois’, ‘temps’ and ‘heure’ depending on the context.

Samuel Beckett managed to stage in his 20-minute play, such aspects of memory as Time and perception, memory imagery, Time and chronological landmarks of ABM, the question of identity, memory and emotions, etc. Most notably, the human ability to conjure up long-gone but specific episodes of one’s life is both familiar and puzzling, and is a key aspect of a personal identity:

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 207.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

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“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.” (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 13)

Memory seems to play the leading double-role in our life; it may be our source of knowledge or lack of it, it may unify or destroy self/ves and our perception of time. Experiences, events, emotions, imagination and perception are closely linked in our memory. We remember experiences and events which are not happening now, so memory differs from perception. We remember events which really happened, so memory is unlike pure imagination. Yet, in practice, there can be close interactions between remembering, perceiving, and imagining. Remembering is often suffused with emotion, and is closely involved in both extended affective states such as love and grief, and socially significant practices such as promising and commemorating. It is connected in obscure ways with dreaming. Some memories are shaped by language, others by imagery. Much of our moral and social life depends on the peculiar ways in which we are embedded in time:

“The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours.”<sup>108</sup>

So, memory is related to identity or identities, as it glues Self through time. Although an understanding of memory is likely to be important in making sense of the continuity of Self, of the relation between mind and body, and of our experience of time, since “the only world that has reality and significance” is “the world of our latent consciousness” (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 13). Thus, with the loss of perception of time, we lose our own identity; our identity may be scattered in Time. And the signal of lost identity is the loss of Voice (the first person singular) or a personal narrative which unifies our memory. Consequently, the three voices, which come to the Listener’s head in *That Time*, may be the voices of his fragmented selves, scattered in time, which only point to some kind of trauma.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

For further analysis of these voices, I will dwell upon their following characteristics:

- The owner of these voices
- Acoustic location and quality
- Location in time, if any
- Temporal landmarks of memory
- Diachronic disunity disorder
- Techniques of linking
- Tripartite structure of the play and the voices

Beckett was quite clear, as far as **the owner of the voices** is concerned: the small head suspended in the theatrical space is the one the voices belong to. Ruby Cohn writes that the play is practically staged in the skull or a head (2001: 332). Thus, the head is the perceiver of all the voices. I presume that this head may be understood on various levels. From a phenomenological point of view, the head is the character, the setting and the only prop of the play. And mnemonically it is a landscape or a *locus*, an improvised stage for the Listener's memories.

As a character, it is physically and acoustically present, although denied of voice. Its acoustic presence is audible rhythmical breathing, which is amplified in the 10-second silences. And visually, the head is so small that it can play tricks on the audience's eyes. The contrast between the white head and darkness adds a nightmarish and hallucinatory quality to the whole piece, making a spectator doubt his own senses of perception. This image restricts the stage space and concentrates our attention "so that the audience's vision of the play is as controllable as the lens of the camera, constantly switching from wide angle to close focus" (Brater 1987: 35). So, the head constitutes the focus of our attention, as it is the only prop present onstage.

The darkness that surrounds it may be understood as the void, subconscious, memory, Time and even death. All these meanings are valid and will be discussed later in the relation to this play. Although the visual allusion is that the darkness is not only enveloping the space but is also devouring the head gradually. The white head is in

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contrast with the stage darkness and this creates tension. It seems as though there are two protagonists onstage: the Head and the Darkness, which are opposed to each other. And Darkness seems to threaten to swallow the white head.

The image of a head may arise different sorts of allusions from biblical to personal, which are echoed by the text itself.

“Like the desolation of a disembodied Dali head, the image we confront here is at once sensational and intimate, empty but filled with suggestion, deserted, yet full of mysterious panic, an apparition that is never explained and that never ceases to pall.” (Brater 1987: 38)

We may see this head as a John Baptist’s head or even Adam’s head since there is a textual reference: “when you started not knowing who you were from Adam...” (391); both allusions, being Biblical, “transport” the audience into ancient times of Genesis/Creation, or to St John’s beheading, which implies torture. Thus the image of a head separated from the body onstage only highlights the proximity of death. Besides, there is the allusion that Beckett himself stated - the link between the Listener’s head and Lao-Tzi (“that old Chinaman long before Christ born with white long hair” (390)), a philosopher who was born with grey hair. All these allusions make this Head as ancient as Time itself. The age is also made prominent by the Listener’s old wrinkled face and his white hair, which makes a halo.

From a philosophical point of view, Beckett staged unimaginable: he separated the head (the Listener’s mind) from his memory flow, since the voices are coming from without. The Cartesian dualism is present onstage, the separation of brain from its content. The stillness of the head and the continuity of words are opposed to each other through theatrical image.

“In Bergson’s restatement of what might be called Cartesian dualism, the brain, especially if conceived as the seat of, or reservoir for, memory is part of spatialization of time, since it is connected to the machinery of the body; and perception, as opposed to the perceiver himself or herself is the process of connection between the inner and the outer, material world.” (Gontarski 2001: 94)

In addition, the absence of onstage body is also important. The body is only verbally reconstructed by the voices: “till the legs dried up...” (392). The body’s locomotion is also present through words, mostly in the action of walking or the non-action of sitting. Thus, the Listener’s body is a “phantom-limb”<sup>109</sup>, or a topic of recollection. We also have to bear in mind that the body is an important receptor of outside information, so with its absence the head lacks present/onstage perception, and so the Listener’s brain is unable to construct his present identity fully; he is only able to listen to the voices’ flow with his eyes closed.

From a psychological point of view, taking into consideration Baddeley’s model of working memory (Appendix I), the head may represent the central executive of memory. Although, due to its silence, we may suppose that the storage process is not qualitative but quantitative in its essence. Images (visuospatial sketch) and words (phonological loop) are not assimilated or processed, because there is no verbal reply from the Listener. Besides, the visuospatial sketch lacks in precision due to the uncertainty of time.

In early drafts Beckett has the head resting on a pillow recalling especially the dying, bedridden Malone. But by modifying the image of the head on the principle “less is more”, Beckett broadens possible meanings of this theatrical image. It is also important to mention that the head is situated slightly off-centre, so the centre is actually dominated by darkness, making it the protagonist. This off-centeredness signals the lack of the control of the Listener over the voices, although Beckett never explained whether the relationship is the one of dominance or of mutual dependence. Nevertheless, I believe that the head cannot live without the voices and vice versa. Although fragmented, they form part of one entity.

“La experimentación lingüística (texto/voces) y la visual (espacio/imagen escénica) son paralelas en el teatro de Beckett, y su mayor preocupación (evidente en la larga serie de manuscritos que preceden a estas obras breves) era conseguir una interrelación perfecta entre las voces y la imagen escénica.” (Rodríguez-Gago 2000:191)

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<sup>109</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s theory of memory as “phantom-limb” has already been discussed in Chapter I.

Beckett attacked the authority of Self as a unique entity and the authority of “I” discourse. The centrality and definiteness are never achieved in his plays, the meaning always remains open. And the three voices coming from different directions contribute to the play’s lack of centre due to their multiplicity.

The second aspect, I would like to analyse, is the **quality and the acoustic location** of these voices. Beckett stated that the voices should be low, rhythmical and melodious, modulating “*back and forth without any break in general flow*” (388). This task was achieved by mounting three loudspeakers in the theatre. Besides, the voices were recorded and played during the performance. Beckett required that these monologues, although featuring the same actor, were to be pre-recorded and not presented live. He also specified that the voices come from three locations preferably, from the left, the right and from above the head, and that the switch from one to the other be smooth and yet clearly noticeable. He did not stipulate that any effort be made to differentiate the voices, however, unless it were impractical to have them coming from three distinct locations; in that instance Beckett asked for a change in pitch to be used to distinguish one voice from another (Brater 1987: 41).

As far as the quality of the voices is concerned, I would like to point out the importance of rhythm, fast speed and lack of pauses. The lack of pauses is signalled by the lack of punctuation and capital letters in the text. The feminine voice in *Eh Joe* is delivering, although fragmented, but still coherent phrases, but in *That Time* one word merges into the other. The first effect created is, on the one hand, of incompressibility: it is difficult at first to understand what the voices are speaking about, as though they speak in an unknown though familiar tongue. The audience is lulled by the continuous flow of words, which creates the effect of the “sea of memory” in the closed space of the theatre. And, on the other hand, the low tone of the voices makes them sound remote as though reciting some ancient poetry. This remoteness may have a connection with Freud’s “fading effect”, since with time our emotional reaction to a certain memory disappears.

“He is overwhelmed by Time, which not only deforms [...], but sweeps him along on a tide which makes the past appear remote, uncertain, and illusory, and the individual human life

seems like a fleeting disturbance of a still, silent, indifferent world, a diminutive ripple on the surface of infinite Time.” (Knowlson 1979: 211)

The acoustic location of the voices is another point to bear in mind. The voices come from three different directions: from the left and the right and from above. So the audience have to strain their hearing in order to perceive well the direction they are coming from and differentiate the three voices, since they sound more or less the same. The direction might help a spectator to attach the specific memory to the specific voice, once he/she starts to understand what the voices are talking about. Only a brief pause in between the speeches allows the audience to be aware of the change of different “memory flows” of A-voice, B-voice and C-voice. Besides, it is important to mention that the acoustic waves reverberate the silence and the darkness of the theatre. The effects created may be various. The first one is of “darkness” talking to us, the second one is that the voices are actually coming from the audience as though the spectators are reconstructing the Listener’s memory, and thirdly, if we understand the darkness as subconscious, it may seem that the audience actually belong there and constitute the body of the darkness, so the voices are coming from the spectators. Furthermore, the voices are born in the darkness of our minds.

Another quality of the voices is their parallelism, as though “always parallel like an axle-tree never turned to each other” (391), they never speak together and there is no dialogue. Like the urns in *Play*, they do not “touch” or hear each other, each of them rotates around its own piece of memory. They are heard like a kind of orchestra conducted by an invisible director, since they are interwoven *per se*. Nevertheless, they mutually depend one upon another in their separate narrations. As always with Beckett, the Voices mirror themselves in their disconnected speeches<sup>110</sup>:

“not a sound to be heard **only every now and then a shuffle of felt drawing near the dying away**” (C, 389)

“**the leaves and ears**” (B, 389)

“**making it up now one voice now another till you were hoarse and they all sounded the same ... and they all out on the roads looking for you**“ (A, 390)

“**muttering that time altogether**” (B, 390)

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<sup>110</sup> The letters in the quotations refer to the voices of the play (A, B, C).



“on into the night some moods the moonlight and **they all out on the roads looking for him or making up talk or breaking up two or more talking to himself being together that way where none ever came**” (A, 393)

“or moonlight **muttering away now one voice now another there** was childhood for you till there on the step in the pale sun **you heard yourself as it again..**” (A, 393)

“**making it all up** on the doorstep as you went along **making yourself all up** again for the millionth time forgetting it all” (A, 394)

“like **a whisper so faint** she loved you hard to believe you even you made up that bit till the time came in the end” (B, 394)

“not a sound only the **old breath** and the **leaves turning**” (C, 395)

According to the above quotations, we may assume that memory voices were always present in this man’s life, looking for him or/and accompanying him on the road of his life. Although there is a reasonable doubt whether he has been making them up; this is the obsession with the voices. As well as the Voice in *Eh Joe*, they want to destabilize the protagonist’s memory and the audience’s perception, hinting at the possibility of the Listener’s mental disability. But their onstage acoustic presence points to their existence: the voices may “whisper, shuffle, mutter, whisper”, but they are audible. Again, the questions arise: Is the man making the voices up? Or are the voices conjuring the image of a head? Since both the voices and the head have a hallucinatory quality, it is impossible to give a direct answer. Nevertheless, it is the material body (the head) that appears first before our eyes and its appearance gives birth to the voices, thus it occupies predominant position in our perception.

As far as **the location in Time** is concerned, the voices are heard at the present moment, but they are not anchored in a specific time; they are directed always towards the past. The direction of the voices is relatively important, since there are a lot of time-markers, such as “ago, long ago, when was that, old, before, behind, still, ever, never, after”, etc. But these time-markers are emptied of their usual meaning, they do not give the exact moment in the past, the voices are just juggling with these words in order to create the atmosphere of “past-ness”. For example, “before” and “after” go together: “when was that an earlier time a later time before she came after she went or both before she came after she was gone... before as then then as after” (B, 393). Thus, time loses its precision and functions only on the level of *durée*.

## *Disembodied Voices of Trauma*

“Pure *durée* is unrepresentable, ineffable, and constitutes for Bergson (and Beckett) a central metaphysical, ontological, existential, and so literary problem, the attempt to ‘eff’ the ineffable, to represent, and so segment and spatialize, the flow of being.” (Gontarski 2001: 95)

What is Time, if “after”, “before” and “now” go together? Beckett destroys time gravity in this play, or dissenters it. Time, as we understand it (minutes, years, etc.), does not exist, it becomes a void. Moreover, this creates an atmosphere of general stillness, which is mirrored in the memory-images of the voices. So far, there are birth, stillness and death, unified by the void of existence. Moreover, the impossibility to locate these memories in time only suggests the disruption of self, since there is a special link between the ability to temporally locate the events in one’s life and self-concept, according to Robyn Fivush (2004: 75).

The direction of the narration confirms the above stated. The word “back” is used 14 times in the play (9 times by A-voice, 4 times by B-voice and 1 time by C-voice), which marks general “backwards” direction. We may call it the direction towards the void, probably the void of the darkness, since the words are “born” in the darkness and then disappear into this void. Another possible meaning may have connection with the trauma of birth/death. There are textual references that point to this type of trauma. On the one hand, voice C remembers “that time curled up worm in slime when they lugged you out and wiped you off and straightened you up” (390), which obviously re-creates the moment of birth, or better to say, the trauma of birth, taking into account the vocabulary used. Voice B also mentions the trauma of birth: “way back in childhood or womb worst of all” (390). And on the other hand, voice B mentions “nothing the worse a great shroud billowing in all over you on top of you” (394), which advances us in time towards the grave, which will be again back to the void of death. As the image of a “drowned rat or bird” “floating off into the sunset”, the direction of memories takes on a negative form. The voices not only “advance” us father in the past, but also further in the Listener’s memories. First the voices only conjure images, but then they amplify the images and talk about the Listener’s states of being and past perception of his own self/ves.

This discussion leads us to the notion of **turning-points or temporal landmarks** of memory in the play, which play the leading role in ABM formation, and, consequently, in the constitution of a personal identity. As far as it was discussed in Chapter I, the primary objective of ABM is “to develop a life history and to do that by telling others what one is like through narrating of the events of the past” (Howe 2004: 60). This author attributes special importance to the turning-points of one’s personal history: “It is also significant that the self plays a prominent role in the autobiographical recall, particularly at points in time where there are major transitions in the self”<sup>111</sup>. Bergson, as well as Beckett in *Proust*, also signalled out the importance of these transition periods in the development/change of one’s identity (discussed in Chapter I). But only in the case of gradual development and assimilation of one’s past identities a person can develop a complete identity. The steps of this development are transition points, which modify an identity and change it:

“Rapidly changing self-concepts may also effect the spontaneous creation and use of temporal landmarks. Temporal landmarks tend to form when events are both experienced for the first time and have personal significance.”<sup>112</sup>

These temporal landmarks in their essence contain self-defining memories, which are vivid, affectively intense, repetitively recalled, linked to other similar memories (with similar patterns and affective responses), focused on an enduring concern or unresolved conflict of the personality, according to Beike, Lampinen, Behrend. It has been mentioned by many critics that the voices in *That Time* are trying to re-construct the protagonist’s memory<sup>113</sup>. And this re-construction of a possible identity or past identities depends on the recreation of self-defining memories.

Formally, the voices themselves may be taken for the protagonist’s temporal landmarks: since A is the voice of an old age, B – the voice of a young man, and C – the voice of an adult. Nevertheless, there is no acoustic difference created between them,

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 56.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 201.

<sup>113</sup> “The nameless protagonist, addressed as ‘you’ ... is an everyman, and like the medieval Everyman at the point of death, he re-views his life.” (Cohn 2001: 332)

“An important motif in all three accounts is the attempt, even the need, to make up the Self, just as life itself comes to be equated with a work of fiction that has to be invented...” (Knowlson 1979: 215)

since all of them are pre-recorded by the same artist. This, obviously, may be confusing. Besides, the chronological ABC order is not observed in the naming of the voices. The Voice of a young man, for example, is not assigned the letter “A”; it interchanges the letter with the voice of an adult and this again creates chronological confusion. The voices, while speaking though observing a strict pattern, do not follow each other according to their age. The play is opened by the voice A, the voice of an old age, and it is closed by C-voice, the voice of an adult. It seems that the cycles of the protagonist’s life are changed, or blurred.

“In the absence of a meaningful organization through which to understand our experiences, we may not be able to integrate those experiences into our self-understanding. This, in return, may lead to a fragmented sense of self.” (Fivush 2004: 89)

Another type of temporal landmarks is created in the narrative through the memories of the voices and the images that they create. That will be the matter of my further analysis.

In autobiographical memory, we assign causal significance to specific events, so that our temporal orientation is by particular times rather than simply by rhythms or phases. Because we can grasp the temporal relations between different cycles or phases, we have a conception of the connectedness of time, which gives us the concept of the past (Campbell 1994: 119). *That Time* challenges this concept, the connectedness is created only by a non-stop flow of voices that remember specific moments of the protagonist’s past or their moments, since these voices were accompanying him through his life. The memories that the voices remember are rather fragmented and remembered by bits, which point to their openness. The voices are unable to create a coherent narrative; they tend to repeat their memories, slightly changing the words. So, the process of remembering is circular in form. We may never be sure whether they have completed their bits of memory at the end of the play. Nevertheless, their memories rotate around the following topics:

**Voice A** is that of an old age. The man returns for the “last time” (388) to the town he grew up in and tries unsuccessfully to reach the folly where he hid as a child between ten and twelve (390, 393) looking at a “picture book” (389) and talking to

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himself for company (392), making up “imaginary conversations” while his family were out in the dark looking for him (390). The trams no longer run (388) and the railway station is “all closed down and boarded up” (391). Dejected he sits in a doorway making up stories of the past (394) while he waits for the night ferry, never intending to return (392).

**Voice B** is that of youth. It describes sitting with a girl beside a wheat field exchanging vows of affection, (388) then lying with her in the sand (392) and subsequently being alone in the same settings (393). In each instance there is unusually no action contact suggesting his inability to extrapolate beyond the point of simply being with another. These events appear to be reviewed at a turning point in his life: whilst sitting beside a window in the dark listening to an owl hooting he has been remembering/ imagining a first-love scenario but then finds he cannot continue and has to give up trying to (394). Beckett stated that this voice is the most emotional in the play.

**Voice C** is that of an adult. By this time he is content to seek shelter (and a degree of privacy) in public places like the Post Office (393), the Public Library (394) and the Portrait Gallery (388). In the gallery he sees a face reflected in the glass and doesn't quite recognize himself in the reflection (389). All his life he has lived in the past – all the voices are reflective – but now he is confronted with a reflection which is current, his own. The text with which the play closes, a “vision” in the library where all the books have dissolved into dust (395) evokes God's admonition to Adam, “dust thou art; unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19).

These are the memory slices which are amplified by the voices in the duration of the play. All the memories are anchored in “where”, but are quite vague on “when”. I propose that they are self-defining memories, due to their vividness, repetitiveness and focus on an enduring concern or unresolved conflict of the personality. This unresolved conflict is, probably, the reason of the voices' appearance and perseverance in the protagonist's life; nevertheless, they are false mediators of his life-story. The voices are very unstable since they are circular and amplifying at the same time. The reason for

repetitiveness is, perhaps due to the openness of those memories, since they are not negotiated into the Listener's identity and remain split, parallel.

“Synonymous with this need to make up his own life is practice, adopted first by the child but followed later by the grown man, of filling in the silence by creating several voices, all of which are fragments and figments of a Self which can be neither isolated nor defined. This sophisticated form of ventriloquism is a verbal substitute for a sense of identity, a dialogue between parts of a self which will never come together to form a whole. It provides a form of consolation, but no solution to the fundamental fragmentation that it reflects.” (Knowlson 1979: 215)

Besides, all the memories are disturbing through their stillness, there is no action so far. These memory images are more like picture descriptions. The general atmosphere is of decay, loneliness and devastation. The character is all alone in his life: from a lonely child sitting with his picture book among the nettles he is turned into an old man with an old breath and only voices for company. Nevertheless, among this flow of memory images, there is a certain reference to temporal landmarks or turning-points which, from my point of view, add movement to this memory slices. My analysis will be based on the following bits of C-voice memory, since this voice refers the audience to a specific turning-point:

“**never the same after that never quite the same** but that was nothing new if it wasn't this it was that **common occurrence** something you could never be the same after crawling about year after year sunk in your lifelong mess muttering to yourself who else you'll never be the same after this you were never the same after that” (390)

“never the same but the same as what for God's sake **did you ever say I to yourself** in your life come on now [*Eyes close.*] **could you ever say I to yourself in your life turning-point** that was a great word with you before they dried up altogether always having turning-points and never but the one the first and last that time curled up worm in slime when they lugged you out and wiped you off and straightened you up never another after that never looked back **after that was that the time or was that another time**” (390)

I suppose that these moments of consciousness, since no particular event is discussed, may be taken for the temporal landmarks of the protagonist's ABM and they are worth analysing. Both memory slices are extremely disturbing because of the choice

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of the vocabulary, such as “worm, slime, lug out, sunk in lifelong mess”, etc.; and the speech, which is full of repetition-permutations (“never the same never quite the same”) as though the voice is correcting itself, produces the effect of memories’ fragility and instability. Besides, as the words are uttered at an even speed, an effect of negation-affirmation is present. For instance, the words “never looked back after that was that the time”, may be understood as a statement: “Never looked back after. That was that the time.”; or like a question: “Never looked back after that. Was that the time?” The transition between a statement and a question is very unclear, and adds to the instability of the narrative.

C-voice refers to the metaphysical/existential issues, since later in the text we have the following “dialogue” between A-voice and C-voice:

A:” .....the truth began to dawn

C: when you started not knowing who you were from Adam trying to work for a change not knowing who you were from Adam no notion who it was saying whose skull you were clapped up in whose moan had you the way you were was that the time or was that another time ...” (391)

The link between these two voices is nearly perfect; the allusion is that C-voice is actually following the narration of A-voice. The Voices are raising the most recurring question of every human being: Why are we here? Voice C furthermore goes backwards in human history till the origins of mankind (Adam). Immediately, the voice mirrors the stage image of a skull, which, as I have already stated, is ancient in essence. The whole disturbance of the speech lies in the negation of particular origins of this head, since the head becomes only a container for something alien to it (“whose skull you were clapped up in”). It seems that the voice points to some sort of confusion, as though the head has to endure some other life, some other sufferings (“whose moan had you”).

In addition, at the end of the play, another existential issue is raised by C-voice - the brevity of life, or the duration between the two turning-points in every man’s life: birth and death, a recurrent theme in all Beckett’s works.

“not a sound only the old breath and the leaves turning and then suddenly this **dust** whole place suddenly full of **dust** when you opened your eyes from floor to ceiling nothing only **dust** and not a sound only what was it it said **come and gone** was that it something like that **come and gone come and gone** no one come and gone in no time gone in no time” (395)

The general image that this narrative creates is that of “dust”, which transcends the boundaries of the play, and refers us to Genesis and mortality. “Dust”, as an image, is present throughout the text in all the voices’ speeches. Voice B creates an image of a drowned rat at the moment of exchanging love vows, which even questions the possibility of this love. Voice A finds dust in the Portrait Gallery, covered in dirt (389) of age. Thus, “dust” becomes a textual symbol of decay and brevity of life; birth and death, love and death are practically united in this text.

“Yet the closing image of the dust extends much further than the death of individuals (his mother, ‘the lot you the last’, (24)) to evoke the passing of generations, even whole civilizations. It also invokes the essential brevity and transience of all human life...” (Knowlson 1979: 218)

The word “dust” and the phrase “come and gone” are repeated three times, which coincide with the number of the voices. In addition, the repetition of “come and gone” creates the pendulum movement in the text, like a poetical image for life brevity. Besides it refers to Freud’s *fort-da* game, taking us again to the discussion of the trauma of return. In this particular text it is the return-to-childhood or return-to-the-void trauma, which resurfaces. Moreover, from a morphological point of view, the word “gone” is Participle II (go-went-gone), and “come” maybe either infinitive or Participle II (come-came-come), so “come” is used in both Present and Past tenses, and “gone” only in the Past. This creates the effect of the continuity of coming into this world with the immediacy of leaving it. The words “in no time” only intensify the abovementioned, and negate Time as duration.

As far as the content of these memories is concerned (“could you ever say I to yourself...” (390); “the truth began to dawn ... when you started not knowing who you were” (391)), it has to do with an unnamed “occurrence” that changed the protagonist’s self-perception. There is a certain link to a possibility of trauma. Self-recognition plays



the key role in the narrative. The protagonist was “split”, destroyed after a certain event in his past, the event we can only speculate about. The presence of the trauma of birth is obvious in the monologues, but birth was only the beginning of a long road of suffering in their (the Listener’s and voices’) life. “Birth” may be considered the first turning-point, although it is not the only one. Moreover, the reference to the sense of non-recognition is present through the narrative: “never the same”, “could you ever say I to yourself”. In order to explain this, I would like to refer the reader to the piece of A-voice memory, when the voice narrates about his visit to the Portrait Gallery: “... behind the glass where gradually as you peered trying to make it out gradually of all things a face appeared had you swivel on the slab to see who it was there at your elbow” (389). Here Lacan’s mirror-stage theory comes into view. It seems to me that the protagonist was unable to recognize himself in the glass at a certain point in his life. This inability of recognition may be both literal (his face) and metaphorical (his own self). As a small child, he could not associate his own reflection with his own image. Consequently, there is a regression backwards in his perception, the regression towards childhood. Besides, another important point to mention is that the sense of dissociation normally leads to the split of Self, which is present in the text through “you” pronoun and the omission of “I”. The voices use the pronoun “you” addressing themselves and the protagonist. The centrality and stableness of “I” discourse is absent. Lampinen, Odegard and Leding refer to this phenomenon as diachronic disunity experience, when we alienate our past selves and “do not feel the same person any more” (2004: 231).

The pronoun “you” maybe be understood on both levels: singular, as addressing the head, or plural, addressing the head, the voices and even the audience. “You” may as well engage the audience in this peculiar memories recall. Knowlson points out that the effect of achieving of a “degree of narrative distance and a form of displacement” (1979: 207) is due to the use of the second person in the narration, as well as memory uncertainty and an alien quality of the three former selves (1979: 208). There may be another explanation for the diachronic disunity experience in the voices’ narrative. An example from the phenomenology of remembering underlines the point that the truth in memory is compatible with some transformation at the time of recollection. For many ordinary and obviously genuine autobiographical memories, most people can ‘flip’ perspectives (Rice and Rubin, 2009). Sometimes one takes “the position of an onlooker

or observer, looking at the situation from an external vantage point and seeing oneself ‘from the outside’; or one can remember the same scene from one’s own (past) perspective, with roughly the field of view available in the original situation, without ‘seeing oneself’” (Nigro and Neisser, 1983: 467–8). Thus, the head may be also taken for a simple witness of his memories.

All the voices have strong references to “not being seen”<sup>114</sup> as though they beg for invisibility. This is one of the characteristics of ontological insecurity, not to mention that the protagonist has various “symptoms”, such as creation of a surrogate self, the desire for isolation, the severance of social relations, withdrawal, the sense of non-existence, decay and dissociation from his own self. All of them are symptoms of a disturbed personality. On a par with the use of the second person they may be aimed at disturbing our feelings, since we may apply Vladimir’s (*WFG*) words to ourselves: “All humanity is us” (54).

The sense of dissociation may also be prompted by insecurity, which the voices display to an extreme. All of them demonstrate a strong desire for a shelter or a hiding place, which is impossible to find so far:

“...where none ever came where you hid as a child slip off when no one was looking and hide there all day long on a stone among the nettles with your picture book” (A, 389)

“you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child” (A, 389)

“when you went in out of the rain always winter then always raining that time in the Portrait Gallery in of the street out of the cold and rain slipped in when no one was looking and through the rooms shivering and dripping till you found a seat marble slab and sat down...” (C, 388)

“on the stone in the sun gazing at the wheat or the sky or the eyes closed nothing to be seen” (B, 390)

The image of the “child on the stone” is the most recurrent in the voices’ memories. There is an evident yearning for a return. Other places, where the protagonist or voices try to hide, have certain resemblance to their old childhood shelter. All the

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<sup>114</sup> Various synonyms of the verb “look” are present in the voices’ speeches, such as “gape, peer, gaze”, etc.

hiding places or shelters have to do with stone, silence and withdrawal. The childhood reference to a ruined castle is still viewed as a shelter by all the voices. Thus, they demonstrate a clear childhood return, on the one hand. And on the other hand, bearing in mind the symbolism of a “stone” discussed in relation to *Eh Joe*, I may suppose that “stone” has a relation to burial ceremonies, and consequently death and the void. Furthermore, Brater links the image of the stone to a “millstone”, which is Biblical in nature; this word is used by B-voice (“the other long low stone like millstone...” (388)). Three of the four apostles in the Bible quote “And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that **a millstone** were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea” (Brater 1986: 46), consequently, he states that “stone” becomes the agent of destruction and damnation in the story. Although, I think that there may be other meanings, if we take into consideration the play’s direction back to childhood, and the fact that this word is actually uttered by B-voice or the voice of youth, we may suppose that the protagonist is trying to return to the security of his early years, and the millstone may be his material protection, since children are guarded by God.

Like Joe, who tries to materially isolate himself from the immaterial Voice, the voices in *That Time* are looking for a material shelter of a stone, while they are craving for a return to childhood and to the darkness of the womb. The backwards direction of the play points to the only shelter possible for them – the shelter of death and non-existence.

The **linking** of the voices’ memories is mainly achieved by musicality, continuous rhythmical tempo, and recurring word expressions and images. Beckett is known to have had a long-standing preoccupation with musical structures. Time duration dictated where the breaks would come as he planned 3 x 5 minutes of speech with silences after 5 minutes and 10 minutes. The pauses “follow moments in which each of the voices confronts a moment of doubt, spatial, temporal or psychological confusion” (Lyons 1983: 162). It is important to mention that overall choice of words is very basic, the majority of words contain one or two-syllables, which creates an effect of sameness. The word expressions “that time”, “that the time” and “another time” are used by all the voices, which probably have to do with temporal landmarks of their

memories or turning-points. They may be considered as another type of linking. Besides, the Listener's head is the physical link of all the voices' memories.

Although, each voice in *That Time* has a subject area independent of the others at first, but as the play progresses, connections are made through common images and recurring themes. C's story takes place in winter ("always winter" (388)); B's events take place in summer, so it is logical to assume that A's tale happens in autumn ("grey day" (389), "pale sun" (392)). A sits on a stone step but remembers sitting on a stone in the folly, B sits on a stone by the wheat field and C on a marble slab in the portrait gallery, so the image of a stone links their memories.

The most recurring images evoked are "old green coat", "dust", "stone/ruin", "nettles/wheat", "picture book". All the objects are stable in the narrative; they do not undergo any kind of change. I think that the objects belong to the category of "old names", since all living beings end mingled up in dust, like the rat, for instance. The most stable of all is the "stone", which is made the centre of gravity by all the voices, as their return to the image is constant. Oblivious to time, the objects outlive their owners ("old green coat"), as though they belong to this world and are not prone to decay. "Old green coat" is continuously mentioned by A- and C- voices:

"A: huddled on the doorstep in the **old green greatcoat**" (392)

"back down to the wharf with the nightbag and the **old green greatcoat** your father left you trailing the ground..." (394-5)

"C: was your mother ah for God's sake all gone long ago all dust the lot you the last huddled up on the slab in the **old green greatcoat** with your arms round you you whose else hugging you for a bit of warmth..." (389)

"... out of the cold and rain in the **old green holeproof coat** your father left you" (392)

"Old green coat" becomes an intertextual symbol in the play. Firstly, it is the symbol of belonging to a family, since it is used in connection with his father, who had owned it before him. Consequently, it becomes a father-image, which provides him "physical warmth", although it lacks love and affection and it is unable to fully substitute his progenitor. As far as we can read through the text, the protagonist is the last one in the line of family succession, thus with his extinguishing, his genetic line

will disappear. This image of last-ness is intensified by A-voice, when he visited the Portrait Gallery and was looking at “a vast oil black with age and dirt someone famous in his time some famous man or woman or even child such as a young prince or princess some young prince or princess of the blood black with age behind the glass...” (389).

Secondly, “old green coat” may be another improvised shelter as the stone, since it definitely returns the Listener to the time of his childhood, when his father was alive. Probably, Voice B does not mention this object, since his parents were alive and this voice does not need to substitute his father’s image for a coat. I presume that with time we forget the faces of our beloved, they fade in our memories. “The original memory trace begins to lose its cohesion and distinctiveness, and fades into the background noise of the memory traces” (Howe 2004: 57). Thus, the Voices A and C have to rely on the image of a coat as their progenitor surrogate, since they are unable to remember their father. Father-less, without hope and faith, they have already lost their roots. The adjective “holeproof”, which is mentioned by C-voice, again has to do with the quality of protection. Though misspelled, instead of “wholeproof”, which means protection against everything, this coat only protects from “holes”, nevertheless, it still retains one quality. This coat accompanied the protagonist through his sleepless nights and winter, and, probably, it is the protagonist’s only material companion.

Thirdly, the verbal image of the coat which is used in the context of “huddling”, “your father left you”, and “with your arms round you” creates an atmosphere of loneliness, and points to the trauma of loss. Furthermore, “green” is considered to be the colour of “hope”, but together with adjective “old”, it may only mean “hope lost”. In conclusion, as well as “stone”, the coat ceases to provide a refuge for the voices and the protagonist, since both are material objects, besides both point to the ontological trauma of insecurity.

It is very unclear, whether the objects in this play serve as memory-triggers (like in *Happy Days*, for example) or these objects are triggered by memory. Their formal use is, perhaps to glue the memories of the three voices, as they are off-stage re-created by the voices; the voices evoke them from the darkness of their memories.

The last thing I want to dwell upon in the connection to the voices in *That Time* is their **tripartite structure** and the structure of the play as a whole, since number “three” is another link that joins the memories and the play together. There are three parts in a play, which may be divided into 36 verse paragraphs. Number three has been always symbolically important from different angles of its understanding. In the first three numbers, all of the others are synthesized. From the union of oneness and duality (which is its reflection), that is, from triad, proceed all of the other numbers, and from this primordial triangle all figures derive. There is also, for traditional civilizations, a direct relationship between numbers and letters of the alphabet, to the point where, with many alphabets, numbers were represented by letters, and had no special signs of their own. This is a probable reason, why the three voices are given letters for names. Besides, counting to three is common in situations where a group of people wish to perform an action in synchrony: *Now, on the count of three, everybody pull!* And, the voices overlap each other in their discourse and unite three different time dimensions.

The symbolism of number three is important to the present discussion since all the play is based on the three voices. Beckett was quite good at music, and, obviously, he was aware of the fact that there are three notes in a triad, the basic form of any chord. The tritone, which divides the octave into three equally spaced notes (root, tritone, and octave). Thus, we may speak about an orchestra of voices. Furthermore, we perceive our universe in three dimensions, and the voices may also be treated like the three dimensions of the protagonist’s mind: the past, split in youth, maturity and old age. As far as perception is concerned, the three primary colours (red, green and blue) give us white, and white is the head of the protagonist. In the verbal palette of colours, mentioned by the Voices, we have blue sky, green coat and “red” is the colour of the sun, mentioned by voice B. Moreover, three is considered to be the most positive number in Christian thought, it has a central importance as the doctrine of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Although, Biblical allusions are interwoven into the play, the three voices are too far to reach any special unity. Instead of uniting the Self through memory, they fragment it. Thus, they negate the existence of Divine Trinity. Knowlson states that “What remains of the past is only the remnant of a threnody, the tattered shreds of what might once have been a coherent memory of a unified past” (1979: 39). Besides, taking into consideration Roman Catholic doctrine as

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well as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, there are three realms of afterlife: Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. The Voices try to create all of them in their speeches, as though they could go further in time. I would say that at first B-voice tries to create a sort of Heaven in the love scene:

“on the stone together in the sun on the stone at the edge of the little wood and as far as eye could see the wheat turning yellow vowing every now and then you loved each other...”  
(388)

Although, amplifying the image of Heaven, voice B creates a sort of personal Purgatory later in the text:

“or by the window in the dark harking to the owl not a thought in your head till hard to believe harder and harder to believe you ever told anyone you loved them or anyone you till just one of those things you kept making up to keep the void out just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud” (390)

The image of a paradise collapses, and this memory is shattered to pieces. Even the Voice doubts whether this love may have ever existed. This memory negates the previous one. And further in the text, a *locus* of pure Hell is conjured up by B-voice:

“when you tried and tried and couldn't any more no words left to keep it out so gave it up gave up there by the window in the dark or moonlight gave up for good and let it in and nothing the worse a great shroud billowing in all over you on top of you and little or nothing the worse little or nothing.” (394)

The last B-memory totally destroys the previous paradise and purgatory images, as the culmination of this speech is the words “gave it up”, as the result of something already accepted, signalled by the past tense of the verb “give”. All the attempts “when you tried and tried” were frustrated, and there is no way out as to “let it in”. We may clearly see the instability of conjured-up images and negative direction of the text as a whole. The Voices are “shape-changers”; they split their own memories, arriving to the multiplicity of past perceptions. Three images of Heaven, Purgatory and Hell overlap in the same memory line.

Furthermore, number three expresses all aspects of creation, including birth, life and death; past, present and future; mind, body and soul; man, woman and child. I think that all these phenomena are present in the play. Firstly, there are three turning-points in the life of the protagonist: birth, life and death. Metaphorically, the tripartite structure of the voices merges all these transition periods at the moment of the performance. Secondly, the staging of the play divides the protagonist's mind, body (which is only verbally re-created) and soul. The figures of "man", "woman" ("mother") and "child" are always present in the Voices' memories, and are connected with the trauma of birth/death, or creation in general.

"Three" becomes the core element of *That Time*, which is the first odd number and may represent a triangle, the most stable geometrical form. Although other geometrical forms are indirectly present in the play: line and circle. All the forms have to do with the perception of Self in the world. The negative direction of the play from birth to death marks a linear succession, although, the eternity of time and continuous death-birth cycle, as well as repetitions in the text, create a circle. Thus, the geometrical forms integrate into the main topic of the play, which is memory and Time, or better say, Timelessness.

"A sequential view of the text of *That Time* reveals then a number of central themes and common images. Yet the use of a three-fold text permits a much wider and more varied spectrum of moods, tones and colours than would have been possible with a single narrative thread. For each of the three accounts is given its own physical setting, its own season of the year, even its own light, as well as its own range of incidents and images."  
(Knowlson 1979: 216)

Having analysed the three voices in *That Time* in relation to memory and trauma, I may conclude that the voices from the past work on multiple levels in this play. They create the perception of Listener's split identities scattered in time, but heard in the theatrical present. Overlapping in time, circularity, echoing, repetition-permutations of images link the voices to the Listener's head, creating an orchestra of disconnected voices of memory.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **“No Body at Rest”: Body and Memory Mutilation**



## CHAPTER V

### “No Body at Rest”: Body and Memory Mutilation

Bodies are the key issue in this chapter, even though I have already started analysing the question of staging a body in Beckett's plays in the previous chapters. It is impossible to separate stage elements, such as voices or bodies in to parts, since all of them form part of a whole. Beckett proves himself a master in treating stage bodies differently. First, he starts staging bodily infirmities, making his audience very much aware of their own bodies. Immobile Hamm in a wheelchair and Clov who is unable to sit, only make us think of the physical limitations of old age and diseases. But Nagg and Nell in the ashbins, transgress our understanding, and make us laugh and at the same time cry at the fragility of human life. Nagg and Nell may be possible “prototypes” for Beckett's further characters. It seems that his intention was to couple a stage image with sculpture and painting. Bizarre three-dimensional images inhabit his stage from *Play* onwards. A character's body starts to take on more roles; it becomes a sort of raw material. Like in *That Time*, when a head severed from a body starts to acquire new meanings on several levels: character, prop and setting.

“In Beckett's theatre, by contrast, the body is considered with minute attention. He approaches it – just as he approaches space, objects, light and language – as a genuine raw material which may be modified, sculptured, shaped and distorted for the stage... in Beckett's theatre the body undergoes metamorphoses.” (Chabert 1982: 23)

The violation and disintegration of stage bodies in Beckett's theatre are taken to an extreme: from the physical immobile figure of Winnie in *Happy Days* to a disembodied mouth in *Not I*. The universe of mutilated bodies is the projection of troubled consciousness of the *theatrum mentis* (the psyche-as-stage) into *theatrum mundi* (the world-as-stage). In a world where our mind is unable to fathom inside/outside reality, our bodies mirror our psyche and, therefore, they are uprooted

and deformed. In Beckett’s later plays, the bodies start to form part of the material world around them, thus they are subjected to immobility and become victims to the immaterial torturers, such as voices, Light or Darkness. At the same time the worst of their nightmares is “to be seen” in the incompleteness of their form.

In the majority of Beckett’s plays, the body mutilation has to do with troubled psyche or unresolved psychic conflicts. Thus, the body deformities are the exteriorization of internal ongoing existential incompleteness. Beckett’s staging may be taken for a deformed mirror of our world. The body ceases to be a substance, and becomes the prolongation of the mind, memory and trauma and is, at the same time, part of the environment. Chabert writes that the body in Beckett’s theatre “is worked, violated even, much like the raw material of the painter or sculptor, in the service of a systematic exploration of all possible relationships between the body and movement, the body and space, the body and objects, the body and light and the body and words” (1982: 54-55).

In the present chapter, I will base my discourse on the techniques of body mutilation in relation to the memory’s fragmentation and trauma, due to the impossibility to cover all possible theories and approaches on this topic. The two elements that I will analyse are stage lighting and the symbiosis between a human body and a material object. The plays I have selected for the current analysis are *Happy Days* and *Play*.

## **5.1. Buried in the Mother-Earth: *Happy Days***

### **5.1.1. Memory via Image Disconnectedness**

“By troubling the Beckettian stage body out of its presumed conventional unity into a radicalized multiplicity, Beckett’s plays develop a human body that functions in multiple modes simultaneously. In some of this modes, the stage body works as a signifier; in other it works as a Do-er that materializes the effects of its performative relationship with its

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environment, describing that relationship with its movements. In Beckett's most extreme experiments, the body's performative movement intensifies the focused energy of the actor's material body to the point at which we become aware of the animated immateriality." (Gray 1995: 1)

*Happy Days* (1961), which was initially conceived as a "[X] female solo" (Cohn 2001: 262), is a play where a complete fusion is achieved between a human body and a material object. The play is a predecessor of Beckett's later plays, so the image in question is not as minimalistic, as in *Play* or *That Time*.

When *Happy Days* was first performed in London, there were disagreements about every aspect of the text and production. Even Kenneth Tynan, the critic who praised *Waiting for Godot*, felt that *Happy Days* was "a metaphor extended beyond its capacity"<sup>115</sup>, nevertheless, he admitted Beckett's strange insinuating power and urged his readers to buy tickets for the play. It was to Brenda Bruce, starring as Winnie in the first production of the play, to whom Beckett explained his plans about the play:

"Well I thought that the most dreadful thing that could happen to anybody, would be not to be allowed to sleep so that just as you're dropping off there's be a 'Dong' and you'd have to keep awake; you're sinking into the ground alive and it's full of ants; and the sun is shining endlessly day and night and there is not a tree ... there's no shade, nothing, and that bell wakes you up all the time and all you've got is a little parcel of things to see you through life.... And I thought who would cope with that and go down singing, only a woman." (Brenda Bruce, qtd. in Graver and Federman 1997: 116)

Consequently, it is a play with a woman as the main character sinking into the earth, and it is Winnie who dominates both the physical and verbal landscapes. There is another character, Willie, but he is a seemingly passive listener, since he utters only several short lines and monosyllables in the duration of the play. Knowlson states that Willie speaks 48 words in Act I, and only one word "Win" at the end of Act II (1979: 108). One theme of the play, which lies on the surface, has to do with unhappiness in married life, thus the play was criticized with visible hostility due to its supposed

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<sup>115</sup> *The Observer*, 4th November, 1962: 29. Qtd. in Graver and Federman (eds.) 1997. *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge: 25.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Brenda Bruce, 7th April 1994. Qtd. in Knowlson 1997. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury: 501.

banality. But again, as with *Play*, it is the central onstage image that carries the play to other levels of understanding. Hereinafter, I will analyse this image in the relation to memory, its perception and the associations that may arise.

“Its success has depended to some extent on factors such as surprise, power and suggestiveness of the image of Winnie confined to her mound of earth or Willie’s final and long-awaited front of stage appearance.” (Knowlson 1979: 98)

The actress’s half-buried body is both tragic and comic; her situation both shocks and amuses us. Winnie is unlike Beckett’s other characters created for the theatre: she is clearly feminine and coquettish. “*About fifty, well-preserved, blonde for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace*” (138). Winnie is in a way obsessed with her aging looks: she inspects her image in the mirror, puts on a hat with a feather, and constantly comments on her appearance to Willie: “All I can say is for my part is that for me they [natural laws] are not what they were when I was young and ... foolish ...and [...] ... beautiful... possibly ... lovely ... in a way ... to look at” (152). She may be just any middle-class wife with a brand of domesticity, except for one thing: the lower part of her body is buried in the mound of earth and she is unable to walk; and that makes her special as a character.

The mound of earth holds Winnie tight, there is no escape for her, but she faces her situation with optimism, already considering the mound as a part of herself. For example, she comments in Act I: “The earth is very tight today, can it be I have put on flesh, I trust not” (149). Here, Winnie seems to be treating the mound as a piece of clothing and an indicator of her weight, which is absurd *per se*. She is adjusting to the surrealism of her predicament, trying to face it as something commonplace. Antonia Rodriguez-Gago in her preface to *Samuel Beckett: Los días felices* writes that “El montículo de Winnie es una extensión del personaje, una especie de falda que la arropa, o un túmulo mortuorio en el que se hunde” (1999: 83). The slopes to the left and to the right resemble a gigantic skirt. The image is symmetrical, and according to Arnheim, “the more regular a shape, the heavier” (1974: 30). The heaviness of the image dictates Winnie’s gravity of narration in the play and emphasizes the fact that this entire alien universe “rotates” around her: she is the alpha and the omega of her world, although she needs Willie for her existence.

The stage of entombment varies from partial mobility during the first act to practically total immobility in the second act. The earth is gradually claiming Winnie's body in spite of her refusal to admit her situation. But she still fantasizes that the earth may "crack all round and let me out" (152) one day. Her optimism does not have any limits. Winnie constantly praises her happy days and the great mercies bestowed on her. But the mound is merciless: it is devouring not only her body bit by bit, but also her memory. The disconnectedness of Winnie's body is mirrored by her disconnected language and her fragmented memory. There is a close relation between the character's diminishing body and her fading memories. In the second act, Winnie's speech gets more disconnected and fragmented and she tends to forget the memories she is talking about: "The sunshade you gave me ... that day ... [*pause.*] ... that day ... the lake ... the reeds. [*Eyes front. Pause.*] What day? [*Pause.*] What reeds?" (162). She remembers and then instantly forgets what she is trying to say and leaps to another subject. Her memory of kissing Charlie in the first act is: "Charlie Hunter! [...] I close my eyes – [...] - and I am sitting on his knees again, in the black garden at Borough Green, under the horse-beech" (142), is reduced in the second act to: "Ah yes ... the ... now ... beechen green ... this ... Charlie ... kisses ... this ... all that ... deep trouble for the mind" (161). There are more gaps and omissions here, than remembrance; with her body gone - her memory is fading. Thus, the mound may be taken for Time, the deeper Winnie sinks into it, the more it affects her memory. All the days are the same in Winnie's world: blazing sun, the bell (which is the signal of another "heavenly day") and unbearable heat are constant; and it is only the growing mound of earth that serves as an indicator of time passing.

The constant routine of her existence, where nothing happening, erases the chronological landmarks of her memory. Her "yesterdays" and "tomorrows" are the same: "It is not hotter today than yesterday, it will be no hotter today tomorrow than today, how could it, and so on back into far past, forward into far future" (154). Thus, Winnie hangs on her procedural memory to keep her going: her daily routines of waking-up, praying, brushing her teeth, looking in the mirror and talking. Nevertheless, there is one chronological landmark in her memory, which marks the "before" and "after" in her life: the moment when she "loses" part of her body. "I speak of when I was not yet caught – in this way – and had my legs and had the use of my legs, and

could seek out a shady place ...” (154). Winnie’s missing part of the body works on the level of Merleau-Ponty’s “phantom-limb”. Winnie’s speech gets fragmented, when remembering her body parts, and parallels the fragmentation of her ABM. After having sunk deeper into the mound, Winnie is more prone to forgetting: “My arms. [Pause.] My breasts. [Pause.] What arms? [Pause.] What breasts?” (161). Like in the previous quotation<sup>117</sup> on page 231, Winnie remembers and forgets instantly, probably due to her fading memory or to memory blocking/repression. Being an optimist, she tries to protect herself from painful memories of losing her body, since there is no alternative for her. Many of her personal memories are linked to the period when she was still able to move, but the majority of them are repressed by Winnie. The affirmation-negation technique is always present in connection to her personal memories and to the chronological landmarks of her ABM. For instance, speaking about the day when Willie gave her the bag “to go to the market”, she says: “That day. [Pause.] What day?” (161)<sup>118</sup>. It is important to mention that Winnie always narrates her personal memories as disconnected flashbacks. There is always an image sequence in her remembering, followed by a question such as “What day?” and then Winnie abruptly changes the subject. All these point to the fragility and instability of her memory, and, perhaps even to voluntary forgetting. Winnie tries to forget painful memories. As in *That Time*, Winnie’s memory is composed of “that days” or “that time” as landmarks of her memory.

As a result, Winnie’s identity is unstable and disconnected, like her body and memory. She admits this flickering quality:

“To have been always what I am – and so changed from what I was. [Pause.] I am the one, I say the one, then the other. [Pause.] There is so little one can say, one says it all. [Pause.]” (161)

Unlike Beckett’s later plays, the “I” discourse is still present. Winnie does not have any trouble with identifying her present Self, as Mouth in *Not I* has, however, she

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<sup>117</sup> “The sunshade you gave me ... that day ... [Pause.] ... that day ... the lake ... the reeds. [Eyes front. Pause.] What day? [Pause.] What reeds?” (162)

<sup>118</sup> Another example of the same construction, referring to her personal (ABM) memories is: “That day. [Pause.] The pink fizz. [Pause.] The flute glasses. [Pause.] The last guest gone. [Pause.] The last bumper with the bodies nearly touching. [Pause.] The look. [Pause.] What day? [Pause.] What look?” (166)



distances herself from her past selves. One of her distancing techniques has already been mentioned, which is affirmation/negation of her memories. Although, in the second act, she uses negation more often as distancing; the sequence: “Not mine. [*Smile.*] Not now. [*Smile broader.*] No no. [*Smile off. Long pause.*]” (161 – twice) signals the instability of her identity and, probably, its rejection. “Not now” repeated constantly in the play creates an atmosphere of time instability. The negation is present in the duration of the whole play, phrases like “No no”, “Not yet”, “Not all”, “Not quite” make Winnie sound unsure of herself and of what she is saying, as though words and memory are failing her.

She is physically rooted to her present moment and desperately holds onto the words to maintain her “normality”, thus habit memory, her classics and daily actions are her allies. The big black shopping bag is another diversion to help her get by. The objects from her bag form part of the physical stage environment, but at the same time they are potential memory-triggers, since they belong not only to Winnie’s present, but they have also accompanied Winnie in her life. The objects from her bag take on more meanings and signify on other levels:

“The very fact of their appearance on stage suppresses the practical function of phenomena in favour of a symbolic or signifying role, allowing them to participate in dramatic representation: ‘while in real life the utilitarian function of an object is usually more important than its signification, on a theatrical set the signification is all important’.” (Brusák 1938:62, qtd. in Elam 1980: 8)

Like a magician, Winnie fishes different objects out of her “treasure” bag and talks about them: the toothpaste brings on the discussion about a “hog”, the mirror makes her talk about her looks, the revolver triggers painful memories of Willie’s attempt to commit suicide. Thus, her bag and the objects it contains may be considered memory-triggers in the play, as well as other topics of conversation, such as her looks or her present situation. And, because Winnie is unable to manipulate them in the second act, her memory gets more fragmented. She is afraid to lose her objects: “What would I do without them? [*Pause.*] What would I do without them when words fail?” (162), says Winnie. She is totally dependent on her objects, as though they have a life of their own: “In the bag, outside the bag. [*Pause.*] Ah yes, things have their life, that is what I always

say, *things* have a life” (162). Winnie makes it sound as though she is envious of her objects/memories, which become separate entities and can do without her, while she needs them to be able to exist. The objects, as well as Willie, are her only possessions in this world, the last remnants and reminders of her past, since all the them are rather old and used.

“En el ‘Regiebuch’ alemán están enumeradas todas las posesiones de Winnie y se especifica que todos los objetos de la bolsa deben parecer muy usados, ser conspicuos y no ser realistas.” (Rodríguez-Gago 1999: 94)

The objects constantly remind Winnie of her age: “Old things. [*Pause.*] Old eyes. [*Pause.*] On, Winnie” (140). It would be logical to say “old” Winnie, since the adjective “old” is repeated twice in the same sequence, but Winnie substitutes it for the pronoun “on”, as though trying not to draw attention to her age. The majority of the objects from her bag are used as well to highlight Winnie’s mouth (the toothbrush, the toothpaste, the lipstick, the looking-glass), making the audience focus their attention on the movements of her lips. As Mouth in *Not I*, Winnie is a great “talker”. These objects also bring about the memories of her “kisses”, which are scattered throughout the play.

From a phenomenological point of view, Winnie, as the woman entombed in earth, may raise various associations from the audience. The earth is normally associated with fertility, motherhood and life. The **Mother Earth** is a motif that appears in many mythologies. The Mother Earth is a fertile goddess embodying the fertile earth and typically the mother of other deities, and it is also seen as patroness of motherhood. The Earth is generally thought of as being the mother from whom all life springs. However, the mound of earth is different in Winnie’s world: there is nothing growing there, the grass is scorched.

*“Expanse of scorched grass rising centre of the low mound. Gentle slopes down to front and either side of stage. Back an abrupt fall to stage level. Maximum of simplicity and symmetry. Blazing light. Very pompier trompe-l’oeil blackcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky receding to meet in far distance. Embedded up to above her waist in exact centre of mound, WINNIE...”* (138)

Winnie is the only “plant” that it contains and instead of “growing” she is sucked into this earth, thus there is a regression process going on. She is returning to “nature” or to “dead nature”, since the mound she is sinking in is lifeless. The appearance of an emmet is considered practically a miracle by Winnie and Willie. Like in *Endgame*, everything is running out in Winnie’s world. The earth is barren, and a merciless sun is burning everything down, even Winnie’s parasol is caught on fire. Furthermore, Winnie is as sterile as the mound, since the lower part of her body is hidden in the earth, and she is childless. And even though the play is full of sexual innuendos (discussed later in this chapter), sex is out of the question for Winnie. The mound of earth is also the grave of her sexuality. The earth is devouring her body; when in the second act her breasts disappear inside the mound, she loses the last symbol of her sexuality. As such, Winnie may be taken for a barren feminine image. We will never know what happened to her and why she is there; and the lack of answers makes it a traumatic experience for the audience, since a character entombed in earth challenges our understanding.

The image of Winnie may raise other artistic associations. Many cultures (Greek, Egyptian) have sculptures of half-woman half-stone. Rank explains this from the angle of the trauma of birth. According to his theory, our worst trauma comes from the separation from our mother, which happens twice in our lives. The first separation is purely physical, when we leave our mother’s womb; and the second one is intellectual, when we are capable of understanding that we are independent from our mothers. Both processes of separation are painful *per se*, and as a consequence they make us insecure and leave us alone in this world. Therefore, the primary desire of any human being is to return to the security of the mother’s womb.

This “return-to-mother” wish has found its way into the Arts. Rank mentions two examples of its artistic representation and both are valid in the light of the current discussion. The first example is the granite statue of Senmut (1470 B.C.), which is in the exhibition in the museum of Berlin (Appendix 6). And Winnie looks very much like this statue, half-buried in earth.

“Así como el profundo significado que el arte griego presenta desde el punto de vista de la civilización y de la evolución en general, proviene del hecho de que creando y

perfeccionando su ideal artístico del cuerpo humano, no hacía más que reproducir el acto biológico y prehistórico del devenir humano: el desprendimiento de la madre, el erigirse sobre la tierra.” (Rank 1961: 136)

Thus, we may take Winnie as an artistic image of fusion, the mound of earth being both her womb and her tomb. Another example, given by Rank, is a sphinx (Appendix 6), which is a hybrid figure as well. The word *sphinx* comes from the Greek Σφίγγξ, apparently from the verb σφίγγω (*sphíngō*), meaning “to strangle”. This name may be derived from the fact that the hunters for a pride of the lions are the lionesses and they kill their prey by strangulation, biting the throat of the prey and holding it down until it dies. The sphinx is always a feminine figure. The Greek legend runs that the sphinx was sent by Hera to the Ethiopian homeland to ask riddles to passers-by: “Which creature in the morning goes on four legs, at mid-day on two, and in the evening upon three, and the more legs it has, the weaker it be?” Anyone unable to answer was strangled and devoured by the sphinx. Oedipus solved the riddle by answering: “Man—who crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and then walks with a cane in old age”. Bested at last, the tale continues, the sphinx then threw herself from a high rock and died. An alternative version tells that she devoured herself.

Winnie may be taken for an artistic representation of the sphinx figure, who is trying to solve the major riddle of her life, the meaning of existence: “What are you meant to mean?” (156), she asks turning to the audience, while telling the story of Mr Cooker/Shower. Like the sphinx, Winnie is devouring herself or fusing with the mound of earth, unable to come to terms with her sexual drive, rejection of procreation and troubled memories.

“El psicoanálisis ha mostrado igualmente que la figura híbrida de la esfinge que representa la angustia no es otra cosa, en cuanto a experiencia psíquica, que el símbolo materno, y el hecho de que uno atribuya a la esfinge el carácter ‘estrangulador’ hace todavía más evidente la intimidad de sus relaciones con la angustia del nacimiento. A la luz de estos datos, el papel que desempeña la figura de la esfinge en la leyenda de Edipo muestra que el héroe, para superar la angustia del nacimiento, debe de retornar hacia la madre, y que esta angustia representa el límite con el que choca igualmente el neurótico en todas sus tentativas de regresión.” (Rank 1961: 133)

### 5.1.2. The Fear of “yesterdays” and “tomorrows”

Winnie’s lack of mobility and the constant process of being sucked into the mound, without any chance of escaping, makes her defenceless and fragile in our eyes. She is certainly aware of her “tomorrow”, since upon waking up in the first act, the first thing she does is to inspect what is left of her, clasping her hands to her breast and uttering a prayer. This inevitably leads us to the discussion of ontological insecurity.

“The spectator is, therefore, involved at several levels simultaneously: at a direct, human level, responding emotionally and imaginatively to Winnie’s physical presence, predicament, words and actions; and at an intellectual level, recognizing in her busy chatter fears and feelings, as well as ideas, which lie, often obliquely expressed, behind her words.” (Knowlson 1979: 99)

Knowlson states that “For however unchanging and apparently endless Winnie’s existence might appear to be, change is present in the shape of decline, degeneration and deceleration” (1979: 95-6). Winnie’s words of “no change, no worse” are just an example of her never-dying optimism and a shield of her fear of decay. In fact, Winnie is terrified of change, since change will be for the worse.

“Although Winnie makes efforts to hide her anxieties and offer optimistic words to herself and her husband, she conveys a lurking fear of the time when ‘words fail’ (147) and there is ‘nothing more to say’ (152). [...] Her ontological anxiety, however, is not only felt through silence but also depicted visually onstage: her body sinking into the ground under the control of an unseen force that seems to be burying her.” (Tanaka 2008: 246)

Winnie is trapped in her fear of the predictability of her situation. The image of the second act only confirms her fears: “*Winnie embedded up to her neck*” (160), for she cannot move her neck any more. Her fears are many: not to be heard or perceived, not to be “lovable”, to lose her human nature, to be alone, and the most recurrent of all “gaze before me with compressed lips” (145, 148, 162). The latter has to do with her further sinking into the earth, where she will be unable even to talk or when she has nothing to say, because she has spent all her words. It seems that though every day is the same, things are disappearing and her memory is fading. In the second act, Winnie loses the upper part of her body, her hands, her neck’s mobility and the contact with her

bag. Thus, words are the only thing left for her. And they help her to survive and not to lose reason. We may view her incessant talking as a shield from her “yesterdays”, “todays” and “tomorrows”. In the review of the production of *Happy Days* directed by Samuel Beckett<sup>119</sup>, Knowlson writes that Billie Whitelaw performed “close to the edge of madness”, clinging desperately on to the manipulation with objects, movements and fragmented memories, as though she was trying to negotiate another “day” for herself. “Don’t you ever have that feeling, Willie, of being sucked up? [*Pause.*] Don’t you have to cling on sometimes, Willie?” (152). And Winnie is clinging on to whatever is at her disposal for existence, but the fear is dooming over her. That is why “sorrow keeps breaking in” (152) from time to time and the smile fades from Winnie’s lips. If in the first act there was still laughter, the second act is more traumatic, since her mobility is drastically reduced.

Winnie is both afraid of her past and her imminent future. That is probably why she is talking non-stop trying to remember her classics and commenting on the irrelevant details of her present situation. Winnie’s pernicious optimism and “no complaints”, as well as “great mercies”, are her tactics to forget or blank out memories. However, as all shields, they do not protect her entirely. From time to time, her repressed memories leak out in the form of uncontrolled fragments or comments, bringing on pain and suffering. That is the reason that prompts me to analyse what is hidden and what is lying deep in her subconscious, or “underneath” the mound of earth, which may be a metaphor for Winnie’s repressed memories as well.

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<sup>119</sup> “The real innovation in this production comes with Beckett’s conception of Winnie. For the woman played by Billie Whitelaw is no model of middleclass decorum holding back the tide of entropy with a barrier of nonchalant heroism. She hovers much more perilously close to the edge of madness than in earlier productions. Winnie’s brand of domesticity is, then, far less comfortable here than it was, for example, in the National Theatre production. And if her habitual actions remain the same, there is a quality of strangeness and tension about them that has not been experienced before. In the first act there is still laughter but it derives from a comedy of discontinuity rather than of reassurance. So Winnie moves rapidly from topic to topic, often fitfully inspired by objects to hand which recall moments from a past which seems no more discontinuous, however, than her fragmented present. Her hands flutter, birdlike, before coming to settle on something to which she clings desperately, a precious commodity which (given her capacity for verbalization) will enable her to negotiate another ‘day’. In the first act, Billie Whitelaw looks much younger than some earlier Winnies, bringing out more sharply the sexual nature of some of her memories, as well as emphasizing the uneasy dichotomy which exists in Winnie between intellect and flesh.” (Review: *Happy Days* directed by Samuel Beckett. Royal Court Theatre, London, June 1979, James Knowlson, (electronic resource <http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num05/Num5knowlson.htm>)

Many critics, such as Worth, Rodriguez-Gago, Knowlson, Cohn, etc., point out the abundance of sexual references in the text, which may be discussed in their relation to Freud's sexual repression. While remembering the day when Shower or Cooker<sup>120</sup> passed in front of her accompanied by another woman, Winnie tells us about their bewilderment at her confinement. The story itself, which she tells twice (in the first act and in the second one), contains more questions than answers, and the audience may see themselves represented in Cooker or Shower, since the spectators keep asking the same questions, such as "What's she doing?", "What's it meant to mean?", "What good is she to him?" (156-7), "Has she anything underneath?" (165). "Underneath" raises two allusions: intimate and sexual/erotic. Both are valid in the play: underneath in the mound are Winnie's ½ body and her most intimate memories and obsessions that have an erotic/sexual nature. She "entombed" them together with her desires, which may be viewed in the light of Freud's theory of sexual repression in women. I have already discussed the importance of psychoanalytic readings for Beckett (Chapter I, 1.3.2.) Beckett was obviously familiar with Freud's teachings:

"Like Baker's *Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis*, J.D. O'Hara's *Samuel Beckett's Hidden Drives* also emphasizes the influence of psychology on Beckett, albeit foregrounding Freud much more firmly: 'Beckett's use of Freud required him to perceive or conceive many such odd details, and also to understand the general structure of neuroses, repressions, and symptoms within such details have a place'." (Feldman 2006: 81)

The first act, as discussed by Knowlson in his review (footnote 121), "brings out Winnie's sexual nature", since there are a lot of sexual innuendos. For instance, Winnie's recurrent comments to her being "sucked up" by the ground or "you were always in dire need of a hand, Willie" (167), as well as his vaseline (147), carry sexual connotations. Sometimes she is even unaware of the direction of her thoughts and possible allusions to "sex" or "sexual organs":

"The great heat possibly. [*Starts to pat and stroke the ground.*] All things expanding, some more than others. [*Pause. Patting and stroking.*] Some less. [*Pause. Do.*] Oh I can well imagine what is passing through your mind, it is not enough to have to listen to the woman, now I must look to her at well." (149)

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<sup>120</sup> Ruby Cohn points out that both names have to do with the act of looking; in German "schauen" and "kucken" mean "to look" and "to peep" (2001: 264).

Winnie first starts talking about the heat and the earth, then talking about the things that “expand”, and her physical language betrays her forthcoming words and further associations to foreplay, such as stroking and patting. So the mound may represent her hidden/repressed sexual drives. Paradoxically, Winnie is constantly alluding to sex, but in her situation it is impossible: the mound of earth impedes her to have any sexual intercourse. At the same time she is probably afraid of its consequences such as procreation: “What a blessing nothing grows, imagine if all this stuff were to start growing” (152).

Furthermore, some of the objects that Winnie manipulates have sexual connotations. Her world is laden with both feminine and masculine objects. She is using feminine objects, such as a looking glass and a lipstick, to improve her fading looks and to be desirable; but she is mostly concerned with masculine objects, such as a revolver and a parasol, and she is constantly fondling them. For instance, her parasol has “a handle of surprising length” (140), and, presumably, it was a present from Willie; and at the beginning of the play the handle of her toothbrush attracts her attention and she examines its inscription non-stop. Based on Otto Rank’s theory, the majority of objects made by mankind resemble our “trauma of birth” complex: people tend to surround themselves by the objects, which have a specific relation to a vagina/penis as symbols of the conception of life. The “revolver” may be one of them; it directly points to a man’s power and resembles the male reproduction organ. When Winnie (after the words “no pain”) holding a parasol, addresses Willie: “Don’t go off on me again now dear will you please, I may need you. [*Pause.*] No hurry, no hurry, just don’t curl up on me again” (141), it sounds as though she is trying to encourage sexual intercourse or comments on Willie’s impotence. Her later utterance “perhaps a shade off colour”<sup>121</sup> “just the same” (141) may sound like an excuse for her previous fantasizing. This speech is accompanied by her rubbing the palms against the mound, which become meaningful in this context.

Another object, which directly leads Winnie to the taboo of her existence, is Willie’s pornographic postcard. The situation is rather comical:

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<sup>121</sup> “off -colour” means obscene or sexist.



## Chapter V

“- hardly a day, without some addition to one’s knowledge however trifling, the addition I mean, provided one takes pains. [*Willie’s hand reappears with a postcard which he examines close to his eyes.*] ..... That is what I find so comforting when I lose heart and envy the brute beast. I hope you are taking in. [*She sees postcard, bends lower.*] What is that you have there, Willie, may I see. [*She reaches down with hand and Willie hands her the card. The hairy forearm appears above slope ...*]” (143-4)

Winnie’s words about acquiring more knowledge every day together with the obscene postcard seem grotesque. Beckett confronts here the “height” of her thoughts with her low instinct. The verbal reference to the “brute beast” is parallel to Willie’s hairy forearm. Moreover, Winnie shows genuine interest in the content of the postcard: she puts her spectacles on and examines the card thoroughly before uttering: “genuine pure filth” and adds that it would “Make any nice-minded person want to vomit!”(144). She is obviously the product of a society raised on taboos against sex, but it seems that her inquiring nature wins and she asks: “What does that creature in the background think he’s doing?” (144), contemplating it closer. She still cannot hand the card back to Willie, she gives it “a last long look” (144), as though magnetized by the picture. But then her “education” makes her condemn the picture: she “*takes edge of card between right forefinger and thumb, averts head, takes nose between left forefinger and thumb*” (144) and drops it in Willie’s direction. Again, Winnie puts on the mask of “civilized” up-bringing, while Willie enjoys examining the postcard, and this helps understanding their contrasting characters. She is more ashamed of her own demonstration of emotion/interest in this pornographic card, than in its real content. That is why she fusses with the card and immediately changes the topic of conversation to a “safer” ground asking for the meaning of a “hog”, which comically leads again to “sex” or to its impossibility due to castration. Winnie is curious about sex, but she tries hard to repress her thoughts about it, because she cannot have sex. There is some kind of internal struggle which goes on inside her. She displays some of the symptoms of hysteria, discussed by Freud.

In *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud analyses the cases of women with visible symptoms of hysteria. Among them he describes Dora’s case, in which he concludes that “the hysteria was due to the shame triggered by her arousal in response to inappropriate advance of a friend of her father” (qtd. in Kaplan 2005: 7).

“In the case of Dora, Freud concludes ‘Freud is fully aware that his audience would find this provocative. He argues that hysteria comes from ‘memory relating to a sexual life’, stating further that ‘the subject has retained an unconscious memory of a precocious experience of sexual relations with actual excitement of genitals, resulting from sexual abuse committed by another person; and the period of life at which this fatal event takes place is earliest youth – the years up to the age of eight to ten, before the child has reached sexual maturity’.”<sup>122</sup>

I suggest here, in the view of the current discussion, that Winnie may have developed certain symptoms of hysteria due to her repressed sexual drive as a consequence of some childhood trauma. The physical demonstration of this is the entombment of the lower part of her body. Her visible interest in sex and its impossibility tear her apart. But there is something else that definitely gnaws at her; something which lies hidden deep in her memory, and may be the key to her present situation, which I will analyse hereinafter.

“Central to this Freudian theory of trauma is a motivated unconscious. In this case, the traumatic event may trigger early traumatic happenings, already perhaps mingled with fantasy, and shape how the current event is experienced.” (Kaplan 2005: 32)

There is, perhaps one crucial memory, which Winnie tries to talk about twice in the play: the Mildred/doll episode. She tells this story in the second act, which has its significance since having sunk deeper into the earth she is unable to manipulate her objects, and the story comes from her deep subconscious. Unable to find any defences against it, Winnie is compelled to divulge it. The story may be analysed as a screen-memory, since there is a mixture of highly relevant fiction with Winnie’s own life. Besides, the story presents some of the features of a traumatic memory: fragmentation, deep emotional response, alienation, repetition, abundance of pauses and overlapping. The real event is not stated, only hinted at through the image of a “mouse”. The narration starts as “There is my story of course, when all else fails. [*Pause.*] A life. [*Pause.*] A long life. [*Smile off.*] Beginning in the womb, where life used to begin, Mildred has memories...” (163). The words “my story” place Winnie as the main character or the author of it, but she substitutes the “I” discourse for a fictional “Mildred”, thus alienating her own self from what happened.

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

This memory is actually a Pandora's box and produces a memory-inside-memory effect (two separate memories linked together). There are two characters described: Mildred and the doll. Freud commented that children's games represent our subconscious desire of the mother-return; at the same time girls who play with dolls learn to be mothers. A doll may be a surrogate for a child to take care of, however there is no "mother-daughter" relation in this story. Mildred is not playing with the doll. Winnie is more interested in the doll's description than in the game. Her narration has several sharp turns: the story starts "in a womb" of Winnie's memory, then Mildred, a girl of 4-5 years of age, is created and then a doll, which, in fact, bears resemblance to the Winnie we see onstage (the doll has a straw hat and a pearly necklace). Thus, it is rather unclear whether Winnie is actually a girl, or whether she is actually a doll in this story, or both. Besides, everything happens at night, or we may understand that the story emerges from the darkness of the unconscious. The story comes in fragments as Winnie's other personal memories and is left unfinished. Winnie unexpectedly interrupts her story calling for Willie's help, and then she speaks about the cries in her head: "No no, my head was always full of cries. [*Pause.*] Faint confused cries. [*Pause.*] They come. [*Pause.*] Then go" (164). Are these cries the consequence of what has actually happened to Winnie? Are they the reminders of pain and suffering? Are they cries for help? I think her story may hold the key.

At the beginning of the story Winnie describes the doll's outfit: "White mesh", "a little white straw hat with a chin elastic", "pearly necklace", "china blue eyes", etc. The colour "white" is related to purity and innocence. Mildred "descended all alone the steep wooden stairs" with her dolly towards the nursery, but abruptly the narration changes from something pure and innocent to disturbing and traumatic: "backwards on all four, though she had been forbidden to do so..." (163). Prohibition and the position "on all four" make this story take on an erotic and sexual quality. Furthermore, the narration gets more agitated due to the abundance of the verbs of movement with elements of secrecy: "tiptoed", "entered", "began to undress", "crept under the table and began to undress Dolly", "scolding her ... the while". Thus, the memory gets more and more threatening. The repetition-perturbation of "undress Dolly" and "crept under the table and began to undress Dolly" are puzzling. Moreover, the doer of this action is not named, since all the verbs of action are interrupted by pauses. We are not sure

whether it is actually Mildred who is performing all these actions. Who is undressing whom? And why to repeat the act of undressing twice? There are elements of memories' parallelism: the first one is the simple act of undressing and the other one is of shame, as it is done under the table. Is there someone else who is disguised by the darkness of the nursery and the darkness of Winnie's memory? The image of a mouse is the climax of the story. “Suddenly a mouse-” (163) and Winnie abruptly interrupts her story. According to Rank, small animals may bear an association to sexual intercourse and procreation, since they are able to enter into holes or a vagina<sup>123</sup>. Winnie is unable to continue her story, she becomes afraid of what she may remember, thus she cries for help. The memory, which started with a white dress and the descent of the stairs, turns into something disturbing and shameful. I suggest that this memory has a double nature, two memories of sexual nature are mixed/paralleled and repressed by Winnie: her memory as a child and that as a young woman. The memory also takes on the form of a screen-memory, since fantasy is linked with the original memory/ies. In 1914, Freud wrote about screen- memories:

“Not only *some* but *all* of what is essential from childhood has been obtained in these memories. It is simply a question of knowing how to extract them out of analysis. They represent the forgotten years of childhood as adequately as the manifest of a dream represents the dream-thoughts.” (qtd. in Mitchell, J. 1998: 103)

The elements of fantasy are represented by two characters: Mildred and Dolly, probably referring to two different periods in her life: childhood and adulthood. Due to the shameful nature of her earlier memories (Mildred's), the ensuing one (Dolly's) shields it. This may be due to the effects of primary and secondary repressions, discovered by Freud. According to him, a child is unable to classify a sexual abuse as sexual in nature, for her/him it is only something unpleasant and painful, and she/he wants to blank it out from her/his memory, that is primary repression. It seems to me that Mildred is actually Winnie when she was a child, a fragment of her primary repressed memory. The reference to a “mouse” is significant, since children are afraid of small animals, and, probably, the whole act of sexual abuse was substituted for this

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<sup>123</sup> “... a causa de la facilidad con que podrían penetrar en su cuerpo y desaparecer, como desaparecen a través de una abertura cualquiera detras de un muro, bajo la mal que, introducido en el cuerpo de la madre, ha quedado allí [...] al contenido de la matriz fecundada.” (Rank 1961: 30)

word, since Winnie as a little girl was unable to “translate” what actually happened to her and the word “mouse” represented for her penetration into her body. That is the reason she has difficulty in associating herself with this child. And since this event was primary repressed in her childhood, Winnie is unable to remember its content, but its emotional traces remained in her unconscious. Freud stated that these memories of sexual abuse originate in childhood, but until a person reaches puberty, he/she is unable to evaluate them as such, so in puberty these memories undergo the process of secondary repression. And, the example of secondary repression is Dolly’s memory, or a memory of Winnie as an adult woman.

“We can divide the subject, memory itself, in two. There are perceptions of experiences, whether external or internal to the subject, which follow old mnemonic traces. Within this general category there is a second one of specific memories that are experiences or experiences of perceptions which are for some reason illicit sexual memories. Sexual memories become repressed and form part of what the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein called ‘the repressed Unconscious’.” (Mitchell R. 2006:105)

In my opinion, the second bit of memory has to do with Winnie’s first sexual intercourse, which helped her to realize what had happened to her when she was a little girl. Here I may only put forth a hypothesis based on the recalling process of the traumatic memories: Winnie’s first sexual intercourse (possible pain) triggered another night and another “blacked out” memory, which is very unpleasant in nature. Consequently, both memories became interwoven in her mind and she tried to repress them both again, thus they are entwined in her unconscious. That is the reason of this memory duplicity: two characters, interdependent of each other and repetition of undressing, and the two abrupt parts of this memory.

Two memories became one, and the first one shaped Winnie’s attitude to the second one and to sex in general. She sometimes melancholically alludes to sex: “Sadness after intimate sexual intercourse one is familiar with of **course**” (164), which resonates with Aristotle’s “*omne animal post coitum triste*”. At the same time, this “sadness” may lead us to think of depression and after-effects of trauma (PTSD), which fully explain Winnie’s references to pain and her screams at the end of the story (165), as though woken up in the middle of a nightmare and her “hearing cries”, “faint

confused cries”, “which come” and then go “as on the wind” (166, 167). Malkin points out the reason of this repetitiveness, as trauma “is experienced as a profusion of ‘disconnected fragments’ or ‘disconnected body states and sensations’ *shorn of the event* that caused those sensations; that is, torn out of narrative and deprived of origin” (1999: 29). Consequently, these cries are faint traces of her repressed memory that she is unable to suppress; their recurrence suggests an open memory and trauma.

“Suddenly a mouse ... [*Pause.*] Suddenly a mouse ran up her little thigh and Mildred, dropping Dolly in her freight, began to scream – [*Winnie gives a sudden piercing scream*] – and screamed and screamed – [*Winnie screams twice*] screamed and screamed and screamed and screamed till all came running in their attire, papa, mamma, Bibby, and ... old Annie, to see what was the matter ... [*pause*]... what on earth could possibly be the matter. [*Pause.*] Too late. [*Pause.*] Too late. [*Pause. Just audible.*] Willie.” (165)

This bit of memory is crucial in order to prove the possibility of Winnie’s sexual trauma: a mouse running up her thigh. The emotional scope is that of agitation, suddenly Winnie starts to remember and separates her adult repressed memory from her primary repressed one: “Mildred, dropping Dolly”. The actual act of “dropping” and falling has to do with pain and fragility, however, the act of dropping supposes a separation of Mildred from the doll and of child’s memory from one of an adult. But the only trace of this painful event comes in the form of an auditory memory of a cry, which is amplified by Winnie’s cry onstage, again joining both bits of memories. “Screaming” is represented both acoustically (3 times) and verbally (7 times). Thus, Winnie gets extremely agitated, but she is unable to tell the event in words, since this memory has not been negotiated in her ABM, and it is an open memory. Nobody, neither her parents nor Bibby or old Anny, were able to protect her, since it was “too late”. This scream is a remnant of her trauma or of her traumas.

Winnie’s double nature starts to emerge from the ruins or the “remaining parts” (167) of her memory: Winnie an adult woman, and Winnie a young girl, which is another onstage hybrid, existing as separate entities. In her memory narration, Winnie identifies herself more with the doll, due to similarity of the looks (Winnie is also wearing a necklace and she is blond<sup>124</sup>). The doll, which in reality resembles a bride

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<sup>124</sup> Winnie remembers her hair: “Golden you called it...” (146)

more than a toy-doll, also points to Winnie's infantile nature. And from time to time Winnie talks to herself in a childish tone: "How often I have said, Put on your hat now, Winnie, there is nothing else for it, take off your hat now, Winnie, like a good girl, it will do you good, and did not" (146). It seems to me that Winnie goes on playing with herself as if she were a doll, which points to the regression towards childhood and the revival of her worst nightmares. She incarnates both a mother and a daughter roles. Her split identity is terrifying to her, and she erects shields in the form of a solid mound or in the form of her verbal diarrhoea for protection of her own sanity:

"Ah yes, so little to say, so little to do, and the fear so great, certain days of finding oneself... left, with hours still to run, before the bell to sleep, and nothing more to say, nothing more to do, that the days go by, certain days go by, quite by, the bell goes, and little or nothing said, little or nothing done. [*Raising parasol.*] That is the danger. [*Turning front.*] To be guarded against." (152)

But there are no shields powerful enough to protect Winnie from her own memory and from the mockery of her existence. Craving for love and companionship, she has rejected by both. And the final tableau of the play is excruciatingly painful: a defenceless Winnie, reduced to a head, interlocks gazes with Willie who is dressed to kill, and is crawling towards her, the revolver within his reach. The mound of earth has already claimed her prey: the fusion is practically completed. Winnie joins the womb/tomb of her memories, but the end is open, because Willie is there, and his intentions are unclear.

## 5.2. The Light as Body/Image and Memory Mutilator in *Play*

"...To this urn let those repair  
That are either true or fair;  
For these dead birds sigh a prayer." (W. Shakespeare "The Phoenix and the Turtle")

"... Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,  
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?" (W. Shakespeare Sonnet 146)

*Play*, written in 1962-63, is a turning point towards a minimalistic approach to image in Beckett's drama. An image enveloped in stage darkness starts to play an important role in Beckett's later plays. The images appeal more to the “creative eye” of the audience, than to their minds, and the reaction to the image is simultaneous.

The image onstage is viewed from different angles by the audience (some see it from the stalls; others see it from the theatre box, etc.), therefore “distance” plays an important part in the perception of an image. A person who views the play from the stalls, has a better chance of studying the image; a person who views an image from the gallery, distinguishes only its general shape. Leonardo da Vinci observed that when a human figure is seen from afar, he “will seem a very small round dark body”, kind of a blur. Thus, each person has his/her own perspective of the image. In his theatre, Beckett creates these images not for the whole bulk of people, not for impersonal audience, but for each individual person in his theatre. As his images are very open, each person reaches his/her own understanding of the onstage image.

Moreover, Beckett tries to avoid clearness in his images; we could even say that the images in his later plays are indeterminate in meaning. For example, in the process of *Play*'s creation, Samuel Beckett changed the image of the play. In the first draft he used not the urns, but three white boxes (one could not mistake them with three coffins) “to contain” two men and one woman. And all the characters had not only names, but also distinguishable factual features: age, gender, social class, etc. The image looked completely comic. But it was very “close”. Beckett changed this image completely and deprived it of details. He turned the three white boxes into urns and the eternal love triangle of two men and one woman into two women and one man, who look very much alike as their faces are made-up grey and seem to be parts of the urns.

Further on I analyse the process of perception of the stage image in *Play* according to its location onstage, form, shape, lighting, colours, how darkness envelops it, as well as a person's reaction to the image and his/her possible memory associations; all the abovementioned characteristics will be discussed in the relation to memory fragmentation and trauma. I have chosen this image because it is the first static image that Beckett created, and it also marks a turning point to minimalistic images of his later



plays: “a partir de *Play* (1962), Beckett inicia un proceso de reducción minimalista del lenguaje escénico” (2000: 291), writes Rodríguez-Gago in her essay “Imágenes y Voces en el último teatro de Samuel Beckett”. In this play Beckett clearly experiments with body as “raw material”, body-object relation, immobility, restriction in space and the Light/Darkness effect.

The images of Beckett’s later plays have a lot in common: black – grey – white colours, minimalistic images on a bare stage, where the light plays the role of the “creator” or “fragmentator”, defining the boundary between light and darkness (“the third dimension” or “no-man’s land”). Shimon Levy stated that “in presenting a stage full with emptiness, Beckett activates the audience’s imagination and involvement, and extends an invitation to make this stage their own” (1997: 15). The images in his later plays are situated a bit “off-centre”, except in *Play*.

Normally the audience fix their attention on a body in the play. In the naturalistic plays the action always develops around the protagonists. A character is always the centre of attention, the doer of the action. But Beckett, in a certain way, replaces a theatre of activity by a theatre of situation. His protagonists are turned into subjects and objects of his plays; they are a field of the action, but not doers of the action. Marek Kedzierski writes that “the Beckettian figure does not stand for an individual human being but rather, the whole stage microcosm stands for it” (1999: 160), which actually confirms my idea that the body onstage mirrors inside and outside realities. In addition, in *Play* it is the Light, which performs the role of the doer of the action as it is constantly moving.

Immobile body starts to play a different role in Beckett’s later plays. If in his earlier plays the characters were normally old people with different kinds of infirmities (blind, lame, etc.), in his later plays Beckett focuses on how to locate a fragmented body onstage. Thus, he reminds me of a surrealist painter (Francis Bacon) situating the fragmented parts of the body on the canvas. Francis Bacon, as well as Samuel Beckett, also experiments with body and form; for example, in his “Figure in Frame” (1950) he restricted the space of the body, and his “Study for Three Heads” (1962), “Head” (1951), “Painting (head of man)” (1950) resemble Beckett’s three heads in the urns,

painted in grey colours on the black background (for paintings see Appendix 5). Bacon once said that “death is the shadow of life, and [...] the more one is obsessed by life, the more one is obsessed with death”.<sup>125</sup> Thus, Bacon’s figures seem to be overcome by the process of decay like Beckett’s onstage characters. The image in *Play* is “carved” against the background of darkness:

*“Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn’s mouth. The heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium, of w2, m and w1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no masks.” (307)*

So the three heads in the urns do not appear when the curtain is raised. The first image that the audience see is darkness, which envelops the whole theatre. Then the Light is projected onto the three urns; Beckett was quite specific on this subject, he wanted to “*light the three faces simultaneously, they should be as a single spot branched into three*” (318). Unlike *That Time*, the unity of the three urns is necessary. There may be two different approaches to understanding this. From a phenomenological point of view, the three heads in the urns are seen as one image; they constitute oneness. And from a psychological point of view, W1, M and W2 are talking about the same period of time and more or less the same situation, presenting it from various angles of their perception. Thus, their fragmentary remembering unifies their memories and amplifies the audience’s understanding of the play. Though the content of their memories reminds us more of soap-opera melodramas, it is the revolutionary approach to staging image, body and lighting effects that make the play memorable: “*The curtain rises on a stage in almost complete darkness. Urns just discernible. Five seconds*” (307).

The interplay of light and darkness is taken to extremes in this play. The Light is another character of the play, as it brings the image out of darkness and regulates the perceptual field of the audience. Thus, the spotlight is the device which focuses our attention on the image and, consequently, on the memory narration. When a person is

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<sup>125</sup> Trucchi “Dix paragraphes pour Francis Bacon”. L’Arce: 73, qted. in Hale “Framing the Unframable: Samuel Beckett and Francis Bacon” in Stewart, Bruce (ed.) *Beckett and Beyond*. 1999: 99.

## Chapter V

contemplating a painting, nothing directs his/her gaze, but in this play Beckett directs our gaze with the help of the Light. Thus, the Light itself may be taken for our “eye” that is questioning the heads on our behalf. Related to this, there is another meaning of the Light as the all-seeing eye of the underworld, which penetrates into the souls of its victims. The stage void, the characters entombed in the urns and the piercing spotlight remind us of one of Dante’s images of Purgatory or Hell. All three heads are definitely not telling us the whole truth, their secrets are well-buried in their minds:

**M:** I knew she would have no proof so I told her I did not know what she was talking about.” (308)

**M:** Am I hiding something? Have I lost- (315)

**W1:** Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell the truth at last... (313)

There is a possibility that they are even unaware of what they are supposed to tell the Light since the vital memory might have been long repressed in their minds. However, there is no evidence in the play that the Light is actually looking for the truth. It is interesting to mention, that when one of the characters in this play criticizes her/his own self, or shows pity for the other or starts getting emotional, the Light abandons her/him:

**M:** Finally it was all too much. I simply could no longer- (311)

**M:** I pity them in any case, yes, compare my lot with theirs, however blessed, and- (315)

**W2:** Am I taboo, I wonder. Not necessarily, now that all danger is averted. That poor creature – I can hear her – that poor creature- [*Spot from W2 to M.*] (314)

Consequently, the Light is not interested in their feelings as well. It seems that it stays more on their faces at the beginning of the play, especially when the two women are “spitting” poison one about the other. Though W2 mixes the pronoun “I” in the reported speech, therefore confusing her identity with W1:

**W2:** What are you talking about? I said, stitching away. Someone yours? Give up whom? I smell you off him, she screamed, he stinks of bitch. (308)

**W2:** ... I know what torture you must be going through, she said, and I have dropped in to say I bear you no ill-feeling. I rang for Erskine. (310)

Perhaps W2, in a way, envies W1 and wants/wanted to occupy her place. Although both are the victims in this situation, perhaps W2 feels more insecure since she does not wholly “possess” M, being only his lover. This insecurity is shown in the text when she calls Erskine (a man) to show W1 off, as though she is unable to do it herself or she wants to humiliate her. At the end of the play W2’s memory starts wandering and she tries to replace her real story by her fantasy: “That poor creature that tried to seduce you, what ever became of her, do you suppose? – I can hear her. Poor thing” (W2, 314). It seems that she has substituted her memory/identity for that of W1. Nevertheless, W1 never reveals what W2 said to her, therefore the memory of their meeting is incomplete.

Following the discourse on the Light as “an all seeing eye”, we may also interpret it as a kind of an impartial judge, since the verbal references to court procedures are continuous in the text: “proof”, “evidence”, “bloodhound” (private detective), “testify”, “judge”, “confess”, etc. This choice of vocabulary points that W1, M and W2 take their present situation as being at court and the Light as a judge. Consequently, the characters may be interpreted as the lawyers of their own fading memories. Nevertheless, the two realities are mixed up here, this “court”, if any, is not a human court but it is taken to the sublime level; it is above human justice. W1 understands it, in a way, when she says: “Penitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned, but no, that does not seem to be the point” (316). The Light in a way performs the role of this impartial judge, not only bringing the image of the characters in the urns out of darkness, but also bringing their memories to light.

The Light in this play is a Creator as it makes the image<sup>126</sup> of the play visible for the audience. It sculpts the characters in urns.

*“The source of light is single and must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims. The optimum position for the spot is at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below.” (318)*

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<sup>126</sup> I will refer to the three heads in urns as an “image” in this discussion, due to the unity of their memories. W1, W2 and M supposedly lived through one emotional situation: love, betrayal and further M’s death. Like pieces of a puzzle their memories may construct one event in the past from different angles of perception.

Chapter V

According to Rudolph Arnheim’s theory of perception, the visual weight of the image is influenced by location, size, colour, and shape. I would like to analyse this image according to these factors, though it is not that easy because the Light changes the image all the time, so it may be considered a mutilator and a shape-changer.

The location of the urns is central and looking front. According to Rudolph Arnheim a central position conveys stability and perceptual harmony, but at the same time it is very inertial and marks the direction towards stillness, fixity, and even death. The image resembles still-life, or “living death”. The only element that makes the image “alive” in *Play* is the Light that is “*swivelling at maximum speed from one face to another*”. The movements of the spotlight shift the centre of the image. And it is the Light which keeps the audience in complete concentration, being quite unpredictable. This unpredictability of the Light influences and alters the order of the characters’ memories<sup>127</sup>:

CHORUS		
W1	W2	M
W2	W1	M
W2	M	W1
M	W2	W1
W2	M	W1
W2	W1	M
W2	W1	W1
W2	W1	M
W2	W1	M
W1	W2	M
W1	M	W2
CHORUS		
M	W1	W2
W1	M	W2
M	W2	W1
M	W2	W1
M	W2	M
W1	W2	M
W1	W2	M
W1	W2	M
W1	M	W2
M	W2	M
W1	W2	W1

<sup>127</sup> Since the play has a tripartite structure, we may distribute the speeches according to their utterances in threes.

*“No Body at Rest”: Body and Memory Mutilation*

M	W1	W2
M	W1	W2
W1	W2	M
W1	M	W2
M	W1	W2
W2	M	W2
W1	M	W2
W1	M	W2
M	W1	M
W2	W1	M
W1	W2	M
W1	M	W1
W2	M	W1
M	W2	W1
M	W1	M
M		
CHORUS		
M		
CHORUS		
M		

As the reader can see from the table, the memories are not ordered chronologically, according to their letters or according to their onstage position (W2 – M - W1). The spotlight shifts the perspective all the time, it never observes any logical turns, thus all the characters in the urns are tense waiting for the spotlight or for their turn to remember. This unpredictability alters the perception and the coherence of their memories, sometimes the Light stops them in midsentence, and sometimes it does not even allow them to talk, as “[Spot from W1 to M. He opens his mouth to speak. Spot from M to W2.]” (309). The Light does not seem to favour any character in particular. Even though, judging by this table, I can state that in the first part it is W2 who is given preference by the Light (out of 11 times, she is “favoured” to be the first one 7 times). In the second part out of 27: M starts 11 times, W1 – 12 times, and W2 – 3 times. Consequently, it is W1 who is leading the memory discourse, and M’s words finish the play. The Light itself is denied of Voice, though given authority to shift the perspectives of the characters’ memories. Angela Moorjani in her article “‘Just Looking’ Ne(i)ther-World Icons, Elsheimer Nocturnes and Other Similarities in Beckett’s *Play*”, states that “on the level of the theatre of the mind in which the spotlight is a projection of the figures, ‘he’ is as much their object from one perspective as they are his from another” (2008: 127). Moreover, the Light is turned into a victim, tormented by the memories of

the trio. As a result of this reading, we may explain its continuous movement as confusion, as he is affected by the vicarious trauma of listening. In addition, this may also give rise to psychotherapeutic associations, the Light being the “doctor” of the trio’s troubled consciousness.

Furthermore, the Light dictates the sequence and the rhythm of the memory flow. As “*the transfer of light from one face to another is immediate*”, the response is immediate as well, as though the Light wants to catch them off-guard and make them reveal their secrets. There are all possible variations of the order, judging by the table: W1 – M - W2; M - W2 - W1, there are even four separate times when all of them speak together, etc. The spotlight performs the role of an orchestra conductor and the musical notes are the characters’ memories.

As each urn is one yard high above the stage, the height of the three urns is the same. And as neither of the urns is bigger and the urns touch each other, the image of the three urns is perceived as a whole. The three urns are quite regular in shape, and according to Arnheim, “the more regular a shape, the heavier” (1974: 40). Besides, there is a certain symmetry in this image: W2 – M – W1. With both women by the sides, the man seems to be the centre of the image and the axis. “The volume of empty space” (darkness) that surrounds the image makes it more solid. At the same time the image of the three urns with the three protruding heads is “bottom-heavy” (the bottom is heavier than the top), so it is quite balanced. I could state that the image is symmetrical, balanced with heavy visual weight. It seems that “knowledge’s influence has little importance, if any, on visual weight”<sup>128</sup>. M seems to be the axis of the tripartite image and the tripartite memory. He is/was desirable by the two women, and he was the object of their dispute. Both of them believe that he was theirs:

**W1:** So he was mine again. All mine. I was happy again. I went about singing. The world-  
(311)

**W2:** Anything between us, he said, what do you take me for, a something machine? And of course with him no danger of the ... spiritual thing. The why don’t you get out? I said. I sometimes wondered if he was not living with her for her money. (309)

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

The impossibility of possession in love was discussed by Beckett in *Proust*. Both women take M as a certain prize for their perseverance. But neither of them is able to win him, since he deserted both W1 and W2. Perhaps one of the reasons for his central position is the traumatic memory he is unable to talk about: his exit from the world.

**M:** Finally it was all too much. I simply could no longer- [*Spot from M to W1.*] (311)

I simply could no longer- (311)

**M:** When first this change I actually thanked God. I thought, It is done, it is said, now all is going out- [*Spot from M to W1.*] (312)

**M:** Peace, yes, I suppose, a kind of peace, and all that pain as if ... never been. (312)

The most important memory is simply omitted: M is unable to talk about this. Presumably, he committed suicide. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the ones who committed suicide had to suffer in the seventh circle of Hell, transformed into bushes and denied of their bodies, as they have committed violence against themselves. Beckett also denies bodies to his trio, they are given urns instead. The Light does not allow M to finish his excuse “I simply could no longer-”, which is emotional in its essence – M makes reference to “pain” and the possibility of non-existence. Death itself is addressed as “it” and “change”. Women's reaction to his death is interesting to analyse, as both of them were traumatized from being abandoned. None of them talks of the way he/she died, all the characters refer to their death as “disappearance”, probably unable to face it even in the afterlife. There are no memories that refer to their life before this “love affair”, thus their previous identities are forgotten and everything hinges on this traumatic memory. I propose that both women's reactions to his death are flashbulb memories, as the women remember better what they did that day; the rest of the memory is blanked out:

**W1:** Before I could do anything he disappeared. That meant she had won. That slut! I couldn't credit it. I lay stricken for weeks. Then I drove over to her place. It was all bolted and barred. All grey with frozen dew. On the way back by Ash and Snodland- (311)

**W2:** I made a bundle of his things and burnt them. It was November and the bonfire was going. All night I smelt them smouldering. (311)

The reactions of both women are the same in their essence: both felt deserted and depressed. W1 links this memory with “grey” and “cold”, W2 - with “fire” and both memories culminate with the image of “ash”. “Ash” symbolizes that from dust we came



and to dust we shall return. Therefore, it points to the brevity of life and, perhaps to its absurdity. At the same time, ashes are applied on the forehead of a person on Ash Wednesday, which symbolize our imperfection and our sins, and from Ash Wednesday on till Easter the Christians have the period of mourning and penitence. Perhaps, mourning over the man is present in both memories, but there are no signs of repentance. Both women want to forget and “bolt” and “bar” their memories of his death and, consequently, their pain. W1 is grief-stricken and angry at the same time, since she wants to find him and goes to the house of W2, she remembers the colours such as “grey with dew” better, and even the place she directs afterwards is called Ash, which has the association with “grey” and at the same time alludes to “life in ashes”. This feeling of “ash” is later intensified by W2 burning M’s clothes, so we have another pile of ashes. W2 tries to destroy M’s possession, perhaps in order not to remember him any longer, she is trying to burn her memory of him together with his clothes. She remembers better the smell of his things smouldering. Literally, “smoulder” in this context means “to burn slowly without fire”, but metaphorically, it has to do with strong suppressed feelings: both processes are undergoing at the same time. I consider both memories “flashbulb”, since flashbulb memories are “distinctly vivid, precise, concrete, long-lasting memories of a personal circumstance surrounding a person’s discovery of shocking events” (Brown and Kulik 1977: 78). People remember with almost perceptual clarity details of the context in which they first heard about the news, such as what they were doing, with whom they were with and where they were. These flashbulb memories are not as accurate or permanent as photographic memories but the flashbulb memories’ forgetting curve is far less affected by time. These memories are parallel in the text with M’s uttering “I simply could no longer-”, cut by the Light as though M’s life was cut at that moment. The Light actually stages his death and his return to the darkness of non-existence.

The Light also affirms the centrality of M’s head as the main theme of women’s memories; besides, the Light gives M the last turn to speak in this play: “We were not long together-“ (318), these words may point to the brevity of the duration of this love affair on earth. As a centre M is rather comical; his hiccups in the play make the audience laugh and show us his unworthiness to be an apple of discord, alluding to his alcoholism.

*“No Body at Rest”: Body and Memory Mutilation*

M: Meet, and sit, now in the one dear place, now in the other, and sorrow together, and compare- [*Hiccup.*] pardon- happy memories. (314)

In a way, all three characters are there in “the one dear place” (which may be understood as theatre as well), sharing “happy memories”. Thus, the centre is made comical.

However, with Beckett nothing is simple, because if you watch *Play* it would be difficult for you to see this image stability. The Light destabilizes the central image: “opening and shutting on me” (317). Onstage everything is important, as it influences the perception of the audience. And in this play the Light transforms this image into an unstable and asymmetrical one:

“All modern attempts at scenic reform converge on this essential point: that is, rendering to light its complete power, and, through it, to the actor and scenic space their integral plastic value.” (*Appia Acteur, espace, lumiere, peinture*, qtd. in Garner, Stanton B. 1994: 56)

So, I suppose that the statement: “the symmetry of this setting [image of *Play*] gives the performance image pronounced balance and weight, lodging its stability around the central axis”<sup>129</sup> is only partially right. If we look at this image as a painting, it is symmetrical with heavy visual weight, but when we watch the play onstage, the Light splits the image, making it unstable. It causes the image to lose its centre or axis, as it illuminates only one character’s head at a time with the exception of four times: in the beginning, at the end of Act 1, at the beginning of Act 2 and at the end of Act 2. In fact, when the Light illuminates only one “character”, the whole image is cut out, or another image is created. When the Light illuminates the three urns at the beginning it performs the effect of “levelling” (showing the whole image at once) and when it illuminates only one urn with a head it performs the effect of “sharpening” (focusing on a part of an image).

The combination of “sharpening” and “levelling” effects permits the audience to see the whole without identifying particular details and at the same time without losing sight of the particular details. It seems that the Light creates and divides the image at the

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

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same time. Meanwhile, during the play, there are eight blackouts, which mean that the image disappears or is “eaten up” by the darkness. Memory is likewise distorted in this play. It is fragmented, overlapped and unstable, all at the same time. It seems that with the progression of the play, the characters still doubt their memories and their present perception. They cease to talk about their past and tend to fantasize (M - talking about possible reconciliation of the two women) or to “analyse” their present state:

**M:** I know now, all that was just ... play And all this? When will all this –

[*Spot from M to W1.*]

**W1:** Is that it?

[*Spot from W1 to W2.*]

**W2:** Mightn't you?

[*Spot from W2 to M.*]

**M:** All this, when will all this have been ... just play? (313)

The fact that the faces are lit from below gives the impression that the Light makes the image lose its stability. The top of the image is viewed heavier than the bottom. The heads, being small in size, are made bigger as they receive more light than the bottom part of the image. This effect also creates “ghostly” faces: if one switches on a lantern (in complete darkness) below the face – the eyes look like black holes and the mouth is exaggerated in size. Children like to do this in Halloween in order to frighten people. Likewise, in the text of the play there are a lot of words connected with “mouth” and the activity of the mouth: “blubber mouth” (310), “Is it something I should do with my face, other than utter?” (314), etc. When the characters open their mouths while speaking, their mouths seem like big black holes, so they are also inhabited by darkness. Furthermore, as there is only one source of light which comes from below, the Light forms a kind of triangle. The triangular shape of light coincides with the “eternal” love triangle of the three characters, therefore, the form becomes meaningful.

The Light also changes the normal “reading” of the image – people read from left to right. We know that “the observer subjectively identifies with the left, and whatever appears there assumes greater importance” (Arnheim 1974: 449). But in the play the Light first illuminates W1 who is situated to the right of M, and then shifts to W2, thus ignoring the centre – M. The Light “dictates” our perception of the play: it

deconstructs a seemingly stable image with visual weight and creates an unstable and asymmetrical one instead.

Colour is also very important in the perception of an image. “Bright colours make an image heavier than dark colours, e.g. a black area must be larger than a white one to counterbalance it; this is due in part to irradiance, which makes a bright surface look relatively larger”<sup>130</sup>. Though in the stage directions of *Play*, Beckett does not mention the colour of the urns and heads, in the production of *Play* on June 14, 1963, the urns have a grey-black colour and the faces of the characters are white-grey. The image is colourless or lifeless in itself. The heads, against the background of darkness, look unbelievably small, even when illuminated by the Light. The colours used by Beckett in his later plays are not bright: there is a predominance of grey, white and black colours, echoed by the narrative. Historical symbolism of these colours is varied. “Black”<sup>131</sup> is associated with “death”. I believe that “black” in this play can also stand for lack of colour, the primordial void, and emptiness. Thus, Beckett creates a black hole around the image – a new dimension that influences the image when the Light is directed only to one head in the urn. “Grey” can symbolise old age, because when you grow old your hair starts to grey. It is also the colour of ashes, which has already been discussed in the connection to women’s memories. Another interesting point to raise is that “grey” is the colour of a shade. A “shade” is mentioned by W2 in the play: “A shade gone. In the head. Just a shade. I doubt it” (317). And I guess, that “grey” has a certain connection with Greek mythology, as a dead soul is a “shade”, and the underworld domain of Hades is inhabited by shades. But at the same time “grey” is a mixture of white and black: it is as two-dimensional as the Light in the play (“hellish half-light” (312), says W). “Grey” could be a border-colour between light and darkness,

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 370.

<sup>131</sup> “In both Greek and Latin, there were several terms for ‘black’ and ‘dark’ with subtle differences among them, but their symbolic associations were similar and almost always negative. In Homer the colour of Death is black (e.g. ‘Iliad’ 2.8349, as is Ker, the spirit of death (2.859)). Hades, the Greek God of the Shadow world, is black in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* (29). Dante’s inferno is also dark, with ‘black air’ (5.51, 9.6), as well as black devils (21.29) and black angels and cherubim (23.131, 27.113). At the same time it is the colour of the night, and of ‘evil’. And sometimes ‘black’ can also represent ideas such as power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, wealth, mystery, fear, evil, unhappiness, depth, style, sadness, remorse, anger, and mourning. ‘Black’ expresses the depths of the unknown, and encourages the imagination of a different world from that of daylight realities.” (Ferber 1999: 27-8)

which does not belong to either of them, but takes part in both. “White”<sup>132</sup> is the colour of purity, but at the same time it is the colour of winter (old age). “White”, like “black”, could mean lack of colour. Obviously, if we look at the relationship between all three colours, the thing that they have in common is the symbolism of “old age” and “death”. Meanwhile, it is possible to associate all these colours with black-and-white photos – memory-pictures from the past, as this play is a kind of collage of memories of the three characters.

Another aspect to analyse in the perception of a theatrical image is its shape. Rudolph Arnheim writes:

“The shape of an object is determined not only by its boundaries; the skeleton of the forces created by the boundaries may, in turn, influence the way boundaries are seen. Shape also depends on memories or experiences we have had with a particular object.” (1974: 56)

In Beckett’s later plays, one can appreciate the formal predominance of shape. The image in this play consists of three urns, oval in shape, and three heads circular in shape joined together. The shapes of an oval and a circle are quite simple. The circle as a form is interesting due to its pre-Christian symbolism which was afterwards adopted by Christianity. It is universally known as the symbol of eternity and never-ending existence, and we may speculate that the Light’s “investigation” will go on forever, which is also shown by the repetitions in speech. There are no sharp angles in the image of *Play*; therefore there is no tension between the parts of the image. However, when we speak about a shape the question of experience and memory arises. I would like to “split” this image into two parts: urns and heads.

On the one hand, the “urn” has a very similar symbolism in different cultures, such as Greek, Egyptian, English, etc. It has strong connections with death, funerals, and the after-world. For example, in Greece the “urn” is a symbol of mourning. The

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<sup>132</sup> “Rabelais in *Gargantura* asserts that ‘white’ stands for joy, solace and gladness. Rabelais points out that the ancients used white stones to mark fortunate days and that when the Romans celebrated triumph the victor rode in a chariot drawn by white horses; sunlight and the light of Christian revelations are also white. To these examples I may add Plato’s claim that in picturing the gods ‘white’ is the most appropriate colour, but in Latin we have two words for ‘white’: *candidus* – ‘bright white’ and *albus* – ‘pale white’. So if *candidus* symbolises joy, gladness, purity; *albus* could symbolise ‘appalled’ (that is the colour of albino men and leprosy), and sometimes it symbolises ‘death’. Then we have two opposite meanings of ‘white’.” (Ferber 1999: 234)

body being a vessel of the soul was cremated and the ashes of the dead were put into the urn for burial. Most urns represent an ossuary. In Egypt an “urn” represents immortality, because the vital organs of the dead were stored in the urns. The ancient Egyptians believed that life would be restored through these vital organs, and an urn was a vessel of future immortality. In her article “‘Just Looking’ Ne(i)ther-World Icons, Elsheimer Nocturnes and Other Similarities in Beckett’s *Play*”, Moorjani discusses the image of the urns with the heads in relation to the Egyptian underworld:

“Yet the stage image of the three urns, encircled in darkness, echoes a still older mythic netherworld. I have in mind ancient Egypt’s cult of the dead, envisioned in terms of the cycles of death and resurrection of the diurnal and nocturnal sun gods Ra and Osiris.”  
(2008: 125)

Later in the same article, she asserts that Egyptian burial practice had to do with the second gestation period that the dead were supposed to “live through” in order to win the afterlife. Thus, the urns may be taken for womb/tomb containers, which obviously point to Rank’s trauma of birth, or re-birth in this case.

Another part of this image is three “talking” heads, which, without a doubt, stir the imagination of the audience. The heads are completely immobile, with the exception of the lip movement and the blinking of the eyes. As the associations with the urns are scanty (all of them pointing to burial or death), the associations with a head separated from the body are numerous, and the majority of them may be linked to torture and death. At the same time the image of the three talking heads reminds us of the tricks of a magician and has burlesque connotations.

From a philosophical point of view, the three heads may allude to “Cartesian dualism”. Descartes stated that a human being is composed of two different substances: body (*res extensa*) and mind (*res cogitas*). The body is part of a mechanical nature, a material substance independent from spirit; and the mind, a pure thinking substance. The distinction between the two qualitative substances is called mind/body “Cartesian dualism”. Beckett’s characters are examples of such subjective thinking substances surrounded by material nature; the subject-object connection was the most problematic part of Descartes’ concept, and it is one of the major motifs Beckett ironically deals

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with. Several times in the play W1 doubts her mental capacities: “How the mind works still to be sure!” (314). Beckett’s characters are always in conflict with the objects around them. A certain tension is always created between the mind and the body (or its absence). In *Play*, this tension is made physical, as the objects (urns) possess the absent bodies and only the mind (the heads that fail to remember) is present. During the play the characters re-create their absent bodies verbally, though the major emphasis is placed on their “looks”, whether they are desirable or not:

**W2:** Her photographs were kind to her. Seeing her now for the first time in the flesh I understood why he preferred me. (308)

**W1:** pudding face, puffy, spots, blubber mouth, jowls, no neck, dugs you could - ... calves like a flunkey. (310)

There is a certain rivalry between the two women, which is carried over into the grave. W1 talks about W2’s body and vice versa, the audience imagine their absent bodies as repulsive and vulgar. Again we can apply Merleau-Ponty’s theory of phantom-limb memory, and in this play absent bodies function as a memory of adultery; it was important for both women not to share M sexually with one another. Nevertheless, in the theatrical present the urns as the substitutes of their bodies look absolutely the same.

In *Play*, Beckett creates a very strong object-body relation, or we could say uniqueness. It seems that the heads “are growing” from these exquisite pots and the darkness nurtures them. Or it can be interpreted that the heads are being “sucked” by the urns, as the urns are much bigger in proportion to the heads, and the heads are only one yard above the stage. The precise directions of Samuel Beckett are:

*“In order for the urns to be only one yard high, it is necessary either that traps be used, enabling the actors to stand below stage level, or that they kneel throughout play, the urns being open at the back. Should traps be not available, and the kneeling posture found impracticable, the actors should stand, the urns be enlarged to full length and moved back from front to mid-stage, the tallest actor setting the height, the broadest the breadth, to which the three urns should conform. The sitting posture results in urns of unacceptable bulk and is not to be considered.”* (319)

The other reading of this image could be that the urns are the bodies of the three characters. In *Play* Beckett joins a human part with an inhuman part producing a kind of monster. Marie-Claude Hubert in her essay “The Evolution of the Body in Beckett’s Theatre” writes that “artificial members of the mutilated body accentuate its inhumane quality” (1994: 35). This image is non-realistic and memorable *per se*. Even in Beckett’s early plays there is a certain relation between bodies and objects, e.g. in *WFG*, it is clear to the audience that Didi is related to the tree and Gogo to the stone. The fusion of body-object starts to get stronger in *Endgame* (Nagg and Nell in the ashbins, Hamm and the armchair) and in *Happy Days* Winnie is fixed in the mound without any chance to move around. In Beckett’s later plays, the body is inseparable from the object. The object restricts the space of the body and its mobility. In *Play* the necks of the three characters are “held tight in the urn’s mouth”. Beckett is always precise with the stage directions, probably, that is why these words attracted my attention. It seems that Beckett gives life to the urns by using the word “mouth”. This mouth seems to be a kind of a hole or a gate. “Down, all going down, into the dark” (312), says M. The urns would never get off their prey. They seem to devour their bodies gradually making them part of themselves. Billie Whitelaw in one of her interviews amusingly reports that while performing in *Play*, “bits [of her make-up] came off when actors began to speak”, and she felt that she “was disintegrating in full view of audience” (qtd. in Ben-Zvi 1992: 9).

Image perception and decoding are processes that always go together. “A seeing phase” or perception is the same for everybody, but a decoding phase is different for everybody. The image in *Play* could prompt different cultural, literary and philosophical allusions. One needs to have his/her mind open to accept that various meanings could co-exist in the image. However, the first reaction to the onstage image dominates our ensuing associations. Form in Beckett’s late plays predetermines the content or is united with it. Image is a meaningful container of the body of language. Thus, *Play* is full of perception verbs: “glare”, “gaze”, “glance”, “stare”, “look”, “poke”, etc. The image of darkness is also created by language: “Silence and darkness were all I craved” (316), “Dying for dark...” (317), etc. The darkness onstage is very dense and it “eats up” the characters when the Light is not on them. The Light/ Darkness contrast creates a certain allusion to a black hole or other dimension, which is completely unknown to the



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Viewer; we could only imagine what is there. The linear location of the image onstage could prompt the linear conception of purgatory by Dante, as the whole play seems to be an after-death interrogation.

The image in *Play* is memorable and shocking, and although it is open and ambiguous, there is a certain parallelism between shape, colours, visual weight, as well as different cultural connotations. All of them point to decay or “living death”, besides with the bodies’ disintegration memories get fragmentary and patchy; and the memory mechanisms fail as well as the characters’ immobile bodies. The image is grotesque, and it can provoke bitter laughter from the audience. Beckett, being Irish, has a sharp sense of humour, and he can transmit his irony through stage image.

In *Play* the image is also timeless as we cannot attribute it to any specific epoch or place. Beckett succeeds in creating a ghostly trio image in the world of shades with the minimum of decoration. The “still-life” or the dead flower pots created by Beckett allow the audience to apply their imagination and fill in the parts intentionally taken out by the playwright, and it is the Light that directs our perception. The spotlight in this play performs various functions: it is the creator and destructor of the image and of memory, a witness and, thus the victim, an impartial judge, an interrogator, “an all-seeing eye”, a shape-changer, the memory and image destabilizer, and a body-fragmentator.

“Among the ‘technical’ systems, perhaps the most promising object of investigation is offered by stage lighting, which has, among other things, constituted a major means of creating virtual space from stage space ever since Adolphe Appia created an ultimate convention. [...] For Appia the cardinal function of lighting was the definition (and thus the ostension) of forms in space.” (Elam 1980: 84)



**CHAPTER VI**  
**The Language of Trauma: Speaking of the**  
**Unspeakable**



## **CHAPTER VI**

# **The Language of Trauma: Speaking of the Unspeakable**

“In Plato, speech or *logos* gives us access to Truth; in Rousseau, speech or *parole* gives us access to nature (human or physical); and in Husserl speech or *phone* gives us access to the Self.” (Begam 2002 :16)

Language is one of the important means, which holds the key to a person’s identity, we reveal ourselves through the way we talk; we remember in words and our memories, though stored in images and sensations, are translated/narrated by us in words. But what happens, when a traumatic event is not registered verbally? How does this storage affect our speech when we are ready to tell or to try to tell it? The language of trauma is unlike our normal speech, due to the difference of trauma storage processes, which have been dealt with in Chapter I. Since one’s identity is disrupted by a traumatic event, the language is also falling to bits. A person is incapable to narrate the indescribable, which is somewhere in his/her subconscious, remembered only through sensations and isolated images, and in the majority of cases these memories are remembered through the eyes of an observer, alienated from the present self. The language of trauma, trying to express the inexpressible, acquires another quality, like a broken record player it goes backwards and forwards, interrupted by silences, hesitations, and in a voice which is not recognizable by the Listener/Speaker. As language represents a Self, it mirrors a person’s troubled inside.

In this chapter, I will discuss the language of trauma in Beckett’s theatre and its relation to identity disrupture. I will deal with the following characteristics of this type of language: fragmentation, regression, omission, repression, reflexivity, intertextuality, lack of centricity, overlapping and repetition. These elements of language mirror the troubled inside of Beckett’s characters. Different types of trauma will be discussed in

relation to the language, such as the trauma of birth, the trauma of sexual abuse, the trauma of loneliness, vicarious trauma and the trauma of loss and mourning. The plays, discussed in this chapter, are *Not I* (1972) and *A Piece of Monologue* (1979).

## 6.1. Verbal Diarrhea: *Not I*

“I hear [Mouth] breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without undue concern with intelligibility. Addressed less to the understanding than to the nerves of the audience which should in a sense ‘share her bewilderment’.” (Beckett to Shneider, qtd. in Cohn 2001: 316)

*Not I* may be considered a monument to trauma in Beckett’s theatre. In this play Beckett stages trauma in its pure essence. The close-up on a tiny mouth and an incoherent stream of words affect our senses and question our ability to understand. In a painful effort to understand, we are straining our hearing and our eyesight. Nevertheless, we are failing, since our brain is not capable of assimilating Mouth’s speech, which is delivered at neck-breaking speed: “and now this stream ...not catching the half of it ... not the quarter ... no idea... what she was saying ... imagine!” (379). We are able to pick up only some fragmented words and word combinations, thus there is the fragmentation of audience’s perception within the fragmentation of Mouth’s already fragmented speech. The play is traumatic both in its staging/form and in its content/language. In order to prove it I will base my analysis of *Not I* on the following points:

- Visual image
- Voice or Voices as a struggle of tormented selves
- Omission in speech as a device to repress “April morning” memory
- Elements of stability in the narration as mirrors of the scenic image and present Mouth’s identity

I am fully aware that the analysis of the **visual image** belongs to the previous chapter, which deals with “body mutilation”, nevertheless I decided to include this play in the chapter about the language of trauma, since a mouth is the organ of speech and

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the disembodied mouth in *Not I* is actually perceived as the organ of traumatized speech, as well as a symbol of trauma and body disintegration. Since traumatic experiences are not assimilated into mind, Roberta Culbertson writes that “Trauma is known not in words but in the body” (1995: 170). And in this play, Mouth embodies trauma to full extent. The excruciatingly physical image of Mouth is the only body part onstage, which, in the present of the stage, substitutes the lacking body and her identity/ies. So the audience face “omission” from the very beginning of the play; and the play itself is more concerned with gaps, holes and porosity both in the visual image and in the speech.

*“Stage in darkness but for MOUTH, upstage audience right, about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow. Invisible microphone. [...] As house lights down MOUTH’S voice unintelligible behind curtain. House lights out. Voice continues unintelligible behind curtain, 10 seconds. With rise of curtain ad-libbing from text as required leading when curtain fully up and attention sufficient into...”* (376)

Mouth is another hole in the play. Suspended in the air and lit from below, it arises several associations: a tiny hole, vagina and even anus. A mouth is an important organ since our very birth, and it is normally associated with the process of eating, and thus with our nutrition and life *per se*. Without food we will die. It is worth pausing here to think through why eating should play such an important role in texts which deal with different modes of representing the self, with individual identity and memory. Maud Ellmann has pointed out that through eating the subject learns to take control over what can be taken into the body from outside and to demarcate the boundaries of his or her own body (1994: 8). Eating simultaneously marks a difference between what is inside the body and what is outside and breaks down that distinction; it points to a distinction between self and other even as it entails bringing the other into the self. Digesting food means assimilating what is other to the self, taking it in through the mouth and digesting (assimilating) it in the stomach, breaking it down so that it can be stored within the body in a different form. This implies that the subject can control what one eats. On the contrary, the image of the constipated body points both to the blockage of communication and to the almost physical need to allow repressed emotions to emerge, to pass through openings and holes, what is exactly happening with Mouth who is unable to control her verbal logorrhoea. Psychoanalysis mobilizes a leaky body, a body

from which uncontrolled words and feelings can pour, in a different sort of narrative of self. Thus, if we take Mouth for a fragment of an identity in this play, we may talk about memory repression and her almost physical need to “spit out” memories, which have not been “digested”. The narrative itself seems to be her “memories” diarrhoea, fragmented speech coming out of a fragmented body. And since her whole body is gone, Mouth is dependent on what is left: “her lips moving... imagine! .. her lips moving!.. as of course till when she had not ... and not alone the lips ... the cheeks ... the jaws ... the whole face” (379), but in the end she admits that the speaking is what constitutes her existence or her identity as we may understand: “the whole being ... hanging on its words” (379). She is so much in need of words for her existence as well as in the need of breathing to exist. Rodriguez-Gago writes that “Beckett’s late plays create a single aural visual body which is the product of a remembered, or misremembered, story told usually by a decrepit, or malfunctioning body” (2003:16).

Another approach to the visual image of Mouth has the connection with Freud’s studies. In his essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud describes mourning and melancholia as different responses to the loss of a love object: in the model he sets up in this essay, mourning is a common, relatively straightforward process, whereas melancholia is “pathological” (1925: 152). He uses the imagery of digestion and cannibalism to describe the melancholic’s response to loss, claiming that the melancholic subject, upon the loss of the love object, desires to interject the object orally: “The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself [...] by devouring it.”<sup>133</sup> By contrast, mourning is described as a gradual detachment of libido from the lost object, unrelated to oral incorporation.<sup>134</sup> In the case of Mouth, though the trauma of loss is present in her speech and in the first drafts Beckett alluded to the theme of mourning over the loss of her lover (Pountney 1988: 94), in the final version of the play Mouth’s diarrhoea transcends the latter and may be taken for mourning over her own lost identity, the pronoun “I” of her speech. So she is vehemently spitting her memories out of her non-existent body to find “something she didn’t know herself” (381). The visual image of Mouth highlights a process of digestion gone awry, turning into indigestion or autophagy; it points to the impossibility of remembering the past in narrative, yet to the

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* 153.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 154.



simultaneous impossibility of forgetting. There seems to be no possible escape from this double bind, no means of converting bodily memory into narrative memory and narrating the loss of her own self/ves. The mouth is turned into a “speech expulsion” organ, thus unable of assimilation. Furthermore, with the absence of the whole body devoured by the stage darkness, Mouth also takes on the function of a memory organ, but coveting bodily into narrative seems to entail the process of self-mutilation and even self-consumption. Like Winnie, gradually sinking in the mound, Mouth may be devoured by the surrounding her darkness. Instead, the conflict between remembering and forgetting a traumatic past continues to be staged through the fragment of a body, a body which seems unable to accept compensatory sustenance from outside, and is instead reduced to vomiting or consuming itself. The Mouth’s presence is already made absence, a kind of “god-forsaken hole” (376) onstage.

In the play, where Mouth is an “absolute” speaker (Malkin 1999: 47), her **voice** occupies the soundscape of the theatre and is the centre of our attention. Although the voice is coming from Mouth, she is unable to recognize the voice as her own: “realized ... words were coming ... imagine! ... words were coming ... a voice she didn’t recognize [...] then finally had to admit ... could be none other ... than her own ...”(379). So Mouth is not only deprived of body, but also her constant reluctance to admit the voice as a part of her de-centres her theatrical presence. The voice’s centricity is challenged by the pronoun “she” of Mouth’s narrative, and obviously creates tension. But paradoxically, “she” also gives stability to the narration, since it makes us aware that the whole speech is about a woman/girl. Femininity is always there in the background of her fragmented discourse, and allows us to re-construct some of her memories. We are there to imagine other ghost/s of Mouth’s former selves. Besides producing the effect of lack of centre in the narration, “she” is an alienation device, which is used by people with PTSD in order to distance themselves from a traumatic experience. At the same time narrating in the 3d person singular may be understood as a self-negation. It is definitely easier to tell about some drama of our past as an observer than as a participant. Mouth’s narration is split due to her refusal to admit her own self: “what?...who?...no!...she!” (377, 379). The same words are repeated at the end of the play with a slight permutation: “what?...who?...no!...she!...SHE!” (382). The interrogative pronouns, which are a stable

presence in Mouth's speech, may be attributed to an internal dialogue going within her and, consequently, to the split of her identity:

"*Not I* further widens the distance between self-narration and identity by focusing on the gap between the enunciating subject and the enunciated subject and the uncertainty about who is saying what to whom." (Malkin 1999: 74)

At the same time the recurring interrogative pronouns conjure a possibility of invisible and non-heard voices, which Mouth is communicating with. To hear voices is one of the symptoms of PTSD. Moreover, enveloping darkness gives way to our imagination, to a possibility of other hallucinatory presences onstage. The narration itself is very unstable, Mouth doubts all the way what she is saying, or there is another voice in her brain that is constantly correcting Mouth: "nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when- ... what? .. seventy? good God! .. coming up to seventy..." (376). Mouth's speech mirrors her memory instability. Malkin proposes that there is an internal dialogue between her "involuntary confessional voice and the voice of resistance, refusing to reveal or denying the memories being offered" (1999: 50). The traces of this internal dialogue are present through the whole performance, and there are no traces of assimilation and coming to terms with her memories. But I would like to forward the hypothesis that Mouth has various voices or fragmented identities "inside" that she is in conflict with; each of them belong to her subconscious and all of them want to find the way out. These troubled selves contradict each other, and probably drive her mad. I think that the repetitions in Mouth's speech hold the key to these identities:

- 1) "... out ... into this world ... this world ... tiny little thing ... before its time ... in a godfor- ... what? .. girl? .. yes ... tiny little girl ... into this ... out into this ... before her time..." (376)
- 2) " that notion of punishment ... for some sin or other ... or for the lot ... or no particular reason ... for its own sake ... thing she understood perfectly ... that notion of punishment ... which had first occurred to her ... brought up as she had been to believe ... with the other waifs ... in a merciful ... "(377)

## Chapter VI

- 3) “all that early April morning light . . . and she found herself in the--- . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . [Pause and movement I.] . . . found herself in the dark . . . and if not exactly . . .” (376-377)
- 4) “. . . practically speechless . . . all her days . . . how she survived!” (379)
- 5) “that time in court . . . what had she to say for herself . . . guilty or not guilty . . . stand up woman . . . speak up woman” (381)
- 6) “. . . realized . . . words were coming . . .” (379)
- 7) “Croker’s Acres . . . one evening on the way home . . . home! . . . a little mound in Croker’s Acres . . . dusk . . . sitting staring at her hand” (380)

All of these moments, or we may call them Mouth’s chronological landmarks, are repeated through her whole speech. Obviously the first turning-point is her birth; the second one is her Catholic upbringing in the orphanage, which should have influenced her mentality. This period of her life modified her identity and made of her a girl, who believes in God and his “tender mercies” accepting punishment and penance. But this identity is already in conflict with the previous one, which points to her being unloved and uncared for. Then comes the moment of “April morning”, which I consider brought about her speechlessness and suffering, and actually disrupted her already split self. The next identity is the identity of shame and speechless resistance; the memory which comes in a flash is, probably, her memory at court. Later the memory of starting to talk again comes, her verbal rebirth. But she herself describes her new identity as something that she is not in control of. And her whole brain is begging it to stop. So this too-verbal identity comes in conflict with the other ones, since it does not reconcile them, no pronoun “I” is used. And her last identity has to do with her old age, suffering and loneliness, “tears on her palm” in Croker’s Acres create the image of suffering and solitude, and, perhaps pain. The image of an old woman is also challenged by Mouth’s discourse, since she doesn’t remember her age and the visual image of a disembodied mouth rejects possibility of any self-identification.

These periods of her life may be considered not only as the chronological landmarks of her ABM, but also as the separate identities, which she used to be and is at

the same time. There is no linking between them, so we may say that the transition periods were rather painful, and no agreement was reached between her former selves. These identities are created linguistically and the words “introduce” these identities into the stage hallucinatory present, their importance lies in the circular structure of their remembrance. Besides, zooming-in effect is present: every time Mouth returns to one particular layer of memory she enlarges it with new memories from this life period, Malkin defines them as “additional moments of remembrance” (1999: 48). For instance, “.. always winter some strange reason ...” (379), which has to do with her old age at Croker’s Acres, later in her speech is remembered more in detail: “once or twice a year ... always winter some strange reason ... long hours of darkness” (382). The only memory, which undergoes reduction in her speech, is the memory of her birth, as though she is distancing herself from it. This is the first memory in the play, and it cheats our perception at first, since it gives the play a false chronology.

“ . . . out . . . into this world . . . this world . . . tiny little thing . . . before its time . . . in a godfor– . . . what? . . . girl? . . . yes . . . tiny little girl . . . into this . . . out into this . . . before her time . . . godforsaken hole called . . . called . . . no matter . . . parents unknown . . . unheard of . . . he having vanished . . . thin air . . . no sooner buttoned up his breeches . . . she similarly . . . eight months later . . . almost to the tick . . . so no love . . . spared that . . . no love such as normally vented on the . . . speechless infant . . . in the home . . . no . . . nor indeed for that matter any of any kind . . . no love of any kind . . . at any subsequent stage . . . so typical affair.” (376)

“or that time she cried . . . the one time she could remember . . . since she was a baby . . . must have cried as a baby . . . perhaps not . . . not essential to life . . . just the birth cry to get her going . . . breathing . . .” (380)

“... tiny little thing . . . out before its time . . . godforsaken hole . . . no love . . . spared that.” (381)

Rank’s concept of the trauma of birth is present in the play from the very beginning as well as the symptom of birth anxiety; preposition “out” negatively points to the act of “getting rid of”. Mouth feverishly tries to choose the right preposition: “out” or “into”, the latter has to do with “entering” and “being welcome”, which is refused later by her speech. Mouth’s birthday is actually the day of her doom. Two

holes are united in the image of a mouth: the womb and the visual onstage image. Out of the darkness of a womb a tiny little girl is transformed into another tiny hole in the stage darkness and/or the darkness of her memory. “Spared of love” with “just the birth cry to let her going” and born prematurely: a child is dragged into this world. Her gender conditions her from the very start. As Rank states in his book, the condition of being born a woman is not well accepted and preconditions her to the life of suffering: “buscamos despreciar a la mujer, negarle todo el valor social e intelectual, a causa, precisamente, de sus relaciones con el trauma del nacimiento” (Rank 1961: 46). The stage image has strong visual association with women’s genitals, which challenges our perception and again brings us back to the trauma of birth:

“Creemos más bien que si el muchacho trata de negar, tanto tiempo como sea posible, la existencia del aparato genital de la mujer, es porque quiere a toda costa sofocar el recuerdo del espanto experimentado durante su pasaje a través de tales órganos, del cual todo su cuerpo se resiente todavía: dicho de otro modo, porque teme despertar la angustia que se relaciona con este recuerdo.”<sup>135</sup>

Beckett practically stages the trauma of birth in *Not I*. Painful birth may be paralleled with her fragmented and difficult to understand language. Mouth seems to be in labour of her own selves. She describes her coming into this life “so typical affair”, which in her case is totally abnormal, as an attempt to come to terms with her affectionless birth. This trauma of birth finds other ways in the text through her two screams, which sound rather artificial, and prove her false command over the voice. But at the same time those cries may symbolize the two painful moments of our life: birth and death. Those two screams are opposed to two laughs in the play: “brought up as she had been to believe ... with the other waifs ... in a merciful ... [*Brief laugh.*] ... God ... [*Good laugh.*]” (377). She is unable at first to utter the name of God, the God who made her existence possible, this idea is undermined by her long laugh. Her memories of her girlhood are not happy at all, she failed to adjust to the orphanage life, from my point of view. Although, she uses religious vocabulary in her speech and alludes to God, she lost her faith as well as her girl’s identity. Two screams and two cries are her only present physical reactions to her former selves, and both responses are negative.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

The narration goes in circles and there are continuous regressions in speech. Mouth constantly recreates these moments of her past, as though they held the key to her ONE important memory, to the repressed memory of “April morning”<sup>136</sup>, which is repeated five times in the play and is the last to go together with the fall of the curtain, as though she couldn’t but tell it again and again, as “psychotic urges to return to, and eternally repeat, the traumatic moment” (Malkin 1999: 29). Since I will base my analysis of her repressed memory and the disrapture of self on this memory, I quote all of them hereinafter:

“wandering in a field . . . looking aimlessly for cowslips . . . to make a ball . . . a few steps then stop . . . stare into space . . . then on . . . a few more . . . stop and stare again . . . so on . . . drifting around . . . when suddenly . . . gradually . . . all went out . . . all that early April morning light . . . and she found herself in the— . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! [*Pause and movement 1.*]” (376-377)

“for on that April morning . . . so it reasoned . . . that April morning . . . she fixing with her eye . . . a distant bell . . . as she hastened towards it . . . fixing it with her eye . . . lest it elude her . . . had not all gone out . . . all that light . . . of itself . . . without any . . . any . . . on her part . . . so on . . . so on it reasoned . . . vain questionings . . . and all dead still . . . sweet silent as the grave . . . when suddenly . . . gradually . . . she realiz— . . . what? . . . the buzzing? . . . yes . . . all dead still but for the buzzing . . . when suddenly she realized . . . words were— . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . [*Pause and movement 2.*]” (378)

“keep an eye on that too . . . corner of the eye . . . all that together . . . can't go on . . . God is love . . . she'll be purged . . . back in the field . . . morning sun . . . April . . . sink face down in the grass . . . nothing but the larks . . . so on . . . grabbing at the straw . . . straining to hear . . . the odd word . . . make some sense of it . . . whole body like gone . . . just the mouth . . . like maddened . . . and can't stop . . . no stopping it . . . something she— . . . something she had to— . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . [*Pause and movement 3.*] . . . something she had to— . . . what?” (381)

“April morning . . . face in the grass . . . nothing but the larks . . . pick it up there . . . get on with it from there . . . another few— . . . what? . . . not that? . . . nothing to do with that? . . .

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<sup>136</sup> T.S Eliot in *Waste Land* (1922):

“**APRIL** is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.”

## Chapter VI

nothing she could tell? . . . all right . . . nothing she could tell . . . try something else . . . think of something else . . . oh long after . . . sudden flash . . . not that either . . . all right . . . something else again . . . so on . . . hit on it in the end . . . think everything keep on long enough . . . then forgiven . . . back in the— . . . what? . . . not that either? . . . nothing to do with that either? . . . nothing she could think? . . . all right . . . nothing she could tell . . . nothing she could think . . . nothing she— . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she!. . . [*Pause and movement 4.*]” (382)

“painless . . . so far . . . ha! . . . so far . . . all that . . . keep on . . . not knowing what . . . what she was— . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . SHE! . . . [*Pause.*] . . . what she was trying . . . what to try . . . no matter . . . keep on . . . [*Curtain starts down.*] . . . hit on it in the end . . . then back . . . God is love . . . tender mercies . . . new every morning . . . back in the field . . . April morning . . . face in the grass . . . nothing but the larks . . . pick it up— [*Curtain fully down. House dark. Voice continues behind curtain, unintelligible, 10 seconds, ceases as house lights up.*]” (382-383)

The importance of this memory is signalled in the text through the framing device of pauses, this memory makes Mouth stop her speech in a frustrated attempt to look backwards. It is somewhere there in her subconscious, but blocked by her senses. Besides, every time she refers to this memory the conflict between “she” and “I” arises in her speech. This memory seems to have split her already unstable and unwanted identities. This memory made her numb and senseless. This memory deprived her of voice and of her body. This memory brings her back to darkness. This memory, together with her previous identity induced the feeling of shame, and as a result her femininity rejection: “could not bring herself . . . some flaw in her make-up . . . incapable of deceit . . . or the machine . . . more likely the machine . . . so disconnected. . .” (378). All these make me discuss this trauma in the light of sexual abuse, which I will try to prove hereinafter.

However, the first thing to consider is the general analysis of this memory. Though the memory is generally placed in “when” (April morning) and “where” (the fields), it is still deprived of “what” (event): “something she had to—. . . what?” The victims of trauma normally remember the settings and small details of the event, but they try to alienate themselves from its painful content, blocking it. And both memory processes are visible here: to remember and to forget, an impossible need to tell and the strain to repress it. The intervening of other memories in her attempt to reconstruct this

important moment in her past may be taken as a device to forget or to postpone remembering:

“But the attempt to give voice to ‘how it was’ is defeated by the difficulties of how it *is* to remember: the inner fragmentation, the different voices intervening, the strains of recall and, not least, the urge to forget that constitute the activity of remembrance itself.” (Malkin 1999: 50)

The narration itself is always discussed by psychoanalysis as a means to cure, since violent trauma may bring on memory loss and cognitive disruption. And Mouth herself wonders how she managed to survive – survive her pain. The answer to this is, probably, her period of speechlessness. The survivor most often, nearly invariably, becomes silent about his victimization, though the experience, nevertheless, in every case remains somehow fundamental to his/her existence, and to his/her unfolding or enfolded conception of him/herself. This silence is an internal one in which the victim attempts to suppress what is recalled (so as not to relive the victimization countless times), or finds it repressed by some part of him/herself which functions as a stranger, hiding self from the self’s experience according to unfathomable criteria and requirements. It is external as well: the victim does not tell what she recalls, in part because others do not seem to hear what is said, partly out of a conviction that he/she will not be believed, and more basically because he/she simply cannot make the leap to words: “If you were not there, it is difficult to describe or say how it was. It sounds very, very, very. . . . I don’t know if there is [a] word to describe the... “ (Laub 1992: 58). This is the general way how a victim tries to start telling her/his story.

“... the speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to – and of listening to themselves. That while silence is defeat, it serves them both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage. Silence for them is a fated exile, yet also a home, a destination, and a binding oath. To not return from this silence is rule rather than exception.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* 58.



## *Chapter VI*

Uprooted from her former selves, Mouth shields in silence and anonymity. Living alone in Croker's Acres with "no one else for miles" (380) was her refuge; she sarcastically calls it "home". I presume, years of silence do not mean years of not thinking. The "buzzing" was always there in the back of Mouth's mind. So once she starts talking she cannot stop.

Mouth isn't able to reconstruct what happened on that April morning fully, but there are some elements that are stable in this narration. They are "April morning", flowers "cowslips", larks, "face in the grass", reference to light and eyes and the impossibility to "piece [this memory] together". The narration of this memory is done on a sensory level through images and perception.

"If we are in the case of Mouth and the unnamable, dealing with actual phantom-limb experiences, what is distinctly Beckettian about the memories is the plainly corporeal nature of recollections, triggered not by mere intellectual memory but by the body's own recollections of sensory experiences." (Maude 2002: 119)

Mouth's lacking body is present in the first three memory slices (see pages 278-279) through physical action of "picking flowers", "standing", "sitting", "wandering", etc. But when her body gets numb, there are only references to her mouth, impossibility/or reluctance to remember, and the "buzzing" of her thoughts. The act of picking flowers to make a ball points that she was still an innocent girl, wandering in the fields picking flowers. We may understand the act of picking flowers on a metaphorical level: "deflower" means to be deprived of the virgin hood. The larks' song is remembered on the level of sounds and constitutes Mouth's auditory memory. A lark has a very rich symbolism in literature. Larks are known for their melodious singing. They also sing while they are flying, unlike most other birds, who only sing when perched. These birds are connected with happiness; they sang the hymns at the gate of heaven. The heaven which was rejected to Mouth, and which she rejects herself, and the word "happiness" does not exist in her vocabulary. Moreover, larks have a crescent shape across their breasts. The crescent shape often signifies lunar qualities, and the moon is often linked with the concept of self and of a woman's image. Therefore, the lark reflects the inward journey that is often associated with self-discovery. This goes hand in hand with their singing, something that, for humans, is

often considered a private activity and a deep reflection of inner self<sup>138</sup>. Paradoxically, Mouth is taking this inward journey, but incapable of reflexivity. Thus, “lark” is transformed into a textual symbol of “doom” and “mourning”<sup>139</sup>, since something dreadful happened on this April morning, when she was “like numbed ... couldn’t make the sound ... not any sound ... no sound of any kind ... no screaming for help for example ...” (378). Mouth fails to reproduce it in words; the reference to “eyes” may have to do with her process of unconscious searching for the omitted memory: “to hit it in the end”. The whole experience is perceived through a “corner of her eye”, the angle being so narrow, that the memory comes in flashes out of darkness. The event itself is shielded by the darkness of her forgetting: she recreates the sensation “when suddenly ... gradually ... all went out”, as if she was suddenly blind-folded. But some traces of what happened may be found in her speech:

“feeling . . . feeling so dulled . . . she did not know . . . what position she was in . . . imagine! . . what position she was in! . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . but the brain— . . what? . . kneeling? . . yes . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling . . . but the brain— . . what? . . lying? . . yes . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling . . . or lying . . . but the brain still . . . still . . . in a way . . . for her first thought was . . . oh long after . . . sudden flash . . . brought up as she had been to believe . . . with the other waifs . . . in a merciful” (377)

The first feeling that she remembers is that of numbness, which may be understood as she was totally dissociated from her own self. Sometimes at the moments of danger, a victim of trauma tries to numb her feelings as a mental protection to “leave her own body” and becomes an observer of her pain. Mouth seems to be uncertain of her real position at that moment, although the position itself has sexual characteristics: the sequence of “standing”, “sitting”, “kneeling” and “lying” recreates the scene of someone manipulating her body together with “grabbing of the straw”, as though in pain. At the same time the sequence of these movements is a regression towards her being an infant, depriving her of her maturity and returning her to a defenceless state of “lying”. Another meaning of “what position she was in!” refers to the woman’s

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<sup>138</sup> The information on lark symbolism is discussed in relation to the article on <http://www.pure-spirit.com/more-animal-symbolism/508-lark-symbolism>, consulted on February 11, 2011.

<sup>139</sup> “Lark” as the symbol of “mourning” appears in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. It symbolises Romeo’s leaving.

morality, since Mouth makes references to her orphanage upbringing, and a possibility of further judgment and punishment, as it was women's fault of being possibly raped since the women were the source of temptation. Thus, following it comes the sense of shame and impotence. The shame comes also from her inability to call for help and to defend herself. Rape, as well, brings on the shame of one's own body, and Mouth literally loses her body after this dreadful experience. Here I may only suppose that the result was her pregnancy and consequently her abortion, which she was judged and condemned for, though there is no clear evidence of this in the text. So her later "guilty or not guilty ... stand up woman ... speak up woman ..." (381) may be actually her speechlessness at court and further self-punishment and recluse with continuous references to forgiveness and "God is mercy". But her whole life resists narration and her language mirrors this fact.

The moment itself when she recovered that "other" voice is not as important as the fact that she started to talk, though she seems to have been restricting this "urge" for some time. Speaking for her has to do with the bowel movements. And here again Freud's theory comes into view, Mouth wanted to get the release – the release from her thoughts. The stage image may also remind us of an anus. Mouth parallels her sudden talking to going to the lavatory: "... sudden urge to ... tell ... then rush out stop the first she saw ... nearest lavatory ... start pouring it out ... steady stream ... mad stuff..." (382). As a consequence, there are a lot of words of expulsion in her speech: "sudden flash", "all went out", "steady stream", "sudden urge". Language ceases to express meaning to her; the stream of thoughts, which is pouring from her "godforsaken hole", is incomprehensible to her own self. Something, which is lying deep in her subconscious, is trying to find the way out; Mouth is trying to vomit it. There is no question of self-reconciliation; there is only a desperate need to let it "out", the way she was dragged out into this world. But this "verbal rebirth" has a side-effect in her:

"but this awful thought ... oh long after ... sudden flash ... even more awful if possible ... that feeling was coming back ... imagine! ... feeling coming back! ... starting at the top ... then working down..." (379-380)

The feelings of pain, suffering and shame are back, and, paradoxically, the steady stream of words help Mouth not to remember. She is more concerned with the

“contortions” of her mouth, than with the buzzing of her thoughts. And since she does not want to recognize her former identities as her own, stubbornly refusing the first person singular, Mouth is denied her physical onstage body: “the whole machine ... but no ... spared that ... the mouth alone ... so far ... ha! .. so far ..” (380). She is in a way afraid of recovering the feelings of her body, preferring physical and emotional numbness to remembering.

Mouth is on the brink of her memory fragility, but there are certain elements in her language that “chain” her to continue to exist. Amidst the chaos of her speech, we can hear three important **elements of stability**: 1) the buzzing; 2) the beam of light and 3) the stream of words. These elements are the most recurring in Mouth’s speech; they piece her life together and help us to understand that she is talking about one woman’s memory. At the same time these three elements define her present identity, her onstage being, which has to do with suffering.

“all the time buzzing . . . so-called . . . in the ears . . . though of course actually . . . not in the ears at all . . . in the skull . . . dull roar in the skull . . . and all the time this ray or beam . . . like moonbeam . . . but probably not . . . certainly not . . . always the same spot . . . now bright . . . now shrouded . . . but always the same spot . . . as no moon could . . . no . . . no moon . . . just all part of the same wish to . . . torment . . .” (378)

The constant stream of words, the buzzing of her thoughts and flashing light are there to torment her. Mouth herself represents buzzing (the tempo, the rhythm and the tone of her voice), stream (constant speech) and flashing light (opening and closing of the mouth). Mouth is unable to escape the constant buzzing of her thoughts or voices of her identities. This buzzing may be considered the reason why she has to talk and the way she talks as well, since her speech is perceived by the audience as a buzzing sound. Although, the buzzing and the stream of words coincide during the play, they are of different natures. The buzzing is created by Mouth’s memory voices or memory traces, which have always been there in her head, unlike the steady stream of words, which came later in her life. Mouth characterized her other selves as “speechless”. She was deprived of her voice for a long time: from a “speechless” infant she turned into a “speechless” adult. Nevertheless, once she starts talking she doesn’t recover her “Voice” or here I would say her authoritative voice, since as the result of trauma she is

not in command of what she is saying. The beam of light, which is the third element of stability is, unlike the Light in *Play*, mirrored in the image of spotlight which illuminates Mouth from below. This light is not intense and only adds a hallucinatory quality to the stage image. The references to this beam in Mouth's speech compare it to the moonbeam "drifting ... in and out of cloud" (377). Here I may only suggest that these flashes of faint light may have to do with sudden moments of memory return, like flashes that illuminate some parts of her past. This beam may shift her memories, fragmenting them at the same time. As Mouth says, the moonbeam is only "poking around" (382), and is "painless ... so far ... ha!... so far ... all that ... keep on ... not knowing what ... what she was ..." (382). That may mean that the beam is not there to search in her mind, it lacks any objective so far, thus its movement is chaotic. This light has not illuminated the darkest corners of her mind and has not found her most painful of memories yet.

Among these three elements of Mouth's present identity, the most important is the buzzing sound. We hear this sound before the rise and the fall of the curtain, and we continue to hear it in our minds when the play is over, thus we may be affected by this/these hallucinatory voice/s. As May's ghostly figure is still present for us after her disappearance from the stage, so the constant buzzing is there in our minds after the fall of the curtain. This buzzing reflects as well Mouth's confusion.

All of these elements have to do with the audience's sense of perception, understood both on acoustic and visual levels. She is the way she is perceived. Mouth's present identity, moreover, may be understood only on a sensory level. She is a nightmare of her own former identities, a fragment of her subconscious being.

"With *Not I* – and Beckett's subsequent memory-plays – the mechanisms of memory are rendered forever indeterminate, shifting, plural, incomplete; and that hallucinatory fragment of body, the never-still and thus never 'formed' Mouth, becomes a fittingly flighty emblem for postmodern ontological dispersal and centerless being." (Malkin 1999: 54)

## 6.2. Narrating the Trauma of Loss and Mourning: Pendulum Movement of the Language in *A Piece of Monologue*

“With the simplest vocabulary – a profusion of monosyllables – and understated rhyme, assonance, and alliteration, Beckett has cadenced a human threnody that is at once a lamentation and a secular benediction on parting the dark.” (Cohn 2001: 358)

*A Piece of Monologue*, written in 1979 for actor David Warrilow, may be considered a hymn to Death in its essence. Death is already there onstage in the still image of the Speaker in the “diffuse light”. No movement so far, “nothing stirring” (425), thus language gains prominence, as it adds “action” to the play and creates images for the audience out of the “black void” of night and actually out of the Speaker’s memory. The Speaker is presumably an elderly man; Ruby Cohn suggests that 30.000 nights equal to approximately 82 years<sup>140</sup>. And as the memory of the elderly, the Speaker’s memory is fragile and full of gaps. The Speaker has voluntarily forgotten his life in order to suffer less. But he is there onstage to tell his half-forgotten story. The stage image, as always in Beckett’s plays, is puzzling: “*Speaker stands well off centre downstage audience left. [...] Two metres to his left, same level, same height, standard lamp, skull-sized globe, faintly lit*” (425). Therefore, two immobile entities are created onstage, like two vertical lines; and only the speech, coming out of the Speaker’s mouth, makes him scenically alive. The language takes on the role of the protagonist in this play:

“What takes place on stage is the Text being made to appear in space and time. The figures on stage are primary embodiments of such projections. If in Beckett’s drama the whole stage microcosm stands for an individual consciousness, then the primary vehicle for the consciousness is the Text.” (Kedzierski 1993: 145)

The Speaker’s speech has a lot in common with Mouth’s verbal logorrhoea. In both plays, articulation gains prominence, both characters are concerned with their mouths, not only as speech-producing memory organs, but also as articulators. The only speakers onstage, they are trying to tell their memories to silent Listeners: *Not I* to the Auditor; *A Piece of Monologue* to a lamp with a skull-sized globe. Both memories are

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 356.

fragmented and deal with something traumatic; both stories deal more with forgetfulness than with remembering. Repetitions of memory fragments are present in both stories, as well as elements of stability, as references. “Light”, as an element of stability is present in both narrations: in *Not I* – the “poking” beam and the stage light from below, and in *A Piece of Monologue* – the light ritual and a lamp as the Speaker’s silent partner. Chronological landmarks are scarce in both memories, but both choose to start their narrations with their memories of birth, signalling it as the first turning-point in their lives. Both characters reject pronoun “I” in their discourse, thus distancing themselves from their stories. Lack of authoritative voice makes them lose control of their memories: “Stands staring beyond half hearing what he is saying. He? The words falling from his mouth” (428). The same happens to Mouth in *Not I*: “motionless ... staring into space ... mouth half open as usual” (379). So both characters are “hanging on words” for their existence. Their inability to control the narration points to trauma. Although, analysing the texts of the two plays, I may suggest that the traumas, though common in their essence, are treated differently. Mouth has an internal conflict going within herself, and the Speaker’s main concern in *A Piece of Monologue* is “not with their [his] own schism, but rather with the world outside the self” (Ben-Zvi 1982: 11). Moreover, the delivery of the text or speech is different in these plays. In *Not I*, there are no capital letters and there are dots between each utterance. Besides, some separate segments consist only of a preposition or an auxiliary verb, making the speech sound disconnected and abrupt. The movement of Mouth’s speech is mainly created by such prepositions as “into”, “out”, “back”, etc., produced at a very high speed, and our impression is that Mouth is getting out of breath with every word uttered. She is actually spitting the words. There is neither beginning nor end in her narration, since the buzzing starts before the curtain is up and goes on even after the fall of the curtain. In *A Piece of Monologue*, the Speaker’s speech is framed by the fading of the light. The text in this play, though fragmented, is divided into balanced segments (word combinations), each starting with a capital letter. Thus, there is more order in the speech. “Falling of words from the Speaker’s mouth” suggests moderate speed and, consequently, time for taking breath and silent remembering. His speech is more rhythmical, due to the equilibrium of segments, mostly monosyllabic words in balanced word combinations. The text is more concerned with images or the sequences of these images, which “wheel” the text forward; the preposition that gains prominence is “beyond”, which

creates another reality in the play. So, the language in *A Piece of Monologue* gains a poetic quality, and though it deals with trauma, there is no violence there, like in *Not I*. This is the language of loss and mourning made poetry. Hereinafter, I will deal with the main characteristics of this type of language, focusing on its connection with quiet/personal trauma:

- The pendulum movement of the text as the trauma of birth/death indicator
- ABM chronological landmarks: “from forgetting or forgotten”
- Behavioural re-enactments as elements of “presymbolic dread”

### **6.2.1. The “Pendulum” Movement of the Text as the Trauma of Birth/Death Indicator**

“... And in the idle darkness comes the bite  
Of all the burning serpents of remorse;  
Dreams seethe; and fretful infelicities  
Are swarming in my over-burdened soul  
And Memory before my wakeful eyes  
With noiseless hand unwinds her lengthy scroll.  
Then, as with loathing I peruse the years,  
I tremble, and I curse my natal day,  
Wail bitterly, and bitterly shed tears,  
But cannot wash the woeful script away...” (Pushkin A. 1834, “Tis Time, My Friend”)

Trauma, as I have already discussed in the previous chapters, may be of different natures. And though the language of narrating of various kinds of trauma shares common features, such as fragmentation, lack of pronoun “I”, repetitions, echoing, overlapping, etc., it may acquire special characteristics due to the nature of the traumatic memories. In *A Piece of Monologue* the speech has a certain lulling movement. Like the rocking chair in *Rockaby*, it creates a soothing effect of the “backwards” and “forwards” movement. The movement that may bring forward the associations with the rocking of a cradle or a comforting movement in the mother’s womb: the movement that we need to ease pain or to lull us to sleep. The speech flows



from the Speaker's mouth in waves, pauses indicated by full-stops in the text. Hereinafter, I will attempt to analyse some parts of the text in reference to this pendulum movement and the traumas of birth/death and mourning. This movement is created on several levels: tempo, rhythm, and the stylistic devices of the text. The text characteristics, which produce this movement are the following: lexical items (antonyms), verbal images repetition, balanced fragmentation of the text, tenses (past – present), prepositions, formal structure repetitions (when the two consecutive sentences start or end with the same word), negation – affirmation, etc. I will provide some examples hereinafter in order to prove my hypothesis:

1. Lexical items (antonyms): birth – death, night – light, cradle – crib; east – west; “sun long sunk” – “new needles turning green”, night – day.
2. Images of repetition, which move the pendulum between the two extremes: image of birth and death (discussed later in this section).
3. Balanced fragmentation of the text. By this I mean that the segments are not long and have approximately the same time of duration in uttering. The majority of words are monosyllabic.
4. Tenses. The opposition of the past tense and the present tense. E.g. “... to where the lamp is standing. Was standing” (425). This opposition also creates the instability of narration and the negation of what has been previously said.
5. Prepositions. Prepositions of a pendulum movement are abundant in the text: “again”, “from – to”, “back – forth”, “back – on”, “again and again gone” (429), “again and again” (429).
6. Formal structure repetitions. They are also abundant in the text. E.g. at the beginning : “Ghost rooms. Ghost graves” (429); “Never two matters. Never but the one matter” (429). At the end: “Up at nightfall. Every nightfall” (425).
7. Negation – affirmation, which signal memory instability. E.g. “No more no less. No. Less. Less to die” (426).

This pendulum movement is recreated in the text by the words “bandied back and forth” (425) and reminds us of a metronome, which brings on the association with Freud’s *fort-da* game. The Speaker seems to play a game with his memories, bringing them forth or zooming them in for us and then distancing them, or in other words, this game may mirror the mechanisms of memory (forgetting, misremembering and remembering). This game seems to have lasted all his life, which he counts in 30.000 nights. Like the swings of a metronome, one night came and then was gone into an eternal image of Night or “years of nights” (426) in the text. Searching the web on this strange number, I came across one of Islam’s prayers that actually states: “Lailatul Qadr is better than a thousand months” [97:3]<sup>141</sup>. Lailatur Qadr is the night of prayer in Islam. Taking into consideration that one month is 30 days, we may translate this prayer into “this night surpasses the value of 30000 nights”. It is the Speaker’s special night, “This Night” (425) sounds prominent in the text, and brings the text to the present moment. This Night/the night of the performance is the time when he is telling his story, which may sound like a prayer or a worship of Night. Out of 30000 thousands of nights, this night is special, because, probably, in this night he will join his “loved ones”. Numbers gain prominence in the text: 30 seconds being the most frequent, which are not only mentioned in the text, but Beckett includes them in his stage direction at the end of the play: “*Thirty seconds before end of speech lamplight begins to fade*” (425). 30 seconds are half a minute or a half-swing of the metronome. The numbers not only “count” the movements of the Speaker’s pendulum, they also represent Time and duration. Since every word uttered is one second gone. “Like grain upon grain”, words fall from the Speaker’s mouth. And the Speaker has an obsession with counting: “Match one as described for globe. Two for chimney. Three for wick” (427). These words remind us of children’s nursery rhymes or counting games. The Speaker is playing with numbers, translating years into nights, hours into seconds and billions of seconds. But making numbers bigger does not help him to expand his life: “Hard to believe so few” (425) is his reaction.

This verbal pendulum may have two different swing directions in the play: one, which I will call a “narrow swing”, goes into the past (memory) and then brings it

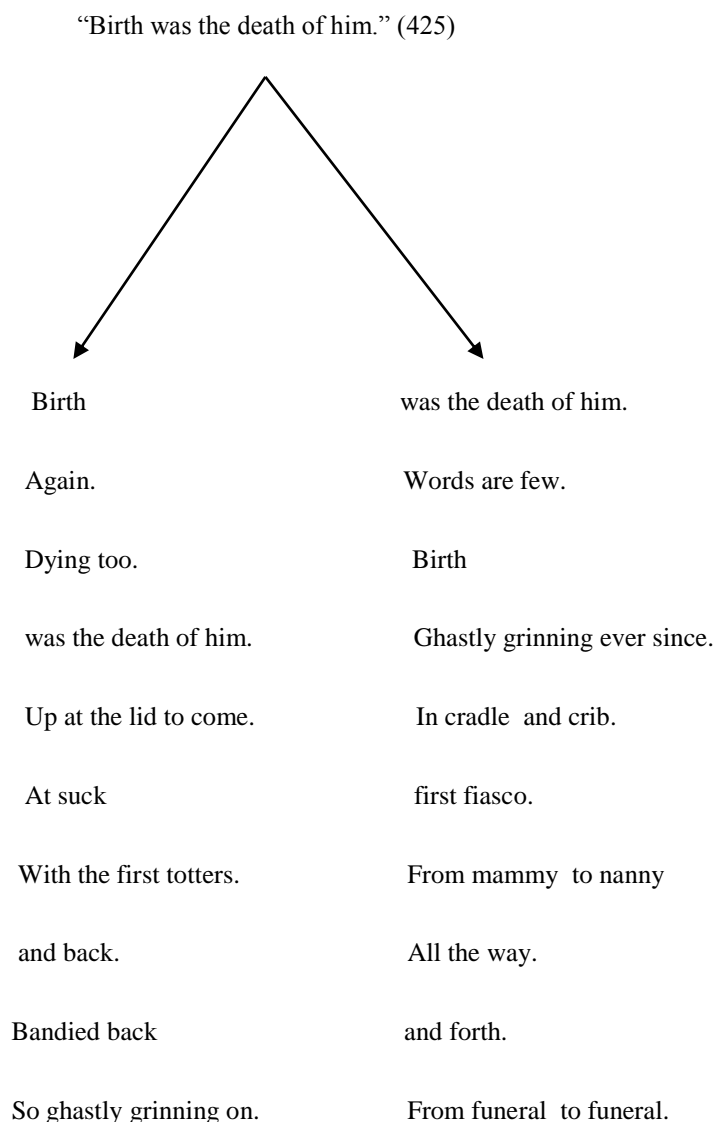
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<sup>141</sup> The Quran. Web site <http://www.islaam.com/Article.aspx?id=130>, consulted on February, 17, 2011. The night referred to is Lailatul Qadr, a special night at Ramadan.

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forward; and the other one, and I will call it a “wide swing”, is metaphysical in its essence, it unites two turning-points of every man’s life: birth and death, or 30000 nights in the Speaker’s life. The pendulum’s incessant movement adds to the instability of already unstable in memory text, but at the same time it creates duration. According to Bergson, the body is fixed in time and space, as the still body of the Speaker onstage, and memory is not fixed, it may travel in time and space, as the language of *That Time*.

This pendulum movement has the starting moment of “birth”. In the picture below I will demonstrate how the narration goes backwards and forwards<sup>142</sup>:



<sup>142</sup> The division of this part of the text (425) is done by me. As a basis, I take a full stop as the initiator of the swing movement. But at the same time I take into consideration, that the opposites (e.g. antonyms) should be on different swings of the pendulum movement, so some segments are distributed into two different swings (like “birth” and “death”, for example).

*The Language of Trauma: Speaking of the Unspeakable*

To now.

This night.

Two and a half billion seconds.

Again.

Two and a half billion seconds.

The pendulum movement in this paragraph is created, apart from balanced phrases and tempo, by repetitions and repetition-permutations, consonance, antonyms and constant prepositions of the backward-forward movement. The pendulum swing is wide, since it moves the text from the moment of birth to the moment of death with the number of life duration in between (“Two and a half billion seconds”): the only segment which is repeated without any permutation in this paragraph and, thus adds stability. The Speaker is mostly concerned with duration than with the memories of his past life. There is no specific “when” in the game of his memory, the process of living is defined by the following words: “*again*, up, in, from, to, back, back, forth, on, from, to, to, *now*, *again*”. All the prepositions (with the exception of framing “again” and “now”) deal with the pendulum movement. In order to reach “this night”, he bandied back and forth between funerals, thus from the very beginning there is a negation of life in the play or the Speaker simply talks about life in negative terms. Everything, which is connected with birth, is negative and unpleasant: “first totters”, as well as the first “suck” (since they are mentioned together in the text) were his first fiascos in life. Actually, “sucking” is also associated with libidinal functions. Rank writes that for a baby this process means “prolongar tanto tiempo como sea posible las libertades ilimitadas del estado prenatal” (1961: 31). But in the Speaker’s case, the mother-child bond was cut with his failure to suck, thus he was totally isolated from the comfort of the mother-baby union. The segment of “From mammy to nanny” appears in the same left swing as “From funeral to funeral”, and both segments share the same grammar structure “from .... to”; thus it is valid to suggest that both movements have to do with already lost “loved ones”. Besides, putting mammy and nanny on the same level again points to this lack of the mother-baby bond and, consequently, to the trauma of loneliness. It is also important to mention, that if we listen to the beginning of the text “Birth was the death of him – again”, which actually means that the Speaker’s life was a sequence of deaths; we may equal it to the segment of “from funeral to funeral”, which sounds like the main theme of the whole play. I suggest that these words initiate or trigger the Speaker’s

memories. “Death” is not only the theme, but also the engine of his narration, which moves it forwards in a number of narrow swings.

As far as the phonetic analysis of this paragraph is concerned, the majority of words are monosyllabic with the predominance of the nasals [ m, n ] and the lateral [ l ], which add smoothness to the text, since these sounds may be prolonged without any friction between the articulators. As well-oiled wheels they glide the text forwards and backwards. The longest utterance in the paragraph is “Ghostly grinning ever since” interrupts the smooth movement and sounds rather unpleasant, due to the velar plosive [ g ], used in the first two words. The following “cradle” and “crib” of the same swing, which are obviously connected with “birth”, also sound unpleasant, since they start with the velar plosive [ k ], which connects these two objects of the infant world to “ghostly” and “grinning” (both starting with the velar plosives), thus arising an unpleasant association of a small child with an old face, grinning at us. The labio-dental fricative [ f ] in the words “few”, “first”, “fiasco”, “funeral”, “from” and “forth” glides the text forwards with difficulty due to its initial position.

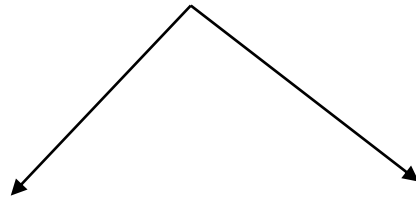
“The words in the opening speech of the play actually trace human growth through complementary speech development: the velar stop g and c, followed by the more sophisticated fricative f, and finally giving way to rhyme and more complex language structures and transpositions: ‘From mammy to nanny and back’.” (Ben-Zvi 1982: 14)

Taking into consideration this brief phonetic analysis, I came to the conclusion, that “pleasant” (nasals, lateral) mostly occur in the words, connected with “death” (e.g. “dying”, “night”, “funeral”); and “unpleasant” (fricatives, plosives) – with “birth” (e.g. “cradle”, “crib”, “birth”, “first”, “fiasco”). The word, which deserves thorough phonetic analysis, is the first word of the play: “birth”, as it is constantly repeated in the text, and the actual moment of birth is created phonetically by the Speaker. The articulation of this word may be considered as a metaphor for the process of giving birth. The word starts with the bilabial plosive [ b ], the air is stopped by the lips and then suddenly released with an explosion. The same happens, when a child leaves the mother’s womb and is being expelled “out”. The vowel [ ɜ: ] may remind a gliding movement towards mother’s genitals, towards the light; and then the labio-dental fricative [ θ ] may be considered as getting out with difficulty. Later in the play the Speaker poetically

describes the pronunciation of this word: “Birth. Parts lips and thrusts tongue between them. Tip of tongue. Fell soft touch of tongue on lips. Of lips on tongue” (428). Kedzierski, who directed several of Beckett’s plays, writes that “The formidable sense of the articulatory aspect of the word [birth] accounts for the spell Beckett’s texts cast on the imagination of so many actors and directors” (1993: 146).

Although the word “death” also starts with the plosive, followed by a vowel and then by the labio-dental fricative, thus creating negative attitude towards it. However, we know that the Speaker finishes his speech with the word “gone”, which lies on the other extreme of the “wide swing”. Beckett substitutes the unpleasantness of the word “death” by the past participle “gone”, which is smooth in pronunciation, due to its ending in a nasal which may be prolonged, thus creating a process of “disappearing gradually”.

The pendulum movement of the whole play has to do with the mechanisms of memory: forgetting – remembering; voluntary and involuntary memory; and repression of traumatic memories. Although the wide swing of the pendulum movement goes from “birth” to “gone”; the play has narrower swings, which may be represented by the following fragments of the Speaker’s memory:



“Birth was the death of him”.

Faint light in the room” – night routine of lighting the lamp. Self- description.

The pictures on the blank wall.

“Lamp smoking though wick turned low.” - night routine. Self-description.

Birth.

Hands lighting the lamp and the chimney.

The funeral scene.

Birth. Articulation.

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Self-description.

Funeral Scene.

Self-description.

“Gone”.

All of these fragments may be taken for the Speaker’s memories: some of them are distant and remote (his family and some memories from his childhood), others are close (night routine), others - repressed (funeral scenes), and then the memory of his own self, all dressed in white is both present and past. The postures, the Speaker describes in these memories of his self-description, are different from the one we see onstage. He is looking front towards the audience, thus the self-description memories may be taken as descriptions of his former selves. As it has been shown before, all the memories have cyclic nature and the Speaker keeps returning to them. His memory goes backwards and forwards. The effect of zooming-in is present in the description of his memories. Actually, the language performs the role of a “camera” or an “eye” that guides the Speaker and the audience through the labyrinth of his memory. With the absence of chronology, we may only understand the text through repetitions, which point to the traumatic nature of the Speaker’s memories:

“Traumatic memories can be so overwhelming that it is only natural to try to avoid reexperiencing them. Paradoxically, however, attempting to avoid remembering a trauma may only increase the long-term likelihood of persistently remembering it.” (Schacter 2001: 10)

There is no particular pattern in the utterance of these memories. Although, the pendulum of his memory goes from “birth” to “night routines” and then there comes a deeper swing into his memory, “the pictures of his loved ones”, as involuntary remembering, perhaps then again as though tired from remembering, the Speaker directs his narration to his “night routine”. Thus, if we call “night routine” and “self-description”, as voluntary remembering, and the rest of the memory fragments as involuntary, we may suggest that two involuntary remembering never go together, as though the Speaker needs a break from talking about them, since they make him suffer. So, voluntary memories may be taken as shields from his repressed memories. Another point is that at the end of the play, all the voluntary memories get more fragmented, less

words are used to describe them: “black veiled lips quivering to half-heard words” (429), as though they start losing their importance.

### **6.2.2. Autobiographical Chronological Landmarks: “from forgetting to forgotten”**

“As is typical of many Beckett’s works, each reference to biography becomes more rapid and increasingly more nebulous, making the inchoate origins of speech more discernible.”  
(Ben-Zvi 1982: 12)

As Ben-Zvi points out the chronological landmarks become scarce in Beckett’s later plays. What is left in the Speaker’s memory, except “night” and “funerals”? He shields his most sacred memories, or they might have lost any relevance to him. There is a close relation between his “words are few” and memory in the play. For the Speaker his whole life was the succession of nights: “Nothing. Empty dark. Till first word always the same. Night after night the same” (427). This nothingness or empty dark void may be paralleled with his memory, since there is more forgotten than remembered. The mechanisms of forgetting, I presume, are voluntary in him. The Speaker blesses and worships the night, since it gives him peace and oblivion; that is why his night ritual is verbally repeated through the whole play. But the pendulum movement of his thoughts makes him challenge his darkness later in the text: “Dark whole again. Blest dark. No. No such thing as whole” (428). The Speaker says this in reference to his night routine, but we may also understand it as the darkness of his memory is not whole/complete, or, making a pun on the word “whole”, one may understand that there are holes in his forgetfulness, and memories leak from its dark void.

The Speaker fights with those memories in the same way as with the pictures which were once on his wall: “Gone. Torn to shreds and scattered. [...] Ripped from the wall and torn to shreds one by one” (426). He seems to have destroyed all the pictures from the walls in an anguish fit, as though he wanted to tear those people from his heart; the pain of loss so strong that he used violence. The Speaker uses impersonal past participle, not admitting that he had actually did it, as though he is ashamed of this act.



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The verb “ripped”<sup>143</sup>, applied to the pictures meaning “to tear something with force” may be applied to the people on those pictures as dead and torn from his heart/memory with violence. Thus, “the blank wall” is actually his private graveyard of the people he loved and lost. Paradoxically, his picture was also there on this wall and it was shredded to pieces together with the other pictures of his “loved ones”.

However, the Speaker failed to remove everything, because “Nothing on the wall now but the pins. Not all. Some out with the wrench. Some still pinning a shred.” (426), as well as he failed to tear them all from his memory. The “wrench” is still there: “wrench”, which is used with both meanings in this text 1) an adjustable tool like a spanner; 2) a feeling of abrupt pain or distress caused by someone’s departure. The Speaker was unable to erase all his memories, as the “wrench” does not go away. The Speaker’s memories are described physically, and in this violent act of “tearing” we may feel his pain and his loss. And since the act of actual loss of a loved one happens on the physical level (his/her body is gone from this world); he tries to destroy his memories of them in a physical way. In the process of mourning, one should come to terms with his loss, but the Speaker only tries to forget and to block his loss violently. A basic view of Freud’s theory of the work of mourning is essential to the present discussion. Mourning, as described by Freud in his article “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, etc. Reality has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. Nevertheless, its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again (Freud 1917: 243-245). Jeannette Malkin describes the trauma of mourning in relation to Freud’s teaching, she points out that the mourner normally loses the interest in the outside world, thus totally isolating himself from any other activity but thinking about the lost ones (1999: 65). “The mourner takes the lost subject into the self, restructures through repetitions all the past moments, and

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<sup>143</sup> Rip means “requiscant in pace”.

reconstructs his or her own identity in terms of his bereavement.”<sup>144</sup> Phil Baker found in Beckett’s texts the proof of mourning and melancholia in relation to Freud’s teachings:

“... mourning and melancholia, internalised parent figures and gendered identification with them, displacement, anality, the womb, deathly repetition, and idealised regression. The overall approach [here] is intertextual, considering psychoanalysis as a historically specific family of recognizable discourses which can be seen refracted through Beckett’s writing. It is less a psychoanalytic ‘reading’ of Beckett’s work than an attempt to read the psychoanalytic and quasi-psychoanalytic material which is already present in certain texts.”  
(qtd. in Feldman 2006: 81)

The Speaker undergoes the process of mourning in *A Piece of Monologue*; although he is voluntarily repressing his memories, they are leaking in the form of images from his memory. He could not but tell them again and again. His whole self is sliced into the repetitions of his most painful moments of funerals of his lost ones; and he himself is among the people that he lost, since he tore his own picture from the wall. This loss of his own self is the reason why he is incapable to come to terms with his physical loss, and is verbally prolonging the lives of the “loved ones” in his memory. When he is standing staring at the blank wall, this wall is not blank for him: all of his loved ones are there in his imagination:

“Could once name them all. There was father. That grey void. There mother. That other. There together. Smiling. Wedding day. There all three. That grey blot. There alone. He alone. So on. Not now. Forgotten. All gone so long. Gone. Ripped off and torn to shreds. Scattered all over the floor. Swept out of the way under the bed and left. Thousand shreds under the bed with the dust and spiders. All the ... he all but said the loved ones.” (426)

The images from the torn pictures materialize before his eyes; again there is physicality in the process of remembering. The shreds of the pictures and the blank wall trigger his memories. Again remembering comes in swings. The main characteristic of this swing is that he remembers and then forgets simultaneously: “There was father.” And the next words: “That grey void.” And though before in the text he still remembered that it was his father who taught him how to light a match on the buttock (426), now he equals him to the grey void, or a hole in his memory. The memory of his

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

mother is also scarce: “That other”, which may mean that he had never been close to her. Paradoxically, both “mother” and “father” lack the possessive pronoun “his”, which may be an alienation device, making his memories less personal. And at the same time, lack of possessiveness isolates him from the world. It might be interesting to mention, that in the duration of the play possessive pronoun “his” is only applied to his body parts: lips, tongue, buttocks. He also uses “his”, talking about the last funeral scene, but instantly changes pronoun “his” to “her”, as though he is afraid to have any possession in this world except from his body. And again he stubbornly refuses to see himself in those torn pictures, third person singular “he” is applied in the whole play, creating the atmosphere of strangeness, as though the voice is split from the body uttering the words. The split of voice from the body is another device to show trauma and the physical self disrapture, since it shows the Speaker’s lack of control over his voice.

Like Krapp’s tape-recorder, the language of the play revolves around the similar memory fragments, which take on the form of repetitions-permutations. And like in *Not I*, on repeating the memory fragments, there is an “additional memory remembrance”. The memories of “loved ones” are repeated 7 times in the play with variations:

“Funerals of ... he all but said of loved ones.” (425)

“Pictures of ... he all but said of loved ones.” (426)

“All the ... he all but said the loved ones” (426) – in relation to the shreds of pictures

“Which ... he all but said which loved one?” (428) – in relation to the grave

“Till whose grave? Which ... he all but said which loved one’s?” (429)

“Coffin on its way. Loved one ... he all but said loved one on his way. Her way. Thirty seconds.” (429)

“Ghost ... he all but said ghost loved ones.” (429)

All these memories are connected with loss and mourning. The main theme is the “loved ones”, since this combination stays stable through the whole play, though the Speaker never gives them names, and the “loved ones” may be substituted for “one big loss”. They are faceless and genderless to the audience. Like the pictures on the wall violently torn to pieces, their names are erased from the Speaker’s memory. He is not sure what funeral he attended, which of his “loved ones” was put into the grave. The only thing that is there in his memory is a succession of funerals. “Gone. Again and

again. Again and again gone” (428). And it seems that he considers 30 seconds as a break from funeral to funeral, 30 seconds being a half swing of a metronome. Thus, his life is pictured by him as a big loss and as unbearably painful. It seems that what he remembers better is the *locus* of the funerals; and he remembers it with clarity, as though the scene was engraved in his memory and is easily retrieved. As discussed in Chapter I, traumatic memories sometimes are recorded on a sensori-motor level in the form of visual images:

“Rain pelting. Umbrellas round a grave. **Seen from above.** Streaming black canopies. Black ditch beneath. Rain bubbling in the black mud. Empty for the moment.” (428)

“Again and again. Again and again gone. Till whose grave? Which ... he all but said which loved one’s? He? Black ditch in pelting rain. Way out through the grey rift in dark. **Seen from on high.** Streaming canopies. Bubbling black mud. Coffin on its way. Loved one ... he all but said loved one on his way.” (429)

The funeral scene is painted verbally to us. Like a painter, the Speaker adds more and more details to his memory landscape, narrating it as seen from “above”, from a bird’s eye perspective. He does not perceive himself as a participant, but as an observer from a far distance, so the scene may be captured as a big blur of grey and black. The principal images of this scene are “rain”, “umbrellas”, which cover the people present, “coffin”, and the black hole in the earth – the grave, which may be paralleled with the black hole of his memory, and make this memory fragment an open memory. The coffin lacks a body, as the Speaker’s memory lacks the names of his “loved and lost ones”. The trauma of death is physically narrated here: the image of black bubbling mud, which is “ready” to devour another faceless loved one. The lack of the body is important as it shows that the Speaker is unable to process the moment when the body disappears into the earth; and he refuses to recognize the one who is dead and taken from him.

According to Freud, a mourner undergoes a process of obsessive recollection, during which the survivor resurrects the existence of other in the space of his psyche, replacing an actual absence with an imaginary presence in order to fathom what he/she has lost in the loss of the other. The Speaker is actually repressing the act of mourning,

which is another pendulum movement in the play: his narration goes from funeral to another funeral. And he himself is gradually dying with every person lost to “the black bubbling mud”.

“Not only does time make the ego merely a series of vaguely perceived selves, but even if the ‘black nothing’ were to offer up a view of the ego, there would be no means of articulating the inner self.” (Ben-Zvi 1982: 10)

The funerals might be considered as possible landmarks of the Speaker’s ABM, although there is nothing concrete in them. The only concrete starting point is his birth. With every funeral the Speaker was losing part of his own self, which is not recoverable so far, adding pain and suffering to his existence. His body is the last remnant of himself left onstage: left to tell his story. He himself has already turned into a ghost, forming part of the other world.

Not in control of his world, the Speaker verbally creates another ghostly dimension in this play; the ghostly realm of his death. His self-description and the present onstage image confirm this: white hair, dressed all in white (white nightgown and white socks), standing motionless, staring beyond. The last memory pendulum swing in the succession of “... he all but said the loved ones” is “Thirty thousand nights of ghosts beyond. Beyond that black beyond. Ghost light. Ghost nights. Ghost rooms. Ghost graves. Ghost ... he all but said ghost loved ones” (429). The language moves the reality to another dimension: from funerals of the “loved ones” – to deep pain of their loss – to resurrecting them in the other “ghost” dimension. The Speaker, unable to come to terms with their loss, joins them in the other realm, the realm of the dead. Moreover, not only “birth” and “death” may be considered the extremes in the pendulum movement, but two dimensions of past/present and “beyond” are other extremes. The pendulum movement of his memories lulls him to join the other ghosts of his memory in body as well. Probably, the last image of an empty grave is for him. “Beyond” signals the shift to other world, the world of the Speaker’s memories. It is interesting to mention that in this memory fragment the words “room” and “grave” appear together in the text and are used in plural. They appear on different swings of the verbal pendulum, thus the dominium of his room or rooms of his memories is his present fragile reality; the room is his “womb” and his grave at the same time. Both realities coincide at the

moment of his speech. The “room” also triggers the memories of the other “ghost rooms” or memory *loci*, which were “once full of sounds” (426), but the Speaker remembers them as other rooms, distancing the onstage room *locus* from the ones in his past, when the people in his pictures were “smiling” (426). The mechanism of voluntary forgetting is in view here: “Room once full of sounds. Faint sounds. Whence unknown. Fewer and fainter as time wore on. Nights wore on. None now” (426). From the memory of “full of sounds” to no sound at all: his memory moves from scarce remembering to total forgetfulness.

The instability of the text, going backwards and forwards, together with the physical stage language, creates nightmarish quality in *A Piece of Monologue*: there are times when we doubt whether the Speaker is a ghost conjuring up his memories, or whether they are the memories conjuring up his ghost onstage.

### **6.2.3. Behavioural Re-enactments as Elements of “presymbolic dread”.**

The discussion about “rooms” leads us to another important theme of the play: “night ritual”, which is obsessively repeated by the Speaker (3 times), and in a certain way it may be viewed as an element of stability in the text. The night ritual is again a repetition-permutation, and has importance to the Speaker as the anchor of his existence. *A Piece of Monologue* has a lot in common with *Eh Joe*. Two characters onstage, imprisoned in rooms are telling/listening to the voices of their memories. Both listen to the voice/voices at nightfall, and both present the symptoms of night anxiety. Although, Joe physically performs the night ritual, the Speaker narrates it. In both plays, the “bed” becomes a prominent prop onstage, but in *Eh Joe* it is realistic, since Joe sits on his bed hiding from the Voice; but the Speaker never approaches it, and the bed is described like a “*just visible [...] white foot of pallet bed*” (425), which in its austerity looks more like a coffin. The bed routine gains prominence in both plays as a symptom of night anxiety. Children are normally afraid of night, as it is the time of separation from their parents, and they normally ask for a lamp to “scare their monsters away”.

## Chapter VI

The Speaker, though welcoming the night, is also concerned with the light: “In the room dark gaining. Till faint light from standard lamp” (425). The lamp, which is already a prominent prop onstage, becomes crucially important in his bed ritual. The Speaker needs this light, as though afraid of the real darkness of the night. The main reason may be his loneliness; deprived of all loved ones, there is nobody to protect him from his memory flow or to keep him company, only the standard lamp and the lulling tempo of his words.

“Si examinamos de cerca las circunstancias en las que nace la angustia infantil, se comprueba que de hecho es el sentimiento de angustia inherente al acto de nacimiento el que continúa, siempre en suspenso, manifestando su acción en el niño, y toda circunstancia que, de alguna manera, por lo general ‘simbólica’, ‘recuerda’ este acto, es utilizada para dar el sentimiento en cuestión, jamás agotado ni satisfecho, un medio de volver a actuar y de expresarse (*pavores nocturnos*).” (Rank 1961: 30)

The Speaker’s night ritual may be understood on several levels. Paradoxically, there is a regression towards childhood in his bed ritual and “night” is not totally welcome by him. He stubbornly performs the same actions every night in precisely the same order: lighting the standard lamp, chimney (which is non-existent onstage), and then turning the wick low, creating semi-darkness. So, Freud’s behavioural re-enactment theory comes into view, as a symptom of trauma. Night is the time for our worst memories and solitude. Since, the Speaker is unable to come to terms with his loss, he shields himself from his traumatic memories at nightfall, creating an activity which keeps him going with his mind blank, “because the pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attention...” (Beckett *Proust* 1931: 29). The counting ceremony of matches may be another device to blank out his memory, like small children counting sheep before going to bed, he counts the matches.

Besides, in the view of the pendulum movement discussion, the references to this bed ritual move the text to the stage present, uniting his voice with the onstage room and his body. They anchor the Speaker’s body to this world, due to the physical movements described, such as “groping” in the dark and striking the matches. Although the Speaker himself refuses to move, as though ready to pass to the moment of complete

stillness. This night ritual reminds him that he is still alive. However, the third night ritual acts as a body-fragmentator in the text:

“In the light of spill faintly the hand and milkwhite globe. The second hand. In light of spill. Takes off globe and disappears. Reappears empty. Takes off chimney. Two hands and chimney in light of spill.” (427)

Linda Ben-Zvi points out the laborious attempts of the Speaker to light his lamp in the view of “reinforcement of the theme of brief thought” (1982: 20), and she parallels it to the mechanisms of painful remembering, when a certain memory emerges from the darkness of our mind and then is gone. But at the same time, the narration of this routine seems like a close-up on the body parts: his hands. With the whole body gone, hands mechanically perform the habitual action and act on the level of Merleau-Ponty’s phantom-limb memory. With the reference to a non-existent onstage chimney, they become memory fragments of habitual memory. As well as the Speaker’s memory, his body is also falling to bits. He does not identify his own body parts. Thus, he is there physically onstage, but, perhaps already gone.

The light from the standard lamp onstage only creates a ghost reality. The whole stage is in the semi-darkness and till the end of the play, or better to say 30 seconds before the end of the play, the light of the lamp starts fading:

“Turn away in the end of darkened room. Where soon to be. This night to be. Spill. Hands. Lamp. Gleam of brass. Pale globe alone in gloom. Brass bedrail catching light. Thirty seconds.” (428-9)

The light from the lamp seems to be his only companion during his 30000 nights, and there is a mutual dependence between them: the Speaker needs the lamp for living – the Lamp needs the Speaker to be lit. Thus, the standard lamp appears as his “other self” in the play and actually signals the approaching of his death or his total disappearance in the stage darkness. The lamp, together with the reference to “oil” and “wick”, may be paralleled to the parable about 7 virgins from the Bible: the Speaker keeps it on as an act of readiness to join his “loved ones”, and at the same time he may light it as a candle in the memory of all the people he lost. Thus, the contrast between Light/Darkness created verbally and physically onstage is not an opposition, given that



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“light” and ”night” depend on each other. All the nights in the Speaker’s night are connected with the light of the lamp and the light of his remembering and forgetting. The pendulum movement of his speech ceases with the fading of the light:

“Such as the light going now. Beginning to go. In the room. Where else? Unnoticed by him staring beyond. The globe alone. Not the other. The unaccountable. From nowhere. On all sides nowhere. Unutterably faint. The globe alone. Alone gone.” (429)

Both realities: the verbal reality of his memory and the onstage physical reality of his present gradually reach the moment of stillness in the darkness, and the light of the lamp is the last to go as the Speaker’s last breath.



## **CONCLUSIONS**



## CONCLUSIONS

“Once the self is processed, and once it is constructed in writing, it is always already expelled, so that is never ‘there’, never really somewhere in one place.” (Malkin 1999: 75)

The main goal of this thesis has been to analyse the bodies and the voices of the characters and the physical stage language as *loci* of painful memories in relation to the theory on trauma and memory in Beckett’s theatre. The research on memory and trauma led to other important themes, such as ABM, chronological landmarks of memory and, consequently, to the question of identity or identities. Beckett artistically deals with all these themes in his theatre. I can conclude that trauma and memory are interwoven in his plays, and that he has created new theatre language, where these themes are made protagonists.

As far as the organization of my thesis is concerned, theories on mnemonics proved to be useful for my analysis. One type of memory *locus* is that of a room. The *locus* of a “room” in *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Eh Joe* and *A Piece of Monologue*, is actually the tomb of the characters’ traumatic memories. The rooms in these plays serve as containers, memory-triggers, and as memories in their essence. Like Simonides’ rooms for better memories’ retrieval, the rooms in these Beckett’s plays are memory containers or better say the tombs of the characters’ repressed memories; there is a special union between character and their rooms, since the room is the character’s shelter and their whole universe, for there are no doors to the outside. All the characters imprisoned in their rooms present catatonic symptoms, which point to their total isolation from the outside world. Moreover, all of the characters in these plays perform behavioural re-enactments (Freud), which, consequently, can be related to trauma. The rooms may be taken for landscapes of different types of traumas, though the trauma, which is common to all of them, is the trauma of birth, the room being the womb/tomb of their memories, their Alpha and their Omega.

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Another type of memory *locus* analysed is the soundscape of memories or acoustic background. The rhythmical sound *loci* of the sea sound in *Embers* and the sound of May's pacing in *Footfalls* are both the traumatic memory triggers and the sounds of the characters' existence. These sounds mark Time and duration in the plays, at the same time creating a vacuum of existence for the characters. In the view of Bergson's idea on duration (quantity – quality), the meaning of these sounds from pure duration is transformed into the substitution of these sounds for the characters' whole life/traumatic existence. May's revolving 9 steps link her not only to the intrauterine situation but also to the birth/death trauma. May's pacing may be taken for a behavioural re-enactment to reach the security of her mother's womb. The sea sound in *Embers* is also Henry's existence, his obsession, his private torturer and his memory. Besides, this sound performs the role of his surrogate-father.

The last *locus*, analysed throughout my thesis, is the void, or stage nothingness (*That Time, Not I, Play*). Although it serves different purposes in all these plays, the common features are the void as the subconscious and the dark void as repressed memories. The contrast of Light/Darkness adds a nightmarish and ghost quality to all these *loci*, with the exception of *Embers*, which is acoustically staged in the darkness of our minds, being a radio-play, and *Happy Days* with blazing light during the whole play. In addition, the Light/Darkness conflict always signals the character's troubled psyche and therefore trauma.

There is a scarcity of objects/props in the plays, and the few there are have been analysed in relation to trauma: the toy-dog and the alarm-clock in *Endgame*, Winnie's bag and its content (the objects she takes from this bag) in *Happy Days*, and the tape-recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape*. All of them are deprived of their original functions and take on new meanings. These objects mostly serve as memory-triggers for the characters as well as devices to kill the time. Some of the objects embody characters' traumas. The toy-dog in *Endgame* takes on another function: it serves as a reminder of Hamm's lonely childhood without parental affection and, thus it is the indicator of his trauma of solitude. The alarm-clock in the same play is the prop, which helps Hamm and Clov to re-enact the trauma of future separation, so it is there onstage as an intensifier of the trauma of separation and death. With Clov's leaving Hamm, the latter

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is doomed to death and vice versa. The tape-recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape*, though being a material prop, serves as another protagonist, which holds the keys to Krapp's past life. It transcends the border between the human and the mechanical and represents memory in this play. Krapp's manipulation with the tape-recorder mirrors the memory processes: remembering, forgetting and repression. Taking into consideration that the tape-recorder possesses a voice or voices of other Krapps, it is an instrument of splitting identities in the play.

As far as techniques to stage trauma are concerned, disembodied voices in *Eh Joe* and *That Time*, led to the conclusion that separation of a voice from a body can be considered a trauma technique. In both plays we have silent listeners, deprived of the voice of authority listening to the voices without, thus they are made observers of their memory and not their active participants. In *Eh Joe*, the gender of the voice creates dramatic tension; the characteristic of the voice being feminine actually makes it sound as a nightmarish voice of trauma. Joe presents severe PTSD symptoms, and the voice is the instrument of his internal "thuggee" and the trigger of his most traumatic memory (the girl's suicide). Moreover, the Voice resurrects Joe's internal conflict between his faith and his present identity, bringing about his sense of shame and guilt. The Voice carries violence *per se*, as the type of trauma she is talking about. In *That Time*, the voices are split into three, and though the Voices serve as chronological landmarks in their essence (A - voice of an old age, B – voice of a young man, C – the voice of an adult), there is no chronology in their speeches: memories' overlapping, echoing and repetitions destabilize an already unstable discourse. Multiplicity of voices point to identity disrapture and instability of chronological landmarks, thus to ABM fragility. Another play analysed in relation to a disembodied voice, is *Footfalls*, where there is a dialogue between May and a voice coming out of the darkness. In contrast to other plays dealt with, the voices in this play are in unison, reaching the climax of pseudo-fusion. Two voices crave for oneness, thus the trauma of "never been born" is staged.

Body disconnectedness and mutilation is another technique to stage trauma, which is the result of unresolved psychic conflicts and external existential incompleteness. With the absence of the whole body in some of Beckett's later plays, memories are more and more fragmented. Body fragmentation also highlights the gaps

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in the characters' memories. The staging of a separate mouth in *Not I* links the play in form with the narration of trauma. The orphic mouth, unable to control her verbal diarrhoea, is transformed not only into an organ of speech, fragmented memory, but also into a kind of vagina (linking the play with the trauma of sexual abuse) and anus (representing the process of expulsion). Staging of separate body parts in *That Time*, *Not I* and *Play*, creates another nightmarish dimension onstage, and splitting the body splits the characters' memories and their identities. Body distortion in Beckett's plays is seen through its union with a material object (urns, mound of earth, ashbins, etc.). This union gets stronger from *Endgame* to *Play*. Lack of mobility fixes the body onstage, creating conflict and tension with the outside reality and the body's troubled inside. The body is fixed and trapped both inside the human form and in the memory flow. In *Happy Days*, Winnie's union with the mound represents the tomb of her sexual desires and a powerful shield from her trauma of sexual abuse. With partial or total lack of the body, the characters present ontological insecurity and sense of shame (*Happy Days*, *Not I*), which reveal the impossibility to come to terms with their traumas.

As regards the language of the plays, it presents some of the characteristics of trauma: the characters are unable to control their voices (*A Piece of Monologue*, *Not I*, *Eh Joe*, *That Time*): the rejection of the "I" discourse is one of the symptoms of PTSD. Therefore, Beckett's characters view their former selves as strangers. Thus, there is no memory centrality in the plays; Beckett denies his characters the chronological order of memory with the character as the centre of the remembering process. Centricity is impossible to reach both in stage position and in memory. Moreover, the narration of memories comes in flashbacks, echoing, repetition-permutations with "additional remembering", overlapping and fragmentation. Memory gets extremely fragile and unstable, especially in the vacuum of Time and the lack of any references of the past. In many of the plays (*Endgame*, *A Piece of Monologue*, *Happy Days*), the characters play with their memories, recreating Freud's *fort-da* game, or "forwards-backwards" pendulum movement. Remembering takes the form of a labyrinth, where the character is "guided through" by an external help (the Light in *Play*), or by memory-triggers which make them remember. Involuntary memories are precious in Beckett's plays and they are the most difficult to get at or to remember. Thus, in some plays such as *Play*, *Eh Joe*, there are stage devices to interrogate and to torment the characters, e.g. the



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Light and the Camera's Eye. Both interrogators and witnesses, they are affected by the vicarious trauma of listening, as well as the audience.

All these memory labyrinths are full of dead-ends due to the characters' forgetfulness, or voluntary memory blocking/repression. Memory shielding is the most common technique in Beckett's plays. His characters try to protect themselves from their repressed memories by interacting with objects, playing with the language, telling stories and/or through their habitual actions. Beckett uses omission, memory blocking and repetition of "additional memories" as techniques to repress unpleasant memories. But these repressed memories find holes in their protection and leak out. These repressed memories take on the form of Mouth's "buzzing": they are onstage but hidden by the physical stage environment and by language. Story-telling is a potential technique to hide or to highlight these repressed memories: Henry's story about Bolton in *Embers*, Hamm's story about a boy in *Endgame*, Winnie's story about Mildred in *Happy Days*. I have analysed all the stories as screen-memories, which prompted to reconstruct different traumatic experiences found in them. All of these stories serve as a kind of box-in-a-box memory. One important memory fragment, usually of a traumatic nature, is enveloped by other memories. The memory trace, being hidden, resurfaces from time to time; its remembering is accompanied by sensations and by the emotional response of the character. The actual event ("what") is never remembered by the character; they try to avoid it at all costs, thus the remembering takes on a circular form. The characters are more concerned with the *locus* description (flashbulb memory), as a device to protect themselves from remembering the traumatic event. Memory duplicity was analysed in Winnie's story in the relation to Freud's primary and secondary repressions. Henry's story-telling was discussed in the light of the trauma of filial guilt. Paradoxically, Henry wants to recreate the memory of his father's suicide, which leads to the obsession-compulsion syndrome. Nevertheless, he fantasizes the same story again and again but unable to verbalize its end and/or to come to terms with his father's death. Hamm uses story-telling in order to shield the truth about Clov's birth, and to keep him by his side. Although, enacting the future trauma of separation, Hamm is not ready to lose Clov.

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As the result of different traumas, Beckett's characters often present regression into childhood or return-to-mother desires. Memory tends to go backwards in time to the pleasurable darkness of the womb. Some of his characters (Winnie) use childish language from time to time. Hamm is playing with the toy-dog, craving for affection; May wants to reach the physical union with her mother. All the voices (A, B, C) in *That Time* crave for a regression to their childhood shelter of a stone. The most stable chronological landmark in all the plays is the moment of birth. ABM, in general, is unstable since practically all the characters are unable to place the events correctly in time. Memory instability is carried to the extreme in *A Piece of Monologue*, where the language creates a pendulum movement; and the funerals perform the function of chronological landmarks of the Speaker's ABM. The Speaker, as well as Mouth in *Not I*, doubts his own memory through continuous affirmation-negation. In *Not I*, Mouth interrogates her own self as though unsure of what she is saying. And the voices in *That Time* use vague "that time" when they try to place an event in time. And since all of Beckett's characters are unable to place their former selves in time without alienation, all of them have identity crisis. Lacan's mirror stage is a powerful device which Beckett uses to stage the disrupture of identity. Like voice C in *That Time*, who was unable to recognize his own reflection in the mirror, the majority of Beckett's characters do not come to terms with their former selves. Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape* laughs at his younger self of 39; W2 in *Play* substitutes W1's memory for her own; May's language creates a mirror image of herself. Thus, Beckett negates them a stable identity, their present onstage identity is the only one they have. The present stage identity is normally created in Beckett's later plays through the stability of the stage elements and of the language, which mirrors the stage: the combination of onstage semidarkness. For example, in *A Piece of Monologue*, the Speaker's present identity is embodied in his night routines, his self-description, his lamp for a silent partner, and his words.

In all Beckett's plays, the process of remembering, triggered by external devices, is normally painful. The characters are unable to piece their memories together, and the recall is always done on a sensori-motor level through images and sensations. Since there is always repression/blocking of the actual event, none of the characters are able to remember the traumatic event *per se*, so their existence may be related to the state of latency. The most traumatic verbal recall is staged in *Not I*, where remembering

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surfaces in the form of constant flashes of body postures, disconnected images and sounds. Her speech plays on our senses and recreates flashing images of something dreadful happening in our brains. The impossibility to translate some painful event into words makes Beckett's characters' language fragmented and full of false starts. The trauma of failure is already present in the language of Beckett's characters, since they are failing to tell something essential in words.

From the present analysis, the trauma of birth has proved to be the primary trauma, which prompted secondary traumas, such as the traumas of progenitor's guilt, filial guilt, loneliness and the trauma of failure as side-effects of existence. The trauma of mourning (*Krapp's Last Tape, A Piece of Monologue*), though a quiet trauma, is treated by Beckett in an existential way: his characters' lives are the succession of funerals/losses of their "loved ones", thus the trauma of death is given a voice. The trauma of sexual abuse is of a different nature; in Beckett's plays (*Not I* and *Happy Days*), this trauma is violent and this violence is mirrored in the stage image and in the violent choice of vocabulary, as well as the trauma of suicide, which is narrated in *Eh Joe* by the vehement Voice.

The research carried out for this thesis has provided an original analysis of the staging and presentation of trauma in Beckett's plays; psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to his theatre have made the analysis more complete and added a different focus to the understanding of his plays. For reasons beyond the realm of this thesis, I did not conduct research on all types of trauma; vicarious trauma and the trauma of aging have been briefly discussed. These topics point to a future line of investigation. Another body of further research could be the trauma of the victimage of location in relation to the physical spaces of Beckett's plays. The analysis of the pendulum movement regarding the language of his plays may also prove to be another field of challenging and fruitful research. Moreover, further research that this thesis opens is the artistic presentation of social taboos as something traumatic for Beckett's characters.

There is still ongoing research in the field of Psychology on trauma, which has become a key issue over the last century. And since its consequences are various and it may affect people in different ways, psychologists are currently carrying out further

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investigation in children and adults. Beckett in a certain way was looking ahead of his time, since he managed to stage different types of traumas artistically in his plays through the language of his characters, his treatment of a body and the physical *locus* of stage. Moreover, he gives trauma a voice of its own in his theatre, making his audience observers and participants. The ontological trauma of existence may be physically palpable by the audience, making us wonder about our own life. The universe of Beckett's characters, trying to exist with what little is left for them in the extinguishing world, is traumatic *per se*. And the images created in his theatre are impossible to forget, they are forever engraved in our minds.

“Beckett's late ‘memory-plays’ do something similar: each impresses a strong, evocative single image onto our memories, images – a displaced mouth, a floating toothless head, a pacing ghostly figure, an ashen rocking woman – that are disturbing and difficult to forget, that, as Cicero suggests in his discourse on memory, have ‘the capacity of encountering and speedily penetrating the mind’.” (Malkin 1999: 41)

Beckett does not give us any artistic “recipe” of how to survive, perhaps with the exception of only one: “laughter”, since it is humour that makes his characters go on. And it is laughter, which may save us in our dreariest moments.

## **Resumen [Summary in Spanish]**



## RESUMEN

### STAGING MEMORY AND TRAUMA: PAST VOICES AND BODIES HAUNTING THE PRESENT IN THE THEATRE OF SAMUEL BECKETT [DRAMATIZANDO MEMORIA Y TRAUMA: EL TEATRO DE SAMUEL BECKETT]

La presente tesis doctoral analiza las obras de Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906-1989) desde una perspectiva original: el estudio y análisis de la memoria y el trauma puestos en escena. Samuel Beckett fue una figura clave en el teatro contemporáneo e influyó en muchos dramaturgos; sus obras tienden al minimalismo, razón por la cual siguen siendo un enigma para el espectador. Existen más preguntas que respuestas en sus obras y por ello el interés en su obra continua en aumento. Beckett fue mundialmente reconocido y galardonado con el Premio Nobel de Literatura en 1969 “por su escritura, que, renovando las formas de la novela y el drama, adquiere su grandeza a partir de la indigencia moral del hombre moderno”. Beckett renueva la forma y el contenido, creando una estrecha dependencia entre ambos. Hay cierto espejismo entre el escenario y el lenguaje de los actores, por ejemplo, el juego entre luz, oscuridad y penumbra en la escena se reflejan en las mentes perturbadas de sus personajes y en su lenguaje. Samuel Beckett ha supuesto una revolución en el lenguaje teatral. El espacio escénico en sus obras (a partir de *Play*) se desarrolla en el subconsciente de sus personajes y en sus recuerdos, a menudo reprimidos. Por tanto, en su teatro la memoria y el trauma tienen su lenguaje físico específico: escenario, objetos, voces incorpóreas y cuerpos fragmentados, el trauma cobra así protagonismo en sus obras. Beckett se interesó en su juventud por la Psicología y al psicoanálisis, como confirma Knowlson en *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (1997), Feldman en “*Beckett’s Books*”: *A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett’s “Interwar Notes”* (2006) y también su propia correspondencia, publicada en la edición de Fehsenfeld y Overbeck *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* (2010) . Beckett transformó en materia artística sus experiencias y sus traumas.

En el Capítulo I, “Staging Memory and Trauma: Past Voices and Bodies Haunting the Present in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett” [Dramatizando memoria y trauma: el teatro de Samuel Beckett], se presenta el marco teórico de esta investigación. Este capítulo está dividido en dos partes: “La Memoria Construye la Identidad” y “El Trauma Reconstruye la Identidad”, siendo memoria y trauma las dos caras de nuestra historia humana. Hay un breve análisis de la crítica literaria sobre la obra de Beckett en relación con los temas que nos ocupan: la memoria y el trauma. Los trabajos más influyentes, de los que parte esta investigación han sido Jeannette Malkin (1999) *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama*, la teoría de la memoria como “phantom-limb” de Merleau-Ponty y los artículos de Antonia Rodríguez-Gago, especialmente “The Embodiment of Memory (and Forgetting) in Beckett’s Late Women’s Plays” (2003). Estos autores demuestran la importancia de la memoria y el trauma en el texto de Beckett, y definen las técnicas teatrales que utiliza este dramaturgo para lograr que la memoria esté físicamente presente en sus obras. La memoria como fenómeno siempre atrajo el interés de los filósofos. Simónides de Ceos inventó la mnemotécnica, analizada en el primer apartado de esta tesis, y al ser el estudio de la memoria voluntaria, la mnemotécnica tiene cierta relevancia para este análisis. Por un lado, la organización de esta tesis está basada en este método, el análisis de los *loci* de las dos clases de memoria: *memoria rerum* y *memoria verborum*<sup>145</sup>. Por otro, la mnemotécnica describe la memoria a largo plazo (LTM) y el almacenamiento de los recuerdos en nuestras mentes, así como el mecanismo de acceder a los recuerdos, previamente “guardados” en los *loci* de la memoria. Muchos filósofos abogan por la mnemotécnica (St. Augustine, Aristóteles, St. Tomás de Aquino, etc.) y dan especial importancia a las emociones como intensificadores de la memoria y a la atención como factor fundamental para recordar. La mnemotécnica nos lleva a los estudios contemporáneos de la memoria; los puntos esenciales del análisis se centran en la percepción y las emociones (positivas y negativas) como elementos clave en la memoria a largo plazo, que nos lleva al fenómeno de la memoria autobiográfica y a la identidad. La memoria autobiográfica define nuestro “yo” y se compone de los puntos de inflexión<sup>146</sup> (“chronological

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<sup>145</sup> La memoria a largo plazo está compuesta por tres tipos de memoria: 1) memoria episódica o eidética, que coincide con *memoria rerum*; 2) memoria semántica, que coincide con *memoria verborum*, y 3) la memoria procesual que es memoria motórica.

<sup>146</sup> Los términos psicológicos están traducidos de inglés al español con la ayuda del departamento de Psicología de CU Villanueva (en especial la ayuda de la Dra. Teresa Artola González, la jefa del departamento).



landmarks”) que influyeron en nuestro desarrollo como persona. Los puntos de inflexión se componen de los eventos cumbres en nuestras vidas, cargadas de emociones. Las emociones positivas nos ayudan a integrarlos en nuestra memoria autobiográfica (ABM), pero los eventos con emociones negativas normalmente son rechazados y reprimidos por nuestro subconsciente, aunque no se borran del todo y siguen incidiendo en el presente mediante pesadillas, “flashbulb memories”, y están influyendo en nuestra identidad presente, interrumpiendo el desarrollo de nuestro “yo” en el tiempo (“diachronic disunity”). Este discurso lleva a al tema principal: el trauma como un evento cumbre, cargado de emociones negativas, no integrado en el ABM. Hay un enfoque psicológico donde se presentan las teorías contemporáneas sobre el trauma (van der Kolk, Kaplan, Caruth), aunque Freud, siendo el padre del descubrimiento del trauma *per se*, tiene especial relevancia en el presente análisis. Mi interés en el trauma se centra en sus tipos (cultural, secundario, personal/emocional) y su manifestación en el presente. Ello sustenta el análisis de los recuerdos reprimidos escenificados en los capítulos siguientes. Así la última parte de este capítulo describe los distintos tipos de trauma en las obras de Beckett.

En el Capítulo II, “Painful Memory Spaces: In the Womb/Tomb of a Room” [El espacio de recuerdos dolorosos: la habitación como útero/tumba], se analiza el espacio de la habitación en *Endgame* y *Krapp’s Last Tape*, como *loci* de memoria. Las habitaciones en estas dos obras no son sólo la decoración del escenario, son las “tumbas” de los personajes al igual que las memorias reprimidas. La habitación, siendo un espacio reducido y sin puertas al exterior en las dos obras se convierte en el “pequeño mundo” de Hamm, Clov y Krapp. Todos presentan síntomas catatónicos, que apuntan al trauma del nacimiento tal como lo describe Otto Rank. Las habitaciones son los paisajes de la memoria, así como la memoria de los personajes *per se*. Por ejemplo, para Hamm esta habitación es toda su vida y contiene incluso a sus padres almacenados en los contenedores de basura. No es sorprendente que las habitaciones, espacios íntimos, evoquen los recuerdos mejor guardados de los personajes. Varios traumas están inscritos en el lenguaje físico de la escena en los objetos y en las secuencias de los movimientos repetitivos de los personajes (“behavioural re-encatments”). El trauma del nacimiento/muerte está presente en las dos obras que se analizan en este capítulo, al igual que el trauma del perdedor y el de la soledad y el trauma del envejecimiento. Pero

en *Endgame* al analizar los objetos y las secuencias de movimientos, se concluye que el perro de juguete representa el trauma del abandono que sufrió Hamm en su infancia. El despertador junto con la secuencia de los movimientos de su manipulación anticipa el trauma de la futura separación de Hamm y Clov. La fábula de Hamm desde el punto de vista de “screen- memory” (memoria constructiva ó memoria de fabulación) se explica porque Hamm teme esta separación. Es la memoria reprimida de Hamm la que va surgiendo durante toda la obra. En *Krapp’s Last Tape*, el magnetofón ocupa un lugar prominente en la obra, que se analiza como Memoria/Olvido y sus mecanismos. La memoria es selectiva y en esta obra es Krapp, quien selecciona sus recuerdos, rebobinando la cinta 3 veces. La habitación, con las zonas definidas de luz y penumbra, se analiza en relación con el subconsciente. El trauma más prominente es el de la pérdida, posiblemente representado por el color negro del luto en la memoria de Krapp.

El Capítulo III es “Rhythmical Sound as *Loci* of Painful Memory” [Sonidos rítmicos como espacio de la memoria dolorosa]. Este capítulo analiza la memoria acústica en *Embers* y *Footfalls*. En ambas obras, los sonidos (en *Embers* – sonido del mar; en *Footfalls* – el sonido de los pies) evocan una memoria traumática, unida al lenguaje de los protagonistas, representativa del tiempo y que sustituye a la memoria en general; estos sonidos representan la existencia de Henry y May. El sonido del mar en *Embers* es un síndrome de obsesión-compulsión, es una constante de la que Henry no puede prescindir aunque no lo soporte. Es la tumba de su recuerdo doloroso: la muerte de su padre, acompañada del trauma de culpa filial. La imposibilidad de integrar este recuerdo en su memoria le hace contar historias, al igual que a Hamm. Pero la memoria de fabulación de Henry tiene otro objetivo: visualizar la muerte de su padre, que Henry intenta recordar y olvidar al mismo tiempo. En *Footfalls* los nueve pasos de la protagonista evocan el trauma del nacimiento de Otto Rank y la relación de madre-hija (9 meses de gestación). El sonido de los pies es el motor de la existencia de May, al igual que su inestable memoria. Hay una fuerte crisis de identidad, entrelazada físicamente con la voz de su madre, que viene de la oscuridad del escenario. El sonido de sus pasos es la única evidencia de su existencia presente y también de su pasado.

En el Capítulo IV, “Disembodied Voices of Trauma” [Las voces incorpóreas del trauma], se analizan las voces incorpóreas en *Eh Joe* y *That Time*, que proceden no sólo

del exterior de los cuerpos de los protagonistas sino también de otras dimensiones. En el caso de *Eh Joe* – la voz femenina viene de la memoria; en *That Time* – las tres voces son las voces del pasado del protagonista. Los dos protagonistas son personajes mudos que escuchan las voces de sus recuerdos fragmentados. Siendo voces incorpóreas, el análisis se basa en las imágenes y en el lenguaje de estas Voces de la memoria. La naturaleza de estas voces en las dos obras es totalmente distinta: Joe está escuchando una voz femenina que le acusa de forma violenta, perturbando su existencia; las tres voces del pasado del protagonista de *That Time* fluyen de forma paralela en el espacio teatral. Joe presenta severos síntomas de PTSD (trastorno del estrés postraumático), se encierra en su habitación y se refugia en su cama; es decir el trauma del nacimiento ya está inscrito en el escenario. Como resultado del fracaso de su fe, Joe presenta una fuerte crisis de identidad; los recuerdos reprimidos del suicidio de “la joven, con ropa interior color lavanda”, susurrados por la Voz protagonista, convierten la existencia de Joe en una pesadilla. El análisis de las voces en *That Time* se centra en el tema de la inestabilidad de los puntos de la inflexión en la memoria del protagonista. Las tres voces, que pertenecen a distintos periodos de su vida, en vez de unir, fragmentan su identidad a través del tiempo. El trauma se visualiza en el escenario mediante una cabeza flotante que actúa como receptor de sus propios recuerdos.

El Capítulo V, “No Body at Rest”: Body and Memory Mutilation” [“No hay descanso para el cuerpo”: mutilación del cuerpo y la memoria], analiza el cuerpo en *Happy Days* y *Play*. La fragmentación del cuerpo y su posición fija en el espacio escénico representa distintos traumas en las obras de Beckett. La evolución del cuerpo como objeto escénico tiende al minimalismo y la ausencia de distintas partes del cuerpo actúa como la memoria “phantomb-limb” de Merleau-Ponti. Con la ausencia parcial del cuerpo, la identidad y la memoria de los protagonistas se desconectan. En *Happy Days* el cuerpo de Winnie está fusionado con el montículo de tierra, que en esencia representa el túmulo funerario de su represión sexual y quizá el olvido de un abuso sexual. Otra vez, las huellas de este recuerdo están envueltas en la fabulación de la memoria (“screen-memory”). Las fabulas ayudan a los personajes de Beckett no solo a pasar el tiempo, sino también sirven de mecanismo de defensa contra sus recuerdos traumáticos. En *Play* la imagen de las urnas con las tres cabezas de los protagonistas se relaciona con la luz escénica, que se convierta en otro protagonista. La luz regula los turnos de los

personajes al hablar y además fragmenta los cuerpos y sus recuerdos. La luz escénica toma el rol de un juez sublime que está interrogando a los personajes en busca de un recuerdo “especial” olvidado por todos ellos. La luz se convierte al mismo tiempo en la víctima del trauma secundario del trío.

En el Capítulo VI, “The Language of Trauma: Speaking of the Unspeakable” [El lenguaje del trauma: expresando lo inexpresable], se analiza el lenguaje del trauma en *Not I* y *A Piece of Monologue*. El trauma como un evento que altera nuestra percepción del tiempo y espacio nunca se almacena en nuestro cerebro con palabras (*memoria verborum*), sino que deja una huella en nuestro subconsciente a nivel senso-motriz (imágenes, sensaciones, movimientos, olores). La víctima no sólo necesita tiempo para asimilar su trauma (el periodo latente), sino también tiene dificultades a la hora de narrar el evento traumático. Boca en *Not I* presenta la imagen más traumática en las obras de Beckett: rechaza el discurso en primera persona singular, o su propio “yo”, incapaz de controlar su propia voz y la expresa a través de la fragmentación del lenguaje, repeticiones, ecos, etc. Está “escupiendo” el caos de sus recuerdos en la mayoría traumáticos. Varios traumas resurgen al completar el análisis de esta obra: el trauma del nacimiento, abandono o soledad. Así Boca no sólo “pierde” su cuerpo y el dominio de su voz, sino también su identidad queda hecha añicos. En *A Piece of Monologue* el lenguaje es el protagonista de la obra; en el escenario no hay movimiento, sólo las palabras del protagonista proyectan la acción de esta corta pieza teatral. El lenguaje rítmico se compara al movimiento del péndulo: imágenes recurrentes, escenas que se repiten, frases cortas monosilábicas que parecen poesía. Toda la vida del protagonista es un movimiento pendular de un funeral a otro, que están tratados como periodos de inflexión en la formación de su memoria autobiográfica, o de su ausencia. El único punto de inflexión es el del su nacimiento. El trauma de la pérdida de sus seres queridos es crucial en la obra y toda su vida es un luto continuo.

Finalmente, en *Conclusions* [Conclusiones], se resume brevemente los puntos principales del presente estudio y se sugieren futuras líneas de investigación. La conclusión general de esta tesis es que memoria y trauma van unidos en el teatro de Beckett. Distintos traumas influyen en la represión de los recuerdos y el olvido voluntario, pero siguen invadiendo el presente de los personajes produciéndose así una

*Resumen [Summary in Spanish]*

crisis de memoria y como consecuencia una crisis de identidad. La utilización de técnicas de análisis con enfoque filosófico y psicológico, como puede ser un estudio de los “recuerdos reprimidos” puede ser útil en las futuras investigaciones de la memoria en el teatro.



## **Conclusiones [Conclusions in Spanish]**





## CONCLUSIONES

### [CONCLUSIONS IN SPANISH]

“Once the self is processed, and once it is constructed in writing, it is always already expelled, so that is never “there”, never really somewhere in one place.” (Malkin 1999: 75)

Una de las metas iniciales de esta tesis doctoral era analizar los cuerpos y las voces de los personajes al igual que el lenguaje físico como espacios de memorias dolorosas en las obras de Beckett en relación con la teoría sobre la memoria y el trauma. Esta investigación me ha llevado a otros temas importantes como la memoria autobiográfica, los puntos de inflexión de la memoria (“chronological landmarks”) y por consiguiente a la cuestión de la identidad o identidades. Beckett trata todos estos temas de forma artística en su teatro. Puedo concluir que el trauma está físicamente presente en las obras de Beckett quien consiguió crear un nuevo lenguaje teatral, donde el trauma y la memoria son los protagonistas.

Las teorías mnemotécnicas han demostrado ser útiles en la organización de mi tesis. El primer *locus* de memoria analizado ha sido la habitación. El *locus* de la habitación en *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Eh Joe* y *A Piece of Monologue*, es realmente el útero y la tumba de las memorias dolorosas de los personajes. Las habitaciones en estas obras sirven como contenedores, activadores de memoria, y como memorias en su esencia. Como las habitaciones imaginarias de Simónides para mejorar la conservación de la memoria, las habitaciones en estas obras de Beckett son contenedores para la memoria o más bien las tumbas de las memorias reprimidas de los personajes; hay una unión especial entre el personaje y la habitación; la habitación en sí sirve como un refugio y representa el universo de sus personajes, teniendo en cuenta que normalmente no hay puertas que les comunican con el exterior. Todos los personajes encarcelados en sus habitaciones presentan los síntomas catatónicos, que señalan su aislamiento total del mundo exterior. Por otra parte, todos los personajes en estas obras están anclados en rutinas que representan movimientos repetitivos sin

sentido alguno y pueden ser analizadas como “behavioural re-enactments” (Freud), que por lo tanto se pueden relacionar con el trauma. Las habitaciones pueden ser los paisajes de diversos tipos de traumas, aunque el trauma, que está en el campo común en todos, es el trauma del nacimiento, la habitación siendo el útero y la tumba de las memorias, su Alfa y su Omega.

Otro tipo de memoria *locus* analizado son los paisajes de la memoria acústica. El paisaje rítmico del sonido del mar en *Embers* y el sonido de los pies de May en *Footfalls* sirven como activadores de memorias dolorosas de los personajes y al mismo tiempo son sonidos de su vida. Estos sonidos marcan el tiempo en sí y su duración en estas obras, al mismo tiempo creando un vacío de su existencia. Teniendo en cuenta la teoría de Bergson sobre la duración (cantidad-calidad), el significado de estos sonidos está transformado desde la pura duración a la sustitución de una vida dolorosa de los personajes. Los 9 pasos giratorios de May la unen no solo a la vida intrauterina, sino también al trauma del nacimiento/muerte. Estos pasos de May pueden ser “behavioural re-enactments” que la lleven a la seguridad del vientre materno. El sonido del mar en *Embers* es también el sonido de la existencia de Henry, su obsesión, su tortura y su memoria. Además este sonido actúa al nivel de un padre-sustituto para el personaje.

Y el último *locus* analizado en esta tesis es el vacío como espacio teatral (*That Time, Not I, Play*); aunque este espacio desempeña distintos papeles en las obras de Beckett, la función común que tiene en todas las obras es la representación del subconsciente y el vacío oscuro de las memorias reprimidas. El contraste escénico de Luz/Oscuridad añade una calidad de pesadilla a todos los espacios teatrales en las obras de Beckett, con la excepción de *Embers*, que está dramatizada en forma de sonido en la oscuridad de la mente del público, siendo una obra de radio; y otra excepción es *Happy Days* con la luz ardiente durante toda la obra. El contraste de Luz/Oscuridad siempre es una señal de las mentes atormentadas de sus personajes, por lo tanto del trauma.

Hay escasez de los objetos escénicos en las obras, pero algunos de los objetos han sido analizados en su relación con el trauma: el perro de juguete y el despertador en *Endgame*, la bolsa de Winnie y su contenido (los objetos que ella saca de este bolso) en *Happy Days*, y el magnetofón en *Krapp's Last Tape*. Todos los objetos pierden sus

significados comunes y adquieren otros significados en las obras. En su conjunto, los objetos sirven para activar las memorias de los personajes al igual que son pasatiempos. Algunos objetos encarnan las memorias traumáticas de los personajes, por ejemplo el perro de juguete de Hamm es el símbolo del trauma del abandono, y le recuerda su infancia sin amor y sin afecto. El despertador en la misma obra es un recurso de dramatización del futuro trauma de separación, su función en el escenario es de intensificador de este tipo de trauma al igual que de la muerte. Cuando Clov abandonará a Hamm, el otro que no puede valerse por sí mismo está predestinado a la muerte. El magnetofón en *Krapp's Last Tape*, aunque siendo un objeto escénico, es otro protagonista en esta obra, que tiene la llave del pasado de Krapp. Este objeto trasciende la frontera entre lo mecánico y lo humano y representa la memoria *per se* en esta obra. La manipulación de Krapp con el magnetofón representa los procesos mentales de la memoria: recordar, olvidar y reprimir las memorias. Teniendo en cuenta que el magnetofón tiene las voces de otros Krapps, que vienen de su pasado, él puede ser el instrumento de la división de su identidad en la obra.

En lo que concierne a las técnicas utilizadas para escenificar el trauma, las voces incorporadas en las obras de *Eh Joe* y *That Time* han llevado a la conclusión de que la separación de la voz del cuerpo puede ser considerada como una técnica de la escenificación del trauma. En ambas obras hay personajes mudos, privados de la voz de la autoridad, que están escuchando a las voces que provienen del exterior. Esto convierte a estos personajes en meros observadores de sus memorias. En *Eh Joe* el género de la voz crea una tensión teatral; la característica de esta voz siendo femenina añade la calidad de la pesadilla que viene del pasado del protagonista, convirtiéndola en una voz traumática. Joe presenta síntomas de PTSD, y la voz sirve como un instrumento de su tortura mental y un activador de su memoria más dolorosa (el suicidio de la chica). Además de esto, la voz resucita un conflicto interno entre su fe y su presente identidad, causando los sentimientos de culpabilidad y vergüenza. Esta voz es violenta por su naturaleza al igual que el trauma del que ella está hablando. En *That Time* las voces están divididas en tres, y aunque las voces son en su esencia los puntos de la inflexión del ABM del protagonista (A-voz es la voz de la vejez, B-voz es la voz de la juventud, y C-voz es la voz de la madurez), la cronología está ausente en sus discursos: superposición, ecos y repeticiones de memorias desestabilizan su discurso ya inestable.

La multiplicidad de las voces apunta a la crisis de la identidad y a la inestabilidad de los puntos de inflexión, y por eso a la fragilidad del ABM del protagonista. La otra obra, analizada bajo la luz de las voces incorpóreas, ha sido *Footfalls*, donde hay un diálogo entre May y la voz de su madre que proviene de la oscuridad escénica. En contraste con otras obras analizadas, las dos voces en esta obra están al unísono, alcanzando el clímax de pseudo-fusión. Ambas voces imploran a la unión absoluta, y esto lleva a la representación del trauma de “nunca haber nacido” (“never been born”).

La discontinuidad del cuerpo y su mutilación es otra de las técnicas escénicas para representar el trauma, que puede ser el resultado de los conflictos mentales no resueltos y una incompleta existencia externa. Con la completa ausencia del cuerpo en algunas de las obras de Beckett, la memoria de los personajes está aun más fragmentada; la fragmentación parcial del cuerpo también apunta a la discontinuidad de la memoria. La escenificación de una boca, separada del cuerpo en *Not I*, une esta obra a la narración del trauma. Boca órfico incapaz de contener la diarrea verbal, se transforma no solo en el órgano de lenguaje y en la memoria fragmentada, pero también en una vagina (uniendo la obra al trauma del abuso sexual) y el ano (que representa el proceso de la expulsión). Escenificando partes del cuerpo separados en *That Time, Not I* y en *Play*, por una parte crea una nueva dimensión de pesadilla, y por otra parte, desgarrando el cuerpo escénico está fragmentando la memoria de los personajes y divide a sus identidades. Otra técnica de la distorsión del cuerpo en el teatro de Beckett es la unión entre el cuerpo fragmentado de los personajes con los objetos escénicos (urnas, cubos de basura, el montículo de tierra, etc.). Esa fusión se fortalece desde *Endgame* y llega al apogeo en *Play*. La ausencia del movimiento de los personajes escénicos crea un conflicto y una tensión con la realidad externa y al mismo tiempo con sus interiores. El cuerpo se queda fijo y atrapado en su forma y en el flujo de su memoria. En *Happy Days*, por ejemplo, la fusión de Winnie con el montículo de tierra es la tumba de sus deseos sexuales y un escudo potente contra el trauma del abuso sexual. Con la ausencia parcial o total del cuerpo, los personajes presentan la inseguridad ontológica y sentimientos de vergüenza (*Happy Days, Not I*), que crea una imposibilidad de afrontar sus traumas.

El lenguaje de las obras también presenta algunas de las características del trauma: los personajes son incapaces de controlar sus voces (*A Piece of Monologue, Not I, Eh Joe, That Time*): la negación del discurso en primera persona singular es el síntoma del PTSD. Por consiguiente, los personajes de Beckett contemplan sus identidades pasadas como extrañas. La centralidad de la memoria está ausente en el teatro de Beckett: Beckett les niega la cronología de sus recuerdos con “yo” como centro de la memoria. En sus obras el centro es imposible de alcanzar (en la memoria o en la posición escénica). Por eso la narración adquiere las características de repeticiones, “flashbacks” (recuerdos fragmentados), ecos, repetición con cambios que añaden diferentes recuerdos cada vez que se repiten, y superposiciones. La memoria tiende a ser muy frágil e inestable, especialmente en el vacío del pasado. En muchas de sus obras (*Endgame, A Piece of Monologue, Happy Days*), los personajes hasta juegan con sus memorias, recreando el juego *fort-da* de Freud, o el movimiento “delante-atrás” del péndulo. Para recordar los personajes tienen que encontrar el recuerdo en el laberinto de su desorganizada e inestable memoria, en algunas obras los personajes están hasta “guiados” por la ayuda externa (la Luz en *Play*, etc.) para recordar, o en otros casos hay activadores de sus memorias. Los recuerdos involuntarios tienen un valor espacial en el teatro de Beckett y son los más difíciles de recordar. Por eso, en algunas de las obras (*Play, Eh Joe*) Beckett crea unos recursos técnicos para interrogar y atormentar a los personajes: la Luz en *Play* y el ojo de la cámara en *Eh Joe*. Ambos son interrogadores y testigos, afectados por el trauma secundario (vicario) de simple escucha. Todos los laberintos de memoria de los personajes están llenos de “callejones sin salida” y los vacíos de olvido, o memorias reprimidas y bloqueadas por los propios personajes. El bloqueo de la memoria como escudo contra memorias dolorosas es una característica común en el teatro de Beckett. Sus personajes están auto-protegiéndose de memorias reprimidas en sus rutinas, además de jugar con los objetos escénicos y con el lenguaje y contar cuentos. Beckett utiliza omisiones, bloqueos de memoria y repeticiones con variaciones como técnicas de represión de las memorias desagradables. Estas memorias reprimidas pueden convertirse, por ejemplo, en el zumbido de Boca: están allí, pero escondidas y protegidas. La fabulación de la memoria (“screen-memory”) es otra de las técnicas potentes de esconder los recuerdos dolorosos: la historia de Henry sobre Bolton en *Embers*, la historia de Hamm sobre el niño en *Endgame*, y la historia de Winnie sobre Mildred en *Happy Days*. Estas historias han

sido analizadas desde el punto de vista de la fabulación de la memoria al igual que los recuerdos reprimidos que pueden contener. Todas estas historias cobran la forma de la caja de la memoria (los recuerdos dolorosos envueltos por otros recuerdos como escudo). El recuerdo reprimido resurge de vez en cuando de forma repetitiva; el recuerdo está acompañado de sensaciones y emociones fuertes del personaje. El suceso en sí (“qué”) normalmente está ausente/olvidado, el personaje intenta no recordar a toda costa, por lo consiguiente el recuerdo resurge de forma circular. El personaje siempre recuerda las circunstancias de este suceso (tiempo, colores, imágenes) o sea el *locus* (“flashbulb memory”), esto le sirve como escudo para no recordar el “qué”. La duplicidad de la memoria de Winnie también ha sido analizada en relación con la represión primaria y secundaria de Freud, cuando dos recuerdos dolorosos están fusionados en uno. La fabulación de la memoria de Henry ha sido tratada desde la perspectiva del trauma de la culpabilidad filial. De forma paradójica, Henry quiere recuperar el recuerdo del suicidio de su padre, que le lleva al síndrome de obsesión-compulsión; sin embargo fantaseando sobre su muerte una y otra vez, es incapaz de hablar de ella en primera persona singular y afrontar el suceso fuera de la fábula. Por otra parte, la historia de Hamm le ayuda a esconder la verdad sobre el nacimiento de Clov y mantenerlo a su lado. Aunque dramatizando el trauma del futuro abandono, Hamm no está preparado para afrontarla.

Como consecuencia de los distintos traumas, los personajes de Beckett presentan ciertos síntomas de regresión al pasado (infancia) y el deseo de la unión con la madre. Sus memorias tienden a regresar a la situación placentera de la oscuridad del vientre materno. Winnie, por ejemplo, algunas veces utiliza el lenguaje infantil. Hamm a su vez juega con el perro de peluche deseando sustituir el cariño perdido, y May quiere alcanzar la fusión física y completa con su madre. Las tres voces (A, B, C) en *That Time* desean el regreso a la infancia y la seguridad de la piedra que era su refugio en el tiempo de niñez. El punto de inflexión más estable en todas estas obras es el momento de nacimiento; y la memoria autobiográfica es inestable por la razón de que los personajes son incapaces de localizar sus sucesos personales en el tiempo de forma cronológica. La inestabilidad de la memoria llega al apogeo en *A Piece of Monologue*, en la cual el lenguaje y la narración cobran la forma del movimiento del péndulo, y solo los funerales sirven como puntos de inflexión en la memoria del Narrador. El Narrador, al

igual que Boca en *Not I*, está dudando de su propia memoria a través de las confirmaciones-negaciones. Y en *Not I*, Boca se interroga a sí misma, demostrando esta inseguridad. Las Voces en *That Time* utilizan de forma imprecisa “that time” como referencias en el tiempo, y como la mayoría de los personajes de Beckett, son incapaces de localizar sus recuerdos y sus pasadas identidades en el tiempo; el discurso en primera persona del singular esta prácticamente ausente, todo esto apunta a la crisis de la identidad. Beckett también utiliza el espejismo de Lacan como una técnica para escenificar esta crisis. Al igual que Voz C, que era incapaz de reconocerse a sí mismo en el espejo, la mayoría de los personajes de Beckett no se reconocen a sí mismos en sus antiguas identidades. Krapp, por ejemplo, se ríe de sí mismo con la edad de 39; W2 sustituye su recuerdo por el de W1 en *Play*; May crea un lenguaje de espejismo en su narración. Por lo tanto Beckett niega una identidad estable a sus personajes; su presente identidad escénica es lo único que ellos tienen. La identidad escénica en las obras minimalistas esta creada por los elementos teatrales estables y el lenguaje, que son el reflejo del escenario en penumbra. Por ejemplo, en *A Piece of Monologue* la presente identidad del Narrador está encarnada en sus rutinas de la noche, su auto-descripción, su lámpara como oyente, y sus palabras.

En las obras de Beckett, el proceso de recordar, activado por los instrumentos externos, es normalmente doloroso. Los personajes son incapaces de unir sus memorias en ABM, y los mecanismos de recuerdo siempre se manifiestan al nivel sensori-motor a través de imágenes y sensaciones; pero siempre hay bloqueo del suceso en sí, por eso se puede hacer el paralelismo al estado latente en su existencia escénica. El proceso de recordar más traumático está puesto en escena en *Not I*, la narración viene en forma de repetición de imágenes perturbadoras de posiciones del cuerpo, los sonidos y la fragmentación del lenguaje en sí. Su narración afecta al espectador y apunta a un suceso terrible. La imposibilidad de transformar los sucesos pasados dolorosos en palabras, hace que el lenguaje de los personajes de Beckett esté fragmentado y lleno de falsos comienzos. El trauma del fracaso es evidente, ya que los personajes no son capaces de narrar sus recuerdos importantes de forma coherente.

Está comprobado, por la presente tesis, que el trauma del nacimiento cobra el papel más importante en sus obras; a raíz de este trauma emergen otros traumas

secundarios como el trauma de la culpabilidad del progenitor y la culpabilidad filial; los traumas de la soledad y del fracaso son las consecuencias de la propia existencia en su teatro. El trauma de luto/duelo (*Krapp's Last Tape, A Piece of Monologue*), siendo un trauma de sosiego, está tratado en sus obras de forma existencial: la vida de sus personajes es un suceso de las pérdidas de los seres queridos, de esta forma el trauma de la muerte cobra vida en el teatro de Beckett. El trauma del abuso sexual tiene otro tipo de naturaleza; en *Not I* y *Happy Days* la violencia de este trauma está puesta en el escenario mediante el lenguaje físico y el lenguaje atormentado de los personajes, al igual que el trauma del suicidio en *Eh Joe*.

La investigación de esta tesis ha proporcionado un estudio original de la escenificación del trauma en el teatro de Beckett; los enfoques psicológico y psicoanalítico han completado este análisis y han añadido una perspectiva distinta al significado de sus obras. Por razones obvias me ha sido imposible hacer un estudio de fondo sobre todos los tipos del trauma: el trauma vicario y el trauma del envejecimiento han sido tratados de forma breve, por lo tanto ellos pueden presentar un interés especial para las futuras líneas de la investigación. Otro aspecto de estudio interesante es la victimización del lugar de los personajes de Beckett aplicado al lenguaje teatral, desde el punto de vista del trauma. El análisis del lenguaje como el movimiento del péndulo es otra de las líneas que podría ser desafiante y fructífera. Además esta tesis abre la posibilidad de la escenificación de los tabúes de la sociedad en el teatro de Beckett, como algo traumático para el público.

Hay que tener en cuenta que el estudio psicológico del trauma no está completo; el trauma *per se* se ha convertido en un campo muy importante de la investigación desde el siglo XX. Sus consecuencias pueden variar y afectar a personas de forma diferente y además la sociedad está en un proceso de cambio permanente, por eso los psicólogos siguen trabajando en este campo. Beckett se ha adelantado a su propio tiempo en la cuestión del trauma; este dramaturgo ha hecho presente este fenómeno en su escena a través del lenguaje de sus personajes, tratamiento del cuerpo escénico y el propio escenario. El trauma cobra voz en sus obras y su público está convertido en los testigos. El trauma ontológico de la existencia está físicamente presente en su escena, y hace que el espectador cuestione su propia vida. El universo, en el cual sus personajes



*Conclusiones[Conclusions in Spanish]*

están intentando existir con lo poco que les queda en un mundo que se extingue, ya es traumático. Y las imágenes de sus obras se quedan grabadas en nuestras mentes para siempre.

“Beckett’s late “memory-plays” do something similar: each impresses a strong, evocative single image onto our memories, images – a displaced mouth, a floating toothless head, a pacing ghostly figure, an ashen rocking woman – that are disturbing and difficult to forget, that, as Cicero suggests in his discourse on memory, have ‘the capacity of encountering and speedily penetrating the mind’.” (Malkin 1999: 41)

Beckett no nos proporciona receta alguna de cómo sobrevivir en este mundo, quizás, solo hay una excepción: la “risa”, teniendo en cuenta que es el sentido del humor que ayuda a sus personajes a continuar. Y es el sentido del humor el que nos puede ayudar en el peor de nuestros momentos.

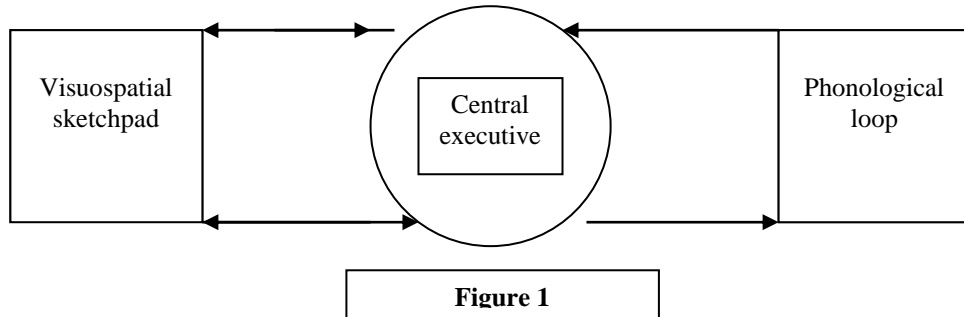


## **APPENDICES**



## APPENDIX N° 1

### WORKING MEMORY MODEL BY ALAN BADDELEY<sup>147</sup>



This model deals with Short-Term Memory, that is why it is called working memory. In the basis of this model lies human thought process. The objective of this model is to demonstrate how STM emerges into LTM. This model was proposed by Miller, Galanter and Pribram in 1960<sup>148</sup>, and was adopted by Baddeley and Hitch. Within experimental cognitive psychology nowadays there several different but complimentary approaches to working memory: one is based on the analysis of attentional control in memory, whereas others try to explain working memory data that is afterwards stored in LTM.

Hereinafter, I will try to give a brief description of this model, which is composed by three components: Central executive, Phonological Loop and Visuospatial Sketchpad.

“The three components comprised (Fig. 1) comprised a control system of limited attentional capacity, termed the central executive, which is assisted by two subsidiary storage systems: the phonological loop, which is based on sound and language, and the visuospatial sketchpad”. (Baddeley 2003: 830)

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<sup>147</sup> This model is discussed in Baddeley’s article “Working Memory: Looking Back and Looking Forward”, published in *Nature Review/neuroscience*, Vol. 4, October 2003: 829-839

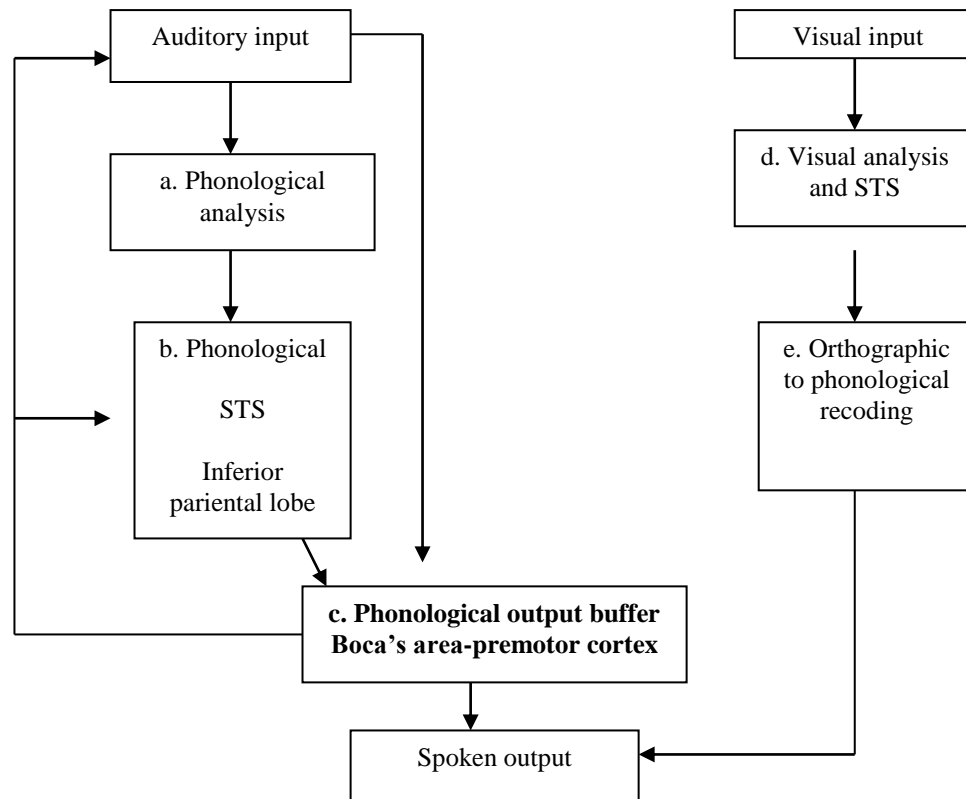
<sup>148</sup> Miller G.A, Galanter E., and Pibram K.H. 1960. *Plans and the Structure of Behaviour*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

## *Appendices*

Both phonological loop and visuospatial sketchpad are very limited in capacity, for instance, only 3-4 objects can be remembered and stored in visuospatial sketchpad. Obviously, both storages can be refreshed by re-articulation and further retrieval.

### **Phonological Loop**

This storage system could be linked to *memoria verborum*, since its function is to facilitate the acquisition of language. Thus it primarily deals with sounds and consequently words decoding. The model of phonological loop comprises of a phonological store, which can hold memory traces for a few seconds before they fade. On the retrieval it was discovered that similarity of sound is crucial for unrelated words, whereas meaning is not that important. Thus a person can confuse two words with similar sounds, but when this model is switched from STM to LTM, sounds became irrelevant and meaning gains importance. A clear example of this is Krapp's confusion with the word "viduity" and "equinox". Another important discovery was that the role of articulation comes from word length effect: memory decreases with five-syllable words. Phonological loop proper has the following composition:



**Figure 2** A. Phonological analysis. B. Short-term storage. C. The programming of speech output. D. Visual encoding. E. Grapheme-to-phoneme conversion. Auditory information gains direct access to a phonological store, after which it passes to an output buffer for recall or recycling through rehearsal. Visual material can be recorded verbally and then gain access to the phonological store through rehearsal. Modified with permission, from REF.19 (2002) John Wiley and Sons Ltd. (Baddeley 2003: 831)

Research on the phonological loop has shown that the capacity of STS for speech sounds is limited to the number of words that one can say “subvocally” (inside your mind) in about 1,5 seconds (Baddeley 2003: 2004). Research has shown that phonological loop also specializes not only in speech sounds, but other sounds as well, for instance, music. Furthermore, its activity is mainly concentrated in the areas of temporal lobes. Another interesting discovery was that phonological lobe seemingly is not involved in the speed of reading and written word comprehension by fluent readers. (Baddeley 1993).

**The visuospatial sketchpad**

If Phonological Loop may stand for *memoria verborum*, the visuospatial sketchpad has to do with *memoria rerum*. In combining the words “visual” and “spatial”, we have the essence of mnemotechnics. The visuospatial sketchpad is a part of working memory that consists of an integration of group of mental processes, which encodes objects in space. The function of this system is to acquire semantic knowledge about the appearance of objects and how to use them, and for understanding complex systems such as machinery, as well as spatial orientation and geographic knowledge. This system is associated with the activity in a pathway that extends from occipital to the temporal lobes.

**The central executive**

The central executive seems to be the most important but less understood component of working memory. Though it has been treated as a pool of general processing knowledge. From central executive the information goes to Episodic LTM, which is a limited capacity store that binds together information to form integrated episodes. It is assumed to be attentionally controlled by the executive and conscious awareness.



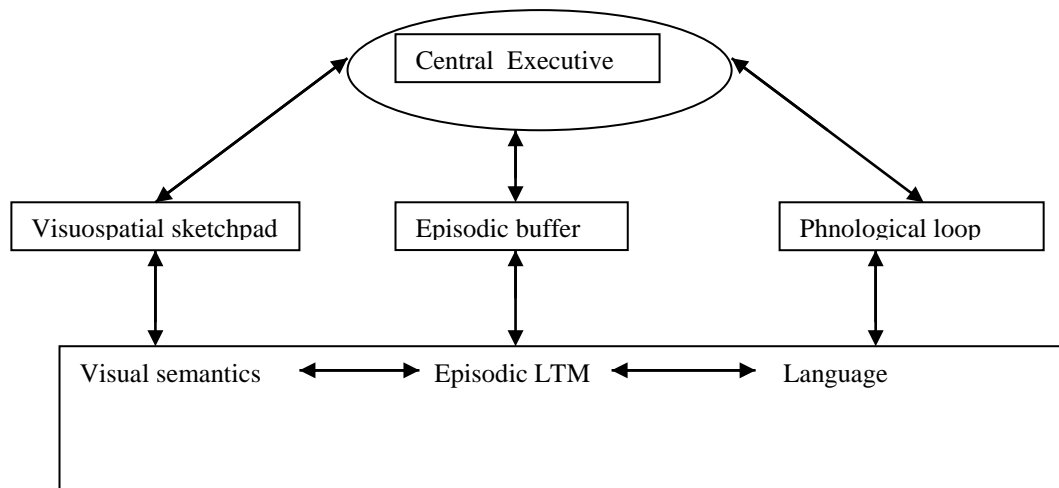


Figure 3. The multi-component working memory. Visuospatial sketchpad, episodic buffer and phonological loop are fluid systems, although visual semantics, episodic LTM and language are crystallized knowledge. The episodic buffer provides an interface between the subsystems of working memory and LTM. (Baddeley 2003: 835)

### Episodic buffer

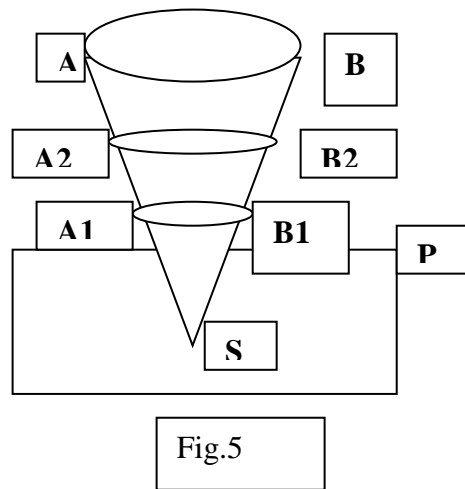
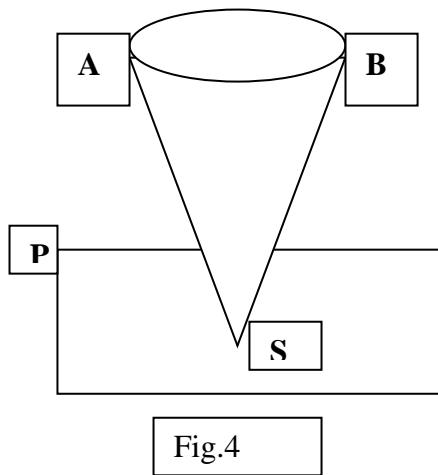
This system receives input from many sources, temporally stores this information and then integrates it in order to construct a mental episode of what is being experienced right now. Episodic buffer stores the information in a complex memory codes, such as phonemic, visual and semantic.

“The multi-component working memory model has a concept of information, but neither equivalent to Freud’s concept of mental energy, nor indeed to the concept of arousal. Without this the system is incomplete.” (Baddeley 2003: 837)



## APPENDIX Nº 2

In his book *Matter and Memory*, Bergson illustrates pure memory with the image of memory cones (MM 152,162).



For S, Bergson takes the present perception of a body, A-B constitute all unconscious memories, and P is the plane of actual representation of the universe. At the point of cone S is the image of the body focussed into a point of present perception, which is in plane B, consequently it participates in the plane of representation of universe. From S memories or images go directly to A-B, where they are stored accordingly. The process may be also inverted, if one needs to remember. In this case, a past image goes down to S, obviously the organization of past images is also according to its distance in the past (Fig. 5). By this, we can understand that memory for Bergson is mobile and progressive. Figure 4 represents a model of “pure memory”. Bergson states that it is not easy to bring the images from their unconscious level, but normally images are extracted by similarity: in order to remember one image we go through different images to get the precise one that we need.

## *Appendices*

After a close look at Figure 5, I have arrived to the conclusion that it is also relevant for defining identities, since even pure memory is not viewed as a whole: it can be divided into different phases or episodes, distanced in time and/or similarity. A1-B1 and A2-B2 are different in nature, and probably, in perception, but they belong to the plan A. Thus, they are retrieved as a feature of A-B, but separately. Besides, a conic shape for pure memory points out to the amount of memory that we accumulate with time, since in the point S there is only present perception, which is small and instantaneous.

## APPENDIX N° 3

### *ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF KINDS OF MEMORY*<sup>149</sup>

Abnormal	<b>Human</b>	Prospective
Abstract	Iconic illusive	Public autobiographical
<b>Accessible</b>	Illusory	<b>Raw</b>
<b>Acoustic</b>	<b>Immediate</b>	<b>Reactivated</b>
Acquisition	Immunological	Real-world
Active	Impaired	<b>Recall memory</b>
Active cultural	Implicit	Recent
Affective	Implicit conceptual	Recognition
Age-related	Improved	Recollective
Age-related-relational	<b>Inaccessible</b>	<b>Reconstructive</b>
Allocentric	<b>Inaccurate</b>	Recovered
Allocentric-spacial	Independent	Reference
Animal memory	<b>Indirect</b>	Reflective
Anterograde	<b>Individual</b>	Relational
Archival cultural	<b>autobiographical</b>	Remote
Arousal-mediated	<b>Infant memory</b>	Repisodic
Articulated	Intentional	Representational
<b>Associative</b>	<b>Involuntary</b>	Representative
<b>Auditory</b>	Involuntary conscious	Retrieved
<b>Autobiographical</b>	Item-based	Retrograde
<b>Bodily</b>	Item memory	Retrospective
Brain-stem	Labile	Reviewed
Cache memory	Latent	Right memory
Categorical	Later	Rote
Cellular	Lexical	Scratch-pad
Cerebellar	<b>Life</b>	<b>Screen</b>
Chemical	List	Secondary
<b>Childhood</b>	Literal	<b>Self-defining</b>
Cognitive	Locale memory	<b>Self memory</b>
<b>Collective</b>	<b>Long-term</b>	Semantic
<b>Color memory</b>	Long-term familiarity	Semi-permanent
Concrete	Material-specific	<b>Sense memory</b>
Configural	Mechanical	Sensitive memory
<b>Conscious</b>	Medial temporal lobe	Sensory
Constructive	<b>Melodic</b>	<b>Sentence</b>
Context	Meta-memory	<b>Shape memory</b>
Context-dependent	Mobile memory	<b>Short-term</b>
Cortical	Modal memory	Single
<b>Cultural</b>	Mood-dependent	Skilled
Declarative	Motor	<b>Sleep memory</b>
Diencephalic	Muscular	Social

<sup>149</sup> This classification is published in *The Foundations of Remembering* in the essay “Roddy Roedigger’s Memory” by Nairne, James (2007: 50).

<p>Direct Discovered <b>Disembodied</b> Distinct Distributed <b>Dream memory</b> Dynamic Early Echoic Elementary <b>Emotional</b> Enhanced <b>Episodic</b> Episodic-like ERP (event-related potentials) Evaluative <b>Event memory</b> Everyday Experiential Expert Explicit External <b>Eyewitness</b> Facial Fact memory Factual False Fear-dependent Fear memory First <b>Flashbulb</b> <b>Forgotten</b> Frontal Future General General political Generic Genetic Genuine Gist memory Global <b>Habit</b> Hippocampally-mediated <b>Historical</b></p>	<p><b>Musical</b> <b>Narrative</b> <b>Natural</b> Network Neural Neuronal New memory Nonconscious Nondeclarative Nonhippocampally dependent Normal <b>Object-in-place</b> <b>Object-object association</b> Object-recognition Object-reward association Object working <b>Odor memory</b> Older memory <b>Olfactory</b> Ordinary <b>Organized</b> Original Particular political Pavlovian Pavlovian fear <b>Perceptual</b> Perceptually-rich <b>Permanent</b> <b>Personal</b> <b>Personal episodic</b> <b>Personal semantic</b> Phonetic Phonological <b>Place memory</b> Political Potential Practiced Prefrontal Primary Primate Primitive Re-embodied Prior <b>Procedural</b> Prose</p>	<p>Socialized Source <b>Spatial</b> Spatial working Specific Standard State-dependent Stimulus-response habit <b>Stored</b> Subcortical Subsequent Superior Synaptic Tacit Target memory <b>Temporal</b> Temporal context Test memory Time memory Topographical Traceless Traditional Transactive <b>Trauma</b> <b>Traumatic</b> Trial-unique object recognition True Typical Unaware <b>Unconscious</b> Uncontaminated Unimpaired Unintentional Unitary Unwanted <b>Verbal</b> Verbatim Veridical <b>Visual</b> <b>Visual spatial</b> <b>Voice</b> Waking Well-practiced Working</p>
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*The types of memories marked in bold are discussed in the present thesis.*

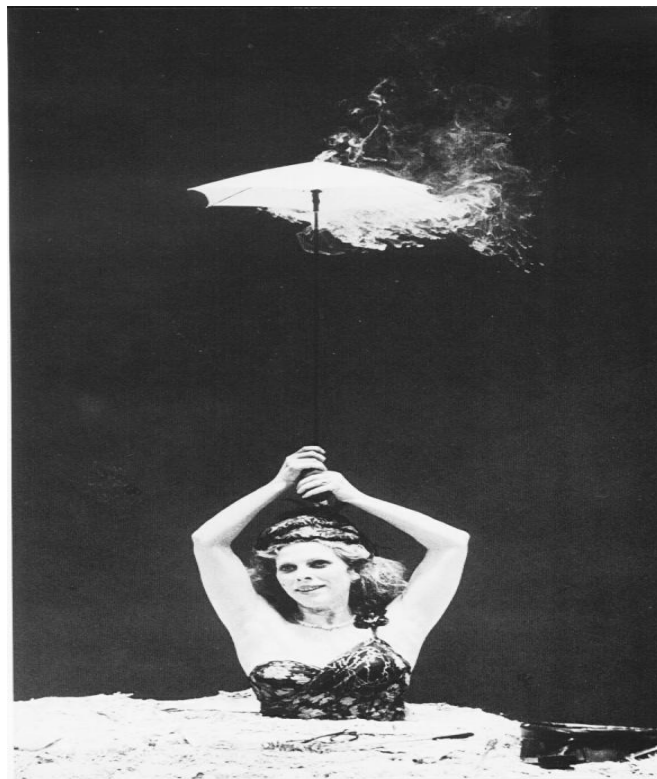
## APPENDIX N° 4

### IMAGES ON STAGE /PHOTOS



Hume Cronyn in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

(Vivian Beaumont Theater, New York, 1972)



Billie Whitelaw from a production of *Happy Days*.



Billie Whitelaw in *Footfalls*, directed by Samuel Beckett.

(Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976. Photo by John Minihan)



A ghastly image of Billie Whitelaw in the premiere production of *Footfalls*.



*Appendices*



Peter Hall and Peggy Ashcroft as Willie and Winnie in the National Theatre production of *Happy Days*.



Jack MacGowran demonstrates a working alarm clock to Patrick Magee in *Endgame* (Aldwych Theatre, London, 1964).

*Appendices*



"You drive me mad, I'm mad!"  
Clov (Steven Spencer) rages at Hamm (Clayton Garrett) in *Endgame*.

(Rogue & Peasant Theatre Company; Kingston, Ontario, 2001. Photo by Melanie Willis.)



"Biscuit. I've kept you half."  
Aaron Miedema proffers Linda Worsley a snack in a 2001 production of *Endgame* in Kingston, Ontario.

(Rogue & Peasant Theatre Company; Kingston, Ontario, 2001. Photo by Melanie Willis.)

*Appendices*



*Not I* (film directed by Alan Schnieder, 1973, Billie Whitelaw starring).



## APPENDIX Nº 5

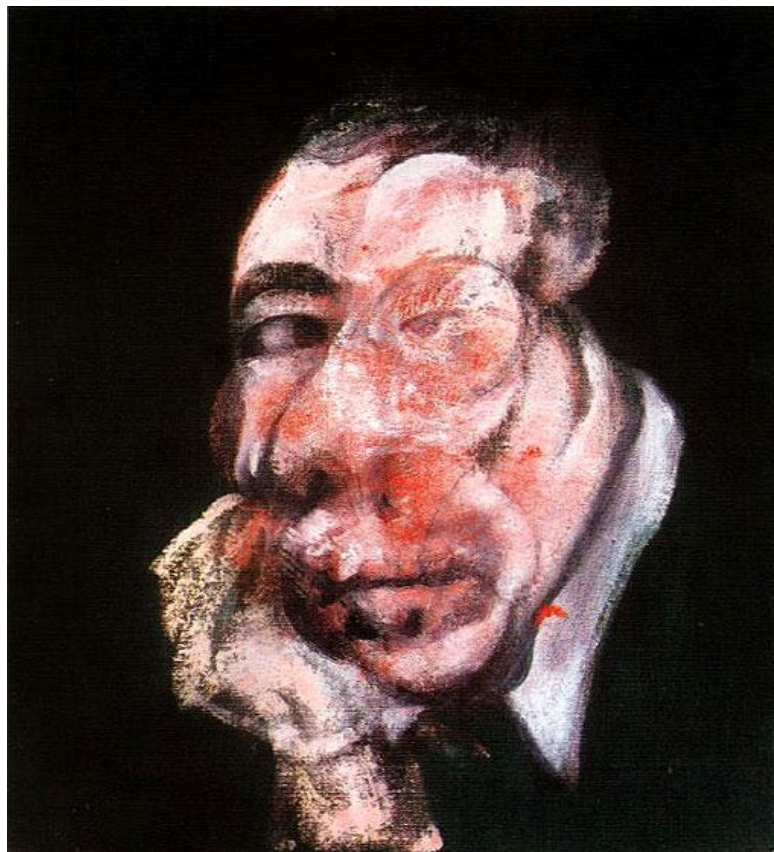
### Francis Bacon's Painting



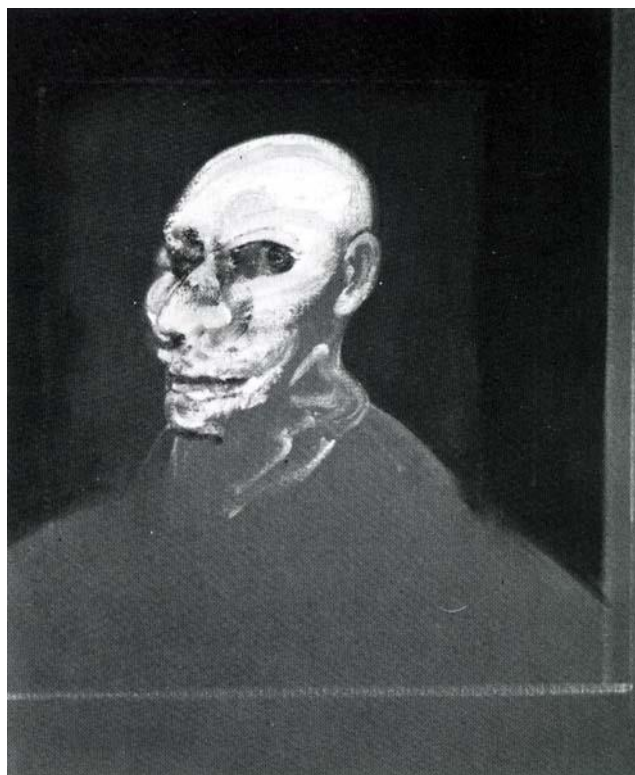
"Figure in Frame", 1950



"Study for Three Heads", 1944



"Head III", 1961



“Painting (head of a man)”, 1950

**APPENDIX Nº 6**



Senmut Granite Statue (1490 B.C., the Museum of Berlin)





Great Sphinx of Tanis (2600 B.C., the Louvre Museum)



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