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**“old tales to keep the void from pouring in”:
Screen Memories in
Samuel Beckett’s Works**

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ABSTRACT

According to Freud, 'screen memories' are those memories from childhood that have been distorted and hide a trauma that the 'ego' has not been capable of accepting yet. This B. A. Thesis aims to analyze how the Irish author Samuel Beckett uses screen memories as a literary device in different ways in his narrative works *From an Abandoned Work* and *Company* and in his plays *Krapp's Last Tape* and *That Time*. In addition, this dissertation shows that the content from those screen memories was often based on Beckett's own life experiences regarding the relationship with his parents and their deaths, his unappreciated sensitivity and his fear of parenthood.

Keywords: Screen memories, Sigmund Freud, Samuel Beckett, Trauma

RESUMEN

Sigmund Freud acuñó el término 'recuerdos encubridores' para referirse a aquellos recuerdos de la infancia que han sido distorsionados y ocultan un trauma que el 'ego' no ha sido capaz de aceptar. Este TFG analiza cómo el autor irlandés Samuel Beckett utiliza los recuerdos encubridores como recurso literario en sus obras en prosa *From an Abandoned Work* y *Company* y en sus piezas teatrales *Krapp's Last Tape* y *That Time*. Además, también pretende mostrar que el contenido de esos recuerdos encubridores está a menudo inspirado en las vivencias personales del autor en cuanto a la relación con sus padres y sus respectivos fallecimientos, su ignorada sensibilidad y su miedo a la paternidad.

Palabras clave: Recuerdos encubridores, Sigmund Freud, Samuel Beckett, Trauma

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Introduction

Childhood memories are essential in the lives and psychology of every human being. Among them, we find a group that the psychologist and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud denominated ‘screen memories’. These are memories which are particularly well-fixed in our minds and which have an apparently trivial content because they hide something that has not been accepted by the ego. This concept from psychoanalysis was used by Samuel Beckett as a literary resource in some of his works, as I will illustrate in this dissertation.

Due to the importance of memory and remembrance in Beckett’s compositions, several scholars have explored this topic in depth. For instance, Svetlana Antrópova Antrópova examined it in different plays in her PhD dissertation *Staging Memory and Trauma: Past Voices and Bodies Haunting the Present in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett*. Some other authors like Verna June Macdonald Brown in her thesis *Yesterday’s Deformities: A Discussion of the Role of Memory and Discourse in the Plays of Samuel Beckett* also analyzed the use of memory in Beckett’s theatre. However, I will focus on screen memories in particular in both dramatic and narrative works.

With my analysis, I will try to illustrate that Samuel Beckett used his own autobiographical experiences as screen memories which constantly fill his works. My objectives are therefore identifying the screen memories in Samuel Beckett’s works with his life and analyzing the way in which he transforms those experiences into a literary device. My final objective is to portray the different ways in which the literary resource of screen memory is employed in his prose creations *From an Abandoned Work* (1957), *Company* (1980) and his plays *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) and *That Time* (1976).

To achieve this, I will first recognize screen memories’ similarities with Samuel Beckett’s autobiography and I will analyze how they are integrated in the text and which role they play in the work in particular. I will also concentrate on their formal differences and the different functions they perform.

Thus, this dissertation will be divided into two chapters. The first one, “Psychoanalysis and ‘screen memories’: From Sigmund Freud to our days” serves as a

theoretical background to the whole work. It includes some notions on the link between Samuel Beckett and psychoanalysis, the description of screen memories by Freud and posterior scholars, and some ideas on how they have been studied in other literary works. The second chapter “Screen memories in Samuel Beckett’s works” includes the analysis as such after a brief introduction on the literary usage of screen memories by Samuel Beckett. This chapter is divided into sections according to the screen memories’ topic. These sections are: “Parent-child relationship”, which deals with the relationship with his parents and the child’s unappreciated sensitivity and fears, and “The trauma of parenthood”, which is concerned with his fear of conception and parenthood.

Psychoanalysis and ‘screen memories’:

From Sigmund Freud to our days

1.1 Samuel Beckett and psychoanalysis

Freud’s theories about psychoanalysis were widely influential in the twentieth century and Samuel Beckett was not an exception. He had a close relationship with psychoanalysis and Freud’s theories. He was knowledgeable about the topic, as it can be proven by the two notebooks full of notes on the topic that he left, and he even underwent psychoanalysis.

In a context when psychological theories and psychoanalysis were awakening the interest of the different artistic and intellectual circles of the time, Beckett also showed interest in them. His interest was so strong that he himself underwent psychoanalysis in London by Wilfred Bion from 1933, when his father and his cousin-lover died, to 1935 (Nixon 38). Beckett suffered from anxiety and panic attacks and he chose Bion for the psychotherapy because they both shared the idea that infant memories were essential for the development of individuals (Feldman 89). The main topics under analysis were the complex emotions felt for his mother, who had always been too demanding and strict on him, especially after his father’s death (Nixon 38), his sentimental problems with women and his turbulent love relationship with his cousin Peggy Sinclair (Feldman 86).

After having experienced psychological therapy for three years, he quitted it and replaced Bion’s role with writing material about melancholy (Nixon 44), in which he found relief in approaching his internal world (Miller 6). As a writer, he used the free associational technique of psychoanalysis (215), a concept coined by Freud which consists in the patient speaking for himself and saying whatever comes to his mind in each moment without any kind of censorship (Thurschwell 24), so that the patient and the analyst together can have a better understanding of the problems treated (36). So, Samuel

Beckett displayed his inner thoughts and ideas in his works. Moreover, Freud did not only give importance to words, but also to moments of silence and body language, which were as meaningful as words. Beckett shared that idea and it may have been what inspired him to give so much weight to silence and gesture in his plays (38).

Beckett was especially interested in the issue of dreams and the unconscious. For this reason, he used some memories obsessively in the different works he wrote (Nixon 42). Many of the memories which he incessantly comes back to are related to his father's death and his mourning. For example, one of the most recurrent memories that he uses is walking with his father across the Dublin Mountains (43). The reason why he used those memories is because they work as a 'screen' to relieve the pain he felt and recreate that lost paternal presence through his works.

1.2 Sigmund Freud on 'screen memories'

The concept of 'screen memory' was first coined by Sigmund Freud in his paper "Screen Memories" (1899). This article focuses on childhood memories, which first appear usually between the ages of two and four, although the time may vary depending on the person (Freud 6), and claims that all of them are mnemonic images (8). Mnemonic images are a psychic stigma that results from a displacement, which is an unconscious defence mechanism by which the mind substitutes an unaccepted object for a new one (Richard). Freud claims that we change our perception of memories with time and that we can never access them in their original form (24). He also establishes that within childhood memories, there are three distinguished types: scenes repeatedly described by parents, small occurrences which are displaced memories of important events, and screen memories (12-13).

Screen memories are childhood memories with an apparently insignificant and trivial content which are extremely well fixed in our minds (Freud 22). It may result striking how we remember so well such an irrelevant memory and the reason for it is that "the essential elements of an experience are represented in memory by the inessential elements of the same experience" (9). Behind apparent innocent memories, there usually lies an unsuspected meaningful significance (11). According to Freud, screen memories are displaced memories because they hide something unaccepted by the ego (12-13). The

ego does not accept the distressing affect of a certain memory and therefore, by being in conflict with it, the ego represses that memory and substitutes it with an apparently innocent one (11). This is to say, screen memories have two layers: the hidden psychic truth and the 'screen' concealing layer (22). Screen memories have a defensive function because they keep a 'screened-off' aspect of a painful reality from surfacing into consciousness, they 'screen' an afflictive reality (Lansky 98). The reason why we, without even being aware of it, use childhood and not adulthood memories in this process is because they are innocent and we unconsciously use their raw material to hide our traumas and forbidden phantasies (Freud 20).

In fact, according to Freud, the value of screen memories is not their content as such, but the relation between their content and the suppressed one. When we think about it, in the image in our head we may act as observers from outside the scene. This means that we do not just see others, but also ourselves in that image, which is physically impossible. This proves that their visual material is created when we become aware that we have those memories. So, they cannot be what we originally received, but rather something created when a certain impression is received by our brain at a later time (23). Taking this into account, Freud raises the hypothesis that we may not have memories 'from' our childhood, but rather memories 'relating to' our childhood. They are recalled as they appeared in later periods because it is at that moment that screen memories are formed, and not during childhood (24). The period when screen memories are actively formed is usually adolescence because it is critical for the psychological development of individuals (Mahon 80). The role of screen memories during this age is to displace the affective emphasis from the significant complex memory content to a less significant and simpler one (82).

In "Screen Memories", Freud also presents a case study of a patient with no neurotic tendencies at all. The patient recalls a memory that he at first considers indifferent and it is his boy cousin, his girl cousin and himself playing in a meadow picking yellow dandelions. The two boys take the girl's flowers and, as a consolation, a peasant-woman gives her a slice of bread. But, jealous, the two boys throw the flowers away and ask for a slice of bread too, which they are given (Freud 13). What worries the patient is that he remembers the yellow colour of the flowers and the delicious taste of that bread with a

disproportionate clarity. The patient believes that he actually never lived that experience and that he created that memory at the age of seventeen, when he came back to his birthplace from where he had to move. He felt comfortable there, in the countryside, but not in the town where he moved to (14). In that trip, he also fell in love for the first time with a girl aged fifteen who was wearing a yellow dress (15) and met the cousins who appeared in his childhood memory (16). After studying the case, Freud concluded that the patient had in fact created a screen memory hiding the phantasy of the life he could have had if he had stayed in the countryside. The delicious taste of that bread stands for his lost material and economic comfort and the yellow dandelions stand for the desire of having married that girl in the yellow dress and having deflowered her (17). So, the elements in the screen memory represent “the influence of the two most powerful motive forces: hunger and love” (18).

1.3 The concept of ‘screen memories’ after Freud

After Freud’s publication of “Screen Memories” in 1899, other psychoanalysts like Otto Fenichel, Edward Glover or Ernst Kris showed their support to his theory and introduced the concept of screen memories in their sessions (LaFarge 38). Until the mid-twentieth century, most of the publications on screen memories did not take an innovative look at them or introduce new ideas maybe because of the need of special technical interventions by the analyst to decipher them (39). However, around the 1950s, experts in the field of psychoanalysis like Phyllis Greenacre, Lucy LaFarge, Florence Guignard or Franco di Masi started exploring new aspects within screen memories.

Phyllis Greenacre developed a new theory taking Freud’s as a base, but focusing on the concept of trauma. She claimed that screen memories were organized around infantile traumata and that the clinical solution for them was reconstructing the hidden event (Reed and Levine 28) to break its defensive nature (34). She believed that the fact that screen memories were so visual was linked to them being a result of trauma, which always has a visual nature derived from the sense of excitement and aggression that it evokes. According to her interpretation, a screen memory is a memory of a trauma being seen by part of the self (LaFarge 42). She also maintained that those memories occurred especially before verbal language was firmly established and were expressed through body language

(Thompson 162). The process of reconstruction of screen memories requires the analyst to explore the patient's environment and emotional relationships at the moment of the analysis because they are constantly changing (154), since they are linked to the phases of genetic development (161). Moreover, screen memories cannot be understood by free association (155), it is the analyst and the analysand who have to work together and collaborate to reconstruct a reality. The role of the analyst is to create tentative deductions of the hidden elements that will be verified by the patient (164).

Lucy LaFarge deeply explored the idea of trauma and argued that screen memories had two dimensions: the trauma as such and the child's way of remembrance of that trauma (LaFarge 55). She also related Freud's concept of screen memories to that of 'transference' and 'countertransference' because in sharing their experiences, patients direct their feelings for someone to another person, in this case the therapist, and the therapist responds to that as if he were the person the patient had feelings for (37); this idea was also defended by Cohen in the chapter "'Screen memories' revisited". LaFarge affirms that screen memories are a creation of one person but agrees with Greenacre that for them to be analysed, the collaboration of the patient and the analyst is required (36)

Florence Guignard also studied the concept of screen memories and claimed that the purpose of screen memories was to escape having been alone and helpless when facing a traumatic experience and that they were the way to keep pain, repression and guilt from surfacing to reality (182). She alleges that they are a product of the hybridisation of a real experience and fantasy or of two or more real experiences in life that had happened at different moments but had in common "an episode of significant psychic work" (182). They are part of implicit memory (183), which stores non-conscious and non-verbal feelings and affects and which starts before birth (177). According to her study, screen memories are linked to mourning and they work as a pause and relief in the process of assuming a loss (183)

Franco De Masi agrees that screen memories are part of implicit memory (77) and that they are not only a defense against a historical event, but also an alteration of reality (61). He also reinforces the importance of reconstructing the past for therapeutic purposes, although he claims that not everyone has the capacity of comprehending one's own thoughts and being able to express them, which could be a problem when undergoing

psychoanalysis (78) More specifically, he believes that screen memories have an autobiographical component (68), as it will be shown in the case of the author here studied: Samuel Beckett.

1.4 Screen memories as a literary device

As well as being useful for psychoanalysis, screen memories have also been proven to be a creative resource in literature and art. According to Phyllis Greenacre, screen memories are memories “used to evoke a remembered experience, the self who registered that experience, and his capacity for invention and construction” (LaFarge 43). They are fruitful for artists because they allow them to create new versions of the self and to develop an imagined work (42). After studying in depth Lewis Carroll’s works, she also defended that screen memories have an autobiographical nature and that the stresses of Carroll’s early life were expressed in his writings through this device (Thompson 155) which is used with ‘obsessional repetitiveness’ throughout his writings (157).

It is undeniable that screen memories have been used as a literary resource and this has also been studied by psychoanalysts like Lucy LaFarge, who focused on *The Portrait of a Lady* and *A Small Boy and Others* by Henry James. She claims that in these works, the author constructs a meaningful picture of childhood memories that share the features of screen memories: they are largely visual, seen from the outside, and they hide the trauma of sadness at the loss of the mother through an idyllic image of closeness to the protagonist’s father (45-46). The example LaFarge displays is an idyllic image of a family having an abundant meal on a summer day where there is also a group of children playing (44). According to her, this memory ‘screens’ the loss of Henry James’ mother and his family because she was pregnant and she had seven more children, so James felt that he was losing importance and attention inside the family (45). By reconstructing the memory in his literary works, the character, and also the author, since it has an autobiographical content, can re-evolve the setting and the objects lost, as well as his own identity (47).

Screen memories in Samuel Beckett's works

2.1 The literary usage of screen memories by Samuel Beckett

Due to the fact that screen memories are part of the unconscious mental process of displacement to hide an unaccepted reality, Samuel Beckett used them as a literary resource in several of his works. Therefore, Freud's study on screen memories could be used to analyse Beckett's production, since he transformed his memories into a literary device. In what follows, Freud's analysis will be applied to his prose works *From an Abandoned Work* (1957) and *Company* (1980) and his plays *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *That Time* (1976). Although they belong to different genres, this distinction may sometimes be unclear because the prose presents some features of drama and vice versa.

From an Abandoned Work is written in the first person and is not divided into paragraphs. It presents the narration by a man talking about three days in which he went out from home and his decay with the passing of time, interrupted by several consistent memories from his childhood and youth that keep coming to his mind while resting on the rocks. *Company's* main thread is the account in second and third person of a man lying in the dark in which his feelings, mainly of loneliness, are described. This thread is again interrupted by the constant intrusion of memories and flashes of the past. Regarding *Krapp's Last Tape*, this play is performed by a sixty-nine-year-old man who plays some tapes that he recorded thirty years ago, where he recalls several memories and comments on them, showing how his beliefs and ideas have changed as he became older. Finally, in *That Time*, the characters are voices A, B and C coming to a listener and each of them evokes memories from a different age. Voice A focuses on childhood, while voice B concentrates on youth and amorous experiences and voice C represents adulthood.

All of these works revolve around the memories of their respective protagonists, who are, except in the case of Krapp, anonymous. Judging by the repetition of some memories and the similar mode of expression, we could consider that we are presented

with the same protagonist in all of these works. Most of the employed memories are based on Samuel Beckett's own autobiography. However, the use of the literary resource of screen memories varies in the different works; they all use the same device, but in different ways. In addition, not all memories are screen memories, and the screen memories under analysis in this case are melancholic or occasionally happy ones, but their tone is mainly nostalgic and sorrowful. Besides, they hide some real traumas that could be easily recognized when being familiar with the author's biography. These are: his tempestuous relationship with his parents and their subsequent deaths, his childhood sensitivity and fears and his rejection of paternity.

When connecting Beckett's literary use of screen memories with Freud's theory, some features could definitely be identified. For instance, in some cases the clarity of remembrance of those screen memories is highlighted in the text itself and they are said to be extremely well-fixed ("A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day") (Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* 60). In some other cases, like Freud stated, the remembered content of the screen memories seems trivial and insignificant. Moreover, Beckett supports the argument by Freud that we do not have memories from childhood, but rather memories related to childhood since the protagonist admits inventing some parts of those memories to heal his pain ("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") (Beckett, *That Time* 230). It is also important to acknowledge that some of Beckett's recurrent images, like his father's green coat, are repeated along several works, becoming almost an obsessive resource. Nevertheless, Freud defended that screen memories were created between the moment of birth until the arrival of adolescence. However, in this dissertation, the timespan of screen memories will be amplified by including some screen memories from youth and early adulthood.

2.2 Parent-child relationship

2.2.1 The maternal figure: A cold bond

It is undeniable that Beckett's personal experience tinted his works of an autobiographical content, and this is the case with the experiences related to his mother which take the form of screen memories. Samuel Beckett and his mother, May Beckett, loved each other, but

their affection has been described as ‘fierce’ because they had a special bond despite continuously struggling with stormy conflicts between them (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 38-39). They usually clashed because May’s mercurial and extremely demanding character grew in little Beckett a rebellious and bohemian attitude (22).

The fruit of this agitated relationship is observable in some screen memories like the ones evoked in *Company*. One of them recalls how the anonymous protagonist of the narrative goes out of Connolly Store and asks his mother a question. The fact that he says that he will never forget her retort implies that the content of this screen memory is well-fixed, as Freud claimed.

A small boy you come out of Connolly’s Stores holding your mother by the hand [...] Receiving no answer you mentally reframe your question and some hundred paces later look up at her face again and ask her if it does not appear much less distant than in reality it is. For some reason you could never fathom this question must have angered her exceedingly. For she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten. (Beckett, *Company* 28)

Knowlson, Beckett’s biographer, states in his book *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* that Connolly’s Stores were actually patronised regularly by May (41). This fact suggests once again that Beckett was inspired by his own experiences to write. In addition, it might result striking that a mother had such a rude gesture with her younger child. The reason for this might be that, as described in the same biography, May was an extremely practical woman with a violent temper (22), and she bore neither these abstract and ‘absurd’ questions nor the fact that Beckett wanted to become a writer (282). This personal opposition distanced them significantly and caused arguments between them.

In *Company*, screen memories like this one are not the principal plot of the work, but rather elements that interrupt the main thread told in second and third person about how the protagonist lies in the dark. This is to say, screen memories are interspersed in the background, appearing like flashes retold by the voice narrating the different events.

This episode relating the story of the brusque answer to this question appearing during childhood is not only present in *Company*, but rather becomes an ‘intra-intertextual’ element along Beckett’s writings. Intra-intertextual elements are those that

appear several times along an author's oeuvre and that are repeated also along different works. This is common in the author, who uses a number of images repeatedly throughout his compositions. In *The End*, a novella written in 1946 and published in 1960 for example, it is narrated in a slightly different way: "A small boy, stretching out his hands and looking up at the blue sky, asked his mother how such a thing was possible. Fuck off, she said" (Beckett, *The End* 96). In the case of *Malone Dies*, a novel published in 1951, the answer differs too: "I said, The sky is further away than you think, is it not, mama? It was without malice, I was simply thinking of all the leagues that separated me from it. She replied, to me her son, It is precisely as far away as it appears to be. She was right. But at the time I was aghast." (98). In this last example, the protagonist mentions that they were on their way from the butcher's, and this could actually refer to Connolly Store (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 225), making it even more obvious that we are dealing with the same screen memory.

The fact that the same experience was used in different works that were so distant in time (*Company* in 1979, *The End* in 1946 and *Malone Dies* in 1951) hints that the screen memory in question might be hiding some kind of trauma perhaps extracted from Beckett's own experience. This episode may represent the clash between a child's sensitivity and his mother's rational mindset, like it happened between Samuel Beckett and his own mother (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 22). Anyway, what is clear is that the use of this memory becomes a resource used by the author to represent this feeling of rejection and the fact that it is repeated along these works adds unity to his lifelong literary production.

Another well-fixed screen memory related to the cold relationship with his mother is the next one appearing in *Company*:

You are alone in the garden. Your mother is in the kitchen making ready for afternoon tea with Mrs. Coote. Making the wafer-thin bread and butter. From behind a bush you watch Mrs. Coote arrive. A small thin sour woman. Your mother answers her saying, He is playing in the garden. You climb to near the top of a great fir. You sit a little listening to all the sounds. Then throw yourself off. The great boughs break your fall. The needles. You lie a little with your face to the ground. Then climb the tree again. Your mother answers Mrs. Coote again saying, He has been a very naughty boy. (Beckett, *Company* 32)

We know that Beckett is turning his own personal experience into a literary resource because Mrs. Coote was actually May Beckett's friend, with whom she used to have 'afternoon tea' with 'wafer-thin bread and butter' (Knowlson, *Remembering Beckett* 40). Indeed, the 'free fall' game was something he himself used to do and that he would only stop doing when the results were too painful or he found the game boring (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 37). Punishments were useless because he was quite determined and independent and with this scene, we can also appreciate the contrast between May's practicality and the freedom and peculiarities that distinguish Beckett's characters and himself (Knowlson 22).

Comments like these ones by his mother hurt the protagonist in *Company*, who claims to have missed a word of praise from his parents (Beckett, *Company* 35). In the storytelling of *Company*, this screen memory appears after the protagonist, lying in the dark, realizes that he had previously lived a similar experience to that of resting without being able to see any light. This experience was lying alone, with his face on the ground after doing that 'free fall' represented in the screen memory. The experiences are relatable because in both of them, the protagonist was alone in the dark, wishing for company and a hand to lift him up: "What a help that would be in the dark! To close the eyes and see that hand" (Beckett, *Company* 32). After the telling of the screen memory, the thread about the protagonist lying in the dark continues and he states that he was "In another dark or in the same another devising it all for company" (33). As a conclusion, this screen memory is used as a device interrupting the narration in the present and hints at a trauma for the constant feeling of loneliness and abandonment, even by the protagonist's own mother.

Beckett's relationship with his mother deteriorated after his father's death in 1933 (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 192), so much that he left Ireland forever in 1937 (290). This content was included in the fiction narrative *From an Abandoned Work* (1957), where the protagonist says: "My mother was the same, never talked, never answered, since my father died" (158). Nevertheless, their relationship improved again when she started suffering from Parkinson (388). Above all, he loved her greatly and her death in 1950 (404) affected him enormously, partly because of the complexity of their intense and turbulent relation, and he felt absolutely alone during the mourning (405).

It was not until seven years later that Beckett used his mother's death as a motif in his literature, since he believed that he had to process a personal experience before it could be used in a work of art (405). The first time he introduced the topic of his mother's death in one of his works was in *From an Abandoned Work*: "But what is the sense of going on with all this, there is none. Day after unremembered day until my mother's death, then in a new place soon old until my own" (160). *From an Abandoned Work* is a short piece of narrative which looks like a stream of consciousness. In it, the protagonist pours all of his thoughts in the paper, including some screen memories indeed. Screen memories, although more diffused, come to his mind and interrupt his principal reflections. In this same extract, there is also an indirect reference to 'New Place', where Beckett's mother lived after her husband's death (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 363).

In *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) Beckett turned his mother's death into one of the clearest screen memories that we can find in his writings:

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 funereal thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her — not having been introduced — she threatened to call a policeman. As if I had designs on her virtue! [*Laugh. Pause.*] The face she had! The eyes! Like ... [*hesitates*] . . . chrysolite! [*Pause.*] Ah well... [*Pause.*] 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. (Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* 59-60)

It is the moment when his mother is lying in her deathbed in hospital and Krapp, instead of talking about that event, describes the scene where he talked to a woman and threw a ball to a dog. These are clearly the trivial content functioning as a 'screen' to displace the unaccepted memory and the traumatic experience. Besides, it is well-fixed because he

remembers every detail like who was in the hospital, the girl's appearance and especially the touch of the ball, which is extremely well fixed, as it happens with screen memories.

The screen memory in question is extracted from the tape and is used as a literary resource that is already suggested at the beginning, when Krapp is reading the ledger and finds the following: "Ah! [*He peers at ledger, reads entry at foot of page.*] Mother at rest at last... Hm... The black ball... [*He raises his bead, stares blankly front. Puzzled.*] Black ball?... [*He peers again at ledger, reads.*] The dark nurse..." (56-57). This adds unity to the play and creates a complete and cohesive narrative thread.

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, as opposed to *Company* and *From an Abandoned Work*, memories are the central element. However, this is achieved using a particular and innovative technique, which is in fact the tapes. The way in which screen memories are introduced in this work is through the protagonist's own recordings about his own experiences and memories dating from thirty years ago, when he was thirty-nine years old.

In closing, the distant relationship with his mother and her later death were a burden that Beckett carried all along his life and that he reflected in his writings through his characters. We could even claim that it was a trauma for him judging by the numerous screen memories about the topic and their intra-intertextual repetition.

2.2.2 The paternal figure: Nostalgia towards good memories

In the works under analysis, we also encounter some screen memories from childhood related to the paternal figure. The relationship between Bill Beckett, Samuel Beckett's father, and the author is said to have been warm, more familiar and less problematic than that with his mother, despite not being overtly affectionate (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 29). Although Bill Beckett did not support Samuel's career as a writer and wanted him to be a professor in Trinity College, he was always a source of strength for him (189). This is why his premature death in 1933 drastically changed Samuel Beckett's life and conception of the world and consequently his way of writing (192). His literature began to be filled with images alluding to his father, like the green greatcoat, nostalgic memories and a perceptible presence of death.

Company is among Beckett's compositions the one which is closest to being an autobiography (680). For this reason, we can find a nostalgic screen memory where the protagonist narrates joyful moments with his father like this one:

There on summer Sundays after his midday meal your father loved to retreat with *Punch* and a cushion. The waist of his trousers unbuttoned he sat on the one ledge turning the pages. You on the other with your feet dangling. When he chuckled you tried to chuckle too. When his chuckle died yours too. That you should try to imitate his chuckle pleased and tickled him greatly and sometimes he would chuckle for no other reason than to hear you try to chuckle too. (Beckett, *Company* 39)

This screen memory is again very detailed and is used as a memory within another memory describing the protagonist's wait for a girl in his summerhouse, where he is meeting her. It might be working as a narrative pause and 'screening' the sorrow for not having his father with him anymore, as well as the feeling of guilt for having deceived him with his career. Beckett's mode of expression in this work makes his ideas look unconnected, which gives the whole work the appearance of something similar to a flow of consciousness.

Beckett also recreates that feeling of nostalgia with the image of the walks in the hills that he used to have with his father, something that he misses and does alone after his death. According to the authorised biography *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, Bill Beckett's pastime was walking and he loved going for astonishingly long walks in the Dubliner mountains (29) in which Samuel participated too (41). These walks became such a significant experience for him, that he even declared that after the loss of his father "he could not write about him, but just walk the fields and climb the ditches after him" (191). The remembrance of taking walks with his father in the mountains was even used for hypnosis in psychotherapy, since it relieved him (583).

This image appears so many times that it almost seems an obsession. It is used as an 'intra-intertextual' resource because he uses it both in *Company* and *From an Abandoned Work*, as well as in *Malone Dies* and *First Love*, among others (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 394). In *Company*, it becomes a detailed screen memory that, as in the previous case, interrupts the story line about the man lying in the dark. Moreover, the narration of the memory is not continuous and is divided in chunks through several pages,

which gives the reader the sensation that the memories are coming to the author's mind and consequently to his writings even in spite of him (394). As the action advances, there is a change of tone and perspective in the account of this screen memory and symbolic elements like the green greatcoat, the quarter boots and the hat are included, which are constant images along Samuel Beckett's lifework.

Somewhere on the Ballyogan Road in lieu of nowhere in particular. Where no truck any more. Somewhere on the Ballyogan Road on the way from A to Z. Head sunk totting up the tally on the verge of the ditch. Foothills to left. Croker's Acres ahead. Father's shade to right and a little to the rear. So many times already round the earth. Topcoat once green stiff with age and grime from chin to insteps. Battered once buff block hat and quarterboots still a match. No other garments if any to be seen. Out since break of day and night now falling. (Beckett, *Company* 33)

Your father's shade is not with you any more. It fell out long ago. You do not hear your footfalls any more. Unhearing unseeing you go your way. Day after day. The same way. As if there were no other any more. For you there is no other any more. You used never to halt except to make your reckoning. So as to plod on from nought anew. This need removed as we have seen there is none in theory to halt any more. Save perhaps a moment at the outermost point. To gather yourself together for the return. [...] The quarterboots sunk to the tops. The skirts of the greatcoat resting on the snow. In the old bowed head in the old block hat speechless misgiving. (Beckett, *Company* 38-39)

With at your elbow for long years your father's shade in his old tramping rags and then for long years alone. Adding step after step to the ever mounting sum of those already accomplished. Halting now and then with bowed head to fix the score. Then on from nought anew. (Beckett, *Company* 47)

An account of the same screen memory is used in *From an Abandoned Work*, which was written some years before and there, longer and more detailed sentences than in *Company* are used. In addition, the nostalgic tone is almost nihilistic, since the protagonist even states that he had never been able to love anyone. The image of being with his father in the mountains is again being used as the 'screen' for the sorrow of having lost him, despite the relationship not being idealized. Beckett evoked the bond with Bill, but he did not romanticise it (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 394)

One day I told him about Milton's cosmology, away up in the mountains we were, resting against a huge rock looking out to sea, that impressed him greatly. Love too, often in my

thoughts, when a boy, but not a great deal compared to other boys, it kept me awake I found. Never loved anyone I think, I'd remember. (Beckett, *From an Abandoned Work* 157)

As a conclusion, the figure of Beckett's father is something that often emerges in his writings to express the nostalgia for him, as well as the pain that he suffered after his death. For it, he commonly uses the resource of screen memories like recalling cheerful moments with him in the summerhouse or walking with him around the hills. These screen memories usually interrupt the main narrative thread of the works, giving the impression that they are memories that the author cannot avoid constantly remembering.

2.2.3 The unappreciated child's sensitivity

As a boy, Beckett was a sensitive child, and that led him to some disagreements and trouble with his parents, especially his mother, who was more of a practical person (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 63). However, some screen memories are neither related to the cold bond with his mother, nor with the feeling of nostalgia for his father. They rather represent that clash between the delicacy of an unconventional and hypersensitive child and his parents' tough and undemonstrative temperaments. This is the case with the recurrent episode of being at the tip of the board and with the fact that Beckett chose to be a writer instead of a professor.

There is a screen memory which relates how the protagonist is at the tip of a board while his father is urging him to jump. This appears in *Company*, among others, and it reflects the opposition between a fearful child and his father's imposition of being brave. The content is also autobiographical as *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* evidences, Bill Beckett used to dive from the rocks with his sons in Dublin Bay (29).

You stand at the tip of the high board. High above the sea. In it your father's upturned face. Upturned to you. You look down to the loved trusted face. He calls to you to jump. He calls, Be a brave boy. The red round face. The thick moustache. The greying hair. The swell sways it under and sways it up again. The far call again, Be a brave boy. Many eyes upon you. From the water and from the bathing place. (Beckett, *Company* 31)

This memory was one of Beckett's recurrent dreams both as a child and as an adult, something that is common in screen memories because of the importance of the 'screened

event' they are hiding (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 37). Another piece of information which evidences that it is a screen memory is that Beckett suffered when he went to see his father's grave because he remembered diving with him and his brother, and the sorrow of not having him invaded the author (221). So, this episode was of an extreme importance for the author and this could be due to the fact that it is hiding a traumatic experience as it is missing his father.

This memory also serves as a narrative pause for the main thread of the protagonist lying in the dark. In this case, this scene is as well used to exemplify how he felt when lying in the dark. Some paragraphs later, he makes reference to this memory saying that his hand would be of great help: "What a help that would be in the dark! To close the eyes and see that hand" (32). It is also an 'intra-intertextual' literary device because it is mentioned in other works like *Eleutheria* (1947), where the protagonist dreams of standing timorously on a diving board while his father told him to jump too (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 383).

Apart from the one previously mentioned, there are also other instances in which the sensitivity of Beckett as a child is made visible. For example, in *Company*, the protagonist takes pity of a hedgehog and takes it home, but when it dies, he feels devastated. This causes the child's worst fears and self-mistrust to emerge.

Now the next morning not only was the glow spent but a great uneasiness had taken its place. A suspicion that all was perhaps not as it should be. That rather than do as you did you had perhaps better let good alone and the hedgehog pursue its way. Days if not weeks passed before you could bring yourself to return to the hutch. You have never forgotten what you found then. You are on your back in the dark and have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench. (Beckett, *Company* 35)

This incident is again using Beckett's autobiographical material as a literary resource since it is said that it was one of his childhood horrors (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 40). During his whole life and especially as a boy and by the end of his life, when *Company* was written, he was hypersensitive to suffering (Knowlson, *Remembering Beckett* 347).

Linked to that hypersensitivity, Samuel Beckett developed a prominent sensitiveness towards literature and art, what made him enrol in the Arts degree in Trinity

at the age of seventeen (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 65). This early passion for art and writing and his emerging creativity is manifested in his writings with the use of the screen memory of hiding with his books behind the folly, a small building similar to a castle, during infancy looking at them or talking to himself out loud while everyone was looking for him. This is what voice A in *That Time*, which represents childhood memories, recounts during the whole play and it is also mentioned in *From an Abandoned Work*, revealing once again Beckett's 'intra-intertextual' usage of some recurrent literary devices and images.

A: [...] that was your mother ah for God's sake all gone long ago that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child someone's folly [...]

A: Foley was it Foley's Folly bit of a tower still standing [...] 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: or talking to yourself who else out loud imaginary conversations there was childhood for you ten or eleven on a stone among the giant nettles making it up now one voice now another till you were hoarse and they all sounded the same well on into the night some moods in the black dark or moonlight and they all out on the roads looking for you (Beckett, *That Time* 229-230)

In *That Time*, as well as in *Krapp's Last Tape*, memories are the base of the narrative and in this case, there is no other storyline than that of remembering. Their introduction is quite abrupt and could even seem unnoticed when watching the play, due to the fast pace that the actors use. Each of the voices in the play represents a period of time from which memories are elicited and there is no pause between their interventions, so the whole play can be interpreted as each voice telling a different account, while at the same time all of them making a whole.

However, there are two moments of ten-second silence and these occur when the voices in the narration completely show their feelings or traumatic experiences. The first one takes place after Beckett puts in B's voice what could easily be a definition of screen memory: "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 [*Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible.*]" (Beckett, *That Time* 230). The second one occurs after the

intervention of voice A saying that the child is alone in the stone: “that time on the stone the child on the stone where none ever came [*Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible.*]” (Beckett, *That Time* 232). This implies that Beckett does not only express his characters’ emotions, feelings and experiences through words, but also through stage directions, more specifically silences. These unique moments of silence in the play may suggest the magnitude of the screened trauma caused by the lack of sensitivity.

As it is typical in Beckett, the remembrance of hiding behind the folly while everyone was looking for him was of such an importance to him that he also mentioned ‘the folly’ in his last poem *what is the word* (1989) and recreated that same scene in *From an Abandoned Work*. In the latter, it is even clearer that he is describing that creative sensitivity of artists.

And when I come to this night here among the rocks with my two books and the strong starlight it will have passed from me and the day that went before, my two books, the little and the big, all past and gone, or perhaps just moments here and there still, this little sound perhaps now that I don’t understand so that I gather up my things and go back into my hole, so bygone they can be told. (Beckett, *From an Abandoned Work* 160)

The fact that Beckett wanted to dedicate his life to literature utterly changed the relationship with his parents and was actually a source of conflict, especially with his father. At the beginning, Bill Beckett rejected his creative aspirations and wanted him to work in business, but once he realized that Samuel had neither the aptitudes and abilities to do it nor the desire, he accepted his artistic aspirations and wanted him to be a professor in Trinity College (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 88). This permits the author to even add some irony to his words when talking about his father’s death: “Fortunately my father died when I was a boy, otherwise I might have been a professor, he had set his heart on it.” (Beckett, *From an Abandoned Work* 157)

Beckett acceded to the post, despite knowing it was not the future that he wanted (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 161). However, he resigned after some time (145), something that his mother did not approve because after having read what he wrote, she saw no future for him in the field (162). When Samuel Beckett’s father died in 1933, the feeling of guilt for having disappointed him impregnated his mind and his writings like

From an Abandoned Work (191) because for Bill Beckett, resigning was seen as “giving up a worthwhile career for nothing” (162).

Ah my father and mother, to think they are probably in paradise, they were so good. Let me go to hell, that's all I ask, and go on cursing them there, and them look down and hear me, that might take some of the shine off their bliss. [...] My father, did I kill him too as well as my mother, perhaps in a way I did, but I can't go into that now, much too old and weak. The questions float up as I go along and leave me very confused, breaking up I am. [...] How did I ever go on another day? Or, Did I kill my father? and then, Did I ever kill anyone? (Beckett, *From an Abandoned Work* 158)

As a conclusion, several screen memories along different works by Samuel Beckett are used to express his frustration at his parents not understanding his artistic sensitivity, existing since he was a child. They depict the clash between his sensitiveness and his parents' material vision of life, and his culpability for having deceived them by choosing to be a writer.

2.3 The trauma of parenthood

It is well-known that Beckett developed a fear towards parenthood since he was afraid of having a child and that one of the women he intimated with could be pregnant. This fear is appreciable when analysing some of his works like *Company* or *First Love*, since his personal feelings are again transformed into literature. The literary device repeatedly used to express it is again screen memories, like narrating the day of the protagonist's birth or remembering how he used to see the stars with his father when finding out that his lover is pregnant.

In the case of *Company*, it is displayed in the form of a screen memory in which the main voice narrates the day when the protagonist was born with every kind of detail, as if he had lived it in first person.

You first saw the light in the room you most likely were conceived in. The big bow window looked west to the mountain. Mainly west. For being bow it looked also a little south and a little north. [...] It being a public holiday your father left the house soon after his breakfast with a flask and a package of his favourite egg sandwiches for a tramp in the mountains. There was nothing unusual in this. But on that particular morning his love of walking and wild scenery was not the only mover. But he was moved also to take

himself off and out of the way by his aversion to the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery. (Beckett, *Company* 29)

You were born on an Easter Friday after long labour. Yes I remember. The sun had not long sunk behind the larches. Yes I remember. As best to erode the drop must strike unwavering. Upon the place beneath. (Beckett, *Company* 37)

Roll as he might his eyes. Height from the ground? Arm's length. Force? Low. A mother's stooping over cradle from behind. She moves aside to let the father look. In his turn he murmurs to the newborn. Flat tone unchanged. No trace of love. (Beckett, *Company* 42)

This screen memory is again divided along several pages and serves as a narrative pause from the main storyline. Along his career, Samuel Beckett offered different versions of his own birth and claimed to have memories of the womb. In spite of being different, all of the versions coincide in the fact that they all involve pain (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 19). In the one cited above the description of the room where the protagonist was born matches that of the author, and is identical to his, according to his biography (33). Besides, Beckett's mother labour was also long and his father was absent during that time (680).

The fear of conception could also be derived from Samuel Beckett's romance with Peggy Sinclair, his young first cousin, who is believed to have inspired some of the characters in his works (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 99). Beckett and Sinclair loved each other but theirs was a forbidden relationship, since of course their parents did not accept it and they were fearful of having a child because of their kinship and youth, and that was what put an end to their relationship (105). Nevertheless, Samuel never stopped loving her until her early death by tuberculosis in 1933, which made Beckett fall into a deep depression (188).

In *Company*, we are presented with a memory where he is again fearful of pregnancy: "Your gaze descends to the breasts. You do not remember them so big. To the abdomen. Same impression. Dissolve to your father's straining against the unbuttoned waistband. Can it be she is with child without your having asked for as much as her hand?" (Beckett, *Company* 40). In this case, the last question may refer to the fact that in Beckett's affair with Peggy Sinclair, he rejected sex and he was looking for a more spiritual connection, while she urged for it (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 105).

The reason why Beckett may have chosen to use so many personal memories as screen memories in *Company* may have been because he aimed to create a ‘confessional autobiography’, in which the present self’s personality is explained through past experiences. He might have sought to create a different and mould-breaking autobiography by ignoring the significant content of memories using screen memories and presenting them in a non-chronological and disrupted way (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 681).

Moreover, in *First Love* we can find more evidence to support that the fear of parenthood was a real trauma for Beckett’s characters. In this novella, the protagonist is having an affair and has been meeting Lulu, his lover, for some time. After some months, he moves to her house, where they live together and she works as a prostitute. She announces him that she is with child and he rejects her, for he did not want to have a baby. After the revelation, he decides to leave the house and not to see her again, since he openly rejected having a baby.

One day she had the impudence to announce she was with child, and four or five months gone into the bargain, by me of all people! She offered me a side view of her belly. She even undressed, no doubt to prove she wasn’t hiding a cushion under her skirt, and then of course for the pure pleasure of undressing. Perhaps it’s just wind, I said, by way of consolation. [...] Look, she said, stooping over her breasts, the haloes are darkening already. I summoned up my remaining strength and said, Abort, abort, and they’ll blush like new. She had drawn back the curtain for a clear view of all her rotundities. I saw the mountain, impassible, cavernous, secret, where from morning to night I’d hear nothing but the wind, the curlews, the clink like distant silver of the stone-cutters’ hammers. I’d come out in the daytime to the heather and gorse, all warmth and scent, and watch at night the distant city lights, if I chose, and the other lights, the lighthouses and lightships my father had named for me, when I was small, and whose names I could find again, in my memory, if I chose, that I knew. From that day forth things went from bad to worse, to worse and worse. Not that she neglected me, she could never have neglected me enough, but the way she kept plaguing me with our child, exhibiting her belly and breasts and saying it was due any moment, she could feel it lepping already. If it’s lepping, I said, it’s not mine. (Beckett, *First Love* 67)

Another feature in this novella that leads us to think that this is a traumatic topic for the protagonist is the fact that in the middle of the narration of the moment when Lulu

informed him about the news, we encounter a screen memory in which the protagonist describes the mountain and the city lights that he could see from the window. There, the figure of his father is present to work as an escapeway, relieving and providing comfort to the protagonist in a hard moment when he is feeling puzzled and distressed by the recent findings.

To sum up, the author reflected his irrational fearfulness towards parenthood through his characters. This is achieved with the help of screen memories, which vary among his works.

Conclusions

The main aim of this B. A. thesis was to analyze the different ways in which Samuel Beckett transformed his life remembrances into screen memories incorporated as a literary resource in the prose compositions *From an Abandoned Work* (1957) and *Company* (1980) and the plays *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *That Time* (1976).

After having identified the content of the screen memories with Beckett's life experiences, it can be concluded that they deal mainly with different traumas related to his life. The cold relationship with his mother is often represented through his characters, as well as the feeling of culpability that he had after she died. Besides, his father is represented as an almost obsessively nostalgic figure that always transmits relief to the protagonists. Another of his childhood and early-youth distresses portrayed in his writings is how his artistic sensitivity was rejected by his family. Finally, the author also adds his own fear of parenthood to his characters' psychology. All of this autobiographical material is used to create the intra-intertextual literary resource of screen memories. The same images dealing with the previously described topics are used along different works, which creates a sense of unity, not only within each composition, but also within Beckett's oeuvre.

However, the role of screen memories varies depending on how they are integrated in each work in particular. While in the plays *Krapp's Last Tape* and *That Time*, screen memories are the base of the work, in the narratives *Company* and *From an Abandoned Work*, they are secondary elements that interrupt the main narrative thread. Besides, different elements are used to introduce them. While in the play *Krapp's Last Tape*, it is the 'tapes', in *That Time*, it is the existence of three voices in the play representing different vital periods. Regarding the narrative works, in *Company* screen memories resemble 'flashes' in the protagonist's mind, while in *From an Abandoned Work*, they help to convey the stream of consciousness.

This project has reached fruitful results when identifying a concept of psychoanalysis in a literary work. Perhaps, this could open a new line of investigation by analyzing how screen memories are introduced in other writers' works and the manner in which they are transformed into a literary device.

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