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SYMBOLS IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S *NOUVELLES*

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ABSTRACT

Samuel Beckett's popularity has increased in recent years, being an author who deals with timeless issues. His *Nouvelles* may not be his most influential works, but despite their short length they contain a powerful and complex symbology worth analyzing. This paper will start with a brief introduction to Beckett's life and works, followed by a synopsis of each of the four *Nouvelles*. These stories are relevant given the interesting language they present, the references to Beckett's biographical experiences, and its symbology. After a short examination of the use of symbols in Literature, the main part of the paper will be developed: the analysis of the symbology present in the *Nouvelles*. The study of its use is essential to understand Beckett's style and vision of the world, marked by pessimism and depicting the meaninglessness of life and human relationships.

Los símbolos en las novelas cortas de Samuel Beckett

RESÚMEN

La popularidad de Samuel Beckett ha sufrido un incremento en los últimos años, ya que se trata de un autor que escribe sobre temas intemporales. Puede que sus *Nouvelles* no sean su trabajo más destacado, pero a pesar de su corta extensión contienen complejos símbolos. Este ensayo comenzará con una breve introducción a la vida y obra de Samuel Beckett, seguido de una sinopsis de cada una de las cuatro *Nouvelles*. Estas historias son relevantes dado el interesante lenguaje que presentan, las referencias a las vivencias de su autor, y su simbología. Tras un breve análisis del uso de símbolos en la literatura en general, se desarrollará la parte central de este ensayo: el uso de los símbolos en las *Nouvelles*. El estudio de su uso es esencial para entender en estilo y la visión del mundo de Beckett, marcado por el pesimismo y representando el sin sentido de la vida y las relaciones humanas.

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Symbols in Samuel Beckett's *Nouvelles*

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1. Introduction

This paper will deal with the use of symbols in Samuel Beckett's four *Nouvelles*: "The Expelled," "The Calmative," "The End" and "First Love." These short stories written in 1946-1947 may not be Beckett's most influential works, but despite their short length they contain a powerful and complex symbology.

In his "On the Freudian Motifs in Beckett's First Love," Paul O'Mahoney states that one characteristic of Beckett's writing is his distrust of symbolism (O'Mahoney 2013: 102). Nevertheless, the four *Nouvelles* seem to be highly symbolic. Nostalgia for the womb, for example, is a common theme in all four of them. The narrators are expelled from their usual residence, their "womb", and thus they wander looking for a place that emulates their quiet and safe previous state. Other similar symbols will be detected and analyzed in the following pages.

It is important to deal with this author given the increase in his popularity in recent years. Samuel Beckett has proved to be an author who deals with timeless issues. He is a writer who can be studied from different angles, and he approaches the study of mankind with honesty and rigor, that is why his work has been chosen as the subject study of this research: his directness regarding the human condition is as important today as it was seventy years ago.

These works are also interesting given the particular language they present, which is the result of Beckett's experiment of writing in French and the translation of these works into English by himself. The constant allegories to World War II, a conflict that Beckett experienced under severe conditions, make his texts important historical documents as well. These productions even have some traces of the theories of psychoanalysis, which drew Beckett's attention from the moment he was treated by Dr. Wilfred Bion after the death of his father.

As a method of analysis in the present paper, I have turned to well-known specialists in Beckett studies: Marjorie Perloff, Ruby Cohn, Paul O'Mahoney, James Knowlson and John Fletcher, among others. I have grounded my study of the *Nouvelles* on these scholars' previous research on Samuel Beckett.

In the following pages, Samuel Beckett's life will be briefly recounted. Some biographical events play a crucial part in the development of the themes of the *Nouvelles*. From an outline of his works in general, I will move on to the *Nouvelles* in particular with a synopsis of each story. After a brief examination of the use of symbols in literature, the main part of the paper will follow: a detailed analysis of some of the most relevant symbols present in each of the *Nouvelles*, including some allegories or references that are not symbols as such, but they are important enough to mention in order to understand the narrative. The final part of the present study will be devoted to the drawing of the appropriate conclusions. A detailed list of the works cited in this paper can be found in the final pages.

2. Results and discussion of the topic

2.1 Samuel Beckett: brief biographical survey

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born in Dublin in 1906, son of William Beckett Jr. and Mary Roe. He was a prominent Irish avant-garde playwright, poet and novelist, and also sometimes considered the last of the Modernists. He studied for his Bachelor's degree in French and Italian at Trinity College, Dublin, between 1923 and 1927. There "he absorbed the history and a love of Romance languages and poetry" (Conley 2001).

In a short stay in Paris after the completion of his degree, Beckett met James Joyce, by whom he would later be strongly influenced. It is important to point out the similarities between their education and the reasons behind Beckett's attachment to James Joyce:

They both had degrees in French and Italian, although from different universities in Dublin. Joyce's exceptional linguistic abilities and the wide range of his reading

in Italian, German, French, and English impressed the linguist and scholar in Beckett, whose earlier studies allowed him to share with Joyce his passionate love of Dante. They both adored words -- their sounds, rhythms, shapes, etymologies, and histories -- and Joyce had a formidable vocabulary derived from many languages and a keen interest in the contemporary slang of several languages that Beckett admired and tried to emulate (Knowlson in EGS 2012).

Beckett also aided Joyce in his research for what later would become *Finnegans Wake* and he wrote an essay called “Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce,” about Joyce’s methods in his last book (Conley 2001).

He was very close to his father, whose loss in 1933 devastated Beckett to the point of having to get professional help. He was treated by Dr. Wilfred Brion, being this the first contact he had with this psychoanalysis. We can find in the *Nouvelles* references to the theories of psychoanalysis that will later be explained in detail.

The difficult relationship with his mother led Beckett to abandon his nation for Paris after acquiring his master’s degree from Trinity College. In his own words, he preferred “France at war to Ireland at peace” (Shenker in Perloff 2005: 80) Beckett’s mother “was determined to break him to make him accept the life she envisioned for him” (Broer 1979: 157), she could not bear seeing his son being a writer instead of the businessman she wanted him to be. These two relationships, with his father and with his mother, are later relevant throughout his literary production, as will be later examined in, for example, “First Love.”

In 1938, Beckett was stabbed by a pimp in Paris. During his stay in the hospital recovering from the attack, he met Suzanne Descheveaux-Dumesnil, who would in 1961 become his wife.

1941 was another devastating year for Beckett. It was the year of the death of Joyce, and the invasion of the Nazis. When the German occupation began, Beckett was neutral as an Irishman. Nevertheless, he joined the Resistance. A year later, the Resistance cell was discovered and Beckett and his partner had to hide in Roussillon, southern France, for the next three years.

Much as the 700 km journey on foot had been hazardous and painful, Beckett’s biographers agree that the stay in Roussillon was in many ways even worse: a mixture of boredom and danger (Perloff 2005: 81). At the war’s end, Beckett and his partner

made their way back to Paris. He then headed to Dublin to see his mother for the first time in five years. After the visit, since his status in France was that of resident alien, Beckett was not permitted to return to his home in Paris, where conditions were terrible and hence volunteered to help the Irish Red Cross build a hospital for the Normandy town of Saint-Lô (Perloff 2005: 82).

It was in Saint-Lô that Beckett witnessed real devastation and misery. One of his jobs was to exterminate the rats in the maternity and children's ward. The building job took six months to accomplish; in January 1946 Beckett returned to Paris to begin what is usually referred to as "the siege in the room" where he wrote the works that were to make him famous (Perloff 2005: 83), for example, the *Nouvelles*, *Mercier and Camier*, *Waiting for Godot*, and the Trilogy: *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*.

Beckett's mother and brother died in 1950 and 1954 respectively, and both passings weighed very heavily on his heart. "He would remember them particularly in the ghostly voices of his later fiction and drama, in the dread of waiting and the search for comfort" (Conley 2001).

He received many prizes throughout his life, including the Nobel Prize in 1969. He did not attend the ceremony, but accepted the award on behalf of the dead James Joyce, saying that he should have received it (Mays 2014).

Beckett wrote less and less in the 1970's and 1980's, "whittling down even more rigorously his work to the barest essentials of expression" (Conley 2009). He died in 1989, a few months after his wife, in Paris, where they are buried together.

Despite the accolades of fame, Samuel Beckett remained a private man whose literary works continued to explore the outer reaches of minimalism and experimentalism (EGS 2012).

2.2 Beckett's literary works

Beckett produced a large body of work despite his “general disposition to silence” (Conley and Ruch 2003). His productions are from various genres: poetry, theatre, novels, and many more.

His *oeuvre* can be divided into two periods (Davies 2001): before and after *Waiting for Godot*, around 1950. The “after Godot” was a period of “international and time-consuming eminence in theatre, radio and television,” when Beckett concentrated on dramatic minimalism with short prose and plays such as *Endgame* in 1958, and the “anti-novel” *How It Is* in 1961, among others (Davies 2001). In the “pre-Godot” period, Beckett was finding his way as a writer, and it yields much more variety but less quality of creative output (Davies 2001). Works from this period include the novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1935 but published in 1992), *Murphy* (1938), *Watt* (1941-5 but published in 1953), along with some poetry and sporadic literary journalism. But the most important work from this period is the Trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* (1947-50 but published in 1951-55), which together stand as “his greatest, certainly his most sustained, prose work, and comprehensively define his essential themes and preoccupations” (Davies 2001).

Samuel Beckett had always been a very particular writer. Even in the beginning of his career he had resisted autobiographical implications. By the time he had finished writing his first two novels, he was able to announce that he had accepted morbidity and isolation as his unique subject (Broer 1979: 157). “Optimism is not my way. I shall always be depressed, but what comforts me is the realization that I can now accept this dark side as the commanding side of my personality. In accepting it, I will make it work for me” (Beckett in Broer 1979: 157). He had been led so deeply into himself, he realized, that he could create a new form in writing, and a revolution in language as well as in dramatic form (Broer 1979: 157). Fearing he would forever be in Joyce's shadow, a new path showed itself to him (EGS 2012):

I realized that James Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realized that my own way was in

impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding (Beckett in EGS 2012).

The many years he spent in France allowed him to make the risky decision of writing entirely in French to escape from everything with which he was familiar, to follow his idea of “subtracting.” The main aim when writing in his second language was to “foreclose his inclinations toward excessively clever prose” (O’Mahoney 2013: 94), as Beckett himself put it, “to write without style.” (Knowlson in O’Mahoney 2013: 94).

In Beckett’s works, there is a predominant presence of imagery of stench and putrefaction, and an inclination for the description of natural and bodily functions (Perloff 2005: 79). He refers to the meaningless of life by depicting worlds surrounded by gloominess, silence and isolation (Broer 1979: 156), recurring to references to the absurdity of human condition. His works are full of “the anguished sense of the repeated failure of human communication”, and his characters “attempt to flee the unbearable chaos of the real world into the madness of their own minds” (Broer 1979: 157).

Mostly all of his characters follow the same pattern:

The tramps of Godot, the narrators of "The Expelled," "The Calmative," and Molloy, invariably experience themselves as ugly, aging, smelly, toothless, incontinent, impotent or incapable of enjoying sex; they are homeless, friendless, and loveless. They meet and have contact with others – but there others remain largely unknown, despite shows of friendship and intimacy. Memory – of better days, of an idyllic childhood home, of a sea to bathe in – is at odds with current reality. Eating is a matter of sustenance rather than pleasure. Urinating is a hardship, defecating a worse one. Feet are likely to be swollen, hair lice-infested, clothing torn and filthy. Sleep is intermittent and disturbed and takes place, not in bed, but in cowsheds, caves, ditches, and on park benches. And yet Beckett’s protagonists don’t seem to be derelicts; on the contrary, they regularly cite Shakespeare, Augustine, the Bible, Shelley, Yeats, and various philosophical text from Geulcinx to Kant (Perloff 2005: 79).

As we can see, the narrators/protagonists in Beckett’s literary productions are similarly “disgusting” and alienated from the world. His travels through Europe and Britain in his youth inspired him: he met many vagabonds and wanderers, which he would use as a base for several of his most memorable characters (EGS 2012). Throughout his literary production, Beckett recurs to the idea of man’s alienation and

the human condition (Perloff 2005: 77). As will be analyzed later, this is a predominant theme in the *Nouvelles*.

Despite his works being set at anonymous crossroads, or in strange, unfamiliar cities, Beckett's narrative seems to reflect the area surrounding his family home (EGS 2012). Because he was an exile from his own homeland, Beckett presents himself as an "artist from nowhere" (Kennedy and Weiss 2009: 2) but we can identify his texts elements that remind us of Dublin. Ruby Cohn, a theatre scholar and Beckett authority, suggested that Beckett's setting was "vaguely" Ireland (Cohn in Kennedy and Weiss 2009: 12), although the more commonly assumed setting for his productions was "everywhere and nowhere" (Kennedy and Weiss 2009: 12). It is also suggested that Beckett would "would purport to have memories prior to this event [his childhood], memories of being in his mother's womb: a situation less blissful than stifling, readily associable with the tight enclosures pondered by the characters and voices in so many of his works" (Conley 2001). This is another central theme dealt with in the *Nouvelles*, the nostalgia for the womb that will be an important issue in the narrators/protagonists lives.

War was another important source of inspiration for Beckett. He spent a few months in Germany between 1936 and 1937, this being his second time visiting the country. While he was there, though his style was mostly objective and documentary and though he tried to separate aesthetics from politics and history, Kennedy and Weiss affirm that "Beckett's diaries of this period disclose a growing awareness that aesthetic decisions engage the narrative challenges presented by shoddy histories and ideological propaganda" (Kennedy and Weiss 2009: 48).

2.3 Beckett's *Nouvelles*

This three-story cycle plus "First Love" (not published until 1970) of 1946-1947 contains Beckett's most searing examination of wartime conditions in Vichy France, especially the miseries and terror of the life of hiding and attempted escape (Perloff 2005: 88).

In the four stories, the anonymous first person narrator is expelled from his residence and so his journey begins, a journey that takes him “through a town that is at once familiar and yet wholly alien” (Perloff 2005: 88). This journey ends on an open road looking for guidance or, in the case of “The End”, death. The passage through the town takes the form of a series of tests to try the narrator’s patience and put his sanity into question (Perloff 2005: 88). The characters of these *Nouvelles* are homeless and unmannered but they seem to have a high sense of literacy, for they sometimes cite the works of Shakespeare, The Bible, Yeats and many more (Perloff 2005: 79).

I will briefly explain the argument of each of these short stories in the order they were first produced.

2.3.1 “The End”

“The End” is the darkest story out of the four *Nouvelles* (Perloff 2005: 96). It is about the protagonist moving “arbitrarily through temporal shelters” (Cohn 2005: 129): a bedded room, a basement room, a seaside cave, a dilapidated shed and a boat. This story has more to do with the “memory of the first-person anonymous narrator protagonist, who recalls events that occurred long before the putative but undesignated present time” (Cohn 2005: 142).

The narration begins with the protagonist being expelled from some kind of institution — maybe a hospital, an asylum or prison. He thinks he is going to miss his stool, his only companion, so dear that even had a hole for his cyst: “*At times I felt its wooden life invade me, till I myself became a piece of old wood*” (Beckett 2009: 38).

Now in the streets, his appearance make people laugh so he rests at the only place that was still the same: the river and his bench. “*In the days that followed I visited several lodgings, without much success*” (Beckett 2009: 41), the owners’ would not have him in. He finally finds a basement, owned by a Greek or Turkish woman — we never know her name — who was not alarmed by the narrator’s oddities.

The protagonist is comfortable in the basement. The Greek woman suddenly offers a discount on the rent if the narrator pays the next six months’ immediately. He

accepts believing it a fair trade. A few days after, someone wakes the protagonist up and asks him to leave the house. It is the rightful owner of the basement: the Turkish woman is nowhere to be found, the narrator is scammed by her. With nowhere else to go, he proposes sharing the room with its new occupant, a pig, but the owner kicks him out anyway.

Days later, he tries to look for the Greek woman to recover the money he had lost, without success. While in the city, the narrator meets an old friend who invites him to stay a few days in a cave on the seaside. While in the cave, he realizes he has a phial in his pocket. It will be useful for later events.

The protagonist feels uncomfortable in the company of his friend after a while, so he decides to leave: *“He was kind. Unfortunately, I did not need kindness”* (Beckett 2009: 47). His friend offers him his cabin in the mountains for him to live in, to what the narrator accepts.

His new residence is in ruins:

The door had been removed (...). The glass had disappeared from the window. The roof had fallen in at several places. (...). The vilest acts had been committed on the ground and against the walls. The floor was strewn with excrements, both human and animal, with condoms and vomit. (...) This was the dwelling to which I had been offered the key (Beckett 2009: 47-8).

He makes himself comfortable there, but one day he can't get up and has to be saved by a cow looking for shelter in the shed. He tries to milk her but ends up being dragged and kicked by the cow: *“I didn't know our cows too could be so inhuman”* (Beckett 2009: 48). Outside the shed, he drinks the milk that was spilled, teaching him a lesson: *“one takes what one can get”* (Perloff 2005: 98).

Trying to make his way back to the city, the protagonist realizes that his aspect has worsened since he left the basement:

The face notably seemed to have attained its climacteric. The humble, ingenuous smile would no longer come, nor the expression of candid misery, showing the stars and the distaff. (...) A mask of old dirty hairy leather, with two holes and a

slit, it was too far gone for the old trick of please you honour and God reward you and pity upon me (Beckett 2009: 48).

He covers half of his face and starts begging “*at a sunny corner*” (Beckett 2009: 49) of the city. He starts moving less and less when he settles definitively on a boat. “*(...) I found a boat, upside down. I righted it, chocked it up with stones and pieces of wood, took out the thwarts and made my bed inside*” (Beckett 2009: 53). He sleeps little in this period, waiting for his death: “*There were times when I wanted to push away the lid and get out of the boat and couldn’t, I was so indolent and weak, so content deep down where I was*” (Beckett 2009: 55). After a long dissertation on his habits on the boat when he would not move and recalling memories of his childhood, he lets go of the chain that binds him to solid ground and he unplugs the hole that will gradually admit the water into the boat. He swallows the content of his phial to let go of everything and have “*a kind of suicide at sea*” (Cohn 2005: 131).

We can conclude that the unappetizing appearance of the protagonist is not pathetic but comic, as is his scrupulosity about the decorum of begging, and his resignation to, and even expectation of, mistreatment (Cohn 2005: 130-1)

2.3.2 “The Expelled”

“*There were not many steps. I had counted them a thousand times, both going up and coming down, but the figure has gone from my mind*” (Beckett 2009: 3). This is how the story opens up with the narrator being expelled, just like in “The End,” from a domicile with his hat being thrown at him from the inside. This “step-counting ritual is the sort of mental exercise one engages in when trying to keep oneself going in a moment of unbearable stress” (Perloff 2005: 88). The hat brings back memories of his father and childhood which are recounted with a nostalgic tone.

Having become homeless, the narrator thinks of his situation while in the gutter: “*Under these circumstances nothing compelled me to get up immediately*” (Beckett 2009: 4). He affirms he is not old — “*I was in the prime of life*” (Beckett 2009: 5) —, but the city where he was born and raised is alien to him. When he decides it is time to

get up and find a new way, he is reprimanded by a policeman — or maybe two, the narrator is not sure — for being a nuisance twice: first for walking in the street and then for running into a lady and making her fall. This is due to the way he walks, leaning to one side, and he tells us why he does it:

I had then the deplorable habit, having pissed in my trousers, or shat there, which I did fairly regularly early in the morning, about ten or half past ten, of persisting in going on and finishing my day as if nothing has happened. The very idea of changing my trousers, or of confiding in mother, who goodness knows asked nothing better than to help me, was unbearable, I don't know why, and till bedtime I dragged on with burning and stinking between my little thighs, or sticking to my bottom, the result of my incontinence” (Beckett 2009: 7).

This is an example of Beckett's emphasis on bodily functions mentioned earlier on this paper, in this case resulting in a comic impression on the reader.

As the narrator wanders the streets and after being looked down upon by passers-by, a funeral catches his attention. He notices that people's attitude is not dignified enough for such occasion:

Personally, if I were reduced to making the sign of the cross I would set my heart on doing it right (...). But the way they did it, slovenly and wild, he seemed crucified all of a heap, no dignity, his knees under his chin and his hands anyhow (Beckett 2009: 9).

He adds: *“The horses were farting and shitting as if they were going on a fair”* (Beckett 2009: 9), breaking completely the solemnity of the funeral.

Next he hops on a cab, feeling uncomfortable with the crowd around him. He describes the cab as a *“big black box, rocking and swaying on its springs, the windows are small, you curl up in a corner, it smells musty”* (Beckett 2009: 9). The cabman is a nice man; he does not seem to be disgusted by the narrator's looks. He takes him wherever the narrator wants *“provided it wasn't too far, because of his beast”* (Beckett 2009: 11). We could say the cabman pities the narrator. Though he was hired by him, the cabman empathizes with the narrator's situations and, though not understanding the deepness of his problems and feelings, he tries to help him in any way he can.

On his part, the narrator seems to enjoy the cabman's company, "*He had preferred me to a funeral (...)*" (Beckett 2009: 13), but he soon gets tired of his presence. Unable to find a place for him to stay, the cabman invites the narrator to spend the night at his home. The presence of such a man was uncomfortable for the cabman's wife, so out of respect for his hosts, the narrator decides to spend the night in the stable.

His night at the stable is filled with paranoia: he hears the hosts talking about him and he thinks the horse is spying on him. Thus, he resolves to escape through the window — the door being locked —, resembling the moment of birth, to continue his way towards nowhere. "*I went out head first, my hands were flat on the ground of the yard while my legs were still thrashing to get clear of the frame*" (Beckett 2009: 15).

2.3.3 "The Calmative"

In "The Calmative," the less colloquial of the *Nouvelles*, the events that take place are dreamlike, and landscapes are vaguer than before in Beckett's fiction (Cohn 2005: 184). There are numerous settings in which the protagonist encounters different other characters, who sometimes tell their own stories.

The narration starts with the protagonist "returning from the dead" (Perloff 2005: 92): "*I don't know when I died*" (Beckett 2009:19). Given his state of restlessness and doubt, calm is what he seeks (Cohn 2005: 147). He decides to tell himself a story like the one his father used to tell him, about the heroic Breem or Breen, to regain his calm: "*So I'll tell myself a story, I'll try and tell myself another story, to try and calm myself, and it's there I feel I'll be old, old, even older than the day I fell, calling for help, and it came*" (Beckett 2009: 19).

The protagonist does not recognize the city he is in. He is not sure that the story he is telling even took place: "*I speak as though it all happened yesterday. Yesterday indeed is recent, but not enough*" (Beckett 2009: 20). Like the rest of the narrators of the *Nouvelles*, the place where they were born and raised seems unknown to them.

He then makes his way towards his city. He pays attention to everything around him, people and objects. He first lays eyes on a bald man in a brown suit, who is telling

a story. He notices how only women seem to find him funny. He then enters the main part of the city through Shepherd's Gate, only to find the street deserted with the feeling that the "*houses [were] packed with people*" (Beckett 2009: 22).

We can see that the protagonist is looking for a change in his life. While watching the ocean he thinks: "*And I might slip unnoticed aboard a freighter outward bound and get far away and spend far away a few good months, perhaps a year or two, in the sun, in peace, before I died*" (Beckett 2009: 23). But he is still uncomfortable: "*I couldn't achieve a little encounter that would calm me a little*" (Beckett 2009: 23), so his situation cannot change until he gets that state of peacefulness.

On the street he encounters a young boy with a goat. The boy is not disgusted by him: he seems rather curious about the narrator. When trying to speak to him, the protagonist utters something that makes no sense, a "*rattle, unintelligible even to me who knew what was intended*" (Beckett 2009: 24). Nevertheless, the boy offers him a sweet and goes away. "*He helped me and his hand brushed mine*" (Beckett 2009:24), we can infer that the narrator is desperately looking for human contact, but he is unable to say a word while watching the boy disappear.

He keeps on wandering until he arrives to an apparently empty cathedral. The narrator hears the organ play and he rushes to see who is behind it. He finds a man on his way there, who gives him an odd look and leaves. Then he finds a little girl holding a man's hand, also disappearing without a word. Unsuccessful in finding who was playing the organ, he goes back to the street, now dark, and tries to find his way following the stars. He mentions that his experiences going across the city are the proof that he still exists in this world (Beckett 2009: 27).

Realizing he is no longer in pain, the narrator sits down and falls asleep. He wakes up to see a man beside him, whispering things. They soon engage a conversation and talk about the man's life, because the narrator seems unable to talk about his own. The stranger reveals he sells phials and tries to sell one to the narrator, who has no money. He proposes a kiss in exchange for a phial and the narrator agrees to kiss him on the forehead: "*I pursed up my lips as mother had taught me and brought them down where he had said*" (Beckett 2009: 31). The man hands over the phial and leaves. The narrator wants to stay in that spot but gets up and leaves too. His pains are back, but he still wanders until he falls to the ground.

When the story finishes, we get the impression that the phial is the calmativ, when it is actually the story itself: fiction is what help us get away from the sometimes unsatisfactory reality of our lives. We all need stories to give shape to our experience and to relieve us from the reality of being ourselves. Of the many characters the protagonist encounters, only the boy with the goat and the man with phials actually address him, and he needs to master all his resources to reply, so unhabituated is he to speech (Cohn 2005: 149). “The calmativ is the most developed and englobing equation of narrative with the process of narration” (Cohn 2005: 150).

2.3.4 “First Love”

“First Love” is the most conventional as to plot and character out of the *Nouvelles* (Cohn 2005: 144). The story begins with the narrator associating his marriage with his father’s death in time. He tells us of his visit to his father’s grave not long ago, with the purpose of writing down the date of his death, and later that of his birth. He discovers then he is twenty five years old at the time of his love affair while he enjoys the atmosphere of the graveyard, seeming to prefer the company of the dead rather than of the living:

(...) I take the air there willingly, perhaps more willingly than elsewhere, when take the air I must. The smell of corpses, distinctly perceptible under those of grass and humans mingled, I do not find unpleasant, a trifle on the sweet side perhaps, a trifle heady, but how infinitely preferable to what the living emit, their feet, teeth, armpits, arses, sticky foreskins and frustrated ovules (Beckett 2009: 61).

With the death of his father, the narrator is forced to leave the house by the rest of the family. On a bench on the bank of a canal that the narrator uses as a bed, he meets his first and only love, Lulu. He is at first disturbed by her presence, but soon he finds himself thinking about her constantly to the point of writing her name on cow dung: “*She disturbed me exceedingly, even absent*” (Beckett 2009: 67). One day he even gets

an erection while being caressed by Lulu: *“It did not escape her naturally, women smell a rigid phallus ten miles away (...)”* (Beckett 2009: 66).

Because he is confused and now admits he is in love with her, the narrator tells Lulu, who he also calls Anna because he got tired of her previous name, to come to the bench not every day but from time to time. On one of their meetings, the protagonist plays a game: he asks Anna to sing a song and he walks away until he cannot hear her, and then comes closer again. The game ends up with him running away from his love out of confusion.

A few weeks later they meet again, on the same spot. The narrator now pays attention to Anna’s face:

(...) it seemed normal to me, a face like millions of others. The eyes were crooked, but I didn’t know that till later. It looked neither young nor old, the face, as though stranded between the vernal and the sere. (...) As to whether it was beautiful, the face, or had once been beautiful, or could conceivably become beautiful, I confess I could form no opinion (Beckett 2009: 73).

He asks her to say something, and she suddenly informs she has an empty room, so the narrator moves in with her. While helping him get comfortable in his new residence, Anna undresses hoping the narrator would do the same, which he does not. She shows him the rest of the house. His room is full of furniture that he takes out to the corridor. *“Finally, the room was empty but for a sofa and some shelves fixed to the wall. The former I dragged to the back of the room, near the door, and the next day took down the latter and put them out, in the corridor, with the rest”* (Beckett 2009: 75). She gives him everything he might need in the room, so he was comfortable enough now: *“Try and out me out now, I said”* (Beckett 2009: 76).

The protagonist wakes up the next morning finding Anna beside him, naked. Though he did not remember a thing, *“It was my first night of love”* (Beckett 2009: 76). He gets used to living there soon enough, so he wants company. Anna gives him a hyacinth, which the narrator spends days looking at, but it dies soon.

Later, he is disturbed by sounds coming out of Anna’s room: *“(...) stifled giggles and groans, which filled the dwelling at certain hours of the night, and even of the day”* (Beckett 2009: 77). When he asks, she says they are his clients: *“We live by prostitution”*

(Beckett 2009: 78). One day Anna announces she is pregnant with the narrator's child, to what he urges her to get an abortion. "*From that day forth things went from bad to worse, to worse and worse*" (Beckett 2009: 79). The narrator was annoyed by references to "their" child to the point of thinking of leaving, but winter was close and he had nowhere to go. However, the birth of the child was too much for him to handle. Almost like being born himself, he leaves the house: "*A mass of junk barred my way, but I scabbled and barged my way through in the end, regardless of the clatter*" (Beckett 2009: 79). He can't bear the cries, "*It must have been her first*" (Beckett 2009: 79). The cries haunt him even in the street, where he does not know if he hears them or imagines them. He began playing with them like he did with Anna's song until he is far away. Still, after a long time after he leaves, he hears the cries.

2.4 The use of symbols in Literature

By the term Symbolism it was normally understood the literary movement originated from France in the Nineteenth Century to reject Realism. But here, we are interested in symbolism as the use of symbols in literature, omnipresent in many styles, periods and civilizations (Wellek 1970: 251).

Symbolism may be defined as the representation of a reality on one level of reference by a corresponding reality on another (Coomaraswamy 1955: 405). Thus, we recognize that words have meaning simultaneously on more than one level of reference (Coomaraswamy 1955: 407). It is a characteristic of symbolism that it may attach meanings to objects without regard for their origin (Derchain 1976: 8), so difficulty when interpreting symbols comes from the fact that we cannot know much about "the emotional associations with which every word in the language and every object in the environment is laden, and on which depends the very existence of poetry and of art in general" (Derchain 1976: 7). Some symbols we acquire through experience and with some others, more difficult, we have to use our imagination to reconstruct these "associations," through guesswork (Derchain 1976: 7). Also, whoever wishes to understand the real meaning of some symbols must have studied the literatures of many countries in which the meanings of symbols are explained (Coomaraswamy 1955: 408).

According to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, the study of the traditional language of symbols is not an easy discipline, mostly because we are no longer familiar with, or even interested in, the metaphysical content they are used to express, again, because the symbolic phrases, like individual words, can have more than one meaning, according to the context in which they are employed, though this does not imply that they can be given any meaning at random or arbitrarily (Coomaraswamy 1955: 407).

We can conclude that “a symbol is a generally accepted sign, with a function, based on some sort of collective convention, analogous to that of language” (Derchain 1976: 7). But there are also a lot of signs whose meaning is determined solely by the intentions of their creators, who rely on their interlocutors’ intelligence and on a close cultural study with them in order to be understood (Derchain 1976: 7).

2.5 Beckett’s use of symbols in the *Nouvelles*

It is important to remark at the outset that “the Beckettian heroes are not allowed any abrupt termination to their sufferings, for death merely consummates the body’s lifelong putrefaction which began in the womb” (Fletcher 1964: 108).

We can say that the protagonist of the four stories described in 2.3 is the same man. According to Fletcher in his *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, each of them accounts for the phases of one’s existence: prime in “First Love” and “The Expelled,” death in “The End,” and limbo in “The Calmative” (Fletcher 1964: 102). For him, all the *Nouvelles* are told from “*l’outré-tombe*,” explaining the pointlessness of the plots:

So that he may have something to say, the hero says anything that comes to his mind, tells first a little tale about a day spent riding about in a cab, then another tale, about his last days, and finally a third, this time a piece of pure imagination, in which he has to keep finding people to meet, to address, to be spoken to by, in a brightly-lit but silent town, in order to be able to continue, in order not to have to listen to his body rotting (Fletcher 1964: 108).

In what follows, the symbols of each story will be analyzed carefully.

2.5.1 “The End”

In the first place, there is a clear symbol of birth in the narrator’s expulsion from the institution. Almost like a newborn, he goes out to the world for the first time since he can remember: *“In the street I was lost”* (Beckett 2009: 40). As if he were remembering his reaction to bombed out Saint-Lô or Paris (Perloff 2005: 97), Beckett writes of the city: *“Whole buildings had disappeared.”* The narrator was comfortable with his former lifestyle as one can be in the womb, so when this state is lost, he looks for a kind of “surrogate womb” in his multiple lodgings. In the basement, he finds his place, but he is expelled in favor of a pig. The cave is a place for him to heal the wounds on his skull and have someone to talk to, but then again he leaves, this time because the company and the sea are too much for him: *“I couldn’t bear the sea, its splashing and heaving, its tides and general convulsiveness. (...). If I stayed here something awful would happen to me, I said, and a lot of good that would do me”* (Beckett 2009 47). The boat seems like the perfect place, but when he gets to it, it is already too late: he can barely move and his end is near. At least he can be comfortable in this last moment: *“Back now in the stern-sheets, my legs stretched out, my back well propped against the sack stuffed with grass I used as a cushion, I swallowed my calmative”* (Beckett 2009: 56). So the narrator’s search for a womb-like place represents the trauma of birth.

We can also find a reference to the Bible. When the protagonist accepts his friend’s invitation to stay with him in his cave, his journey to his new dwelling resembles Jesus Christ’s entry into Jerusalem (Fletcher 1964: 109), but slightly different: *“But to my amazement I got up on the ass and off we went, in the shade of the red chestnuts springing from the sidewalk. I held the ass by the mane, on hand in from of the other. The little boys jeered and threw stones (...)”* (Beckett 2009: 46). Whereas Christ’s entry is triumphant and filled with joy, the protagonist’s way towards the cave is received with mockery and contempt. The world around him can be either cruel or indifferent towards him. We can say in this matter that the cow that the narrator tried to milk can be seen as a symbol of the indifference of the world towards him. *“Her udder was covered with dung. (...) She dragged me across the floor, stopping from time to time only to kick me. I didn’t know cows too could be so inhuman”* (Beckett 2009:48). This can be justified by the narrator’s own experience. Society never accepted him,

which is why he is “kicked” by the animal. Still, he clings to it with all his strength. When the cow leaves, the narrator drinks the spilled milk, as if accepting its leftovers to survive, but then regretting letting it go. We can infer that the narrator still wants to be a part of a whole: “*More master of myself I might have made a friend of her. She would have come every day, perhaps accompanied by other cows*” (Beckett 2009: 48), but it is too late to change.

The boat may be seen as a symbol of both a house and a coffin. While the narrator lives there, he performs the activities we usually perform in our residence: he urinates, defecates and rests in this same place. We can even see the rats as his “children” given the way that the narrator speaks about them: “*I even had a soft spot in my heart for them*” (Beckett 2009: 53). The narrator feels comfortable in the boat to the point of choosing it as the place where he will die. Thus, it also represents a coffin. Inside this coffin, he gets ready for this moment and accepts his fate. It is not fancy, but the coffin is appropriate for the death he has chosen for himself, he does not fight against it. This acceptance of the inevitability of death suits this solitary character. He does not seem to be the kind of person who is scared of death. He embraces it because he knows it is inevitable.

2.5.2 “The Expelled”

Again, the symbol of birth is present in this story, even more clearly than in “The End.” We even have two moments representing the coming to the world: first when the narrator is expelled from where he lives, and later when he escapes from the cabman’s stable through the window.

After the first birth moment, the narrator tells us of his problems when walking and his incontinence, as if he were an infant. He feels “*stiffness of the lower limbs*” (Beckett 2009: 6), and has a habit of “*pissing [his] trousers*” (Beckett 2009: 7). The narrator states he is “*in love with hiding and the prone position*” (Beckett 2009: 7), which prompts him to search, the same as in “The End,” for a “surrogate womb.” He then finds it in a cab: “*It’s a big black box, rocking and swaying on its springs, the windows are small, you curl up in a corner, it smells musty*” (Beckett 2009: 9). The

narrator tells the cab driver to go somewhere he does not really want to go with the only purpose of staying in the cab a little longer. He even asks if it is for sale, knowing he would not have enough money to pay for it.

The second birth moment happens, as stated earlier, when the narrator leaves the cabman's stable, where he was spending the night, through the window. This is a more graphical symbol. He physically emulates the moment of birth: "*I went out head first, my hands were flat on the ground of the yard while my legs were still thrashing to get clear of the frame. I remember the tufts of grass on which I pulled with both hands, in my effort to extricate myself*" (Beckett 2009: 15), and it is the beginning of a new life, because he goes "*towards the rising sun, towards where I thought it should rise, the quicker to come into the light*" (Beckett 2009: 15).

Another important symbol to mention is the narrator's hat as a fatherly figure. The hat is an item present in almost all the *Nouvelles*, and it always brings back memories related to the narrator's dear father. When the narrator of "The Expelled" is forced to leave his residence, his hat is thrown at him from the inside. He does not know how to describe the hat so he recalls the day when he first got it: "*When my head had attained I shall not say its definitive but its maximum dimensions, my father said to me, Come, son, we are going to buy your hat, as though it had pre-existed from time immemorial in a pre-established place*" (Beckett 2009: 4). To recall this specific story in a moment of stress and confusion is very meaningful, it leads us to think that the narrator's relationship with his father was a very special one. The day he got his hat represents the day he became a man: "*It was forbidden me, from that day forth, to go out bareheaded, my pretty brown hair blowing in the wind*" (Beckett 2009: 4), the hat being a reminder of his new responsibilities and obligations. Though his father passed away, he still seems to be a powerful figure in the narrator's life: "*When my father died I could have got rid of this hat, there was nothing more to prevent me, but not I*" (Beckett 2009: 5). Still he says he does not know how to describe his hat. Maybe he cannot describe his feelings towards his father rather than the aspect of the hat.

Although it could not be considered a symbol, it is important to remark the fear and paranoia the narrator feels throughout the story. This is mostly evident at the end of the narration, when the protagonist is at the cabman's stable. He feels like he is under surveillance: "*(...) and above me the voices of the cabman and his wife as they*

criticized me” (Beckett 2009: 14), and he even feels watched by the horse: “*Several times during the night I felt the horse looking at me through the window and the breath of its nostrils*” (Beckett 2009: 15). These attitudes are a reflection of Beckett’s experiences during the war. Hidden in southern France, he had to be extremely careful not to be discovered because it would mean execution. The three years he spent in Roussillon without much human contact but that with his wife accentuated his distrust of strangers and this feeling of being under constant surveillance.

2.5.3 “The Calmative”

The narrator leaves his “*den littered with empty tins*” (Beckett 2009: 19) not because he is expelled: “*What possessed me to stir when I wasn’t with anybody?*” (Beckett 2009: 19); but because he looks for a change. In this sense, we can see his journey as birth and a new beginning or even as a return from the dead, a way back to civilization. We see, again as in the previous stories, the protagonist’s difficulty to move, as if he were using his body for the first time: “*I couldn’t get up at the first attempt, nor let us say at the second, and once up, propped against the wall, I wondered if I could go on, I mean up, propped against the wall*” (Beckett 2009: 19-20). Like a newborn, he is surprised by the new things around him: “*(...) oh, look, trees!*” (Beckett 2009: 20).

The symbol of the entry into Jerusalem comes back in this story. Again, it is a reverted atmosphere to that of the original setting found in The Bible. In “The Calmative,” it is not triumphant but unnoticed:

I entered the town by what they call the Shepherds’ Gate without having seen a soul, only the first bats like flying crucifixions nor heard a sound except my steps, my heart in my breast and then, as I went under the arch, the hoot of an owl, that cry at once so soft and fierce which in the night, calling, answering, through my little wood and those nearby, sounded in my shelter like a tocsin (Beckett 2009: 22).

His presence is not welcomed as though his existence was meaningless, and the “bats like flying crucifixions” reinforce this religious reference. It can also be related to Beckett’s idea of hell that, according to John Fletcher, is “rather an eternal and solitary

state of suspension than a Dantesque torture-chamber thronged with popes and leechers” (Fletcher 1964: 108).

Throughout the story, the narrator pays attention to the light, mentioning it several times, the first when he arrives to the city: *“It was lit as usual, brighter than usual, although the shops were shut. But the lights were on in their windows (...). But I felt the houses packed with people, lurking behind the curtains they looked out into the street (...)”* (Beckett 2009: 22). We can say that given this insistence on the matter, the light can be seen as a symbol of surveillance. That “light” is present everywhere the narrator goes, for example when he visits the harbor: *“I could see lights flushed with the water. And the pretty beacons at the harbour mouth I could see too, and others in the distance, flashing from the coast, the islands, the headlands”* (Beckett 2009: 23). It is contrasted with the lack of light in his encounter with the boy with the goat: *“Admittedly the light was poor”* (Beckett 2009: 23). Because he was not being watched, the narrator feels free to speak to someone, even though he does not engage a full conversation. He tries to find refuge, but even the Cathedral is a *“brilliantly lit nave”* where he is unable to rest. Again, this is part of Beckett’s experiences in Roussillon. Besides the feelings of constant surveillance, the exchanges taking place in this story emulated the ones happening on the way to Roussillon (Perloff 2005: 95). He writes a lot of references to the War, but never mentioning the word itself (Perloff 2005: 93).

Lastly, the narrator starts losing his ability to walk in front of a horse-butcher’s: *“(...) through the chink I could make out the dim carcasses of the gutted horses hanging from hooks head downwards”* (Beckett 2009: 32). The butchered horses are a symbol of death and putrefaction, reminding the narrator of his own condition: he has been long dead and, in his story, he is losing his life again.

2.5.4 “First Love”

In “First Love,” a highly intelligent, witty narrator looks back to a highly repressive world – his own inner world – where he behaves as a child, a baby, and now and then even as a fetus (Hillenaar 1998: 419). This story has been influenced by the

author's experiences of psychoanalysis, so it includes some notions belonging to this discipline.

In this short story, the narrator is expelled from his home by his own family, following the death of his father. This is, as in the other *Nouvelles*, a symbol of birth. From that moment on, the narrator has to live by himself and deal with the world.

The quest for a new womb is most evident in "First Love". The narrator even finds a "mother" in Lulu/Anna, more than a lover as we can think in the first place. This figure will be dealt with in the in the following pages.

To begin with, the perfect womb-like place the narrator finds is the room Anna offers him. First, he looks at it with horror due to the density of furniture, so he starts taking it out to the corridor. He only keeps the sofa, to which he climbs "*back, like a dog into his basket*" (Beckett 2009: 75), position-wise, he looks like a baby in the womb (Lawley 1993: 190). The furniture awakens the protagonist's anxiety (O'Mahoney 2013: 99), but once it is out of sight he relaxes: "*I was alone at last, in the dark at last. Enough about that*" (Beckett 2009:76). This is a confirmation that Beckett is taking us back to experiences of a time when nothing in our inner and outer life was at all complex (Hillenaar 1998: 424).

Throughout the narration we see that the actions and decisions of the narrator are not always those of an adult. He sometimes has complicated thoughts of a very "adult" person, but then the description of his feelings and sensations are very elementary, like those of a child. We have an example of this in the way he wants to stay away from Lulu, but when he is away from her, the need for her presence arouses. This is part of the two fundamental tendencies or aspirations that govern our psychic life: first our longing for physical presence and love, everything we experienced and learned in the beginning with our mother or the one(s) that took her place, and second, our desire to turn to the outside world, away from her (Hillenaar 1998: 428). According to Henk Hillenaar, such behavior reminds us very strongly of what happens in the consulting room of a psychoanalyst. Beckett is using psychoanalytic experience when he writes about the difficulties his character has in coping with life and love (Hillenaar 1998: 419).

We can see the dead hyacinth the narrator keeps in his room as a symbol of a graveyard and death. From the beginning of "First Love" we can sense a preference of

the narrator for the dead. He enjoys his visits to his father's grave, as if they were a picnic: "(...) *I take the air there willingly, perhaps more willingly than elsewhere, when take the air I must*" (Beckett 2009: 61). He also admits to envy the dead (Beckett 2009: 63). Hillenaar says that death remains a source of desire for the narrator; desire of death, according to the Freudian notion of "death instinct," or Wilfred Bion's "principle of active Nothing" is an always present in the narrator's mind (Hillenaar 1998: 422).

The climax of the story is reached with Lulu's child being born. It is something the narrator cannot stand: "*What finished me was the birth. It woke me up*" (Beckett 2009: 79). It is the moment when he identifies himself with the nascent child, an identification which has been carefully prepared in the narrative (Lawley 1993: 190). The narrator knows the horrors of the world and pities the child: "*What that infant must have been going through!*" (Beckett 2009: 79), but at the same time he wants to experience again the sensations of birth. There is a parallelism between the child's efforts to get out and the narrator's own efforts to leave Anna's house through all the furniture in the corridor: "*A mass of junk barred my way, but I scrabbled and barged my way through in the end, regardless of the clatter*" (Beckett 2009: 79). When the narrator rearranges the furniture, he explains: "*The door could be opened and closed, since it opened inwards, but had become impassable.*" (Beckett 2009: 74-75). The constant references to doors make us consider, according to Paul Lawley, "birth as the definitive emergence through a swinging door" (Lawley 1993: 193). Both the child and the narrator start their lives at this ending point of the narration, for the protagonist it is his third time if we consider the expulsion from his father house as his second birth.

An interesting symbol is Lulu/Anna as a mother. This also has to do with the theories of psychoanalysis, specifically to the two fundamental fantasies recurring in most psychoanalytical treatments: the father and the mother (Hillenaar 1998: 420). In "First Love", the father is called "my father", whereas the mother is called "first love" (Hillenaar 1998: 420). These two figures are never represented together, but they are important in the narrator's life from the first sentence: "*I associate, rightly or wrongly, my marriage with the death of my father, in time*" (Beckett 2009: 61). There are several parallelisms between the narrator's experience with his father and with his "mother", Lulu. Both stories bring us from outdoors to a room indoors. In both episodes this room is again abandoned for another life outside. The two scenes also share the contrast made by the narrator between an upright position and lying down on a bed, a bench, a sofa

(Hillenaar 1998: 421). The father is of the utmost importance: he is a happy memory, he shows the world to the narrator and teaches him to love to write, and with him the symbol of the hat as the fatherly figure is again present. He even was a kind of protective figure, taking care of the narrator even beyond the grave (Hillenaar 1998: 422). But the center point of this analysis will be Lulu as “the mother.”

Lulu/Anna is a very motherly figure. We can say so because the narrator seems only to begin to tolerate her when she becomes something of a default mother-figure to him, and when he separates from her sexually (O’Mahoney 2013: 99). In his company, the narrator will be almost all the time lying down or trying to do so, in contrast with the active and upright position he adopted when he was with his father (Hillenaar 1998: 422). According to Hillenaar, Beckett’s character pursues “supiness,” which should permit him to have access to a subtle regressive state of the mind (Hillenaar 1998: 425), and the help of Lulu is essential to achieve it.

Lulu/Anna is a very important figure because it is the only female character of the story, so this “first love” has no rival. The first meeting with Lulu happens in an open space, but here the bench is described as a shelter: “*It was a well situated bench, backed by a mound of solid earth and garbage, so that my rear was covered. My flanks too, partially, thanks to a pair of venerable trees, more than venerable, dead, at either end of the bench*” (Beckett 2009: 65). In his craving for regression, the narrator must be happy with such a setting, “empty” as a cradle or perhaps the womb of a pregnant woman (Hillenaar 1998: 424).

Lulu/Anna as a mother also offers the narrator the safety of a home. When she shows her pregnancy to the narrator, he seems to be immersed in a state of peacefulness prompted by the memories of his childhood:

She had drawn back the curtain for a clear view of all her rotundities. I saw the mountain, impassable, 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 (Beckett 200: 78-79).

According to Paul Lawley, this is an experience of interior retreat and controlled “outings,” an easy movement between defined poles of interiority and exteriority where the memories themselves function as a retreat from the status of fatherhood that is at that moment being pressed upon him (Lawley 1993: 191). The “impassible, cavernous, secret” object which prompts visions of escape and freedom clearly describes not the distant mountain but the all-too-proximate pregnant belly (O’Mahoney 2013: 97), so this regression into the narrator’s own mind functions as a get away from the uncomfortableness of the situation.

Another important symbol is love as a mere exchange. In this story and mostly in all the other *Nouvelles* too, human relationships are not exactly an exchange of love and affection. In this pessimistic world created by Beckett, the characters approach other human beings to obtain something from them. This is exactly what happens between the narrator and Lulu/Anna: a relationship of convenience, an exchange.

Initially, we could believe that the narrator loves Lulu/Anna given the way he is obsessed with her when they are separated after their meetings at the bench. But as we read on we realize that he just wants someone to pay him some attention and to take care of him. When Lulu/Anna offers him a room, it is the perfect opportunity for the narrator to achieve his desired state of “supiness”: “*I thought she would say she had nothing to say, it would have been like her, and so was so agreeably surprised when she said she had a room, most agreeably surprised*” (Beckett 2009: 73).

The same happens with Lulu/Anna: it is not that she finds the narrator attractive or loves him, she wants someone to keep her company like a puppy. Given the fact that she is a prostitute, it is easy to presume that she is an outcast from society. Her profession makes it difficult to find someone to share her life with, so when the narrator appears she seizes the chance. All she has to do is take care of him even if he does not seem interested in her sexually or emotionally; sexual intercourse only occurs in the room next to his (Hillenaar 1998: 425).

For Beckett, human relationships are an exchange of attentions and commodities in which we approach other people for mere self-interest. It is a pessimistic view of love that we see depicted most notably in “First Love.”

3. Conclusions

As I have previously mentioned, Samuel Beckett's works deal with timeless issues and he approaches the study of mankind with honesty. As we have seen, the symbology he uses in the *Nouvelles* serves the purpose of illustrating the idea of the meaninglessness of life: these symbols reinforce even more the desolation of the human condition. Beckett's bleak world where the *Nouvelles* take place is a pessimistic representation of our own world. Beckett's concept of humanity is strongly influenced by his experiences during the war, which forced him to be isolated and afraid for three long years in Southern France. Not only the war, but his difficult relationship with his mother together with the loss of his father marked him profoundly and his feelings manifest distinctly in the *Nouvelles*.

We have seen in "The End" that the birth trauma of the narrator urges him to find a new dwelling place that can simulate his state of safety and comfort in the institution he was expelled from: he looks for a new "womb." The indifference of the world leads him to find refuge in desolated places in ruins in which he survives on his own. "The End" depicts more prominently the quest for a "surrogate womb" given the multiple dwelling places he inhabits. Finally, the narrator does not turn to civilization even in his last moments, he rather chooses a "coffin" in which perform his last journey emphasizing the impossibility of fruitful human relationships.

"The Expelled" shows us the importance of a fatherly figure to accompany us in the world. The narrator of this story recalls memories of his father's teaching in his hardest moment, when he was being thrown out to start his life on his own. After finding a comfortable new place in which he can act as a child again — a cab — he gives us a very visual birth scene while escaping from the stable's window. What the narrator of "The Expelled" is more concerned about is the people and things around him, which make him feel like he is under surveillance and compel him to escape. We can deduce that after his "rebirth" he will still look for his special place where he would not be bothered with the predicaments of adult life.

The next story, "The Calmative," takes us to an isolated city full of symbols. The narrator is always alone and with the feeling of being watched, symbolized in the strong

light around him all the time. Inverted images of Biblical passages, like the entry to Jerusalem, and the narrator's unsuccessful encounters with people illustrate the failure of human relationships. This dehumanized world is accentuated by symbols of death and putrefaction.

Finally, "First Love" is an elaborated reflection of the meaninglessness and selfishness of human relationships. Love in this story is dealt with as a mere exchange of commodities: the narrator wants somewhere to stay and Lulu/Anna wants someone to keep him company. This is a very pessimistic depiction of people's prime concern: the search for love and affection.

To finish this paper, it should be stated that Samuel Beckett is an author whose works are deep and interesting enough to engage in further research. The *Nouvelles* are full of harsh, critical situations that put the narrator to the limit, but turn comical given the simple but sharp language Beckett employs. We can read the *Nouvelles* as a document of fundamental importance to understand Samuel Beckett's style and vision of the world.

Conclusiones

Como se comentó anteriormente, las obras de Samuel Beckett tratan temas intemporales y el autor se aproxima al estudio del ser humano con honestidad. Tal y como hemos visto, Beckett utiliza los símbolos en las *Nouvelles* para ilustrar el sin sentido de la vida: estos símbolos refuerzan aún más la desolación de la condición humana. El sombrío mundo de Beckett donde tienen lugar las *Nouvelles* es una representación pesimista de nuestro propio mundo. El concepto de humanidad del autor está poderosamente influenciado por sus vivencias durante la guerra, la cual lo obligó a permanecer aislado en el sur de Francia por tres largos años. No sólo la guerra, también la difícil relación con su madre y la muerte de su padre marcaron profundamente a Beckett, y sus sentimientos se manifiestan claramente en las *Nouvelles*.

Hemos visto en "The End" que el trauma de nacimiento que experimenta el narrador lo obliga a encontrar una nueva residencia que emule su anterior estado de

seguridad y confort en la institución de la que acaban de expulsarlo: buscará un nuevo “útero materno”. La indiferencia del mundo lo lleva a refugiarse en lugares desolados y en ruinas en los que sobrevive por sí mismo. “The End” representa más destacablemente la búsqueda de un “útero materno sustituto” dado las múltiples moradas que habita. Finalmente, el narrador no recurre a la civilización incluso en sus últimos momentos, antes prefiere elegir su propio “ataúd” en el que realizar su última travesía, enfatizando la falta de necesidad de contacto humano.

“The Expelled” nos presenta la importancia de la figura paterna para enseñarnos el mundo. El narrador de esta historia evoca recuerdos de las enseñanzas de su padre en su momento más difícil: cuando está siendo expulsado, obligándolo a vivir por su propia cuenta. Después de encontrar un nuevo lugar en el que puede actuar como un niño otra vez, el narrador nos ofrece una escena de nacimiento muy visual al salir de la ventana del establo. Lo que al narrador de “The Expelled” le preocupa más es la gente y las cosas a su alrededor, las cuales lo hacen sentir como si estuviera siendo vigilado y lo obligan a escapar. Podemos deducir que después de su “renacimiento” seguirá buscando ese lugar especial donde no pueda ser molestado por las complicadas implicaciones de la vida adulta.

La siguiente historia, “The Calmative”, nos traslada a una ciudad desolada y llena de símbolos. El narrador está siempre solo y con la sensación de estar siendo observado, simbolizado en la cegadora luz a su alrededor la mayoría del tiempo. Imágenes invertidas de la Biblia, como la entrada a Jerusalén, y los encuentros fallidos del narrador con gente de la ciudad ilustran el fracaso de las relaciones humanas. Este mundo deshumanizado se acentúa con símbolos de muerte y putrefacción.

Finalmente, “First Love” es un reflejo elaborado del sin sentido y el egoísmo de las relaciones humanas. El amor en esta historia se define como un mero intercambio por conveniencia: el narrador necesita un lugar donde hospedarse y Lulu/Anna quiere a alguien que le haga compañía. Es una representación muy pesimista de la principal preocupación de los seres humanos: la búsqueda de amor y afecto.

Para finalizar este artículo, debe ser señalado que Samuel Beckett es un autor cuyas obras son lo suficientemente profundas e interesantes como para propiciar una más profunda investigación. Las *Nouvelles* están llenas de situaciones difíciles que ponen al narrador al límite, pero se vuelven cómicas dado el simple pero mordaz

lenguaje que Beckett utiliza. Podemos leer las *Nouvelles* como documentos de fundamental importancia para entender el estilo y la visión del mundo de Samuel Beckett.

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