

Deconstructive Study of Man's deplorable Status in the Panoptical Society of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*

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Abstract

As an elegant writer of early post-modernism, Samuel Beckett's works strongly question regularities and intentionally oppose traditions. They violently disturb all the settled notions, metaphysical conventions and doctrines of structuralism. Concerning all these issues in Beckett's *Molloy*, this study makes intellectual use of Michel Foucault's viewpoints of power, knowledge, self-restraint and panopticon. It says that human requires a non-functionalist society whose arrangements, whatever they are, serves no larger purpose and has no redeeming social value. For researcher, the kind of radical society which is motivated by prejudice of the power has nothing but servitude, injustice, family disintegration and religious skepticism.

Key words: Deconstruction; Panopticon; Surveillance; Skepticism

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Molloy - the first novel of Samuel Beckett's Trilogy-destabilizes the metaphysical traditions and standards of structuralism in its society and it also violates the conventions of linear structure in its narrative. The story of novel has two disorderly episodes of Molloy and Moran's journeys which do not proceed in a straight line: Moran is a private detective, who begins his journey where

Molloy ends while Molloy, an invalid man, begins his journey where Moran ends. In fact, there is no beginning or ending, only open-ended process of repetition and circulation without direction (Moorjani, 1982:39-48). These circularity and repetition are the principle tactics of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction which Beckett employs not only to question the values and standards of structuralism but also to preoccupy and challenge the readers' conceptual thoughts. About the importance of repetition, Steven Connor says:

While to a large extent repetition determines and fixes our sense of our experience and representations of that experience, it is also the place where certain radical instabilities in these operations can reveal themselves. It is therefore no accident that Samuel Beckett, the writer who this century has most single-mindedly dedicated himself to the exploration of what is meant by such things as being, identity and representation, should have at the center of his work so strong and continuous as preoccupation with repetition ... (1988: 1).

This argumentative use of repetition and violation of linear structure in *Molloy* coincides with the greater analysis and debate on Molloy and Moran's deplorable conditions. It is by the virtue of this analysis that we can judge about predetermining structures and the reasons for the characters' adjustability or unadjustability towards these structures.

In the beginning of the first episode of the book, Beckett relates the report of Molloy who wishes he can find his mother. In this report, Molloy's condition is horribly that of 'dark wood' wherein he knows nothing about his existence: "As to her address, I was in the dark, but knew how to get there, even in the dark" (Beckett, 24). He questions strangely the logic of his being; for him the first experience of the birth has been along with the first taste of shit. He considers his arse as a womb because he considers himself to have been anally engendered. For him, a small piece of newspaper which is used for cleaning his arse is the identity card (Macaskill, 1988:

15). And it is via this silly identity card that he ridicules the laws of his society while he encounters police. His ridiculous behavior against the funny crime of leaning on bicycle suggests the idea of Foucault that all laws are creation of society and should be disregarded.

Molloy struggles against the laws of society because he wants to find himself. He knows nothing about himself and his surroundings. The only thing he knows is that he has regressed to his mother's room in an unknown place. Interestingly, whenever he speaks much of his mother; in contrast, he mentions less of his father. Who is father? Where is mother? Are they alive or dead? These are a few of Molloy's questions about his identity and condition that obsess him. It is as a result of this obsession that he starts to get angry, gets confused and subsequently wishes for death by saying, "What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my good byes, finish dying" (Beckett, 3). Although this ambiguous condition of Molloy is really troublesome; it never holds him back from his journey of finding mother. Thus, in spite of ambiguity and paralysis (having one stiff leg), he fastens his crutches to the crossbar of his bicycle and sets out for this journey.

Like Molloy, the readers also have a great deal of doubts and disabilities while they go further with their reading in a way that they can not sustain their line of thoughts. As Peter Eubanks (2007: 52) says, "In reading Molloy, readers rather resemble the protagonist in that they lose a certain sense of order that they never regain as they are forced to relinquish previous assumptions". As though it seems Molloy's report has deliberately generated this kind of perplexity and involvement in the readers to frustrate their thoughts and emotions. A clever example of such involvement can be seen by following a dialogue that seems to be between Molloy and reader: "You may object that this is covered by the business of my legs, that it has no importance, since in any case I could not put to the ground the foot in question. Quite, quite. But do you as much as know what foot we're talking about? No. Nor I. Wait till I think" (Beckett, 106). In fact, Molloy never wants the clarity of his account; he employs the big denial in which the gratifying certainty of clear stances and the neatness of identification are measured dangerously (McDonald, 2006: 91).

What is considered as a denial of certainty and identity is the reflection of Michael Foucault's philosophical idea of panopticon and it is so that Beckett depicts the radical interrelation between surveillance and individual's identity (Vaz and Bruno, 2003: 275). This belief is evident in both episodes of *Molloy* because Beckett wants it in this manner. Then, he assists neither individuals nor readers in obtaining certain knowledge. In this regard, Thomas Cousineau, as a reader of Beckett's work, describes his feeling of frustration: "It is as though Beckett has placed us within a double-bind, an impasse from which there is, apparently, neither retreat nor progress" (1999: 53).

Regarding the above comments about Molloy, his condition and also his readers', Moran's case in the second half of novel is not better than him. He is revealed as a fastidious individual of catholic faith who has a good house and living condition. In spite of the seemingly respectable home life though, he is living in a condition that is the radical example of panopticon. Moran's story begins one Sunday in the summer when he receives a secret message of prompt departure to find a strange man (not as much strange for readers). His departure is accompanied by uneasiness and a sense of unpreparedness which bodes ill for the successful achievement of his goal (Campbell, 2002: 88). At last his mission ends unsuccessfully and on his return home he unexpectedly finds everything ruined: "My bees, my hens, I had deserted them. I went toward the house. It was in darkness. The door was locked" (Beckett, 238).

Such a miserable and unexpected circumstance of Moran is far from our mind because; as explained in Jude R. Meche's essay, he has been like an ineffective mimic in the colonial society of his superior, Youdi (imperialistic power). He has also attempted submissively to emulate his superior's value in order to gain acceptance in his organization (2000: 237). Why then are his submission and adjustability responded angrily by destruction and dejection instead? This question of Moran's ending justifies further investigation and also again returns our attention to his initial submissive condition. It highlights the big problems of monitoring and surveillance in the society and is also a hunt for something which is well defined in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. In *Discipline and Punish*, the discussed issues of monitoring and surveillance are very dangerous and they destroy social status, inventiveness and self reliance of people. Foucault, in fact, depicts the society in which people have no will power. In his opinion, people are like captives placed in the prison of the world in which they are strictly controlled by a disciplinary mechanism (Foucault, 1977: 197). It is common then for their society to define an expiry date for them and after that they lose their validity and utility, it wants them to be destroyed.

Anthony Uhlmann in *Beckett and Poststructuralism* makes intellectual use of Foucault's viewpoints about surveillance and monitoring. He allocates the first chapter of the book to *Molloy* and he compares it to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Uhlmann regards Molloy and Moran's unhappy conditions as engaging in an opposition between surveillance and power in which one attempts to behave outside the orders of structuralism in society and the other one behaves within the orders and regulations (1999: 40-58). It seems that Uhlmann, through investigation of Molloy and Moran's directions and failures, has opened a new window to criticize conventions and traditions of metaphysical society.

It is surprising why the same failure and unhappy condition is narrated twice and moreover who is then

unhappier man here in this duplication, Molloy or Moran. Before deciding to answer these questions, it is critical to decentralize the subject and go over the deplorable social conditions in which each of these characters are arrested since their social conditions are necessary considerations on the matter. In my opinion, all culminated problems of characters are the reflection of harsh structuralism in the society. The kind of radical society motivated by prejudice of the power has nothing but servitude, injustice, family disintegration and hatred toward religion among its people. It is believed that the notions of surveillance and power are the original sources of crippling problems for those who have least compatibility to them. This research, with the help of deconstructive thoughts, is looking forward to studying of Molloy's structuralist society in order to prove its problems in the areas of self, family, communal life, tradition and religion as well as finding a good solution for them.

Beckett's Molloy and Moran have the same unhappy condition but they are totally different in their sense of selfhood. Where Molloy resists against any ordering agent whether in form of the policeman or the attractive caretaker like Lousse, Moran easily surrenders himself to the sources of power and submissively obeys Youdi's order. The self-abandonment of Moran is a bitter truth and against our expectation because he is a strict conventionalist who gives much importance to bases of tradition and discipline in his life and his surroundings. As Sabbar Saadon Sultan says, he wants to be a tyrannical power (2004: 426) and he likes to control others especially his family, his son, Jacque and his house keeper, Marta. For example, he controls all elements of his son's life from his bowl movements to his stamp collections. As for Marta, he controls her daily chores like cooking in the kitchen and others. On the other hand though, he is overly sensitive when controlled by them. For example, if he feels Marta and Jacque are spying on him, he can not endure it and becomes paranoid as well as reacting neurotically. Moran's tyrannical days of ambition for power ends as soon as he receives Youdi's obligatory message. James Donald O Hara (1982: 19-47) says: "Moran's complacency among his fellows is unsettled not by emotion but obligation".

The secret message from Youdi is just read once by Gaber without any further explanation and moreover, Moran is not allowed to have a copy of this missionary paper. This is supposed to be an example of excessive censorship in the panoptical society. The society which is concerned with revealing any information and knowledge to others wants him to leave his home and go to the wilderness in search of Molloy. Although Moran is reluctant to do so, he embarks to do it under obligation: "At the thought of punishments Youdi might inflict upon me, I was seized by such a mighty fit of laughter that I shook, with mighty silent laughter" (Beckett, 220-21). Moran sets out his journey with his son and he receives more pain and

suffering during it. He even murders a strange man who appears before him seemingly without any reason. As he goes further, he loses his power of doing his mission then he receives a short and instant message to return home. For Youdi, Moran has become useless because he has no more use then it was better to retire and destroy him.

Molloy's life is the opposite of Moran. Whereas Moran regulates his self based on necessity of other's order, Molloy respects his own wish for his mother and willingly goes to find her. On a journey toward his mother, nothing may stop him even the accidental encounter with motherly character of Lousse. Although Lousse takes care of Molloy and provides him food, clothing and shelter, Molloy could never stand the situation. It is because he thinks that he is a prisoner under continuous supervision of Lousse, who seems to be similar to Youdi: "Whereas Molloy emerges with mother, Moran identifies with Youdi who now it will become clear, is the patriarchal equivalent of first part's Sophia [Lousse]" (Smith, 1991: 61). Thus, Molloy escapes from her house and in an unconventional manner, steals some silver and a knife-rest from her house; he has no shame in telling about it to the readers. It seems that he wants to take revenge on Lousse from wanting to detain him. Moran can not tolerate any kind of supervision and the only thing that may comfort him is the name of mother (Mag). In spite of many interpretations which find the name of Mag repulsive, I believe this name emphasizes a motherly attraction and it is taken from the word 'magnetic'. Although this attractiveness and absorption has no result and Molloy never finds his mother, his condition though is much better than Moran's ending because he is helped by an ambulance or a vehicle of some kind. He is brought to supposedly a charitable institution for care. It seems that society defends and cares for those who break its structures and laws even though they are useless and are disabled in a ditch. It is as if society wants Molloy to retain his critical value and selfhood, and not to yield himself to the bases and principles of structuralistic society in order to be respected. In *Naturalizing Molloy*, Thomas G. Pavel writes (1994: 185): "Molloy's invalidity, by keep him close to his body and far from the rule-governed world, makes him a more dignified, even happier character".

Next to the increase of self abandonment and the decrease of self esteem, we discuss the other problem of misunderstanding among family members regarding both characters of Molloy and Moran. In his report, Molloy is highly engaged with the concept of language as a means of communication. He tries to bridge the gap between his mother and him via language but he is not successful and his attempt does not have a positive outcome. Molloy masters his tenses, and yet they do not allow him to express everything as he encounters situations where no grammatical tense can help convey his thoughts (De Larquier, 2004: 44). For example he writes of his peculiar way of communication and understanding with

his mother. He parodies communication with his mother by Morse- like codes of knocks on her skull. Through this language, he certainly deconstructs the rules of structuralism in language and he declines the liner nature of signifier and signified. For him, the relations between knocks and meanings are completely circumstantial and sometimes one knock may refer to several meanings. Thus, he reverses all arbitrary relations of signifier and signified because for him, there is no accurate agreement of truth. "I got into communication with her by knocking on her skull. One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know, four money, five good bye. I was hard put to ram this code into her ruined and frantic understanding, but I did it, in the end that she should confuse yes, no, I don't know and good bye, was all the same to me, I confused them myself" (Beckett, 18).

In contrast with Molloy's unsuccessful attempt, Moran never tries to understand his son. He prevents him from doing things that he likes to do. He wants to educate his son with non-democratic and authoritative principles of structuralist society and he overwhelmingly uses disciplines. His way of teaching though not only ends unsuccessfully but also it shapes his son's violence and hatred toward him. As a result, his son doesn't like him and never wants to be like him. William Atkinson confirms this warning about supervision and discipline when he writes about their influence on breakdown of family or father-son relationship: "By means of enemas and such like, Moran is attempting to control, to censor, his own son. His son eventually deserts him ... when sees that his father has become someone else, the progeny of old power" (2001: 133). But for Molloy, the situation is totally opposite of what started in Moran. Molloy respects the rule of motherhood and likes to be with her and he is happy being in that situation: "I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more" (Beckett, 4). In this case, Beckett, in fact, justifies Foucault's argument about the negative effects of discipline and power.

The next problem which is significant in *Molloy* is the radicalization of religious thoughts highlighted in Moran's report. According to Robin Robinovitz, the religious thoughts of the work are quite similar to religious prejudice of Augustan age: The confessional style and moralistic tone of Moran's report recall St. Augustine's confessions; the emphasis on discipline, authority, and asceticism are likewise Augustinian (Robinovitz, 1979: 25-44). For Beckett, religious zealots of any creed are defeated people and he introduces Moran as a good example of such people. Although he seems to be very scrupulous with religion and assiduous in his attendance at Catholic rituals, he is not the person who pretend to be; he is a seemingly religious zealot who has excessive sexual deviations in secret. He masturbates periodically in his room and he never gets enough satisfaction especially since he is afraid of being seen by others:

"Now if there is one thing I abhor, it is some one coming into my room, without knocking. I must happen to be masturbating, before my cheval glass. Father with yawning fly and starting eyes, toiling to scatter on the ground his joyless seed, that was no sight for a small boy" (Beckett, 137).

Masturbation is not Moran's only sexual deviation; he has some other sexual and homosexual abnormalities. In one scene, he gives his son enema and in another, he is libidiously watching the genital of his neighbor's dog, Zulu. In spite of all these sexual deviations, he never wants to lose his dignity as a religious person in the eyes of others. He wants to be perceived as honorable, religious and his in society provides him the good condition to supervise the other people. For example, he has applied the verger (church officer) to control all the church comers and provide a list of the faithful. This maneuver is a disgusting form of supervision of religion which Beckett does not believe in; through this he creates a false impression of religion. He believes that religion should not seek totalitarian power and should not be for supervision. At the end of Moran's report, he pulls the trigger and shoots to the dead body of religion. There, he reveals the most significance change from a practicing Catholic to a religious skeptic. Moran declares sixteen theological questions and these proclaimed questions cast doubt on salvational role of religion. It is the last sharp attack upon surveillance of religion in the structuralist society of *Molloy*.

On the other hand, Molloy's life does not turn too much to religion or at least it has less engagement with it. But there is a nihilistic sense in his condition that supports skepticism and doubt on religious principles. But this sense never stops him from progress. The progress he makes, however slow and painful it has always been with no limitation. He does whatever he wants and whenever he wants with liberty. This type of liberty is one of the important doctrines in Foucault's theory which negates the societal rules and questions god's presence. "Foucault didn't believe in God and was completely amoral. He believed in a world without God, where the individual is the only purpose in life. He believed people should strive to be whatever they want" (Mc Gaha, 2000).

Beckett himself is almost an anarchist as like as Molloy; he dislikes societal rules and conventions. For him, the structuralist society has a great deal of deficiencies for its residents. He creates a big question of conventions in society and asks how it is possible leaning on bicycle to be a crime but killing of the innocent to be ignored or considered less than killing a dog. While Molloy runs over and kills Teddy, Lousee's dog, an angry crowd chases after him to punish him but when he kills a human being, nobody pursues him. Even Molloy and Moran never feel sorry about killing a human being: "These murders mean nothing to them. Moran is sorry that he can not remember how the murder happened,

for he is sure that it would make an interesting story, Molloy tells his interesting story, whose interest for him lies in carefully explaining the mechanics of how he was able to accomplish this act on crutches" (Rastalesky, 1997, 207-8). By studying both Molloy and Moran, the researcher finally favors Molloy's non-conformity and tries to make sense of it. But on the other hand, he has a negative opinion of Moran's conformity. Moreover, he criticizes the harsh standards and conventions of society and makes us aware of its following problems. He believes that harsh standards impose a severe monitoring on Molloy and Moran in order to control their understanding and knowledge. It is so that Moran completely succumbs himself to Youdi's censorship and never tries to get knowledge: "For mostly I don't know, it is perhaps no longer so, it is too soon to know, I simply don't know, perhaps shall never know" (Beckett, 140).

This study regards the lives of Molloy and Moran as an iconic model of the bigger society; it concerns with the way they think or behave. In fact, the researcher brings the deep structures of thought and eccentric behaviors to the focus and then concludes shattered hierarchy of metaphysical assumptions. As a result, the unsettled metaphysical implications and assumptions open a contradictory reading and confusing argument on fundamentals and principles of man's living. This study has a thoughtful warning and a clear message about the dangers of surveillance, radical conventions, religious deviance and family disintegration. It asks its readers to make decisions and to take responsibility for their lives rather than yielding them to extremity of conventions and standards in the structuralist society. To resist conventions and orders is to resist the others controlling our lives at levels that dig at the very root of family and community. It wants them to have courage for critical declaration and respect their self dignity as humans.

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