

# Parody in Samuel Beckett's Molloy

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**PARODY IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S *MOLLOY***

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the B. A. in English Literature at the  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to explore the role of parody in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary parody is a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule. Parody can have a subversive role as well. The novel was written during the period of postmodernism. *Molloy* is written as a confessional first-person narrative. Many argue that *Molloy* is the perfect example of Beckett's black humor and despairing point of view. Also, many described *Molloy* as an example of usage of several literary devices that, later on, became distinctive features of Beckett's work. One of those literary devices is parody. Emphasis will be put on the influences on Beckett's work; deconstruction of the self and the Cartesian concept of mind and body dualism in Beckett's work. After providing a definition of parody this thesis will explore the links between parody and narration and focus on the postmodern techniques in the novel. A detailed analysis of parody, in the context of Beckett's novel, will be carried out. The main aim of this thesis is to provide an overview of the use of parody in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* and prove that parody is one of its most essential constitutive parts which often has subversive meanings and establish Beckett as one of the most important postmodernist writers.

**Keywords:** *Molloy*, Beckett, parody, postmodernism, narration

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## 1.INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that, modernism was considered a movement with the ultimate goal of modifying traditional beliefs. Overall, modernism required tradition to make everything new – from art to music and literature. The departure from the traditional approach to science and individuality has led to the reaction of assuming their certainty. In more detail, undermining their certainty and question the established notion of reality. The prefix 'post' did not suggest a new era – it formed as a reaction against modernism in the wake of the Second World War and post-war events. In literature, parody was, often used to subvert the traditional views often with humorous effect.

*Molloy* is a novel written by Samuel Beckett and published in 1951. The novel belongs to a trilogy and it was the first book written in that trilogy. The other two novels are *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. The first part of *Molloy* is narrated by Molloy and the second by Moran. According to many critics, Molloy and Moran are one person and the journey that they both embark on is the one of existentialism. *In Molloy*, there are allusions and references to other writers and works, such as Carl Gustav Jung; Dante's *Divine Comedy*; James Joyce's *Ulysses*; Homer's *Odyssey*; George Berkeley; Marcel Proust's *Combray*; and Descartes. The novel consists of two monologues and is written in first-person narration. We do not know where Molloy is going nor why Moran is pursuing him. There are many unimportant passages described in much detail and some of the events that are important for the text are mentioned along the way. The novel is one of the most important novels of postmodernism. It is not clear where the plot takes place, but it could likely be in Ireland because that was Beckett's homeland and there are a few passages in the text that insinuate the landscape of Ireland. Molloy shows a strange obsession for his mother and we see that by the fact that he feels an unbearing urge to find her and on the other hand it seems that the two have a somewhat

unusual relationship because he knocks her on the head. Among many literary devices used in this book, Beckett uses parody and minimalism.

### **1.1.A short biography of Samuel Beckett**

Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906-1989) was an Irish author, critic, and playwright. (Britannica.com) He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. Beckett wrote in English and French. He came from a family with a Protestant background and studied Romance languages at Trinity College from the year 1923 to the year 1927. For a while, Beckett was a reader in English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. It was there that he befriended James Joyce. In 1930 he became a lecturer in French at Trinity College, but already in 1931, he started his travels to London, France, Germany, and Italy. When it comes to his prewar studies, he wrote two essays; one on James Joyce and one on Marcel Proust. *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) is a collection of ten stories that describe the life of a Dublin intellectual, Belacqua Shuah. In his novel, *Murphy* (1938), Beckett describes an Irishman who becomes a male nurse in a mental institution after escaping from his fiancée. His poetry includes *Whoroscope* (1930), a poem on René Descartes, and *Echo's Bones* (1935). He wrote the novel *Watt* (published in 1953) and the incomplete novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in the 1930s. Between 1946 and 1949, Beckett wrote his trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, as well as two plays, *Eleutheria* and *Waiting for Godot*. The latter brought him world fame when it was performed at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris, in January 1953.

Many critics believe that Samuel Beckett is one of the most significant writers of the twentieth century. (Calder 2017: 1) John Calder, in particular, believes that he represents the culmination of the achievements of his three most important predecessors: Proust, Kafka, and Joyce. In addition, Calder points out that some key elements in the work of those writers, which influenced Beckett's work are:

(...) Proust's demonstration of the elasticity of time, Kafka's brooding sense of menace, prescient of the horrors to come in his own Germanic and Jewish world, and Joyce's ability to blend myth with daily life through language (...). (Calder 2017: 1)

When referring to Beckett's style of writing, Calder concludes that Beckett oftentimes presented popular beliefs, which are classic for modern and postmodern literature. He wrote satirically and wickedly – regularly obeying the natural outcomes of a belief to their rational conclusions. (Calder 2017: 8)

## **1.2. Influences on Samuel Beckett's work**

One of the important influences on Beckett was the Irish bishop and philosopher George Berkeley. Beckett found his emphasis on vision, anti-Lockean, and mind-dependent realities very useful. Not everyone knows that Berkeley's “Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions, Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tarwater, and Commonplace Book of Occasional Metaphysical Thoughts“ later renamed to “Philosophical Commentaries“ have largely affected the structure and style of Beckett's texts. In their study on Beckett and Berkeley, Danielle De Ruyter, Matthijs Englebets and Sjef Houppermans point out that it would not be fair to define Berkeley a “philosopher“ and Beckett a “writer“ because Berkeley was a philosopher who among other things was a very good writer and Beckett was dealing with a lot of philosophical issues, many of which went under Berkeley's sphere of interest. (De Ruyter, Englebets, Houppermans 1998: 331) Beckett has first heard of the eighteenth-century philosopher when he was a student at Trinity College. Students were supposed to read the philosopher's “Essay Towards Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain“. Beckett's matriculation tutor was A.A. Luce who was Berkeley's modern editor. In his later years Beckett gave away many of his books, but when he died two volumes of Berkeley's works were found in Beckett's personal library. That just proves that he thought of him very highly. Both Beckett and Berkeley considered knowledge to be the result of perception. (De Ruyter,

Engelberts, Houppermans 1998: 332) Danielle De Ruyter, Matthijs Engleberts and Sjeff Houppermans say that Beckett's first allusion to Berkeley can be found in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" (1932) – "percipi to percipere". (De Ruyter, Engelberts, Houppermans 1998: 332) In the novel "Murphy", there are allusions to the philosopher's "Three Dialogues". Beckett also wrote a work called "Three Dialogues" which is on contemporary painters. With his saying: "I drink, therefore I am" Beckett implies that he finds it funny that humans are trying so hard to convince themselves that they exist and he makes fun of Berkeley to an extent. The biggest impact on Beckett was made by Berkeley's works "Philosophical Commentaries" and "Siris". In these works questions such as the nature of one's own identity and what is beyond the world were raised and that is what Beckett found relevant to himself. He sought inspiration even in the philosopher's personal and less known philosophical works. It is worthy of mention that both Beckett and W.B. Yeats were fascinated with Berkeley's "Commentaries" and that this work offered them a more thorough picture of his personal life than his personal life itself. An interesting fact is that Beckett's middle name was Barclay which pronounced sounds quite similar to Berkeley. "Waiting for Godot" was also impacted by Berkeley. As Norma Kroll mentions, there are connections between Lucky and the philosopher. (Kroll 1995: 541) Based on the philosopher's idea of what it means to exist, Beckett made the representation of existence in Godot. In his early work "Proust" (1931) there are allusions to the philosopher's ideas about the powers that created the world and the mind. In the essay "Proust" there are insinuations to Berkeley's explanation of God as the "pure subject" because Beckett describes Proust's mind following the aforementioned explanation. There is a passage in *Molloy* which shows that Beckett was influenced by Dante and the Dutch philosopher Arnold Geulincx.

"I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of



freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, poring upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the proud and futile wave. Which, as it bears me from no fatherland away, bears me onward to no shipwreck.“ (Boitani 2011)

Dante's Belacqua is an image that appears in *Molloy* when Beckett compares Belacqua's posture with the image of an unborn foetus. (Robinson 1979: 75) The influence of the Bible is also present. Youdi is similar to Yahweh (Jehovah), the Hebrew name for God. It is not wrong to assume that Youdi is a metaphor for God. (Calder 2018: 112) Moran poses some theological questions and one of them is: “What was God doing with himself before the creation?“ (Calder 2018: 115) Another important influence on the novel is René Descartes and his concept of mind and body dualism which will be discussed later in the thesis.

### **1.3. Defining parody**

The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries) defines parody as:

A composition in prose or verse in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as to make them appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects; an imitation of a work more or less closely modeled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect.

As one can conclude, the main aim of parody is to intentionally imitate characteristics of individuals, or certain topics, to be humorous and very often subversive. In addition, in literature, parody is mainly an impression of a certain style and manner. (Britannica.com) On the one hand, parody can be viewed in negative intent and/ or context.

On the other hand, parody in literature can have a positive connotation – mainly for a constructive purpose, or as an expression of admiration and emotions. In her very influential book “A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms“ Linda Hutcheon

points out that the term parody has its roots in the Greek noun *parodia* (Hutcheon 2000: 32 ) which means “counter-song“. The prefix *para* in the word parody carries two meanings. The first meaning of the prefix is mostly encountered when defining the term parody – “counter“ or “against“. The second meaning of the prefix *para* implies some sort of affection.

Hutcheon implies that parody is a form of imitation. (Hutcheon 2000: 5- 15) The major similarity between parody and imitation is that parody is defined by ironic reversal. As the author emphasizes, ironic inversion is a trait that all parodied literature has, but criticism does not need to be present in the form of ridiculing someone or something for the literature to be called parody.

Moreover, Hutcheon (Hutcheon 2000: 10) considers the following to be the best description of parody in the twentieth-century art forms:

In my focus on twentieth-century art forms, I hope to suggest that there are probably no transhistorical definitions of parody possible. Nevertheless, I shall constantly be using examples from other periods to show that there are common denominators to all definitions of parody in all ages - although they are not the ones usually cited. It is modern parodic usage that is forcing us to decide what it is that we shall call parody today. The closest model to present practice was not called parody at all, but imitation. (Hutcheon 2000: 10 )

Sometimes it is hard to differentiate parody from irony because one needs the other to understand it fully. Hutcheon explains that the main function of parody is to separate and contrast. Irony and parody perform on two levels – a primary called foreground; and a secondary, which is the backgrounded one. (Hutcheon 2000: 34)

It is interesting to point out that Russian formalists tended to treat parody as a mode of auto-reflexivity. For example Tynjanov discovered Dostoevsky's use of parody as a means of

emancipation from him. Russian formalists were known for emphasizing the historical role of parody.

Other scholars such as Northrop Frye, Kiremidjian, and Lotman also emphasized the historical role of parody. Susan Stewart claims that parody consists of " (...) substituting elements within a dimension of a given text in such a way that the resulting text stands in an inverse or incongruous relation to the borrowed text".

There are situations where one might interchange parody with pastiche, but pastiche stays within the same genre serving as its model and parody can undergo adjustment. Parody and pastiche both involve the issue of purpose. Pastiche is usually an imitation of unspecified possibilities of texts.

## **2.PARODY AND NARRATION**

This thesis will also briefly explore the correlation between parody and narration, in particular, how narration manifests in works written in parodic style. This will be illustrated with the examples from *Molloy*.

### **2.1.Narration in *Molloy***

*Molloy* is written as a confessional first-person narrative. Molloy narrates the story of his life, but he knows that the meaning of the story is not his. The reader must understand how Molloy got to his mother's room, both on a physical and a psychological level. The first narrative of the novel shows us the use of the first-person voice as a requirement and a tragically inadequate perspective at the same time. David Weisberg points out that in the novel communication and coercion are completely intertwined. (Weisberg 2000: 93) The

second part is also a first-person narrative and it is narrated by Moran. Moran may be a version of Molloy or Molloy himself. Moran never encounters Molloy and we can come to understand that, in a way, the novel is about Moran's gradual transformation into Molloy.

Weisberg says that in part two the term *agent* appears and it has three references. (Weisberg 2000: 110) The first reference is the notion of Moran's agency. The context that surrounds him is beyond his comprehension. The second reference is the fact that Beckett plays with the espionage novel. Thirdly, Beckett introduces us to an experiment with basic narrative elements: an agent is merely a functional role in the *discourse*.

Moran's obligation to pursue Molloy brings up allusions to Kafka's novel *The Trial* and it implies a theological dimension too. It is crucial to remark that, when it comes to narration, it is important to understand the order in which Molloy's and Moran's narratives appear. Many critics claim that Molloy, as the object of pursuit, should have appeared after Moran who is the pursuer, has presented his monologue.

In her article "Antiphonal, Mnemonic, and Recursive in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*: A Narratological Study" Alireza Farahbakhsh discusses three narrative styles used in *Molloy*. The first one is the mnemonic style which implies that the character lives in the past. Character's memories and reflections are crucial for this narrative style. Only by seeing himself in the image of other characters, can the character find his true self. The second narrative style that Farahbakhsh writes about, is the antiphonal style. Its role is very important. This style is about the use of a plethora of questions which are either followed by transient answers or no answers at all. These questions demonstrate that the character is unable to answer his questions. Molloy believes that he could find his true identity if he found his mother. Although Molloy does search for his mother, he does not find his true identity. In *Molloy* there are many instances of questions brought up by the two protagonists. At one point

Moran expresses his disgust toward women: “Question, Have women a soul? Answer, Yes. Question, Why? Answer, Answer, in order that they may be damned.” (Farahbakhsh 2018: 17) The third narrative style is the recursive style. In the novel there are some structures and words that are repeated. Repetition enables the narrative to become an endless process. In the novel, there are sentences which are repeated with variation. For example, the words 'fatigue', 'dumb', 'stiff' and 'tired' are repeated. At the end of the novel the narrator repeats what he said at the beginning of his part and then denies those sentences. The reader might conclude that Moran cannot trust words.

## **2.2.Relation between parody and narration**

We can perceive narration as narrating a story which, oftentimes, consists of the beginning, the main part, and the end. The main goal of guided narration is to provide a reader with a logical sequencing of events in literature. Narration is also called storytelling, and Aristotle's term for the narration was *prothesis*. As Richard Nordquist states in his book “A Guide to All Types of Narration, with Examples“, the person who recounts the events is called a narrator. Stories can have two types of the narrator – reliable and unreliable. Nordquist gives an example that, if a story is being told by someone else, lying, or deluded, such as in Edgar Allan Poe's “The Tell-Tale Heart“, the narrator would be deemed unreliable.“ Defining narrative, Richard Nordquist states that the account itself is called a narrative.

Nordquist defines the point of view as the perspective from which a speaker or writer recounts a narrative. (Nordquist 2020) According to him, there are two types of point of view – first person and third person. The first person uses "I" and provides an inside of the thoughts of just one person or one at a time. The third person can be limited to one person's perspective or, secondly, can provide an insight into the thoughts of all characters. Latter is called the

omniscient third-person narrator. The author states that narration itself is fundamental for the story – it is the text which is not a dialogue or a quoted material.

There are two (or three) types of narration in literature. Nordquist explains the variation of understanding the types of narration, quoting two academic resources:

"There are two forms: simple narrative, which recites events chronologically, as in a newspaper account;" note William Harmon and Hugh Holman in "A Handbook to Literature", "and narrative with a plot, which is less often chronological and more often arranged according to a principle determined by the nature of the plot and the type of story intended. It is conventionally said that narration deals with time, description with space." (Nordquist 2020)

Cicero, however, finds three forms in "De Inventione", as explained by Joseph Colavito in "Narratio": "The first type focuses on 'the case and...the reason for the dispute.' (1.19.27). A second type contains 'a digression... to attack somebody,...making a comparison,...amusing the audience,...or for amplification' (1.19.27). The last type of narrative serves a different end –'amusement and training' – and it can concern either events or persons (1.19.27)." (Nordquist 2020)

Concluding the thoughts on narration, the author states that narration is not found just in literature, literary nonfiction, and academic studies. Narration can also be found in writing in the workspace.

Regarding the relationship between parody and narration, it is important to point out that parody is a constituent part of the narrative. As a form itself, it cannot function without the narrative – or someone to transfer the thoughts of the author. Although these do not have to be presented traditionally, as is the case, for example, when writing *in medias res*, the reader must ultimately understand the clear intentions of the author and the use of parody.

### 3.PARODY AND POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is a late 20th-century movement, which has its foundation in Western philosophy. Postmodernism is defined by a prevailing suspicion of reason, skepticism, subjectivism, relativism, and intense sensitivity to the role of ideology – especially in supporting and preserving political and economic power. As Brian Duignan (Britannica.com) suggests, postmodernism was, in its core, the reaction against the intellectual characteristics of the modern period in the history of Western philosophy (17th – 19th century): “(...) many of the doctrines characteristically associated with postmodernism can fairly be described as the candid denial of general philosophical perspectives that were taken for granted during the 18th-century Enlightenment.”

#### 3.1.Postmodern literature

As Sheeba Sheeba (Sheeba 2017: 181 – 190) reports in her book “Postmodern literature: Practices and Theory“, postmodern literature is:

(...) a form of literature which is marked both stylistically and ideologically, by a reliance on such literary conventions as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, games, parody, paranoia, dark humor, and authorial self-reference. Postmodern literature also often rejects the boundaries between "high" and "low" forms of art and literature as well as the distinction between genres and forms of writing and story-telling. (Sheeba 2017: 181)

When referring to stylistic techniques of postmodern literature, Sheeba suggests that the following are most frequent: pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, temporal distortion, minimalism, maximalism, magical realism, and reader involvement.

The most notable works of postmodern literature, by *listverse.com* are *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* by Samuel Beckett; *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski;

*Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut; *Labyrinths* by Jorge Luis Borges; *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by Hunter S. Thompson; *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller; *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon; *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs and *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace. (McClure, F., listverse.com)

Sheeba (Sheeba 2017: 186 – 190) discusses some of the most prominent issues and problems of postmodernism, as determined by scholars. Firstly, most readers think that postmodern literature is very difficult to comprehend, due to the use of language, forms, jargons, and terms. Secondly, many argue that one of the main flaws of postmodernism is its lack of format. Furthermore, according to the author, postmodernism can sometimes be understood as bizarre, due to the lack of pointing solution when talking about most cases.

### **3.2 Postmodern techniques in *Molloy***

Besides parody, which is the crucial part of the thesis, there are other postmodern techniques present in the novel. *Molloy* is written in a form of stream of consciousness and there is little dialogue itself. This is because Beckett used minimalism. (Wordpress.com) Dialogues are a minimal aspect in his novels. When characters speak there are no quotation marks or paragraph breaks which would indicate a speaker. Beckett uses a plain indication word – “said“, every time a speaker appears. (Wordpress.com) These examples show that the author cares little for dialogue. Metafiction is a form of fiction where the readers are aware that they are reading a fictional work. Beckett often reminds the reader of this by addressing him directly. *Molloy* and *Moran* are retelling their story which is also characteristic for metafiction. Another postmodern technique used is poioumena. Poioumena is a type of metafiction in which the story is about the process of creation. Works written in this type of metafiction are usually about the process of creating the book. This technique is used in the whole trilogy. Paranoia is another technique to be discussed. *Moran* thinks that his son has a



special way of calling him to hurt him. He also thinks that his son's dentist was insinuating something when he used the word “naturally“. (Daram, Rahmani 2013: 46) These are some of the instances of Moran being paranoid. In her article “Ironic Structure in Beckett's fiction“ Edith Kern notes that already the title itself is an irony. The reader expects a story of one person, but is presented with two independent stories told by two protagonists. Intertextuality is another literary technique used in *Molloy*. As will be shown in the thesis, there are many references to other authors and their works. For instance, Beckett makes allusions to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, to René Descartes' concept of mind and body dualism, to Carl Gustav Jung and also to the Bible. These allusions will be discussed as a part of parody. The last postmodern technique to be discussed is temporal distortion. The narration in *Molloy* is non-linear. The protagonist provides little valid information from his past, he forgets things and cannot be trusted all the time because the reader cannot be sure whether something actually happened in Molloy's past. The amount of time to do something is rarely identified.

### **3.3 Parody in postmodern literature**

Parody is considered crucial to postmodernism, but there are multiple variations of how it is called depending on the context in which it is used. To name just a few we have an ironic quotation, pastiche, and intertextuality. Rarely do we encounter the word 'parody' in studies on postmodernism. The reason for that could be in the eighteenth-century definitions of *parody*, which are connected to ridicule. (Hutcheon 2002: 51) Postmodern parody does not neglect the past; it merely demonstrates that we are no longer connected to the past due to the passage of time and historical changes. There are numerous examples of parodied texts in Umberto Eco's work, in the work of Jorge Luis Borges and Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the work of Angela Carter, we also find parodic echoes. (Hutcheon 2002: 30) These echoes serve as ironic feminizations of canonic male representations. Parody is very present in art as well and therefore we can find it the work of Mark Tansey, in the painting of Picasso, Manet, and

Magritte. In modernist literature, we find parody in the work of T.S. Eliot, Thomas Mann, and James Joyce. Christa Wolf parodies Homer's tale of men and war, Aeschylus's work, the writings of Herodotus and Aristotle, Goethe's work, and Schiller's work.

#### **4. Parody and deconstruction of the self**

In the study "Beckett's Trilogy and the Limits of Self-Deconstruction" Helga Schwalm mentions a quote by Stanley E. Gontarski on Beckett: "Beckett deconstructs his own texts so thoroughly that deconstructive analysis, at any rate, often seems merely redundant." At the beginning of the novel Molloy says: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there." This example is a denial of first-person narrative. The end of the novel finishes in paradox and it denies closure. These sentences belong to Moran and they are very important because they marked the postmodern literature: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining." In his article "Samuel Beckett's Postmodern Fictions" Brian Finney describes how Moran deconstructs his "self" because he undergoes a big transformation. Firstly he is a confident agent and father and then at the end of his narrative Moran is an uncanny copy of Molloy. Both Moran and Molloy are searching for their true self. On the one hand the whole trilogy is about a man who wants to reach the core of his being by retelling his life to himself. On the other hand it is about a modern artist who is exploring the source of his imagination. While doing that he is telling stories to himself which leads to separating himself from the "real" world. In the study "The Self without the Other in Derrida's *Khora* and Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*" Azita Zamani notes that the protagonist has to speak because he is made of words and his silence would be his death. He achieves essence only through language. That is why his self is very uncertain.

The Unnamable talks about himself constantly and offers the reader a lot of information, but the more he talks, the less is revealed. The protagonist tries to create the Other(s) so that he has the possibility of seeing himself from outside. He tried to prove his existence by creating Others and trying to connect with them. Zamani notes that without the Other, the mirror to look at ourselves would crash. Only under Other's gaze, we become definable and real. The novel puts emphasis on language and it implies that language is the only weapon that the protagonist has. The common phrase “to be or not to be“ manifests itself as “to speak or not to speak“ in *The Unnamable*.

### **5.Parody and the Cartesian concept of mind and body dualism in Beckett's works**

In his book “Philosophy of Samuel Beckett“ John Calder points out that a lot of dualism can be found already in Beckett's background and the Irish world in which he grew up. To exemplify, Ireland was divided into Catholics and Protestants and it had Anglo-Nationalist rival politics. (Calder 2017: 24) Moreover, it was class-divided as well. Descartes thought that the mind and body are linked in the pineal gland or *conarium*. On the contrary, his student Arnold Geulincx had a theory that mind and body are not connected in any way whatsoever. The best example of Cartesian dualism in *Murphy* is in the representation of Murphy's mind. The perspective of London is also Cartesian and it increases Murphy's Leibnizian perceptions of relational space. (Cousineau 1984: 225) Another novel that can be brought to relation with the Cartesian concept is the novel *Watt*. (Calder 2017: 62) In *Watt*, the author admires and imitates the system, but he even mocks at it and does all that at the same time.

In his book “Understanding Samuel Beckett“ Alan Astro mentions an article by Hugh Kenner in which he speaks of the bicycle as the Cartesian invention par excellence. For Descartes, the body is separate from the mind and it works as a machine. That is why Kenner considers that a bicycle could be perceived as an extension of the body. In her book “Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism“ Yoshiki Tajiri notes that Molloy's body changes throughout the story. When he starts the journey, he has to rely on crutches and his bicycle. At the end of his journey, he has to crawl forward and the bicycle is gone except for its horn. The narrator says that his story is not his own. The story moves on its own as a chainless bicycle would do. A man riding a bicycle is something that Kenner calls the 'Cartesian Centaur'. This is Beckett's Cartesian dream in which mind and body are not in interaction. Kenner considers that the world of *Molloy* lacks a functioning bicycle and is doomed to a deteriorating machine – the human body. There is a passage which shows how remote Molloy feels from his body.

“And when I see my hands, on the sheet, which they love to floccillate already, they are not mine, I have no arms, they are a couple, they play with the sheet, love-play perhaps, trying to get up perhaps, one on top of the other. But it doesn't last, I bring them back, little by little, towards me, it's resting time. And with my feet it's the same, sometimes, when I see them at the foot of the bed, one with toes, the other without.“ (Tajiri 2007: 43)

In the novel, except from the mind-body division, there are more examples of division. The self is divided from the world, father from son, man from nature etc. In *Molloy* the unity of the self depends on the division from all other elements. (Ben-Zvi, 1992: 123) There is a part where Moran praises how delightful it is to be in total separation of mind from body.

“To be literally incapable of motion at last, that must be something! My mind swoons when I think of it. And mute into the bargain! And perhaps deaf as a post! And who knows blind as a bat! And as likely as not your memory a blank! And just enough brain

intact to allow you to exult! And to dread death like a regeneration.“ (Ben-Zvi, 1992: 124)

Death is a consequence of the division of mind from body, but union between them is unstable at best.

## **6. ANALYSIS OF BECKETT'S *MOLLOY***

### **6.1. Parody in *Molloy***

In this part of the thesis, more attention will be given to parody in *Molloy*.

M. M. Bakhtin (Valdez 1985: 2) claims that the novel “parodies other genres; it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language“. Through parody, the novel can demonstrate that earlier or contemporary literary conventions are "something historically relative, delimited and incomplete“. Bakhtin furthermore suggests that over the years the novel has subjected itself to parodic self-criticism:

it is characteristic that the novel does not permit any of [the] various individual manifestations of itself to stabilize. Throughout its entire history, there is a consistent parodying or travesty of dominant or fashionable novels that attempt to become models for the genre. (Valdez 1985: 2)

Joyce also used this sort of parody in his works. In his study “The Sadly Rejoicing Slave: Beckett, Joyce, and Destructive Parody“ Michael Moses Valdez compares the use of parody in Beckett and Joyce. Beckett showed how close he was to Joyce when in *Molloy* he referred to himself as a “sadly rejoicing slave“, „on the black boat of Ulysses,“ who follows with his eyes “the proud and futile wake“. Beckett uses modes of parody aforementioned by

Bakhtin in *Molloy* when he preempts the opening lines of Keats's *Endymion*. (Valdez 1985: 2) Joyce also parodies those lines in Molly's soliloquy in *Ulysses*. In *Molloy*, there is one impressive episode when Molloy spends a lot of time trying to establish a system that would provide him to circulate sixteen stones through four pockets. (Valdez 1985: 3) He aims to suck all sixteen stones, but putting in the mouth each stone only once. This ludicrous episode becomes even more significant when we find out that it has a hidden allusion to an episode from *Ulysses*. If we want to relate Molloy to Ulysses, it is possible to say that Molloy is the Ulysses who never returned to Ithaca. On the other hand, Molloy can be linked to Bloom because he also travels in circles and always returns to his mother, whom we relate to Molly-Penelope. Another character that will be mentioned is Lousse. (Valdez 1985: 4) Lousse can be compared to Bella-Circe because she imprisoned Molloy using spells and the magic power of molys. The protagonist Moran is another character to be related to Bloom-Ulysses. He also goes on an epic journey, but the difference is that he does not have a wife and a son waiting for him. Moreover, Moran is abandoned by his son. In his attempt to retell the Homeric myth (Valdez 1985: 4), Beckett parodies and vulgarizes *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*. Another author draws parallels between *Molloy* and *Odyssey*. K. J. Phillips claims that to argue that Molloy is a parody of *Odyssey* we can recall the episode when the policeman asks Molloy what his name is. Here Beckett parodies Odysseus's use of the "noman" riddle. (Phillips: 22) Another instance is Odysseus's bag of winds which correlates with Molloy's description of his farts per hour. Odysseus leaves his wife and goes toward the Isle of the Sun and on the other hand, Molloy leaves Lousse and heads "towards the sun, why not, the wind has fallen. Or rather towards the least gloomy quarter of the heavens". (Phillips: 22) Molloy kills Lousse's dog Teddy and they bury it later on, and Odysseus's dog Argus dies when the owner returns home.

According to Bjørn K. Myskja and his book "The Sublime in Kant and Beckett", another example of parody is the relationship between Molloy and his lover. This is a parody

of love because they meet in a dump and Molloy gets paid for the lovemaking. The lovemaking is described as tiring and the end of parody is when he praises this love:

I never sought to repeat the experience, having I suppose the intuition that it had been unique and perfect, of its kind, achieved and inimitable, and that it behooved me to preserve it in my memory, pure of all pastiche, in my heart... (Myskja 2002: 39)

Molloy often points out that he is unable to live an ordinary life that has regulations and that kind of life is parodied. The life Moran led before embarking on a journey is a parody of a bourgeois life. (Myskja 2002: 43) Since Molloy is portrayed as a complete outsider in an ordinary world it is important to perceive his interpretation of this world merely as his point of view, therefore meaning that Molloy is perhaps not always to be trusted.

Perhaps not so well-known is the fact that Samuel Beckett was inspired by the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung and this influence is manifested in *Molloy* as well. (Beidler 1993: 103) Besides from Jung's influence in *Molloy*, we can also find various other philosophical and mythological influences. Molloy can be seen as a parody of the Jungian psyche. (Beidler 1993: 103) The protagonist Moran serves as a Jungian "persona" and Molloy is his repressed shadow. In the article "On the Nature of the Psyche" Jung divides the human mind into two spheres: the conscious and the unconscious. (Beidler 1993: 104) There is a paragraph which is a great example of Molloy's unconscious perception:

"All grows dim... It's in the head. It doesn't work any more, it says, I don't work any more. You go dumb as well and sounds fade. The threshold scarcely crossed that's how it is. It's the head...If you think of the forms and light of other days it is without regret. But you seldom think of them, with what would you think of them: I don't know. People pass too, hard to distinguish from yourself. That is discouraging." (Beidler 1993: 104)

The structure of *Molloy* parodies Jung's explanation of a unified human psyche. (Beidler 1993: 117)

Another instance of parody manifests itself in a slightly different way from what was discussed earlier on in this thesis. *Molloy* parodies the detective novel as a form and the realist form of a novel as well. (Dechene 2018: 220 ) A realist novel usually has a plot and the reader expects concrete events to happen and to have a good insight into the protagonist's background, relationships with other people, what the character likes and does not like, and similar. However, the novel *Molloy* does not offer any of that or merely provides some vague indications about those notions. What is meant by something *concrete* in this context, is for example the event when Tolstoy's Anna Karenina commits suicide. (Boulter 2008: 109) That is a novel with a very strong realist form. It is odd that Moran whose role is that of a detective, pursues such a mysterious person like Molloy, and he is also very distant to the reader because we are only given vague and abstract information about him. Antoine Dechene explains that *Molloy* does not follow the rules set by Tzvetan Todorov in his work *Typology of Detective Fiction* (Dechene 2018: 220) because a metaphysical detective story is not made of "two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation." The novel parodies that division through its two *a priori* separated parts. John Tibbetts also claims that *Molloy* is a parody of a detective novel describing a proper detective novel as follows:

"The primary assumption is that there is order in the universe, that the world is knowable, is open to the power of the detective's observation and reason. [The detective] makes sense of what appears at first glance to not make sense. The crime is committed in the past, and it is solved in the present. The detective/narrator is reliable. There is a clear ontological and moral distinction between pursuer and pursued." (Tibbetts 2016: 227)

Based on this definition, we can come to realize that *Molloy* does not fit into those assumptions because Beckett presented us characters that we know very little of, we cannot trust their narratives and what is most important – the pursuer never found his object of pursuit.



In his article “From purgatory to inferno: Beckett and Dante revisited”, Michael Robinson claims that with *Molloy* Beckett is parodying Dante as well. Belacqua is the character that Beckett often alludes to in his later novels, including *Molloy*. At the beginning of the novel the author describes how his protagonist rests beneath a rock, under which "I crouched like Belacqua or Sordello, I forget." (Robinson 1979: 75) By saying that his characters were in the “knee and elbow position“ he alludes to Belacqua's position in Ante-Purgatory. This posture corresponds to the one of an unborn foetus. (Robinson 1979: 75)

In his work “Beckett Re-membered: After the Centenary” James Carney explains that Molloy's journey is a huge parody of an inner journey, the one happening inside of one's mind. Psychoanalysis perceives this as the relationship between the fetus and his mother. Molloy is not able to properly communicate with his mother and that is a parody of psychoanalytic nurture:

My mother. I don't think too harshly of her. I know she did all she could not to have me, except of course the one thing, and if she never succeeded in getting me unstuck, it was that fate had earmarked me for less compassionate sewers. But it was well-meant and that's enough for me. No, it is not enough for me, but I give her credit, though she is my mother, for what she tried to do for me. And I forgive her for having jostled me a little in the first months and spoiled the only endurable, just endurable, period of my enormous history. And I also give her credit for not having done it again, thanks to me, or for having stopped in time, when she did. And if ever I'm reduced to looking for a meaning to my life, you never can tell, it's in that old mess I'll stick my nose, to begin with, the mess of that poor old uniparous whore and myself the last of my foul brood, neither man nor beast. (Carney 2012: 24)

Molloy rejects his mother's nurture and that can be brought into correlation with the Oedipal paradigm of psychoanalysis. The fact that he wants to be separated from his mother points out his meditative methods. In the novel, Molloy mentions that he studied psychiatry,

and psychoanalysis is intertwined with this discipline, but the two specialties cannot explain Molloy's sufferings. Gilles Deleuze wrote about characters in literature that could be "diagnosed" with a psychological disorder. Moreover, he perceives the writer as the symptomatologist whose style of writing creates a new perspective of the world through a character who is "diagnosed", and according to him, the written text is the symptom. (Carney 2012: 26) *Molloy* is a novel that deals with problems of identification and naming and they are crucial for the text itself. For the aforementioned issues, a considerate example would be the part when Molloy talks to the police officer and he can barely remember what his name is. Deleuze coined the term which means not wanting to be placed under any category, i.e. rejecting to be named. The term is "nomadic thought" and the nomad represents the "namelessness" which is presented by Molloy's name. (Carney 2012: 27) Other instances of issues with naming are with other characters, such as Molloy's lovers Ruth and Edith, his mother Mag, and the names of places like Bally, Ballyba, Turdy, and Turdyba. These kind of issues can be found in the second part of the novel too, when Moran is unsure what is the name of the man that he pursues. He knows that the beginning is "Mol" but does not know how to finish it, whether with "ose, or one, or even oc."

The next instance of parody in *Molloy* to be dealt with in this thesis is Moran's version of the Lord's prayer which to an extent alludes that God does not exist. The following is his version of the prayer: "Our father who art no more in heaven than on earth or in hell, I neither want nor desire that thy name be hallowed, thou knowest best what suits thee." (Beckett 2009) This passage demonstrates that Beckett was probably an atheist and that he used biblical imagery in his work to parody, criticize, and mock. Another parody of God to be found is the parody of the Adonis. (Willmott 2008: 200) Molloy and Lousse bury her dog and by the descriptions, we can conclude that she feels about this dog as if it were her child. Here Beckett parodied the notion of dog to represent God. Lousse is the embodiment of the Magna

Mater figure. (Willmott 2008: 200) More than once does Molloy relate himself with the dead dog, i.e. child, and with the Adonis counterpart to the Magna Mater. Moran and his son could, to an extent, be related to Abraham and Isaac (Jebb 2011: 72) because in the novel there is also the father and his son; the journey, and the knife, but there is no mention of God taking action. There is a passage where Moran is worried whether he was allowed to take the Eucharist after he drank a beer. (Jebb 2011: 72) This part could be perceived as parody because it seems that Molloy does not respect God:

“The host, it is only fair to say, was lying heavy on my stomach. And as I made my way home I felt like one who, having swallowed a painkiller, is first astonished, then indignant, on obtaining no relief.“ (Jebb 2011: 72)

The parts in the novel where the gardens are mentioned are parodies of Eden and the creation myth of the gnostics. (Moorjani 1992: 186)

In the episode with Lousse, Beckett made a parody of a European concept of masculinity. (Jeffers 2009: 75) When they are burying the dog, it is more than once that Molloy tells Lousse that he is aware of the fact that it should be him doing all the work. “It was she put him in the hole, though I was the gentleman.“ Molloy's references to himself as a "gentleman" show us that Beckett based this notion of masculinity on a code of "chivalry". (Jeffers 2009: 75) Molloy refers to himself as a gentleman which is also an allusion to the Victorian era and its position of genders. Molloy is not a gentleman because he is unmanly and therefore he is only a parody of masculinity. (Jeffers 2009: 75) If reading the French version of the novel, one can discover that instead of using the equivalent *gentilhomme* for the English *gentleman*, Beckett used the term *monsieur* which carries a different meaning, the kind that does not emphasize the masculinity of a man. (Jeffers 2009: 76) That might be the case because the author wrote the French version in the way a translator would do it rather than a writer and therefore paid more attention to making meaningful sentences than to the

meaning of words themselves. In no way whatsoever is it possible to consider Molloy a gentleman because if we would put him in the Victorian era he would have to assist Lousse to be considered a gentleman, and if put in the modern era it would still be expected that he does the physical work if he wants to be labeled as a true gentleman. Another thing that exemplifies the protagonist's unmanliness is when Lousse dresses him in a female nightdress. (Jeffers 2009: 77) When Molloy is asked to give his identity papers to the police officer, he firstly thinks of a completely different thing from the one asked for.

"Ah, my papers. Now the only papers I carry with me are bits of newspaper to wipe myself, you understand, when I have a stool. Oh I don't say I wipe myself every time I have a stool, no, but I like to be in a position to do so if I have to." (Jeffers 2009: 77)

The mentioned quote unites two aspects of masculinity, the man seen from the outside and inside. Interestingly, Molloy has such a high opinion of himself, labeling himself as a gentleman, and yet he is unsure whether Ruth/ Edith was a man or a woman. Now the question that could easily be brought up is: could a true man ever be with another man? There are homosexual notions insinuated and that leads to one of many arguments that in no context can the protagonist be perceived as "masculine".

Beckett can be brought to relation with Proust as well because there are claims that *Molloy* is a "grotesque parody" of Proust's narrative. (Gray 1994: 162) A parody of Proust is when Molloy gives his mother three taps on the head because three taps mean "I don't know" and this is in opposition with Proustian, grandmotherly meaning of "I am here, I love you." Molloy says "I don't know" which needs to be understood as a parody of Proust, and as a retraction of that parody because it might be that he does not remember what the three taps used to mean. Therefore, it is necessary to consider both variants. (Gray 1994: 166) Molloy and Moran bring out the parody of the reintegration of the self through memory and

imagination, an idea Beckett made based on his interest in Schopenhauer which led to his negative opinion of Proust.

## **6.2.Pastoral and subversive parody in *Molloy***

In the novel Beckett deliberately parodies pastoral conventions and that is why pastoral and parody are connected in such a way that Beckett makes a pastoral parody. Authors such as Virgil and Pope used pastoral to make worlds that have nothing to do with corruption of the city. Beckett used it for geoinimaginary insides and outsides. (Hamilton 2005: 325) In the traditional meaning of pastoral there is a world where folk sing, play or find consolation in nature. In Beckett's pastoral Arcadia is a joke and escape is barred. In the novel Molloy and Moran have short encounters with the shepherd and his flock. These encounters should be educative for both of them and they are aware of their significance, but are not enlightened in any way. Pastoral characters are usually associated with a life of *otium* – days of song and play – and Beckett's characters fail in attempts to sing and play. (Hamilton 2005: 335) The landscape described in *Molloy* corresponds to the landscape of south county Dublin. The geography is presented as ambiguous and inhospitable. (Hamilton 2005: 327) One of the striking landscape descriptions is the one of Ballyba:

“The pastures, in spite of the torrential rains, were exceedingly meagre and strewn with boulders. Here only quitchweed grew in abundance, and a curious bitter blue grass fatal to cows and horses, though tolerated apparently by the ass, the goat and the black sheep.”

(Hamilton 2005: 328 )

We can perceive Molloy and Moran as *hunters* because they are trying to reach a goal that they know nothing of. The *garden* (Hamilton 2005: 333 ) is another important notion in the novel. When Molloy decides to pursue his mother, he leaves the garden just like Moran

leaves his garden when Gaber tells him to pursue Molloy. Although for Moran the garden is some sort of a shelter, a place where he feels secure; he does not get to spend a big amount of time in it. When he returns home after his pursuit of Molloy, Moran informs the reader that he had the best time when he resided in the garden. Realizing how he feels about it, makes us think that Beckett was trying to refer to Voltaire and his work *Candide*. Readers of *Molloy* can fall into the temptation to think that Molloy is looking for Mother Nature and not his biological mother. (Hamilton 2005: 338) Molloy's and Moran's journeys in the country are not connected to enlightenment or emancipation.

In her study "Moran as secret agent" Julie Campbell states that she considers the protagonist of the second part of the novel to be a parody of a secret agent. Beckett plays with the conventions that make a spy thriller genre. To an extent, he is also playing with his readers because they expect different patterns from the ones that he presents. Beckett is parodying the system of this genre and subverts it. This is one of the parts of the novel where the subversive role of parody appears. In their book "After the Final No: Samuel Beckett's Trilogy" Thomas Cousineau and Geoffrey Aggeler mention another instance of subversive parody. This is the parody of maternal figure which is usually someone who gives us protection. In the second part, Beckett replaces this figure with Youdi, Father Ambrose and Moran who are male figures. There is a part where Molloy says of women: "(M)y memory confuses them and I am tempted to think of them as one and the same old hag, flattened and crazed by life." Moran treats his son very badly and therefore raises doubts about the legitimacy of paternal authority. (Cousineau, Aggeler 1999: 15)

## 7.CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to present what is parody, its function and how it manifests itself in *Molloy*. *Molloy* is a part of a trilogy, it consists of two monologue paragraphs and parody is one of the most prominent literary devices. The Cartesian concept of mind and body dualism is important for the novel and it is interesting how a lot of this dualism can be found in Beckett's background. Marcel Proust is one of the authors who are mentioned in the thesis and there are claims that *Molloy* is a parody of Proust's narrative. Beckett also parodies the traditional pastoral. Although there are descriptions of landscape Beckett uses them for different purposes and is not trying to present the pastoral world as a place where someone can be carefree and alienated from the troubles of the life in the city. It is mentioned how parody can also have a subversive role. In an attempt to demonstrate that, the protagonist of the second part is described as a parody of a secret agent. Attention is also given to the period of postmodernism and to postmodern techniques in the novel. Deconstruction of the self is a concept used to describe that the whole trilogy is about a man who is retelling his life and who is searching for his true self. In this concept a lot of emphasis is put on language and it is shown how without language the protagonist dies because he only consists of words. To conclude, *Molloy* is a complex novel which requires a lot of analyzing to be understood and written about. It presents quite a challenge for the reader, but it is fascinating in how it always leaves some space for further discussions and interpretations. “[This book] is that *rara avis*, doing precisely what it proposes to do, and so well that further comment seems superfluous... The analysis is deft, incisive and persuasive, and typifies much of the edition.” (James Joyce Literary Supplement)

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