

Freudian Forgetfulness in Beckett's Trilogy

Through creating unattainable conditions for themselves, Molloy and Moran's search for individuals whose appearances they do not know parallels the Freudian concept of *structuralized self-shattering* in its fate to fail. Molloy's "immediate goal... was to get to [his] mother as quickly as possible" (Beckett 25). Without understanding the exact nature of his relationship to his mother or motivations behind his determination, Molloy pursues his quest with foundational gaps in information namely, "Why must he see his mother? Who is she? What does he expect to accomplish by seeing her again?" (Hesla 93). Although Molloy has some memories associated with his mother and some vague inclinations in understanding the nature of his pursuit, he becomes less bound towards the same initial reasons that had originally compelled him, asking, "My reasons? I had forgotten them" (Beckett 23). Although Molloy shows appreciation for his residency in his mother's home, which relieved him from homelessness, a Freudian lens of his motivations for searching would reveal that his actions are "extensions of self-love; more precisely, they are interests and activities that contain an expansive narcissism" (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 43). His obsession over finding his mother, represents the elements of "a neurotic structure: a repressed impulse with an element of conscious behavior that is both a defense against and an expression of this impulse" (Bersani 30). Contrary to a hedonistic explanation of motivation, Molloy's quest to find his mother does not explicitly offer Molloy utility, although he claims that "[he] was not sad" or that "[he] didn't feel unhappy" (Beckett 16). He laments his mother for bringing him "into the world, through the hole in her arse," writing off his experience of childbirth as the "first taste of shit" (Beckett 12). Echoing Beckett's attitude of never been "properly born," Molloy represents an extension of Beckett's conception of existence as a struggle (Lecture on *Whoroscope* and *The Unnameable*). From Molloy's accounts of his sexual experiences, his conception of romantic experience does not fall within traditional

definitions of love, namely with a foundation based on pleasure. From his sexual interactions with the multi-named “flat” woman, Molloy sarcastically asks, “Is it true love, in the rectum?... Have I truly known love, after all?... I would have made love with a goat, to know what love was” (Beckett 52). With a conception of love based on a relationship of “precarious footing” with his mother, Molloy, from his own accounts of his previous relationships, does not have a definition of love linked with his definition of happiness (Beckett 81). Within the Freudian lens, the development of the ego “comes into being as the result of a certain development of autoeroticism” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 36). Paired with his difficult relationship with his mother, the development of his conception of “narcissistic love is inescapably masochistic” (Bersani 38). It would follow that his sublimation of his warped conception would lead him “to repeat the reverberating, pleasurable painful tensions themselves, apart from the acts that may at first have produced them” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 37). When he could no longer “endure peace,” Molloy “took a vegetable knife from [his] pocket and set about opening [his] wrist” (Beckett 56). Interpreted through a Freudian lens, his self-inflicted cutting could be interpreted as “a desire to shatter totality. The ego, at its origin would be nothing more than a kind of passionate inference necessitated by the anticipated pleasure of its own dismantling” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 38). His recollection of the “flat” woman had been one of dissatisfaction, describing her appearance as one of “extraordinary flatness, physically speaking of course” (Beckett 51). Through the same Freudian lens, his disappointment is an example of “the parodistic revival of primary narcissism — in which the ego is ordered to find pleasure in loving an ideal to which it is guiltily inferior — is also a distorted repetition of primary masochism” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 40). To clarify, “this type of masochism has nothing to do with self-punishment; to speak of it as constituting the sexual is an

attempt to describe the peculiarly human adaptive mechanism by which the infant pursues the repeated shattering of its psychic stability as a source of pleasure. But the essay on narcissism points to a wholly different form of masochism, in which the ego's self condemnation is experienced as pleasure. In seeing to it that 'narcissistic satisfaction from the ego ideal is ensured,' the 'special agency' of which Freud speaks penetrates the narcissism of moral masochism" (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 40). Without the conditions to continue shattering his ego (i.e. a state of discomfort), Molloy would grow to become more and more discomforted with his comfort. Moran, unlike Molloy, *does* have an explicit reason to go on his search; he had been given "instructions" from Youdi (Beckett 89). Also, unlike Molloy's search for this mother, Moran "knew about Molloy, without however knowing much about him" (Beckett 108). He understands "a surprising amount about Molloy... however, he is ignorant of the circumstances through which he had acquired this knowledge, and goes so as to suggest that perhaps he had invented Molloy" (Hesla 95). Their similarities, however, revolve around their mutual unknowingness of the concluding criteria for their search. Moran writes, "If, having found Molloy, [Moran] still did not know what to do with him" (Beckett 132). He repeats this sentiment again later, as he "tried to remember what [he] was to do with Molloy, once [he] had found him" (Beckett 142). Until, of course, he gives up, writing "I still did not know what I was to do with Molloy, when I found him. I thought no more about it" (Beckett 152). With similar ambiguity surrounding his past as Molloy, Moran's quest to find Molloy mirrors Molloy's quest to find his mother in its masochistic nature. Because both Molloy and Moran are not familiar with the object that would terminate their search, their searches were doomed to be "a failure" from its inception (Hesla 96). After coming to meet many figures that resemble what he conceived to be an image of Molloy, Moran concluded that "there were three, no four Molloys"

(Beckett 110). With his quest paralleling the Freudian notion of “*structuralizing self-shattering*, ” Moran will not find a concluding condition to his quest even if he encountered Molloy (Bersani 41). As an expression of “masochism,” the mere notion of finding solace in a conclusion is contrary to the “ego's self-condemnation is experienced as pleasure” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 40). Even encountering various individuals who resemble the man he had been searching for, Moran writes, “I have seen no one, I said” (Beckett 145). Similar to Moran, Despite the possibility of him being in the “wrong town,” Molloy continually entertains the possibility that he “was a little closer to [his mother] than the night before” (Beckett 35). Both of their searches, however, in a Freudian lens, culminates in violence, as “self-shattering is turned into rageful aggressiveness, and the excited dismantling of identity is degraded into the longing for a merely biological death (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 45). Both Moran and Molloy commits acts of violence in the name of self-shattering; Molloy “dealt [a man] a good dint on the skull” and a few “warm kicks in the rib” and Moran, in a state of forgetful violence, “found [a man] stretched on the ground, his head in a pulp” (Beckett 78, 145). Without realizing the extent of their “insatiable appetite of the self for the nonself does indeed destroy an equilibrium,” Molloy and Moran utilize their environment to “balance between ego structures and the innumerable representations that are generally not allowed to break through the ego’s boundaries” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 74). Entertaining the possibility that his existence has been dictated by forces outside of his own control, perhaps through an author who writes their actions, Molloy posit the question, “Can it be we are not free? It might be worth looking into” (Beckett 32). With Freudian motivations of self-shattering, Molloy and Moran’s pursuit for impossible objectives reflect the their yearning to redeem the masochistic autoeroticism through the culture of redemption.

Through an understanding of *structuralized self-shattering*, Beckett utilizes Molloy and Moran as extensions of himself to redeem his sublimation through a Proustian reconstruction of his experiences. Molloy introduces himself, “Here’s my beginning. It must mean something, or they wouldn’t keep it. Here it is” (Beckett 4). Molloy exists as the protagonist of his own recollection, and his choice of “must” implies an existential authority to his role within his own narrative. Although novels follow a general paradigm regarding its structure, Molloy’s deliberate choice to mark the beginning of the novel as his “beginning” delineates the framework that his retelling represents a series of calculated choices over the *his* presentation as well as *his* execution of the information he chooses to disclose. He echoes his understanding of his selection bias when questioning his own perceptions, asking himself, “...or am I imagining it, in the interests of the narrative?” (Beckett 51). Given Molloy’s confusion about his identity and the series of seemingly arbitrary interactions that follows him leaving his mother’s room, his reconstruction of his own life merely represent a “certain impression of his experience” or “expression of any ‘truth’” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 9). Aside from the impossibility of experiencing objective truth, Molloy’s reconstruction also supports the Proustian notion that “the only life worth living is life ‘realized within the confines of a book’” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 11). Yet, within a Proustian perspective, the “the ‘living reality’ of the past ‘does not exist for us until it has been recreated by our thought’” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 9). In other words, the literary translation of Molloy’s life becomes “more real than the original” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 11). Upon the realization that he is “merely existing,” Molloy developed a sudden desire to “[cry] out as [he has] always cried out,” describing the action as “good for him” (Beckett 21). Through creating a cohesive narrative to the events that occurred in his life, Molloy utilizes writing to “simultaneously erase, repeat, and redeem” the

action of “existing” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 11). Moran shares Molloy’s sentiments of translating his thoughts and experiences in the form of literature, saying that he “enjoyed thinking in monologue” (Beckett 90). Moran also shares Molloy’s sentiments surrounding selectively translating and omitting specific occurrences to create a cohesive narrative, writing that “[he has] no intention of relating the various adventures which befell [he] and [he] son, together and singly, before we came to Molloy country” (Beckett 126). Although Molloy and Moran have similar objectives for searching and motivations for writing, the differences in their messages represent the nuances between their differences in their identities. The mutual objective connecting universal experience to create an ideal that would leave individuals “guiltily inferior” is the act of searching; Molloy seeks to find his mother, and Moran seeks to find Molloy. Although Molloy derives his need to find his mother endogenously, Moran is tasked to find Molloy through his career as a detective. Proust writes, “‘The differences between one man’s books and another’s were not the result of their respective labors... rather than the expression of a radical and essential difference between diverse personalities’” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 10). Neither, however, explicitly find the object of their pursuit; “failure is the ideal of nearly all Beckett’s characters, and in one of his rare theoretical statements, Beckett himself has said that ‘to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and graft, good housekeeping, living’” (Bersani, *Arts of Impoverishment* 11). Therefore, in the context of a Proustian reconstruction of Beckett’s reflections of his own life, it should be no surprise that both Molloy and Moran use writing as a medium to redeem themselves for their failures: “The forms of culture become transparent and — at least from an interpretive point of view — dismissible: they are, ultimately, regressive attempts to make up for failed experience (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 22). Despite their

own awareness of their motivations for writing, however, Molloy and Moran's inclination to write their "memoirs" had ultimately been compelled by "some unidentified authority in control of their lives," perhaps alluding to Beckett's act of dictating their actions (Bersani, *Arts of Impoverishment* 50). Even when Molloy and Moran act as the protagonists within their own story, their monologue reveals their understanding of their own metaphysical good of their own life. As a religious man who believes in a higher authority, Moran often acts as if he does not have control over his own actions, and he references the existence of an author (in the context of fulfilling his role within the plot) with the same veneration as he would a God. Moran writes, "And in writing these lines I know in what danger I am of offending him whose favour I know I should court, now more than ever. But I write them all the same, with a firm hand weaving back and forth and devouring my page with the indifference of a shuttle" (Beckett 127). Although the narrative reads in the form of a retelling by Molloy and Moran, the existence of their stories is metaphysically caused through Beckett's creation of them. Although Beckett, as the author, does not explicitly appear in *Molloy*, his presence could be inferred through his creation of his characters. Similar to *In Search of Lost Time* by Proust, *Molloy* is a "non-attributable autobiographical novel. The experience it records may, it is suggested, belong to," in this case, Samuel Beckett, "or it may belong to a fictional character named [Samuel] or it may belong to a fictional character not named [Samuel]. Or, finally, it may belong to no one at all" (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 12). Beckett, as the creator of *Molloy*, is inextricably tied within its universe, and his relationship is that between the artist and his art. Within the Proustian lens of redeeming life experiences through creating art, it follows that the characters within *Molloy* are also extensions of Beckett's life, particularly to address his understanding of the autoerotic pleasure of dismantling his own ego. Through the "aesthetic of reparation, the artist's life — a

life at once “translated” and made “more real” — is the only legitimate subject of art” (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 20–21). Written in the first-person, *Molloy* is told through the perspective of two subjects: Molloy and Moran. Although they have separate storylines with each having a different set of insights, the extent of their existence is dependent on the metaphysical causation of Beckett’s artistic expression. With his understanding of the “insatiable appetite of the self” to “destroy an equilibrium,” the concept of structuralized self-shattering exists as an idea to motivate individuals to utilize a Proustian reconstruction of their experiences to redeem themselves in the cultural of redemption (Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* 74). Through his understanding of his autoerotic tendencies towards structuralized self-shattering, Beckett seeks to redeem his masochistic tendencies through literature.

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