
**PROBLEMATIZING TRADITIONAL NOTION
OF CHARACTER AS A UNIFYING PRINCIPLE WITHIN
A NARRATIVE IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S
NOVEL MURPHY**

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DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-425-2-14>**INTRODUCTION**

Murphy (1938) is the first published novel by the Irish-born Anglo- and Francophone writer Samuel Beckett. It centres on the interiorized experience and life philosophy of a Dublin man, Murphy, belonging “*to no profession or trade*”¹, who has recently settled in London (Chelsea) where he arrived about six months ago to escape his affections with Miss Counihan and where he meets Celia, a prostitute of Irish origin, whom he admits to have “*deplorable susceptibility*”² to. With a specific type of irony, it also figures other characters who circle Murphy: Mr. Neary, a guru from Cork who disparages Murphy, “*that long hank of Apollonian asthenia*” and “*that schizoidal spasmophile*”³, as he considers him to be for abandoning “*angel*” Counihan; Neary’s former pupil called Wylie who thought of Murphy as of a “*notable wet indeed, <...> a vermin at all costs to be avoided – <...> the creepy thing that creepeth of the Law*”⁴; Neary’s servant Cooper, “*man-of-all-work*”⁵, who is sent to London in pursuit of Murphy; Ticklepenny, a pot poet from the County of Dublin and a male nurse at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat who will offer his position to Murphy due to the fear of going mad himself while working in the wards; Miss Carridge, the landlady of the house in Brewery Road, “*a woman of such astute rectitude that she not only refused to cook the bill for Mr. Quigley [Murphy’s uncle living in Holland], but threatened to inform that poor gentleman of how she had been tempted*”⁶ by Murphy; and Mr. Endon, a patient at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat whom Murphy seemed to be bound to “*by a love of the purest possible kind,*

¹ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 17.

² Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 179.

³ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 49.

⁴ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 49, 217.

⁵ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 54.

⁶ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 64.

exempt from the big world's precocious ejaculations of thought, word and deed", however, as one reads in the novel, "*the sad truth was, that while Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr. Endon was no more than chess*"⁷. In addition, there are a number of minor characters with episodic appearance in the narrative, like the Civic Guard on duty in the General Post Office (Dublin), Miss Rosie Dew with her Dachshund Nelly in Hyde Park, Dr. Angus Killiecrankie, the head male nurse Mr. Thomas ("Bim") Clinch and his twin brother Mr. Timothy ("Bom") Clinch at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, etc., each being mockingly individualised by the narrator who "hovers over the novel and reflects on it"⁸.

So Beckett's novel traces Murphy's lifetime and posthumous (as earthly remains) fortunes in London from Thursday, 12 September to Saturday, 26 October 1935, with flashbacks to his days at Neary's Pythagorean academy in Cork and his meeting with Celia on London street. In addition, it provides two sub-plots: the first sub-plot involves Celia and her wheelchair-bound paternal grandfather, Mr. Willoughby Kelly, a kite-flyer, whom she "*kept nothing from <...> except what she thought might give him pain, i.e. next to nothing*"⁹; the second sub-plot starts in Dublin and revolves around the love triangle "Neary – Miss Counihan – Wylie", with Murphy as a ghost figure.

Beckett's novel *Murphy* is seen as both "a parody of the traditional novel"¹⁰ and "a reaction to a certain type of modernist fiction dominated by an aesthetics of formal mastery"¹¹, as "the matrix of his later works, anticipating many of their concerns"¹², both thematic and formal ones. In *Murphy*, Beckett problematizes traditional notions of character, subjectivity and the representability of events, focuses on spatial structures (inner and outer spaces), models the narrative "on the sensory perspective of the eye", points to the limits of language, cross-references from section to section, which is usually characteristic to technical discourse, plays with narrative authority and, to agree with J. M. Coetzee, violates "the code of point of view"¹³, that is, the very "rules" of the novel, weakening its formal cohesion. Employing sensationalist traps (stating, for example, "*A shocking thing had*

⁷ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 184, 242.

⁸ Bolin, John. Beckett's *Murphy*, Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican*, and the "Modern" Novel. *Modernism/modernity*. Vol. 18(4). 2011. P. 774.

⁹ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 11.

¹⁰ See: Fletcher J. *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*. London : Chatto and Windus, 1964. P. 41.

¹¹ Miller T. *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999. P. 18.

¹² *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* / C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski. New York : Grove Press, 2004. P. 387.

¹³ See: Coetzee J. M. *The Comedy of Point of View in Beckett's Murphy*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. 1970. Vol. 12(2). P. 19–27.

happened"¹⁴) to raise traditional expectations of the involved readers concerning some "shocking" events occurring in the characters' lives (like Murphy's heart attack and falling in chapter 1 or the retired butler's suicide in chapter 5), Beckett fragments the narrative: he breaks in with a different sub-plot (a conversation between Celia and Mr. Kelly, a description of Murphy's mind, etc.), switches the place of action (from London to Dublin or from the outer world to the inner self) to return to the "shocking occurrence" only two or three chapters later.

Unlike Beckett's later works, the narrative of *Murphy* is yet anchored in relation to mimetic mode of writing and facticity through the concreteness of details, precise dating and placing of events, which may seem to support the reader's "illusion of constructing an interpretation by referring the words of the text to objects in the real world"¹⁵, as it is with realist writing. In his diary entry from January 1937, Beckett defined his artistic field and his role in it as follows: "I am not interested in a 'unification' of the historical chaos any more than I am in the 'clarification' of the individual chaos, and still less in the anthropomorphisation of the inhuman necessities that provoke the chaos. What I want is the straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births and deaths, because that is all I can know"¹⁶. (Beckett's approach, as seen from the quotation above, is grounded in "phenomenology of everydayness".) However, the abundance (even the excess) of dates and facts in *Murphy* does not contribute to their accessibility and comprehension, most of these facts are devoid of sense and serve to provide obstacles or slow down the narrative rather than further it. And, to construct an appropriate interpretation of the novel, as it happens with modernist texts, "the reader must follow the complex web of cross-references and repetitions of words and images which function independently of, or in addition to, the narrative codes of causality and sequence"¹⁷. So Beckett actually deconstructs the mimetic illusion of unified reality in *Murphy* and undermines the traditional representability of events. All this happens since the novel is actually centred on its titular character, Murphy, who is centred on his self, "*unredeemed split self*"¹⁸, rather than on the objective reality.

The aim of this study is to examine Beckett's novel *Murphy* in terms of the poetics of character, arguing that though at the level of character's

¹⁴ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 106.

¹⁵ Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2001. P. 23.

¹⁶ Quoted in: Knowlson J. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. New York : Simon & Schuster, 1996. P. 228.

¹⁷ Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2001. P. 23.

¹⁸ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 188.

construction it bears evidence of the author's skill at creation of vivid characters with satirical portraiture, it does not rely on rational causality and comprehensible motive, playfully subverting the very idea of novelistic realism and of the "unified character". In addition, Beckett uses the devices of the puppet-theatre to construct certain types of characters which would reappear under the same or different names in his other works: Mr. Endon can be seen as the same type of personage as mysterious Godot (*Waiting for Godot*); Cooper as "man-of-all-work" unable to sit reappears as Clov in *Endgame* and Mr. Kelly, unable to stand and bound to wheel-chair, can be seen as a precursor of Hamm; the names of 'Bim' and 'Bom', given to two figures in the playing area of Beckett's final play *What Where*, recall the characters of Mr. Thomas ("Bim") Clinch and his twin brother Mr. Timothy ("Bom") Clinch.

1. Murphy as one of Beckett's solipsistic characters

The fictional world of Beckett's novel *Murphy* is populated by many more or less significant and impressive characters, still it revolves round its protagonist who, as the story develops, is needed by five people: "*By Celia, because she loves him. By Neary, because he thinks of him as the Friend at last. By Miss Counihan, because she wants a surgeon. By Cooper, because he is being employed to that end. By Wylie, because he is reconciled to doing Miss Counihan the honour, in the not too distant future, of becoming her husband*"¹⁹. So, Murphy, though he himself seems to be unconscious of it, is vitally needed by others as a means to "move forward" and to make sense of their existence. However, their need cannot be satisfied and their quest for Murphy is doomed to failure, since he disparages and rejects the very idea of social intercourse and belonging to the world of sense and strives to cut himself off from its importunities, finding the only pleasure in the "*life in his mind*"²⁰ where he feels free; in fact, Murphy is "as alienated from society as he is split from his body"²¹.

Murphy is one of the first characters, to appear in Beckett's works, who, with utmost determination, strives to retreat into an undisturbed interiority of his own self due to his sense of alienation from the world "outside", perceived as "*big blooming buzzing confusion*"²², of not being ready or fitted to cope with it, to join in its activities. His self desperately attempts to defend itself from external obstructions and influences by nurturing "*that*

¹⁹ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 202.

²⁰ *Ibid.* P. 2.

²¹ Fletcher J. *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*. London : Chatto and Windus, 1964. P. 53.

²² Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 29.

self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world"²³. Exhibiting "a mechanical inelasticity, an inability to adjust to the modern, bureaucratic-commercial London that lies outside his mind"²⁴, Murphy strives to avoid any interaction, even if it brings pleasure to his body, as it is with Celia, since then it might intrude and destroy the calm of his mind, two entities his being is divided between, the poles of object (body) and subject (mind): "*The part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled up at the thought of her*"²⁵. Murphy's being requires no sense of connection to anybody, the only one he desperately needs is his inner self "*where he could love himself*"²⁶. Appealing to mental experience rather than any physical activity, Murphy, who is interested in mystic practices, astrology and chess, appears as radically new or "other".

In the opening scene, the reader finds Murphy, man with gull's eyes and yellow complexion, in a mew ("*a medium-sized cage*") in West Brompton, sitting naked in his rocking-chair and being held in position by seven scarves, which is said to be the only way for him to come alive in his mind. Besides, one gets to know from the text that the protagonist is addicted to the dark and to remaining still for long periods (chapter 3). These oddities or rather habits of living constitute a specific mode of being, pointing to a preference for solitary activities, that is, character's asociality, and can be regarded as mechanisms that shelter Murphy from the tensions of the "big world" and the things that might disturb him, resisting the idea of coherence and social interaction as major factors in character's construction. His being "other" is evident from the birth, as the narrator hilariously describes the event: "*His troubles had begun early. To go back no further than the vagitus, it had not been the proper A of international concert pitch, with 435 double vibrations per second, but the double flat of this. How he winced, the honest obstetrician, a devout member of the old Dublin Orchestral Society and an amateur flautist of some merit. With what sorrow he recorded that of all the millions of little larynges cursing in unison at that particular moment, the infant Murphy's alone was off the note. To go back no further than the vagitus. His rattle will make amends*"²⁷. The metaphor of being "*off the note*" in the melody of the world signifies Murphy's otherness and presupposes his unwillingness to integrate into any social structure and to adopt to its codes

²³ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 168.

²⁴ Miller T. Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999. P. 180.

²⁵ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 8.

²⁶ Ibid. P. 7.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 71.

and rules, thus manifesting his free will for solitude and no sympathy with his times.

In fact, Murphy is a creature of “*his own system*”, of “*his private world*”, that is, of his mind as a self-reflexive projection, which he is eager to retreat into. In chapter 6, Beckett interrupts the progress of the narrative to offer a description of “Murphy’s mind” that “*pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without <...> subject to no principle of change but its own, self-sufficient and impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body <...> Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it*”²⁸. So, his mind is treated as no instrument of cognition but a self-enclosed entity (“*mental chamber*”), which has three zones: the light, containing “*forms with parallel, <...>, the elements of physical experience available for a new arrangement*”; the half light, containing “*forms without parallel*”; and the dark, which is “*a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms*”²⁹. Murphy’s system is, thus, grounded in solipsism, in the idea of self-autonomy and self-sufficiency. And instead of “trying to force correspondence between his system and the world, he simply ignores the world”³⁰.

So Beckett’s Murphy is no type of the character that experiences the rationally or traditionally sanctioned. His story is illustrative of Patricia Waugh’s statement that in “modernist fiction the struggle for personal autonomy can be continued only through *opposition* to existing social institutions and conventions. This struggle necessarily involves individual alienation and often ends with mental dissolution”³¹. Murphy’s conduct is divided and separated from the “normal” conduct dictated by society: his life philosophy is that of indolence and inaction (“*To die fighting was the perfect antithesis of his whole practice, faith and intention*”³²), challenging the very idea of life standards and social status as significant identifiers of person’s well-being. Murphy declares himself “*a chronic emeritus*” incapable of any remunerative occupation, since he believes that all working for a living is just “*a procuring and a pimping for the money-bags, one’s lecherous tyrants the money-bags, so that they might breed*”³³. As John Fletcher has noted, Murphy is “fundamentally indifferent to the whole system of ‘pensums and

²⁸ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 107, 109.

²⁹ Ibid. P. 110–113.

³⁰ Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2001. P. 46.

³¹ Ibid.. P. 11, 46.

³² Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 38.

³³ Ibid. P. 76.

prizes' the elaboration of which the world considers one of the highest achievements of human genius, but which is merely, as far as Beckett is concerned, the carrot that keeps the donkey treading on his rounds"³⁴. Living in London, Murphy "survives by virtue of an arrangement with his landlady, who fraudulently adds a supplement to the bill she sends to his rich uncle in Holland, and then hands Murphy the proceeds, less a reasonable commission"³⁵. Soon, having moved with Celia to the room in Brewery Road, Murphy is forced to find a job, "which means (since work is done by the body) betraying his mind"³⁶. However, daily leaving Celia in the morning, he only pretends to search for jobs, because, to remember the narrator's remark, "*No Murphy could work*"³⁷. So Murphy's wanderings through the city, unlike those of Bloom and Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, are indeed aimless.

Murphy is represented as no supporter of consumption ideology and as one who demonstrates no bourgeois relationship to material possessions or property. His only possessions are his suit (described with detailed accuracy in terms of its colour, cut, and material: "*His suit was not green, but æruginous. <...> In some places it was actually as black as the day it was bought, in others a strong light was needed to bring out the livid gloss <...> No less than the colour the cut was striking. The jacket, a tube in its own right, descended clear of the body as far as mid-thigh, where the skirts were slightly reflexed like the mouth of a bell in a mute appeal to be lifted that some found hard to resist. The trousers in their heyday had exhibited the same proud and inflexible autonomy of hang. But now, broken by miles of bitter stair till they were obliged to cling here and there for support to the legs within, a corkscrew effect betrayed their fatigue. <...> With regard to the material of this suit, the bold claim was advanced by the makers that it was holeproof. This was true in the sense that it was entirely non-porous. It admitted no air from the outer world, it allowed none of Murphy's own vapours to escape*"³⁸), a lemon bow tie ("*a perfectly plain lemon made-up bow tie presented as though in derision by a collar and dicky combination carved from a single sheet of celluloid and without seam, of a period with the suit and the last of its kind*"³⁹), and a rocking-chair that "*never left him*". The other chattels Murphy is said to have obtained once include his books, pictures, postcards, musical scores and instruments (things of no practical

³⁴ Fletcher J. *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*. London : Chatto and Windus, 1964. P. 53-54.

³⁵ *Ibid.* P. 39.

³⁶ *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* / C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski. New York : Grove Press, 2004. P. 387.

³⁷ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.* P. 71-72.

³⁹ *Ibid.* P. 73.

value), but they “*all had been gradually disposed of <...> rather than the chair*”⁴⁰.

It is worth mentioning that Murphy’s body is also treated as possession, which he is as careless about (he suffers from violent heart attacks and from pains in neck and feet) as he is negligent of his appearance (as seen from the condition of his suit; the oddity of his appearance even causes the boys in the street ridicule him). But simultaneously, Murphy seems obsessed by his rocking-chair, since it is not simply a piece of furniture but the “*aid to life in his mind*”⁴¹. It is “a maternal object”, as John R. Keller suggests, since “he is securely held by the chair (as a child would be held by a mother), strapping himself in when the world becomes too overwhelming and frightening”⁴². The chair provides the protagonist with “a defensive escape”: “*...he worked up the chair. Slowly he felt better, astir in his mind, in the freedom of that light and dark that did not clash, nor alternate, nor fade nor lighten*”⁴³. The chair helps Murphy rock himself into oblivion when the empiric world vanishes and he is born into his mind.

However, being split in two, body and mind, as the narrator emphasises, Murphy is subject to certain bodily passions he cannot subdue and to things he adores. Murphy’s “*deplorable susceptibility*” to Celia, stars, ginger biscuits, rocking-chair, fourpenny lunch, and a ride “*in one of the new six-wheelers when the traffic was at its height*”⁴⁴ points to the involvement with the world of sense and things and suggests his need for objects external to him. But as soon as he finds himself at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat in the company of patients who, as he “*insisted on supposing*”, seem to have achieved the complete withdrawal from the “*contingencies of the contingent world*”, the mental state he desires himself, Murphy is ready to leave Celia and the world outside for good and all. He proves to be an effective nurse due to his identification with the patients, “*his kindred*”: “*His success with the patients was the signpost at last on the way he had followed so long and so blindly, <...>. His success with the patients was a signpost pointing to them. It meant that they felt in him what they had been and he in them what he would be. It meant that nothing less than a slap-up psychosis could consummate his life’s strike*”⁴⁵. But, though Murphy is excited with the fact that “*the self whom he loved had the aspect, even to Ticklepenny’s inexpert*

⁴⁰ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 189.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 189.

⁴² Keller, John Robert. No Endon Sight: Murphy’s Misrecognition of Love. *Keller J. R. Samuel Beckett and the Primacy of Love*. Manchester and New York : Manchester University Press, 2002. P. 53.

⁴³ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 95.

⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 183–184.

eye, of a real alienation”⁴⁶, soon he realises that the perfect withdrawal achieved by the schizophrenic Mr. Endon is closed to him and he is simply “a speck in Mr. Endon’s unseen”⁴⁷, that he needs Celia, that his retreat into the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat turns out to be another failure, and, as the end of chapter 11 suggests, a fatal one (his explosion): “The gas went on in the w.c., excellent gas, superfine chaos”⁴⁸. Murphy’s death, thus, is no conscious choice or closure, but merely an accident, which means that previously depicted events have no effect on what happens in the end.

In line with other characters in Beckett’s later fiction, Murphy is “an agile but despairing mind tied to, and unable to escape from, a decaying and disgusting body which it holds in contempt”⁴⁹. His drama is the struggle between “the self whom [he] loved” and “the self whom he hated”, which is interpreted by Tyrus Miller as “a defensive protest against the contingent social forces that constantly undermine his illusory autonomy”⁵⁰, and which in many scenes is represented by the narrator in a tragic-comic manner that culminates as more tragic than comic.

2. The aesthetics of puppetry in constructing characters in *Murphy*

Murphy is one of Beckett’s earliest attempts to employ the aesthetics of puppetry while constructing his characters, even Celia, the principal female personage in the novel, but not Murphy, as we read in the text: “All the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except *Murphy*, who is not a puppet”⁵¹. The figure of the narrator, then, plays the role of *Murphy*’s “puppeteer”. However, the narrative technique employed by Beckett, unlike Thackeray’s “puppet-mastery”, presupposes that this figure is more than a narrator: he is the one who masters the fictional world of *Murphy*, “frequently interferes with the diegesis, using a mixture of deliberate clichés, ironic reflections on literary texts and devices, and references to censors, the reader, or other novels to emphasize *Murphy*’s status as textual construct”⁵². What is more, “roaming over his world from on high”, it is he who controls the arrangement of events (the plot itself) and the characters. In many scenes, the narrator even displays impatience with the characters’ actions

⁴⁶ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 194.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* P. 250.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* P. 253.

⁴⁹ Fletcher J. *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*. London : Chatto and Windus, 1964. P. 53.

⁵⁰ Miller, Tyrus. *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999. P. 188.

⁵¹ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 122.

⁵² Bolin, John. *Beckett’s Murphy, Gide’s Les Caves du Vatican, and the “Modern” Novel. Modernism/modernity*. Vol. 18(4). 2011. P. 774.

and speech. So he interferes with the characters' discourse and does not allow them to speak for themselves: for example, in chapter 2 the narrator paraphrases Celia's account to Mr. Kelly of how she has met Murphy ("*Celia's account, expurgated, accelerated, improved and reduced, of how she came to have to speak of Murphy, gives the following*"⁵³); in chapter 4, he does it with Neary's account "*of how he came to reach the end of Cork endurance*"⁵⁴; in chapter 7, the same occurs with Cooper's account of how he has found and lost Murphy; in chapter 5, he does it to avoid Ticklepenny's "wretched" speech ("*It is hard to say where the fault lies in the case of Ticklepenny, <...> but certainly the quality of his speech is most wretched. Celia's confidence to Mr. Kelly, Neary's to Wylie, had to be given for the most part obliquely. With all the more reason now, Ticklepenny's to Murphy. It will not take many moments*"⁵⁵).

Murphy's narrator remains nameless and unembodied (not "on stage"), but, nevertheless, he is integral to the structure of the novel and his powers, as his irony, seem limitless. On the contrary, the characters, or literary "creatures" as Beckett put it to emphasise their status of "fictitious created beings", are as if arranged "like pieces on a chessboard": "the apparent choices the characters make, and the apparently random moves they observe, lead to an inevitable "*fool's mate*" at the hands of the scornful chessmaster who waits to brush them from his board"⁵⁶. They seem "puppet figures", subjects of another's control, whose constructed nature retains little potential for an autonomous life. They cannot understand the complexities they are faced with and are ignorant of causality and the logical sequencing of events.

Simultaneously, while "the spectator of a puppet show is focused primarily on the body of the puppet, which evokes the experience of a particular character", Murphy's personages are vividly portrayed by the narrator and the particulars of their appearance enable the reader to visualise each as a character of certain type. Moreover, their personalities are characterised by specific faculty or pathological condition: Neary, for example, is noted for his faculty to "*stop his heart more or less whenever he liked and keep it stopped, within reasonable limits, for as long as he liked*", which he exercised "*when he wanted a drink and could not get one, or fell among Gaels and could not escape, or felt the pangs of hopeless sexual inclination*"⁵⁷; Wylie is described as a small-time sensualist whose "*reactions as a street bookmaker's stand*

⁵³ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid. P. 48.

⁵⁵ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 87.

⁵⁶ Bolin, John. Beckett's *Murphy*, Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican*, and the "Modern" Novel. *Modernism/modernity*. Vol. 18(4). 2011. P. 781.

⁵⁷ Beckett S. Murphy. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 3.

were as rapid as a zebra's"⁵⁸; Miss Counihan is ridiculed for being "quite exceptionally anthropoid", with her mouth large enough, so that the "kissing surface was greater than the rosebud's, but less highly toned"⁵⁹; Cooper is known as a man who "never knocks, nor sits, nor takes his hat off", his only visible humane characteristic being "a morbid craving for alcoholic depressant"⁶⁰; Mr. Willoughby Kelly's description is no less odd and tragicomic ("Mr. Kelly's face was narrow and profoundly seamed with a lifetime of dingy, stingy repose. Just as all hope seemed lost it burst into a fine bulb of skull, unobscured by hair. Yet a little while and his brain-body ratio would have sunk to that of a small bird"⁶¹); Miss Dew, "a low-sized corpulent middle-aged woman", is said to suffer from duck's disease⁶²; and Miss Carriage's affliction is her acute body-odour. The oddities are integral to the poetics of character in *Murphy*. Beckett's literary "creatures" seem to be an instrument of the possibilities of extended cognition of human's nature which is ridiculed by the narrator-author. A specific type of irony generated in the novel anticipates a different mode of creating meaning: "The object of derision here is so closely intertwined with the order and choice of words used to enact the ridicule that they merge in a single rhythm of phrasing just below the threshold of laughter"⁶³.

What concerns Celia, she is certainly the most subtly-drawn character in the novel, with her particulars given in "molecular detail": at the beginning of chapter 2, she is described in physical terms, with regard to her height, weight, colouring, and other measurements, to ground her in the physical world Murphy strives to cut himself off. The list of physical characteristics, along with her occupation as a prostitute, emphasises her physical nature. And it is her physical endurance that makes Murphy continually wonder at her and at the "music" she can offer him. But, in fact, Celia is more than satisfaction, she turns out to be the only person who loves Murphy and needs him as he is, as one who can smooth him and starts to understand due to the transformation she undergoes herself. She explains her relationship to Murphy as follows: "I was a piece out of him that he could not go on without, no matter what I did"⁶⁴. Celia seems to be the most human figure in the fictional world of Beckett's *Murphy*.

⁵⁸ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 42.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* P. 118.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* P. 118, 54.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* P. 11.

⁶² *Ibid.* P. 97

⁶³ Miller, Tyrus. *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999. P. 20.

⁶⁴ Beckett S. *Murphy*. New York : Grove Press, 1957. P. 234.

CONCLUSIONS

The importance of Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* lies in the way it has extended the tradition of the novel in general, and the legacy of character's representation in particular, as well as in its preoccupations with formal and thematic concerns evident in the author's later works. It is in *Murphy* that Beckett first clearly sets "the tone of the hero defeated by a maleficent destiny which dallies with him rather than crushes him outright"⁶⁵, and introduces the protagonist who falls outside dominant systems. Murphy's shunning of the "big world" and his addiction to remaining still for long periods presupposes the alienation and the economy of movement peculiar of nearly all the characters of Beckett's later work. Murphy, like Molloy, Krapp and other literary "creatures" populating Beckett's fictional world, is represented as an outsider incapable of integrating into the outside world of people and things, the big world of physical sensations, as unwilling to communicate with it and, thus, searching for the shelter, the small world of one's self. Beckett does not aim at the unification of character: he constructs his character as irrational (searching the state remote from reason and passion) and conflicted (with divided self). Murphy's feeling of profound dualistic split results in the experience of disconnection and fruitless wandering to find home, that is, incapability to integrate into any structure. *Murphy* is the "novel of motion", which for its protagonist is the motion "from-himself-to-himself", visualised through the regular back-and-forth motion of the rocking-chair he is obsessed with.

And though Murphy, who is said to be "no puppet", is a titular character of the novel and seems to be the only unpredictable element with free will, he does not function as a basic unifying principle within a narrative: to use Schopenhauerian metaphor, he is not "the melody", "the high, singing, principal voice, leading the whole and progressing with unrestrained freedom, in the uninterrupted significant connexion of *one* thought from beginning to end, and expressing a whole"⁶⁶. Murphy's death is described at the end of chapter 11 and it does not rely on rational causality; in chapter 12, Murphy is figured at the mortuary as a badly damaged corpse, a body without soul and mind (with a birthmark as the only proof of his identity), to be burnt and become "*the packet of ash*", angrily thrown by Cooper at a man who has given him "*great offense*" in the pub, as a result the remains of Murphy's "*body, mind and soul*" are distributed over the floor and then "*swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the*

⁶⁵ Fletcher J. *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*. London : Chatto and Windus, 1964. P. 54–55.

⁶⁶ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Vol. I. New York : Dover Publications, 1969. P. 259.

spits, the vomit”⁶⁷; in the last chapter, Murphy is merely a remark once stated. In fact, the key figure complicating the narrative linearity and authority in the novel is the narrator who interferes with his comments and ironic reflections, controls the characters and often refuses to allow them to speak for themselves. Besides, what appears here to be a basic building element providing the thematic and structural unity of the text, the transformation of the content into form and form into content, is the motif. These are the motifs of bodily confinement, circular closure, and representational anxiety further developed in Beckett’s later fiction.

SUMMARY

Published in 1938, Samuel Beckett’s novel *Murphy* anticipates many thematic and formal concerns of his later works. Violating the rules and codes of the traditional novel, it complicates narrative linearity, plays with narrative authority and problematizes traditional notions of character and the representability of events. The aim of this study is to examine Beckett’s novel *Murphy* in terms of the poetics of character. The paper argues that Beckett does not rely on rational causality and comprehensible motive in constructing his principal character, Murphy, and that he emphasises the division of the personality rather than unity. So, subverting the idea of “unified character” in *Murphy*, Beckett introduces an alienated, irrational and conflicted individual whose life philosophy is that of indolence and inaction and who is incapable of integrating into the big world of physical sensations and, thus, searches for the shelter, the small world of one’s self. Murphy’s drama, as Beckett shows, is the struggle between the need for the big world of the body and the little world of the mind, which he is torn between. Besides, Beckett’s novel figures many other vivid personages whose portrayal of the inner psychic condition is often balanced by ironic portraitures, descriptions of their outer physical condition, as provided by the narrator who often addresses the reader and, in fact, rules the fictional world.

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