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Existential Abuse of Readers in Samuel Beckett's *Malone Dies*

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ABSTRACT

Malone Dies marks the point where Samuel Beckett foremost turns to “metaphysical destruction” of “untrue self,” and Derrida’s critique of the notion of “self-presence” of the subject. In this article, I examine Beckett’s literary absurdities to his readers’ concerns of “abuse” through them. For this investigation Malone Dies posits a stream of conflicting “linguistic nihilism” to the concerns of deconstructing “untrue self,” arguably, which will reflect how abuse of Beckettian readers is stimulated. In this context, abuse is specific forms of

emotional tensions aroused by the readers encounter with the Beckettian intersubjectivity. In particular, the existential model of abuse will be analysed as a part of beyond "self-deconstruction" autonomy.

Malone Dies, the second novel of Samuel Beckett's trilogy begins with the protagonist Malone, an elderly man confined to his deathbed in a room, unable to move and waiting for his death. To quote from *Malone Dies*: "When I have completed my inventory, if my death is not ready for me then, I shall write my memoirs" (Beckett 1991: 184). "I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth to into death, such is my impression" (Beckett 1991: 114). And while waiting for the death Malone starts writing his autobiography:

I SHALL SOON BE QUITE DEAD AT LAST IN SPITE OF ALL.
Perhaps next month. Then it will be the month of April or of May.
(Beckett 1991: 173)

It is clear here that Malone wishes simply to die. With him Beckett intends for his readers to arrive at Nothingness. But in abject nothingness there is somethingness that may abuse the conscious reader's ordinary emotion into the unusual. Immediately, a skeptical reader may question: How can be a reader abused by reading *Malone Dies*? To find the answer requires putting into question the literary notions of "expression," "experience," and "consciousness."

Furthermore, the reading of *Malone Dies* suggests that, during comprehension, the reader generates some form of perceptual simulation that represents attributes implicit in the text. Similarly, a perceptual simulation appears to be generated during concept property verification tasks (Kan, Barsalou, Solomon, Minor & Thompson-Schill 2003; Solomon & Barsalou 2001; Strack 2011: 36). In this regard, there are strong connections between language and emotion. When reading or listening, we often find ourselves becoming sad, angry, afraid, happy, joyous, or aroused depending on the meaning of the language we are processing. It is likely that much of the pleasure

we gain in reading and listening to narratives and poetry is directly related to an author's skill in producing these emotional states in us. In fact, language can be a reliable method for inducing emotional changes in experimental situations. Moreover, the emotional states of readers influence their judgments of, and memory for, fictional character traits (Erber, 1991; Laird, Wagener, Halal & Szegda 1982). It may be subsumed that if these emotional states with the reader are nudged according to Malone's (a fictional character) inherent traits then the output would be subversive. The reader notes that the narrative voice of Malone is subjectively painful to read on, that the inversion of the text even into the subconscious mind of the reader disperses his emotions.

Before exploring on the point of "abuse of reader," however, I want to shed light on the whole conception of the relation between language, thought, feeling and the world, which *Malone Dies* undoubtedly expresses. However, the word "abuse" can be interpreted into a number of different ways as: mock, ridicule, shock, exhaust, insult, or bully. In this connection, I examine in this article how Malone fills the reader with the images of terror and exercises their access-consciousness into terror-consciousness. Phenomenally, access-conscious are thought, belief and desire expressed unconsciously by the reader. This concealment of consciousness takes two forms according to Heidegger's "modern representational thinking," and what Jacques Derrida elects as "self-presence." This theory of authenticity conceptualizes "self existence" as a self-reflective and emotional experience. Unconsciously, our psyche and body are moulded by "emotional experiences" and then, "it's vague, life and death" (Beckett 1991: 206). In this way in the act of reading Beckett's negative words has some thrusting "metaphorical attraction" that makes the reader now much closer to the physicality of the text, and much more closer to Malone with "terror." Thus, negative words used in *Malone Dies*, such as, "swelling," "decaying" and "dying," can alter the expression of genes, weakening areas in reader's frontal lobes and disrupting his brain's cognitive functioning. Conventionally, hostile language, such as, "I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of

all” (Beckett 1991: 173) can disrupt specific genes that play a key part in the production of neurochemicals that protect us from stress. However, a single negative word can increase the activity in our amygdala (the fear centre of the brain). This releases dozens of stress-production hormones and neurotransmitters, which in turn interrupts our brain’s functioning – This is especially with regard to logic, reason, and language (Borchard 2013). In this regard Andrew Newberg, M. D. and Mark Robert Waldman write in their book *Words Can Change Your Brain*, that “a single word has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress” (2012: 3).

Malone is one of Beckett’s “characters that resemble paralytics,” and with him Beckett “wishes to describe the universal, timeless human being racked by the horrors of castration anxiety. Castration anxiety is one of the major psychological obstacles to creation” (Anzieu 1986: 251). At the same time, castration anxiety represents a threat to the subject, who “risks the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being” (Kristeva 1982: 64). This thought may appear highly disturbing with its compressed expression; the reader may feel uneasy to read the text given below, as in a flux of scatological mockery the images uncover:

I would die delighted, she would close my eyes and put a plug in my arse-hole, as per instructions.

(Beckett 1991: 273)

So that I would have hesitated to exclaim, with my finger up my arse-hole for example, Jesus-Christ, it’s much worse than yesterday, I can hardly believe it is the same hole. I apologise for having to revert to this lewd orifice, ‘tis my muse will have it so.

(Beckett 1991: 101)

I’ll let down my trousers and shit stories on them: stories, photographs, records, sites, lights, gods and fellow-creatures, the daily round and common task. Observing all the while, Be born, dear friends, be born. Enter my arse. You’ll just love my colic pains. It won’t take long, I’ve the bloody flux.

(Beckett 1991: 383-384)

In the above texts the physicality of the words like anus, and arse-hole “create the same cognitive anxiety in their reader that exists in their characters, so that when incidents such as” Malone demanding to his caretaker Moll to block the continuation of his excremental processes after his death “is demystified, the reader is left feeling” (Davis 2005: 21) with “textual anxiety.” Indeed, in his “textual anxiety” the susceptible reader ponders over the wobbling concepts, where he does not giggle and does not find the “expression” pleasurable at all but he is sensually abused with the image of “anus absurdity.” This force of the literal metaphors compels the reader in his pursuit for clarification and framing-effect (one thing in other) for the image produced in his mind. His metaphorical assertion brings him to visualise familiar or unfamiliar physicality of the image. Still, it is not mere understanding of the visibility of the image to signify of resemblance or of identity but most importantly the “sensory assault” led by it. As Donald Davidson writes, “a metaphor doesn’t say anything beyond its literal meaning” (Davidson 1979: 30) and “an account of metaphor that denies that it is a form of communication will thus not only have difficulty saying what understanding or misunderstanding can consist in, it will also encounter problems in saying how the nonassertoric framing-effect takes place” (p. 37). Thus, the reader may become a helpless victim of the disturbing “mental image,” though this and related images did dominate him and may assault his thinking. Now what I argue that not only metaphors of Beckett’s terror unearth exhaustion, trauma, threat, harassment, fear, suffering, panic, emptiness and frustration but they make the reader feel that Beckett’s characters onto him launch them (precisely, one by one or at once all of them) and he cannot escape them even if he wishes to. Although the metaphorical destructibility of thought (e.g. the non-being) at every scale has limits of destructibility, it has limits of interpretation, and it has limits of limit itself. For this, Berggren concludes that “all truly creative and non-mythic thought, whether in the arts, the sciences, religion or metaphysics, must be invariably and irreducibly metaphorical” (Berggren 1962-1963: 472). To quote from *Malone Dies*: “What have I omitted? Little things, nothings.

They will come back to me later, make me see more clearly what has happened and say, Ah if I had only known then, now it is too late” (Beckett 1991: 265). “God does not seem to need reasons for doing what he does, and for omitting to do what he omits to do, to the same degree as his creatures” (Beckett 1991: 89). Thereby the reader may ask: Why Beckett created Malone dying in loneliness and helplessness? As Knowlson states, Beckett conveys “a view of life which sees birth as intimately connected with suffering and death and which sees life as a painful road to be trod” (Knowlson 1997: 2). He suggests of Beckett’s “early fascination with the mineral, with things dying and decaying, with petrification” (Knowlson 1997: 29). He also states that Beckett “linked this interest with Sigmund Freud’s view that human beings have a prebirth nostalgia to return to the mineral state” (1997: 29). In this scenario Sigmund Freud claims: “The aim of all life is death” (Freud 1920: 38). And Beckett puts in *Malone Dies*:

I know those little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. Nothing is more real than nothing. They rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark.

(Beckett 1991: 192)

For this conception of “the Nothing” and, in particular, the theory that “naught is more real” than this “Nothing,” Beckett is drawing, as he indicates, on the atomist theory of Democritus of Abdera, one of the pre-Socratics on whom he took extensive notes in the early 1930s (Weller 2006: 70). In a flux of reading the text, although the reader may feel associated with Malone. With this the reader may be transported into the nothingness of Malone and he may discursively feel as a “non-being.” The subjectivity of “non-being” is pre-transcendence of the absolutely self-regulating being. It is for this reason that the “non-being” is situated above and beyond both the “metaphysical self” (more precisely, the noumenal self) and the “transcendental self” (as “external reality” of self). To make it more clear, previously many thinkers, taking their lead from the French philosopher,

René Descartes, had believed that, whatever our doubts about the nature of “external reality,” we knew with complete clarity the contents of our own minds. Freud disabused them of this illusion. Not only is there an unconscious, a part of the mind to which we have no conscious access, but unconscious irrational forces inform our thought and behaviour in ways of which we are unaware. We know not what we do (Wake & Malpas 2013: 74). All access to the world is mediated by the mind, which is in turn structured by some language system or other. Hence the “problem of presence”: metaphysics is based on an illusion (Vanhoozer, James & Benson 2006: 60). According to James K. A. Smith, Vanhoozer goes on to formulate his reading of Derrida in terms of “presence” and “absence” but “Derrida’s analysis of language destroys the ideal of pure presence”; presence “is only a mirage” (Smith 2006: 114). In this regard Anthony Uhlmann writes, “What it means to think; indeed, it formulates a new image of thinking for literature, one which involves a failure of thought, as the self mercilessly seeks out itself and fails to grasp it. It is an image of the absence of self-presence and, because it follows *Malone Dies*, it refers the problem of such absence back from the problem of thinking itself (in *The Unnamable*) to the problem of the interrelation between the writing and the one who writes (*Malone Dies*) (Uhlmann 2006: 108).

Ultimately, the reader unconsciously permits Beckett’s neuro-thematic writing culture to instigate in him a primordial sense of “metaphysical destruction” of his “untrue self.” The metaphysical destruction of untrue self exquisitely maintains the precarious gap and balance between self-annihilation, which does not propound “identity-escape” (that is exchangeability between different identities), and self-disintegration, which does not necessarily culminate with death, but only through an arbitrary act of reincarnation of the self. Later on, the contiguous termination of the self uncovers the “non-self.” As Malone remarks, “And on the threshold of being no more I succeed in being another. Very pretty” (Beckett 1991: 194). In this way the reader is imprisoned within a world of “textual illusion” where he is alienated from his self-presence, and thereafter, he attains this “untrue self” = “false self” = “non-self” which reflects the

never-ending search for self-discovery. The false self is alternatively described as empirical self and ego-self, while the true self is perceived as the transcendent self (Merton 1967: 7). The false self is characterised by superficial consciousness, as opposed to the deep transcendent self that awakens in contemplation (p. 7). According to Merton (Merton 1979b: 86), the true self is not easy to find, precisely it is hidden in obscurity and nothingness (Jennifer Slater O. P. 2012: 40). With this we must note that the untrue self of the reader may differ from Malone's untrue self, and when they interact within premises of "cognitive empathy" some points of comparison and conflict among them succinctly arrive. Such conflict between them becomes the conflict between the self and the other which emerges in a state of terror-consciousness. It is possible with the reader's "reflexivity of consciousness" which Heidegger contends: "only because the 'there' has already been disclosed in a state-of-mind can immanent reflection come across 'experiences' at all" (Heidegger 1962: 175, 136).

In the light of foregoing, the reader finds that Malone is still seized into self-inflicted, but mostly in the flux of being. In this regard Ethel F. Cornwell claims that Malone "does not seek his identity, he flees from it; his quest is for anonymity, for self-annihilation" (Cornwell 1993: 41). As Malone asserts: "The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness" (Beckett 1991: 198). On the one side by the endless story telling Malone exactly evokes the formlessness of his "untrue self" and on the other side the untrue self of the reader splits up into parts that make him feel hopelessness, hollowness, cynicism and emptiness. With each of them the reader faces multiple metaphysical questions about his own existence and he gets no answer. This, however, is a biggest insult to his intelligence that he fails to find the answer. As we know human beings are known for their wit, intelligence and quest for solving questions, issues and problems. On the contrary, Malone is not desperate to solve the problem of his identity and selfhood. As he states: "But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I

do, nor why I am, nor where I am, nor if I am" (Beckett 1991: 219). In my view, the answer to our existence is hidden in the logical space of silence. For this Beckett asserts, "The experience of the reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence communicated by the intervals, not in the terms of the statement" (Beckett 1932: 138). As Malone says, "that silence of which, knowing what I know, I shall merely say that there is nothing" (Beckett 1991: 247) "and indeed the silence at times is such that the earth seems uninhabited" (Beckett 1991: 253). For this Beckett claims: "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness" (Gruen 1969: 210). Therefore, it is clear that silence represents nothingness.

Silence = Nothingness

Also we have evolved out of nothing and we will return to the state of nothingness from which we rose. "Nothingness" is not bound in time, matter, and energy. Similarly, any word or sound also originates from silence and dies into silence.

Into the further investigation of "abuse of reader" Beckettian intersubjectivity paves the route for the subtleties of investigation into his proponent readership, as the acquisition of narrative language is "serene linguistic nihilism" (Cusset 2008: 227). For example, in *The Deconstructive Character* Walter Benjamin writes: "Some pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them, others pass on situations by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called the destructive" (R, 302). Subjectively, the text passes the mind of the reader through "incestuous, violent, disturbing, and overwhelmingly realistic" (Ashwood 2003: 1) illusory situations and thus liquidating him. Furthermore, such a notion of reading can be correlated with a nonreductive concept of experience: linked to language and not merely to perception, experience becomes not only a form of interpretation; it is also a form of prophecy, a way of taking hold of the future (Osborne 2005: 227). It can also be said that the paradoxical relationship between the Beckettian text and the reader must take account of multiple "reflection of consciousness" the words employ. At the

same time, the syntax has exploded out the words to function as psychic-semiotic elements, whereas the reader oscillates between different modes consciousness interplayed according to reminiscent of words. On the contrary, Derrida insists that writing is 'not a supplement to the spoken word' but a quite different performance (Derrida 1976: 14). Each reader has his own private reading words of Beckett and these words aren't mere "coded symbols" (Ong 2002: 73), but they have invisible voices, untouchable forces, and they have unexplored essence of life that accentuate sensations, emotions and feelings. The psychotic-effects of the written words may be larger and long-lasting than the spoken words or reverse of each other. Though Derrida claims that 'there is no linguistic sign before writing' (Derrida 1976: 14). But neither is there a linguistic 'sign' after writing if the oral reference of the written text is adverted to. Though it releases unheard-of potentials of the word, a textual, visual representation of a word is not a real word, but a "secondary modelling system" (cf. Lotman 1977). Thought is nested in speech, not in texts, all of which have their meanings through reference of the visible symbol to the world of sound. What the reader is seeing on this page are not real words but coded symbols whereby a properly informed human being can evoke in his or her consciousness real words, in actual or imagined sound. It is impossible for script to be more than marks on a surface unless it is used by a conscious human being as a cue to sounded words, real or imagined, directly or indirectly (Ong 1983: 84).

Now the reader may anticipate objection over the concept of "abuse" by arguing that it is impossible to be abused by the prospect of reading Beckett. With this my further investigation into the psyche of readership may come to an end. But in the prodigy of ending there is endlessness. As Malone says: "Nothing is impossible, I cannot keep on denying it much longer" (Beckett 1991: 185). The Beckettian language functions as transparency much beyond "self-reflectivity." According to Ludwig Wittgenstein "beyond the bounds of the language lies nonsense – propositions which cannot picture anything" but still 'there is something to be shown and he characterises it as

mystical” (SEP 6). Then the reader may ask further: Is abuse of reader metaphorical? Until we know the answer to this question or to any question it remains quite mystery to us. So the question of abuse is not a mystery but we are mysterious, more specifically, our mind is mysterious. Henceforth, we are lost in the world of the words that we have stopped thinking that there is the same world beyond words which can be interpreted without them. For example, we see things but we don't see them completely and for seeing them completely we have to adopt the panoptic precision with reductionism. We think that we are safely reading *Malone Dies* but we are abused by reading. We think that we are conscious but many of such conscious thoughts and actions are motivated and governed by unconscious fears and desires. We are up to now so much lost into the jungle of the words that all language, whatever its style, inevitably falsifies reality: “Live and invent,” Malone says. “I have tried. I must have tried. Invent. It is not the word. Neither is live” (Beckett 1991: 194). According to Nietzsche, it is the individual's consciousness, then, that words and world come together. The mind mirrors reality, and language mirrors thought. The issue is rather where language and thought about the world are primarily about ourselves: how we see, how we experience, how we talk, and therefore how we think, about the world. According to the non-realist, nothing is naturally given; everything is culturally graven. In short, all the significant distinctions that make a meaningful world out of human experience are, in the final analysis, linguistic creations. The non-realist is an unbeliever for whom words and concepts are nothing more than human contrivances (Vanhoozer, James & Benson 2006: 45). Similarly, Richard Rorty comments: “This post-positivistic kind of analytic philosophy thus comes to resemble the Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida tradition in beginning with criticism of Platonism and ending in criticism of Philosophy as such.” Therefore, Derrida rejects the metaphysical impulse as misleading oriented to “transcendence,” that is, to an extra-linguistic reality that can nevertheless be represented by language (pp. 56-57). Prominently, here a question arises: What is language? This language is the expression of the inherence of nihilism in

metaphysics and of metaphysics in nihilism (Miller 1979: 217). Expression is also a language. The word “abuse” is also a language. Meanwhile, the reader’s cognitive experience with *Malone Dies* enables him to classify between the happening, thoughts, and experiences in his mind, apparently, there is no means of escape from subjectivity of expression (either consciously or unconsciously), and therefore, Malone’s expression is disturbing, henceforth, the argumentation evolve in the concept of “mental abuse.” Sometimes the reader may feel melancholic about Malone. It is hard to measure the quality of the reader’s feelings which overlaps with sadness. But it is the reflexive memory that evokes melancholy when the reader compares Malone to himself. Adhesively, the reader finds that his emotional stimuli are highly arousing while reading the negative words to positive words low arousing. As we know that ‘emotions are not spatially located in the body, nor are they are distinct entities that could be “let out.” Rather, we might distinguish between emotions as biochemically driven, unconscious bodily responses, and the words that describe various emotions and which are constitutive of what we take emotions to be (Gergen 1994; LeDoux 1998). While the reader tries to free himself from his “emotional consciousness” he does not get rid from it for some time.

In the end the reader through the panoptic precision of Malone’s hollowness sees his very own obscure ending at cognitive depths, and feels Malone saying to him:

I feel nothing. It is there I die, unbeknown to my stupid flesh. [...] My concern is not with me, but with another, far beneath me and whom I try to envy, of whose crass adventures I can now tell at last, I don't know how. Of myself I could never tell, any more than live or tell of others. How could I have, who never tried? To show myself now, on the point of vanishing, at the same time as the stranger, and by the same grace, that would be no ordinary last straw. Then live, long enough to feel, behind my closed eyes, other eyes close. What an end.

(Beckett 1991: 186, 19)

Finally, Malone dies, not knowing who he is. And the reader wishes to escape from the “textual anxiety” or from the meaningless stories (which in many cases is interpretively shocking) or from the insane vagrant characters (making their terrified and desperate “fictional voices” which have grotesque echoes and screams) or from the images of the degrading portrayal of humanity, and altogether from the “exhaustive fiction” (e.g. *Malone Dies*). Wholesome he fails to escape from them. As Malone remarks: “It is true you know nothing of this, you flatter yourself you are hanging by a thread like all mankind, but that is not the point. For there is no point, no point in not knowing this or that, either you know all or you know nothing” (Beckett 1991: 225). Lastly, the reader may ask to his “non-self”: Am I a human fragment to the degrading humanity or suffering at the hands of Beckett’s “frosty ethics.” Malone replies to him: “And when (for example) you die, it is too late, you have been waiting too long, you are no longer sufficiently alive to be able to stop” (Beckett 1991: 230). The anxious reader reads next, “That is the end of me” (p. 283).

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