

## Self-Construction and Self-Destruction in Beckett's Novel:

### MALONE DIES

Omar Najm Abdullah.

University of Diyala – College of  
Administration & Economics

[omereconomics@uodiyala.edu.iq](mailto:omereconomics@uodiyala.edu.iq)

البناء الذاتي والتدمير الذاتي في رواية بيكيت: مالون يموت

المدرس عمر نجر عبد الله جامعة ديالى كلية الإدارة والاقتصاد

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الملخص

تبحث الورقة البحثية الحالية في عملية البناء الذاتي والتدمير الذاتي في العمل الأدبي لمالون يموت. في عمل صموئيل بيكيت، "مالون يموت"، يتعمق السرد في الموضوعات الوجودية للخلق والانحلال عبر عدسة التعبير الفني لبطل الرواية المحتضر. ينصب التركيز الأساسي لموت مالون على الاستكشاف والتركيز على فن السرد. توصلت هذه الورقة إلى استنتاج مفاده أن استخدام بيكيت لتقنية تيار الوعي في عمله، لا سيما في مالون يموت، يمكن تفسيره على أنه مسعى لفهم الطبيعة الأساسية للذات. تتميز هذه المساعي الأدبية بجو مقلق وتوظيف متعمد للتلاعب بالألفاظ. الكلمات المفتاحية: الوعي، الوجود، مالون يموت، البناء الذاتي، التدمير الذاتي.

#### Abstract

The current research paper investigates the process of self-construction and self-destruction in the literary work of *Malone Dies*. In Samuel Beckett's work, "*Malone Dies*," the narrative delves into the existential themes of creation and dissolution via the lens of a dying protagonist's artistic expression. The primary focus of *Malone Dying* is in the exploration and emphasis on the art of narrative. This paper has arrived at the finding that Beckett's utilization of the stream-of-consciousness technique in his work, particularly in *Malone Dies*, can be interpreted as an endeavor to comprehend the fundamental nature of the self. These literary endeavors are characterized by an unsettling atmosphere and the deliberate employment of wordplay.

**Keywords:** Consciousness; Existence; Malone Dies; Self-Construction; Self-Destruction.

#### 1.Introduction

During a period characterized by a high level of literary output, Samuel Beckett composed the novel *Malone Meurt* in the French language between the months of November 1947 and May 1948. During this period, the author concurrently composed the two novels in the Trilogy, namely *Molloy* and *L'Innomable*. In the year 1956, Grove Press, a prominent publishing company in the United States, released a publication named *Malone Dies*. This work was a translation of Samuel Beckett's *Malone's Meurt*, undertaken by Beckett himself.

His use of the stream-of-consciousness method is the aspect of his style that draws the most attention to itself. The narrative style used by the narrators in *Molloy* and *Malone* is referred to as "stream-of-consciousness," and the phrase "stream-of-consciousness" refers to the way in which the narrators communicate their ideas in a continuous manner, most of the time without the use of transitional elements.

*Malone Dies* is the outcome of Beckett's self-described "frenzy of writing," during which he created works that not only defined his literary trajectory but also exerted a significant impact on the development of prose and theatre in the post-war era. In light of the aforementioned creation, it is somewhat paradoxical that this particular piece of literature not only chronicles and embodies the gradual decline of its central character, Malone, but also explores the potentiality of narrative fiction. The composition may have been produced at a

state of heightened inspiration, although its thematic focus is in Malone's indulgence in destructive gratification, encompassing both his physical decay and the imagined realms he fabricates. Malone, an elderly individual restricted to his infirm bed within a medical facility, engages in the act of composing narratives within a notebook he has retrieved from his immediate surroundings, as a means to distract himself from the imminent approach of his mortality. The narratives crafted by Malone often exhibit a tendency to intermingle, resulting in a state of ambiguity both within themselves and in relation to Malone's own account of his being, sometimes referred to as the "present condition," as he approaches the end of his life (Boxall I).

Samuel Beckett's novel, "*Malone Dies*," delves into the existential theme of mortality through the narrative of a dying protagonist who engages in the act of storytelling. In doing so, the novel explores the inherent tension between the creative impulse and the inevitability of death. As Malone's final days spin out of control and he nears his certain death, he says, "Now it is a game, I am going to play" [Beckett 180]. The narratives, however, swiftly transcend Malone's original aims, evolving into a discourse centered on contemplation rather than mere evasion. In Samuel Beckett's novel *Malone Dies*, the central character, Malone, constructs his personal identity within the realm of storytelling. Through his narratives, Malone presents a candid depiction of the limited and desolate nature of human existence, while also emphasizing the significance of an active, curious, and imaginative human consciousness in confronting this inevitable destiny.

Over time, Malone's self-imposed limitations gradually erode, leading to a transformation in his narratives that transcends their initial purpose as a complex means of avoiding direct confrontation with unresolved matters. Malone swiftly discerns that his work possesses the capacity to both dismantle and construct his own being, resulting in a fusion of his personal identity with that of his literary personas (Higgins 39).

In his scholarly investigation, Schwalm (181) examined the concept of self-deconstruction and its inherent limitations. The act of engaging Beckett in dialogue with deconstruction or post-structuralism can be considered a quite commonplace endeavor within academic discourse. The comparison being made is between Derrida's critique of the notion of self-presence in the subject and Beckett's emphasis on the unattainability of an authentic self, as exemplified in his trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* (Derrida, 1973; 1976). However, it is imperative to reconsider this affinity. The researcher proposed a comprehensive examination of the subject matter from multiple perspectives, since Beckett's trilogy serves as both a precursor and an exposé of the constraints inherent in Derrida's deconstruction of subjectivity.

According to Gontarski (1986: 6), "Beckett deconstructs his own writings so thoroughly that deconstructive analysis, at any rate, frequently seems plain superfluous" because of how thoroughly Beckett dissects his own work. Like Beckettian subjectivity, which constantly shifts between presence and absence, destruction and reconstruction, deferral and creation of an illusion of self-presence, reading develops a consciousness of the self that is similar to the self. As so, the trilogy is a simulacrum of the destruction of subjectivity, or a contradictory image of it. As readers, we can follow the two-tiered structure of self-awareness as we take in a self-defeating storyline. Perhaps it is here that Beckett seizes the aprotic frame of deconstruction, or at least surpasses it. The analysis of the trilogy never allows the critic to take on a deconstructive stance, but the structural analysis of literary self-deconstruction forces the critic into the open.

In his work "*Malone Dies*," Samuel Beckett predominantly explores the concepts of "metaphysical annihilation," the "untrue self," and Jacques Derrida's critique of the notion of "self-presence" within the subject. In addition, the author provided further elucidation on the underlying conceptual framework of *Malone Dies*, which explores the interplay between language, cognition, affect, and the external reality.

The access-conscious refers to the reader's views, beliefs, and desires that are expressed subconsciously. Based on Heidegger's concept of "modern representational thinking" and Jacques Derrida's notion of "self-presence," there exist two distinct modes through which consciousness can potentially remain concealed. Within the framework of sincerity, the concept of "self-existence" is perceived as an introspective and subjective expedition.

According to Higgins's analysis, Malone's narratives present a stark portrayal of the constrained and desolate human condition, while simultaneously affirming the presence of a dynamic, inventive, and inquisitive human consciousness in the midst of this existence. In the context of Malone's demise, storytelling is regarded as a form of artistic expression that played a role in the perpetrator's ultimate downfall.

Higgins elucidated the manner in which Malone derives significance in his existence and forges his sense of self by means of narrative, so affirming both in the context of an existence devoid of purpose. Narrative

discourse, akin to the physiological acts of ingestion, digestion, and excretion, can be regarded as an inherent human capability. In the context of Malone's literary works, both his characters and his own conduct might be interpreted as representations of the human condition, rather than as distinct individuals. Despite its imperfections, this action allows individuals to assert their existence and deliberate intention within Beckett's harsh and bleak reality (46).

Samuel Beckett's body of work collectively portrays a pervasive cynicism towards various facets of human existence that are conventionally regarded as providers of comfort and significance, including the individual, interpersonal connections, creative creation, religious devotion, and philosophical introspection. In Beckett's work, the presence of conflict and contradiction is pervasive, leading to a state of impasse due to the inherent complexities arising from the interplay between the mind and body. Emotions encompass a spectrum that spans from ennui to malevolence, while reasons can be characterized as either absurd or enigmatically irresistible.

In the first-person narratives of Beckett, the protagonists exhibit a palpable existential awareness, leading them to acknowledge their lack of genuine personhood. The majority of Beckett's characters can be characterized as societal outsiders, as their ability to effectively communicate with others is either severely impaired or excessively transparent, hence failing to offer solace. Both artificial and organic manifestations of creativity are generally disapproved of. The inherent artificiality and limitations of words and literary conventions render it challenging to fully comprehend the intended meaning of authors. The act of engaging in organic creativity is perceived as awful due to the immense burden of responsibility associated with the creation and subsequent suffering of another entity. The examination of philosophy inside Beckett's literary works is intricate, and the interpretations thereof are equally intricate. The denizens of this realm exhibit an unquenchable desire for structure, concord, and assurance; nonetheless, it becomes apparent that these attributes are really illusory concessions made by those who are reluctant to confront the inherent void of existence (Walker IV).

In "A Study of the Fiction to 1953," Vandervlist demonstrated how the narrative techniques employed in Beckett's early fiction, influenced by a dialogic engagement with Joyce's oeuvre; suggest a critical examination of conventional notions of narrative and subjectivity. The research findings indicate that Beckett's literary works effectively engage with the literary experiment presented in Joyce's "Work in Progress" and Beckett's unique interpretation of Proust's writings. However, it is argued that Beckett's writing ultimately rejects the potentialities associated with modernist literature (Said 50). Taking this into consideration, Beckett embarks on the task of crafting literature that is deemed "impossible." In such works, the main character and storyteller reject their assigned roles, the assumption of capturing the audience's attention is examined and finally abandoned, and the speaker's control over language is subjected to profound interrogation. The literary works, such as "More Pricks than Kicks," "Murphy, Watt," "Malone Dies," and "The Unnamable," exemplify the narrative possibilities inherent in rejected and seemingly "impossible" approaches such as silence, futility, and apparent inadequacy. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the isolated individualism exhibited by the characters in Beckett's works is intricately connected to the deterioration of both language and self.

This process offers a hypothetical glimpse into the theoretical concept that language, when detached from real-life or customary contexts of speaking and responding, transforms into an independent system of signs that lacks the ability to address matters of self and identity (III).

## 2.Representation of Self

In the novel "Malone Dies" authored by Samuel Beckett, an exploration is undertaken about the utilization of space, objects, and the process of writing as means to redefine the author's identity. In the literary work titled "Malone Dies," Beckett assigns the role of composing his own life story to the fictional character Malone. This novel serves as the second installment in a trilogy, alongside "Molloy" and "The Unnamable," authored by Beckett. Beckett employs a diverse range of metaphors, self-deprecating admonitions, sarcastic confessions, sexual jokes, and admissions of doubt in order to utilize his character's experience as a metaphor for his own life. In the novel *Malone Dies*, Beckett provides the reader with poignant insights into his personal growth and inner uncertainties as he navigates the path towards success. The novel functions as a medium of transmission, effectively transmitting the author's identity and memories to the reader in a manner akin to a theatrical production. This is the reason why the introverted Beckett devises a strategy to engage with his audience, which involves "performing" his character Malone (Catanzaro 119).

In the opening of the novel "Malone Dies," the protagonist and writer, Malone, residing within an asylum,

explicitly expresses his impending mortality. The individual endeavors to occupy his time by engaging in the creation of fictitious narratives, wherein he intertwines imaginary personas with his own deteriorating recollections and modes of self-representation. Additionally, he does an inventory of his belongings. Malone remains immobile upon a desolate sleeping surface, plagued by a lack of awareness regarding his location and personal identity. The work exhibits a scarcity of narrative events.

The novel exhibits a lack of consistent characters and deviates from standard norms about language usage. It deliberately rejects established principles such as maintaining constant character identities and employing reliable language. The work and its protagonist-narrator exhibit a postmodern schizoid voice (Rahmani 136). It is apparent that there is not a direct correspondence between Beckett's writing endeavor and the narratives of his characters. However, there exists a component of what Abbott refers to as "autography" that holds significance inside these novels. Abbott (1996, 20) distinguishes between "autobiography" or "self-writing" and autobiography by highlighting the narrative nature of the latter, which often presents life events in retrospect, while the former suggests an ongoing state of incompleteness (Hulle 256).

In Beckett's literary work titled "*Malone Dies*," the protagonist, Malone, manifests his individuality by engaging in the creative process of storytelling. Through his narratives, Malone presents a resolute depiction of the constrained and monotonous nature of human existence on Earth, while also affirming the presence of a dynamic, inventive, and inquisitive human intellect (Higgins 38).

By presenting a somber portrayal of the creative act's capacity, Malone effectively demonstrates his ability to construct meaningful narratives, so conveying not just his existence but also his own identity and engaged awareness within the realm of existence. By employing lines such as "I have, I have" (Beckett 199) and consistently addressing his bodily processes, the protagonist effectively asserts his existence on a fundamental, corporeal plane (Beckett 199). Furthermore, the author asserts his distinctiveness by divulging personal anecdotes from his own experiences, including his journeys (184), the tally of individuals he has eliminated (236), and even a small glimpse into his early years (268). (Higgins 41).

### 3. Self-Construction in Malone's Novel

The novel *Malone Dies* by Samuel Beckett examines the creative process that is conducted by a protagonist who is nearing the end of his life, and the fundamental theme of the book is centred on the conflict that arises between creation and deconstruction.

Malone discovers via his writing that he is creating and developing his personality through his characters. Malone asks, "Will I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?" at the start of his Sapo history. (189), realising that he may be drawn back to what he was attempting to escape. Many of Malone's stories suggest Sapo and Macmann are self-representations. Malone declares himself a deity by creating Sapo and Macmann: "I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say" (226). This sentence implies that Malone's characters represent him and share his trips and experiences. To emphasise his character-hood, he explains, "I write about myself with the same pencil and in the same exercise-book as about him." (207). Malone indirectly develops his personality by shaping Sapo and Macmann's identities through writing. In another place, Malone says, "I hated writing, but I had to do it. It is needed to locate me and him." Malone now uses storytelling to discover who he is and where he has "gone to" (207). Malone tries to detach himself from himself, but his characters bring him back. His writing emphasises this identity rather than subjecting it to his narratives (39).

However, if we see Malone's narratives as a reflection of his life and character, they depict a somber depiction that persistently explores themes of mortality and the lack of vitality in the creative drive. The narratives predominantly center on gratuitous acts of violence, while deliberately undermining creative or constructive endeavors, rendering them futile or detrimental. The author contrasts the traditionally procreative quality of a sexual relationship with the reality of Macmann and Moll's relationship by emphasizing the lack of pleasure and fulfillment they experience in their relationship. For example, when Moll is dying, she exhibits symptoms so severe that "half a century younger, she might have been taken for pregnant" (265). When characterizing Sapo's parents' passivity, Malone once again emphasizes failure and inaction by saying, "It was as though the Saposcats gained the strength to live from the possibility of their impotence" (188). The fact that Mrs. Lambert "annihilated so in less than a second the work of two or three minutes" (214) shows how hopeless it is for her to complete any activity, no matter how small, like sorting lentils for supper. The themes portrayed in the stories appear to express reluctance towards embracing the possibility of novel creation and progressive advancement, so suggesting that the very act of writing may lack productivity (40).

The central focus of *Malone Dies* centers on the author's imaginative endeavor of fabricating narratives. The work extensively explores the futility of mortal humans attempting to craft narratives through the inherently flawed medium of language, yet ultimately asserts the indispensability of engaging in this endeavor. The construction of narratives serves to validate Malone's own identity, as well as his introspective understanding of himself, within an existence that lacks inherent significance. Malone's aspirations may remain unrealized, although he has achieved a personal victory through maintaining mental clarity and asserting his opinions. Storytelling, akin to the fundamental human activities of sucking, eating, and defecating, can be regarded as an innate human capability. In Malone's narratives, as well as in his own conduct, Malone and his creatures might be interpreted as representations of the human condition, rather than as distinct individuals. Despite its imperfections, this action enables mankind to assert their presence and conscious engagement, even within the constrained and somber atmosphere depicted by Beckett (Higgins 45-46).

#### 4. Self-Destruction in Malone's Novel

In addition to the thematic content of the narratives, Malone's writing style serves as a manifestation of this destructive tendency through its consistent incorporation of illogical and dissolving elements in its pursuit of establishing a cohesive narrative structure. "There is no use indicting words, they are no shoddier than what they sell," (195) he continues, underscoring the point that both the stories' contents and his method of recording them are meaningless. Malone consistently weakens the coherence of his narratives by casting doubt on essential facts regarding his characters instead of definitively establishing them. This is evident when he states, "Sapo had no friends—no, that won't do. Sapo was on good terms with his little friends" (189). Additionally, Malone arbitrarily alters Sapo's name to Macmann, as indicated by his remark, "I can't call him that any more" (Sapo's name is changed from Macmann to Macmann). Surprisingly, Malone himself acknowledges that he does not entirely comprehend the origins of his own characters, saying, "I have not been able to figure out why Sapo was not expelled." (190). Malone's narratives are compromised as he interjects them with self-deprecating comments, including the phrase "What tedium" (189) on multiple occasions, and interrupting his own sentences to express, "This is awful" (191). These actions paradoxically hinder his efforts to produce coherent stories. Furthermore, Malone undermines the credibility of his own narratives by consistently casting doubt on his own authority. Malone's literary creations are deliberately constructed with the intention of afterwards deconstructing them, so creating the perception that this artistic endeavor is inherently self-destructive. Near the end of the story, Malone writes, "My notes have a curious tendency, as I finally realize, to annihilate all they purport to record." (259).

The narratives serve as a manifestation of this inherent tendency towards self-destruction, and even in their most basic material composition, they demonstrate a semblance of mortality, since the writing implements are consistently shown as delicate and constrained (Higgins 40).

Cornwell argues that Malone's storytelling technique reflects a tendency to deny rather than affirm consciousness. Due to his aversion to the burden of human consciousness and the resultant solitude, the narrator in Beckett's work seeks solace within an internal realm, with the only means of reemergence being through succumbing to madness or mortality (50).

Mark Sachner holds a more positive viewpoint of Malone's writing compared to Critchley, and he makes a correlation between the perpetuation of these narratives and the perpetuation of awareness. According to Sachner, "what keeps the curve of his fiction moving on into infinity as it forever approaches, but never meets, its own destruction is the presence of the artistic consciousness that maintains itself through the narrative voice." (152). Despite the potential emergence of contradictions or narrative disintegration as the stories go towards their culmination, Malone consistently maintains a presence throughout. Sachner notes the lack of purpose in Malone's writing in this comment as well. The author observes that while Malone's writing does not entirely eliminate itself, it does exhibit a proclivity towards self-destruction as long as Malone's consciousness remains its sustainer. Sachner acknowledges the inclination towards self-destruction. Sachner (153) employed the term "pattern of failure from which there is no escape" to characterize these phenomena. Malone admits to himself that he has a history of failure when he writes, "I began again." "But gradually with a different goal, not any longer in order to succeed, but rather in order to fail," says Beckett (195). Despite this, Malone's solution to this meaningless fight is to "continue to write and, symbolically speaking, to live." Sachner (153). The creative act is inherently flawed and unsustainable over an extended duration, yet it remains crucial for individuals to assert their awareness within the broader societal context. This paradox is exemplified in the novel *Malone Dies*. Despite the absurdity and futility of the scenario, Malone persists, steadfastly adhering to

his narratives until the final moment when it is feasible to do so. In doing so, he validates the strength and liveliness of his own consciousness. Although Malone fails to achieve his ultimate goal, he becomes triumphant in this specific endeavor.

## 5. Conclusion

The novel "*Malone Dies*" contemplates the inherent futility of a fallible human endeavoring to convey narratives via an imperfect medium, namely language. Nevertheless, it eventually emphasizes the significance of making an effort to do so. Malone use narrative techniques as a means of constructing and substantiating his sense of self inside a void existence. Malone's narratives and behavior demonstrate that storytelling is an inherent aspect of the human experience, comparable in significance to fundamental physiological activities such as sucking, eating, and defecating. This assertion is supported by the presence of universal symbols within Malone's characters. Despite its imperfections, this gesture serves as evidence of humanity's presence and intentional engagement inside Beckett's constrained and gloomy setting. This paper has derived two primary conclusions:

- 1- The stream-of-consciousness technique employed by Beckett is a prominent characteristic of his writing style. The term "stream-of-consciousness" refers to the narrative style employed by the narrators in Molloy and Malone, when their thoughts are expressed continuously and often without the use of transitional elements.
- 2- *Malone Dies* represents another endeavor by Beckett to comprehend the fundamental nature of the individual. The work exhibits a disconcerting atmosphere, and it is abundant in instances of linguistic playfulness. In his work, Beckett effectively portrays the profound anguish and hopelessness experienced by an individual who finds themselves in a state of anticipation for the inevitable arrival of their own demise. The individual maintains a perpetual consciousness of the shame that ensues from the incapacity to execute basic duties. The primary thematic focus of the work appears to revolve on the concept of mortality; nevertheless, with closer examination, it becomes evident that the underlying essence of the book pertains to the intricacies and complexities of human existence.

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