**Inside or Outside: The Problem of Liminality and Unsuccessful Self- centeredness in the Panoptical Asylum of Samuel Beckett’s *Murphy***

“Humanity is a well with two buckets,” said Wylie, “one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied.” (Beckett, 1938, 44)

Samuel Beckett’s first published novel, *Murphy* (1938), is the story of ‘big blooming buzzing confusion’ in the life of an unstable man who longs for nothing more than rocking on a chair and daydreaming. *Murphy* is a bizarre work that questions lots of metaphysical issues and standards, and contributes to a new framework of study under the influence of post structuralism. In *Murphy*, Beckett like many of his works applies the practice of decentering through an obscure language with lots of insoluble gaps. Its language is spattered with words that go dead as soon as they sound and they are disclosing the fundamental sense of unsureness and the unsuccessful endeavor of self-centeredness. The logic of novel is based on suggesting a position for the title character and eccentrically on the other side immediately overturning it. Murphy is unable to attain a center and experience the process of subjctification over the course of novel because he has already been locked into his liminal location as a prisoner of the extremes: inside/outside, self/other, body/mind, present/absent, sane/insane and etc.

Murphy is an inactive person quite without profession, or trade; he has new arrangements and challenging interests for his life. He is so much interested to cut off from his sensuous corporeal life in the big world because for him this kind of life is an impediment to attainment of the truth. Thus, he tries as much as he can to get rid of it. In this sense, He steps into a small room, a liminal location in London. His room is like a medium-sized cage, where there is no contact with the outer world. Here, he “would have to buckle to and start eating, drinking, sleeping, and putting his clothes on and off, in quite alien surroundings”. (Beckett, 1938, 5)

For him the outer world reflects the dark cynicism that pervades his willingness for the inner world. As Murphy turns from the ugly world of outer reality to his own inner world, he mirrors the challenge between mind and body, the self and the outer world, and the entrapment and the meaning of freedom. For him, “the inner world and his psychotic withdrawal, promises an absolute freedom, whereas the outer world guarantees a rigid determinism”. (Begam, 1996, 47)

Murphy wants to break the rupture between outside and inside world in order to find his selfhood but he cannot. He finds his soul in limbo or in a liminal location suspended between outside and inside: “There is no ‘form in change’ to unify the plurality, inside and outside, since ‘the break with outside implies the break with the inside […] no relation of replacement for the naïve relation exist […] what we call the outside and the inside are the very same thing”. (Gontarksi and Uhlmann, 144) Murphy is a “complex and oddly tragic character who cannot reconcile the unreality of the seen world with the reality of the unseen.” (Graverl, 1979, 51-52) He claims that “I am not of the big world; I am of the little world.”( Beckett, 1938, 123) And due to that, he tries to run away from detention and ‘the colossal fiasco’ of the big world to find solace and relief from miseries of long desires, intensive intrusive imaginations and overt hallucinations but it is impossible. Several times he says that “soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free” but he cannot.(Beckett, 1938, 10) As a matter of fact, he realizes that he is not part of the inner world as a whole then he decides to be waiting. In other words, whatever he attempts to find relief, his attempt fails and he is unable to get rid of this existential world.

Before coming to London, Murphy is studying in Cork in an academy with Neary, a philosopher, and lots of pupils. Murphy’s heart is too irrational to achieve what the other pupils and their philosopher want; then he leaves there for a new destination. The novel reflects Murphy’s role as a traditional existential hero, incapable of making any possible authentic act. Traditionally, an existential hero is one who doesn't define himself in terms of what the Other or the public crowds in society define. The hero stands alone against the crowds and generates a self-interpretation from his own will and experiential history. The experience of Other is the experience of another free subject who inhabits the same world as a person does. In its most basic form, it is this experience of the Other that constitutes inter-subjectivity and objectivity of the hero. This actuality establishes the authentic experience for the hero and it is so that the hero usually accepts his own mortality and generates meaning out of the meaninglessness of finite experience. In this regard, the hero is usually an atheist or non-believer who rejects the metaphysical constitutions and theological thinking in the society. In this regard, Melvin Friedman says,“he brings both theological and metaphysical issues down to simple devices and uses the matter to escape both”.(Friedman, 1970, 32) The existential hero while he sees he is alienated from everything surrounding him, decides to regards himself as the center in the world. In other words, this alienation creates a desire for self-dependence and self centeredness. It creates a degree of power and motivation for the hero over others by violation of metaphysical conventions.

Talking through the existential hero and the binary of outside and inside, the story of *Murphy* questions Murphy’s appetence and fondness to the internal world and inquires the reason of his motivations for making such a decision. Murphy assumes responsibility for his life through the act of choosing between two alternatives, the big world of outer society and the small world of inner side. For him, this existential choice is accompanied with anxiety and confinement. In this regard, he has decided to drift into inner world in a search for subjectivity and a private world of sovereign and freedom. But in this way he makes himself physically debilitated and he puts himself tied in the cage-like room; and is eccentric that through this suffering, he looks for something that he does not know what it is and more eccentric that he enjoys and advocated this state of suffering and confinement:

“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 except to their communion. The rock got faster and faster, shorter and shorter, the gleam was gone, the grin was gone, the starlessness was gone, soon his body would be quiet. Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free.” (Beckett, 1938, 172-73)

Murphy sits most of the day on his rocking chair, to which he ties himself, restricting his body in attempt to free his brain. Murphy on his rocking chair, applies the strategy of ‘sit and think’ to have a vision of the desired world because the practice of ‘go and see’ is not a potential resolution for the abstract world of self. Accordingly, he inevitably retreats with intentional depersonalization and imagination: “He distinguished between the actual and virtual of his mind, not as between form and the formless yearning for form, but as between that of which he had both mental and physical experience and that of which he had mental experience only. Thus the form of kick was actual, that of caress virtual.”( Bastable, 1976, 76)

For him, the experience of the inner world can never be as easy as the experience of the outer world or the external realities. To achieve this goal, his mind flies from one idea to another. This chaos of consciousness eventually objectifies his subjectivity. In fact, neither the experimental method of ‘go and see’ nor the logical way of ‘sit and think’ are possibly helping him to reach an illumination in the world (of absence). In this regard, his thoughts become distracted emotionally and they can no longer be cut off from his physical experience and body: “Murphy’s mind and Murphy’s body are as ‘two synchronized clocks that exactly agree without influencing each other casually’, or like the two sides in Murphy’s chess game; neither can win until the other surrenders. Only by surrendering his body will-via the chair, via Murphy’s ‘surrender to the thongs of self’ - can become ‘astir in his mind’”. (Goerhke, 1938)

This particular Cartesian binary displays Murphy’s position in liminality so that he cannot do anything to release himself from the battle of mind and body. In this sense, he awaits in dark zone of his cage because he has nothing to do in this battle. Chris Ackerly and Stanly Gontareski in *Beckett at 100* describe this battle (between mind and body) in *Murphy* as a “Cartesian catastrophe”. This means that Murphy has negated the mind-body dualism of Descartes. This is a post-structural thought and it says that the Cartesian’s constructive subject no longer provides the basis for a definable self in the character of Murphy. This Cartesian analysis is so much dominant in critical responses (especially in deconstructive studies) to Samuel Beckett’s works. About the importance of this notion, Michael Mooney (1982) also says that Beckett’s critics usually cut their way through Cartesian approach and there is little doubt that Cartesianism cannot be ignored. ( Mooney, 1982, 214)

Murphy aims to release himself from the straps of life and to seek himself in an abstract world of selfhood but strangely sits naked on a rocking chair for long hours while he is tied to his position with seven scarves: “Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his tights to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. Sweat poured off him, tightened the thongs. The breath was not perceptible. The eyes, cold and unwavering as a gull’s, stared up …”.( Beckett, 1938, 5)This situation of Murphy’s body strapped to his rocking chair in a small room is an unusual scene which strongly makes a deep impression on readers because “if one intervenes upon it [body] to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty.” (Foucault, 2011, 7)

In fact, the readers get confused by this self imprisonment and therefore, they cannot definitely conceive why the character likes this situation. It seems he likes this fastened circumference very much because it gives him a deep sense of tranquility and control over his body and mind. For him, the rocking chair, to which Murphy confines himself, functions as the guarantor of his essential identity. In fact, Murphy is so much dependent to it and without it he is nobody. Michael Davidson (2007) in *Every man his specialty: Beckett, Disability, and Dependence,* acknowledges this dependency of Beckett’s characters on objects (such as rocking chair in *Murphy* or bicycle in *Molloy*) as “prostheses for limited mobility and agency” and he comments on the fact that through this dependency “bodies are in the states of increasing decay with limbs becoming unusable and memories unreliable.” (Davidson,2007, 57)

In other words, Murphy is identified in terms of the spaces of the chair( or object) to which he is bound. He, or rather, his body, is literally objectified as an integral part of the chair through which he draws definition for his selfhood. Murphy appears so much dependent to the rocking chair and highly wondered by sounds and sights around. He hears “the echo of a street cry, which now […] gave Quid pro quo! Quid pro quo! directly.”(Beckett, 1938, 5) These echoes of paranoid hallucinations (Quid pro quo) are pervaded in his living place and they are creating annoying delusional perceptions. They are sounds that Murphy disrelish.

They detain him from all the possible directions in the world to which he does not belong, in a manner that is not understood what they are. Murphy, here, is the “not-I” but he is an object being absented by others. It is the walls of Otherness which detain him. The social functions as a parallel discourse to Murphy's fantasy of the ‘Other,’ functioning intrusively, the ‘sights and sounds’ of which detained him in the world to which they belonged. Wendy Foster about the fantasy of Otherness and unknown sounds of *Quid pro quo* says:

“Murphy locates his sense of self in the space of the fantasy. The body, for Murphy, is a place of imprisonment, an extension of the social bond in which freedom is achieved, ironically, through its antithesis. […] The oscillation between absence and presence within the text works, indicationally, to mark Murphy's state of essential disjunction. Murphy is fundamentally *out of step* with the world. He is split, *dis-connected*. For Murphy, the "big world" from which he is irrevocably alienated is defined by the mantra of "*Quid pro quo*."” (Foster, 2013, 5)

It seems the world of the novel is deterministically regulated by lots of unseen forces and there is no alternative for Murphy and others in it to undertake a journey to the world of self and centeredness. Murphy’s quest for selfhood is negated by the sense of loss or false identification. When the story opens Murphy is in bound in a room in London. He has come to London to meet Miss Counihan, a young lady who is accustomed to a luxurious life unlike Murphy. In London, Murphy is quite poor and pitiable then Miss Counihan’s patience ends and she leaves him, of course for one important reason and it is just for having her own luxurious life.

Not long after Murphy meets Celia- an Irish girl and a prostitute- on streets and Celia falls in love with him; although, after a short time she leaves him to go back to her own profession (prostitution). Murphy is unable to live without her for long then agrees to work if she backs to him. He finds a job in a mental asylum and there he meets Mr. Endon, a schizophrenic man. Murphy becomes so much dependent to Mr. Endon and the asylum; and the happiest moments for him are the times he spends with Mr. Endon. He finds Mr. Endon as a friend and he would like to imagine himself as one with him. He, in fact, sees within Mr. Endon, a legality and legitimacy of his self. This diversion and escape from the reality of self and desire to become Other is the subject that reveals Murphy’s aporia. Wendy Foster in *Murphy’s Aporia: An Examination of Spaces of Desire as Structured Absences* about this objectified sense of otherness says:

“Murphy's process of self-objectification is an attempt to incorporate himself back into the "other." His construction of self as a "projection," "dark" and "larval" that becomes "clarified," articulates the direction of the split self towards unification with the "other." This assumption of unity is an essential impossibility, a "misrecognition." Murphy's construction of an identification with his "wards" is mediated by his very real position of authority over them as "caretaker." His position both inside and outside the social apparatus indicates Murphy's ultimate and incommensurable alienation from the objects of his desire.”(Foster, 2013, 5)

Murphy constructs for himself a boundary existence, in which there are two extremes of self and Other. He locates his essential existence in the fantasy and oscillating motion between self and Other. Murphy is a fond of his little world, peculiar habits and prodigious desires; he likes a changeless and lifeless system in which there is nothing new as it is notified in the first line of *Murphy*: “The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new.”(Beckett, 1938, 5) His mind is not engaged in ‘eating, drinking, sleeping, and putting clothes on and off’. The concept of a change is seriously disgusting for Murphy and he always tries to resist but it is unavoidable because he cannot adopt himself to the changing circumstances.

For instance, when Celia wants to make a man out of Murphy, he refuses any novelty and development but his refusal is not everlasting. He loses his control and freely flies to experience changes and deconstructions. In the beginning, he likes the rocking-chair and never leaves it just like a child grasping his mother’s arms firmly; however, his interest and love shifts into respecting Celia and at Celia’s coaxing, he reluctantly leaves the chair and finds a job and there, he makes an acquaintance to Mr. Endon. He spends the best hours of his days on unfinished games of chess with him in the padded cell of the mental institution and he forgets all about his beloved chair:

“he had been enjoying since morning, in little Mr. Endon and all the other proxies. That was why he felt happy in wards and sorry when the time came to live them. He could not have it both ways, not even the illusion of it. He thought of the rocking chair left behind in Breweary Road, that aid to life in his mind from which he had never before been parted. He worried about it (mental institution) more and more as the week of day duty drew to an end”. (Beckett, 1938, 130) However, he feels a perfect existence in the company of Mr. Endon in mental institution but his interest no longer tarries and again he is reverted to Celia and his former living condition in MentalMerceyseat (or the asylum). (Waters, 1984, 115)

*Murphy* like Jacque Derrida criticizes the concept of determination of being and remarks the possibilities of options and personas that pass beyond selfhood. It also uses the term *difference* to refer to the origin or production of differences and alterations. For Murphy, events are happening on and on until he faces a kind of non-stop alteration in the sensual world. Since the sensory world is incapable of providing that perpetual sanctuary and ongoing sense of goodness for Murphy, all his yearnings are failed. David Patties (2000) says “this is, of course, a paradoxical wish: he is determined, through an act of will, to achieve a state in which he can will nothing.” (Pattie, 2000, 58) In this sense, Murphy feels that he is a deterministic slave of his desires that are continuously varying (the theory of discontinuity). It seems that the big world is hostile, offering him nothing but a cyclical revelation of his needs and desires. The issues of his desires look like the terrifying syndrome with no alleviation. “For every syndrome that is eased, another is made worse.” (Beckett, 1938, 43) Desire, in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, is the ecstasy of the gap and it is put off to the later time. In other words, Murphy's existential quest or his desire of finding self is always already deferred and it is marked, significantly, by its implication within a discourse of absence. The notion of absence in *Murphy*; however, involves the paradoxical movement, or oscillation, between nodal moments of presence. For Murphy, absence is the aporia that exists, or rather subsists, between and within self and other.

Murphy’s horoscope determines his inconsistent future and never lets him feel autonomy; for him everything is temporary, predetermined and under celestial control. He is supposed to be a voluntary prisoner of the panoptical society. Murphy restricts himself willingly; in fact, he takes Foucauldian view of confinement. It is surprising because this view is overturned and this time it is Murphy himself that carries the task of confinement and ties himself to the chair, not society.This form of self imposed asylum is not something new in Beckett’s works. We can find several works in which characters are seeking self imposed asylums from a world that they cannot cope with.Victoria Swanson, Phd associate of Tennesse University, in her article *Confining, Incapacitating, and Partitioning the body: Carcerality and Surveillance* in Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame, Happy Days,* and *Play*, acknowledges some points of philosophical intersections between Michel Foucault and Beckett within some dramatic works. In this regard, she focuses on partitioning of subject and the dispersal of self as it is mirrored in Michel Foucault’s panopticon. She says that Beckett’s characters are bound in a self imposed prison (similar to Foucault’s panopticon) in which they are constantly obsessed by their self consciousness and by the means of this self consciousness and regulation; they vacillate between subjectivity and subjection:

“Beckett often places each character’s consciousness in stark contrast with the substantial self on which it reflects. In so doing, he presents subjectivity as a predicament of self consciousness. For Beckett, the Sartrean vision of subjectivity is a trap that can only be escaped, if it can at all, by the kind of self-violence that leads to self-dissolution. Sartre sees the subject-object relation in terms of exteriority whereby one sees while also being seen where only through being seen does gazing actualize a relation which remains outside the self”. (Swanson, 2011, 2-3)

Elizabeth Barry (2006) also in Beckett and Authority regards some scenes and occasions of self-imposed asylum in initial parts of *Murphy* and she says: “The ‘mew’ that Murphy is staying in at the beginning of the novel is described as a ‘cage’, an old meaning of the word ‘mew’, a space where someone or something is confined forcibly or through choice. To initiate the narrative, there is a development—Murphy’s mew is ‘condemned’—which forces him to become involved with the world of society or the padded cell of the lunatic.”(Barry, 2006, 43-44) )

Anyway, Murphy’s interest in isolation and confinement extends well beyond his room to the mental asylum of Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (hospital for the better class mentally deranged). Beckett’s vision of Murphy confined in the padded cells of lunatics in Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (M.M.M.) has a close philosophical affinity with Michael Foucault’s panopticon. Like the containment prevalent in prison, Beckett confines Murphy to the restrictive setting of M.M.M. In M.M.M., like panopticon, there are numbers of cells with small windows on doors that are employed to control and view within the cells during days and nights. Suzanne Desmond in chapter one of her thesis about this issue says:

“When Murphy visits the M.M.M.’s padded cells for the first time , the narrator describes them as, ‘windowless , like monad, except for the small shuttered judas in the door, at which a sane eye appeared, or was employed to appear, at frequent and regular intervals throughout the twenty-four hours’. The shuttered judas in this case becomes a sort of one way window through which nurses (or metaphorically speaking, the outside world) can view their wards without being viewed themselves.” (Desmond, 2008, 6)

*Murphy* takes the readers to the world of insane minds in the asylum and correspondingly renounces the application of sane minds in comparison to the insane ones. It asks us to regard both sanity and insanity and judge who is sane and who is insane. In Beckett’s opinion, there is a great deal of confusion in the binary of sane/insane or normal /abnormal. According to Beckett, the notions of sanity/insanity, normality/ abnormality and mind/body are not as they are mentioned in Descartes metaphysics. Considering this issue of confusion, *Murphy* pictures the mind as ‘a large hollow sphere’ and thus it challenges the metaphysical notion of mind: “Murphy’s mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded 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”. (Beckett, 1938, 76)

Regarding the issue of sane and insane, novel devotes a whole chapter (chapter six) to mind’s deficiencies, disharmonies and alterations. He states that the idealistic world or the conceptual utopia cannot be obtained in the shadow of sane minds. It takes Foucault’s viewpoints of self-restraint and dystopia, and carries out the task of seeking confinement. *Murphy* under the influence of Foucault brings new definitions of the sane and insane minds that become the foundation of much of Beckett’s later works. For Beckett, the distinction between sanity and insanity is so much narrow or even perhaps the distinction in some occasions doesn’t exist. Beckett believes that the difference described between the sane and the insane sometimes have seeable and very real effects on people, but it can also sometimes serve to illustrate a particular effect of the indeterminacy of definition.

In *Murphy,* Beckett forces us to conceive of insanity as perhaps a more bearable state, and illustrates that the ‘insane’, possibly, possess a more cultivated mind than it sounds, and is therefore to be envied sometimes. Indeed, Beckett via Foucault’s ideologies reveals whatever man uses his mind and rationalization for, he gets closer to confinement, emotional incongruity and eventually death. And the more mental detachments he follows, the more freedom and welfare he attains. (Desmond, 2008, 39)

The contradictions *Murphy* addresses between the sane and insane world, is like a comedy that makes everybody laugh. It illustrates lunatics as cheerful and fortunate people “enjoying all the amenities of a mental hospital.”(Beckett, 1938, 112) There, they are encouraged to do sports or loiter. And for them, the experience of passing time is nothing but the positive feeling of peace and solace. (Weller, 2006, 71) On the other hand, it presents the sane world contiguous to horror and panic in a way that its residents always feel trapped, imprisoned, and disabled to escape, incapable of letting the cry out, but no one can hear and no one can do anything to save them from the chaos of the outside world. *Murphy* also questions what it means to be sane through its role reversals of nurses and patients in Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. *Murphy* regards the insane people as the powerful sources in the society. It runs against the theory or idea that would always tend to argue that power is held exclusively by dominant groups in society. It draws the attention to Foucaudian philosophy that power is something which can be practiced by people in specific situations, which will produce other reactions and resistances, and isn't tied to specific groups or identities.

In *Murphy*, we can see power is as a factor which can be even used and deployed by insane people. The schizophrenic Mr. Endon (patient) has a dominion role over Murphy (nurse) and seems that it is his existence that proves Murphy’s presence. We can see this occasion in chapter eleven of the book: “the last at last seen of him himself unseen by him and of himself”.(Beckett, 1938,171) This dependency means that we cannot always think of nurses or patients as ones that they should be conventionally. According to researcher, there are some occasions like that of *Murphy* in which the role of nurses and patients are reversed. Beckett provides a cynical portrayal of nurses and in this regard, he questions what it means to be sane through role reversals of nurses and patients. Beckett remarks nurses paradoxically as the real lunatics while their patients seem quite sane in comparison. (Desmond, 2008, II) This issue of reversal satirizes the common hierarchy of sane/insane and it indicates Foucauldian model and theory that power is everywhere and it runs in and through all relationships and interactions. David Gauntlett in his book says: I like the idea that identities are not fixed, that power differences change in different situations, that your destiny and power and life are not determined by a few supposedly descriptive facts about yourself such as gender, class, ethnicity, age and so on. I much prefer the idea that these are relevant but don’t determine anything. (Gauntlett, 2002, 13) Accordingly, it is silly to reckon that power will be somehow possessed by certain people and not at all held, in any way, by others. For Beckett, people do not have a real identity within themselves .He says that an identity is communicated to others and it is not a fixed thing within a person. But it is a constant shifting freely floating between self and other, body and mind, sane and insane, absent and present, and eventually inside and outside: “I’m neither one side nor the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I have two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that’s what I feel myself vibrating.”( Beckett, 2009, 376)

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