

Interpretation of the Return Motif of Ulysses in the Early Novels of S. Beckett

Yelyzaveta Vasyliuk

School of Philology, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv
National University, Kharkiv, Ukraine

Abstract

The Ulysses's motif of return in *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Murphy* by S. Beckett becomes a key theme. Belacqua Shuah and Murphy strive for being at home, as well as Bloom and Odysseus. The main character of *More Pricks Than Kicks* Belacqua Shuah wanders from one of his beloved to another, that can be a reflection of Odysseus's wanders. Bloom's coming back home is reconsidered by S. Beckett: Belacqua and Murphy die in the end of the novels. The idea of coming back is also represented by Belacqua's concept about the way of boomerang in *More Pricks Than Kicks* and the way that loops the loop like an eight, following which however you don't return to the place where you started, but going down you meet yourself, 'going up'. Stephen's 'silence, exile and cunning' and Bloom's 'coming back was the worst thing you ever did' is played up by S. Beckett as 'Doubt, Despair and Scrounging' in *More Pricks Than Kicks*. In *More Pricks Than Kicks* the image of a bicycle, inherited from Ulysses, symbolize the increasing mechanization of human's life, and in *Murphy* the image of a bicycle is replaced by a rocking-chair, Murphy strives for 'state' movement, movement at the same place.

Keywords: James Joyce, home coming, searching for home, Samuel Beckett, wandering

Introduction

Irish writer Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) is considered to be the disciple of James Joyce (1882–1941). S. Beckett inherited J. Joyce's narrative techniques, motif of bodiness etc. But from the very beginning he was searching for overcoming the great influence of *Ulysses* (1922).

An English researcher of *Ulysses* S. Gilbert notes that Bloom is a "<...> Wandering Jew, an exile <...>" [9: 366].

H. Blamires, an English scholar, points to the Bloom's focus on wanderings and says, that "Correspondences between Murphy and Sindbad and the Flying Dutchman build up the Odyssean-Wanderer theme" [5: 164]. J. Joyce himself emphasized the motif of

wandering and return in Homer's *Odyssey* and considers this return as "<...> profoundly human <...>" [8: 417]

A Canadian researcher J. Boulter claims that S. Beckett is «<...> keeping with Freud's notion of the death drive: both Murphy and Freud speak of life as a 'circuitous path', a wandering trajectory that is essentially a return to a prior state (death; inorganicism), a prior location (home). Life is thus characterized as essentially nostalgic by both Freud and Murphy, <...> a homesickness» [6: 93].

In their turn, British researchers M. Bariselli, N. M. Bowe and W. Davies in *Samuel Beckett and Europe: History, Culture, Tradition* claim that Murphy's «<...> "wandering to find home" and his obsession with the 'inner' sense of his self (or mind) not only indicate the want to re-configure the metaphysical aspect of existence but also a desire to 'retreat' from a world <...>» [2: 60].

However, comparing analysis of the return motif, which is one of the dominant in *Ulysses*, *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Murphy* wasn't held.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the specifics of the functioning of the return motif in *Ulysses*, *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Murphy*, to establish a way of S. Beckett's reconsidering and reinterpreting of return motif of *Ulysses*.

Analysis

A Russian mythologist E. M. Meletinskyi considers Bloom as Odysseus of the XX cent., a parody to Homer's Odysseus [12: 309]. A Russian writer and literary critic V. Nabokov in his lecture on *Ulysses* bewares from seeing in Bloom's wanders the wanders of Odysseus and notes that J. Joyce erased Homeric names of episodes because of the scientific focus on allusions to *Odyssey*.

The return motif in *Ulysses* serves as a plot. Wandering nature of Bloom, wandering son of wandering people, Wandering Jew, is presented in his status of a diambulist (the one, who wanders in the day-time, Bloom is called diambulist during his conversation with Stephen), although he is a somnambulist too, floating kidney, carrying a wandering soap, which "<...> has a "little Odyssey" all to itself" [9: 152]. Wandering nature of Stephen, Wandering Aengus, is realized in his status of a noctambulist (the one, who wanders in the night), in his last name, Dedalus, the escaper from the Minos palace, his ash stick. They both loose the keys from their home, both suffer from the aggressor, who occupied their houses, Boylan and Mulligan [13: 444].

Bloom has complicated and discordant feeling about returning home. It is his strong belief that «<...> the coming back was the worst thing you ever did <...>» [5: 568], "(Molly — Y. V.) Could never like it again after Rudy. Can't bring back time. Like holding water in your hand. Would you go back to then? Just beginning then. Would you?" [10: 213]. Bloom doesn't give the answer to the last question. Also during the

day he doesn't want to come back because he fights his feelings about Molly, who is going to cheat him at 4 p.m.

He has reflections about the "resurrection" of Parnell, Irish patriot and Leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, who lost his career because of his love affair with a married woman. Bloom delights Parnell, although he is convinced that his return is "<...> highly inadvisable <...>", "<...> you were a lucky dog if they didn't set the terrier at you directly you got back. <...> you came up against the man in possession and had to produce your credentials <...>" [10: 754—755] "<...> you would feel out of place as things always moved with the times" [10: 757]

Bloom like to dream about journeys, coming back to "the Promised Land": "Agendath Netaim: planters' company. To purchase vast sandy tracts from Turkish government and plant with eucalyptus trees. <...> north of Jaffa" [10: 72]. But at the same time he admits he wouldn't do that: "No, not like that. A barren land, bare waste. <...> A dead sea in a dead land <...>. It bore the oldest, the first race. <...> Wandered far away over all the earth, captivity to captivity, multiplying, dying, being born everywhere. <...> Now it could bear no more" [10: 73]. He also dreams about vendetta to his offenders: "<...> obey the summons of recall. <...> a wrecker of justice on malefactors, a dark crusader, a sleeper awakened, with financial resources (by supposition) surpassing those of Rothschild or the silver king" [10: 858].

Pub serves as a place where Bloom comes to terms with his fate, at the same time Molly is seeing Boylan. Till that moment he was fantasizing about coming back home and prevention of betrayal. The finish of Bloom's journey is returning home. «<...> the childman weary, the manchild in the womb. Womb? Weary? He rests. He has trevelled» [10: 642].

The images of a tram and a bicycle in *Ulysses* symbolize the increasing mechanization of human's life. Bloom wonders, if it is possible to run the line to the cemetery for the municipal funeral trams [10: 79—80]. The bicycle appears many times in *Ulysses*, although Bloom doesn't use it at all. On that day there is a College cycling race [10: 106], Bloom watches a passer-cyclist, who looks like G. Russell, one of the Irish Literary Revivals, who was acquainted with J. Joyce, he meets cyclists in the nighttown. Mananaan in the "Circe" episode "<...> smites with his bicycle pump the crayfish in his left hand" [10: 627]. A crayfish may symbolize cancer of Stephen's mother. In the "Ithaca" episode Bloom and Stephen "<...> reveal a third connecting link between them? Mrs Riordan (*Riordan may be allusion to Jordan River, Mrs Riordan may symbolize Israel — Y. V.*), a widow of independent means, <...> a constant informant of Bloom who resided also in the same hotel <...>. He had sometimes propelled her <...>, in her convalescent bathchair with slow revolutions of its wheels <...> where she had remained for a certain time scanning through his onelensed binocular fieldglasses unrecognisable citizens on tramcars, roadster bicycles, equipped with inflated pneumatic tyres, hackney carriages, tandems, private and hired landaus, dogcarts, ponytraps and brakes passing from the city to the

Phoenix park and *vice versa*. <...> Because in middle youth he had often sat observing through a rondel of bossed glass of a multicoloured pane the spectacle offered with continual changes of the thoroughfare without, pedestrians, quadrupeds, velocipedes, vehicles, passing slowly, quickly, evenly, round and round and round the rim of a round and round precipitous globe" [10: 796]. The cyclicity and eternity of movement of mankind is emphasized here.

The aim of Stephen's wandering is to find himself and spiritual father, a patron. He leaves his Church, family and home. He rents the Martello Tower. His reconsidering of the Hamlet theme gives a key to his inner need of father: "<...> consubstantiality, in the literal sense of identical in substance, is a theme of this book: Stephen, the son, is or will be Bloom, the father" [14: 138]. So searching for the father is searching for himself. This to some measure is the reason Stephen rejects Bloom.

As well as Bloom, Stephen doesn't want to come back home, where he is not quite at home, because he is bereft the key and because he in some way wants to come back to his previous house. But as well as Bloom, he can't do it because of the tragic events that depress him.

The ways of Bloom and Stephen do not lead to their reunion as father and son. Stephen doesn't return home, he is going further.

Thus, the motif of return in *Ulysses* represents the *Odyssey's* return matrix and finishes with Bloom's returning. Bloom and Stephen, exiles and wanderers, don't unity because of the complicated, ambivalent feelings about returning and a traumatic past, they don't want to return in. Bloom's wanders are cyclical what is reflected to some extent in the image of a bicycle.

The motif of return in *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) by S. Beckett also serves as a plot. Belacqua Shuah, the main character of the novel, lame on both feet, enjoys travelling and admiring the scenery of Ireland. His name is borrowed from *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, which he reads in the original in the novel. Belacqua in *The Divine Comedy* is staying in the Purgatory for not praying for his life and postponing it until his last confession before death. Now he will sit under the mountain for as many years as he has lived on earth,

<...> there were persons in the shade
behind the rock, in posture people take for negligence.
And one of them, who seemed weary, was sitting
embracing his knees, holding his face down low
between them.

<...> "look at the fellow: he
appears more negligent than if Laziness were his

sister.”

“<...> First it is necessary for the heavens to turn around me outside here as long as they did in my life, since I delayed my good sighs until the end <...>” [7: 71].

A Russian researcher L. Yu. Makarova, in her Ph.D. thesis, *“A Genre Experiment In Early Prose By S. Beckett (More Pricks Than Kicks)”* (2008), notes that on the other hand Belacqua’s position is notable, “The character is not in hell, where he had to end up as an unrepentant sinner, and not in paradise, which he could not reach because of his negligence, and not in the main part of purgatory, where everything is covered with movement, but on the first ledge, at the bottom of the mountain < ... >” [11: 75]. It is also noted that “<...> Beckett emphasizes the cyclicity manifested in Belacqua’s turn to Dante and his return to his original position” [11: 76].

Unlike Dante’s Belacqua, Beckett’s Belacqua constantly wanders, travels. Although he is inherently “< ... > sinfully indolent < ... >” [3: 31], however, he considers this world to be the result of his imagination and brings liveliness to his life “<...> preferring one place to another <...>” [3: 31]. He could thus “<...> give <...> the Furies the slip by merely setting himself in motion” [3: 31], from the blues.

Belacqua’s wanderings are repeatedly emphasized: when he “<...> that uneasy creature <...>” [3: 72] felt lonely, wanderings are shown in quaint thoughts: he thinks that “<...> only luminous, <...> in radiance, or words to that effect, <...> to take notice that sweet style is Belacqua’s <...>” [3: 38], and finally, for his funeral hearse comes “<...> hearse, black as Ulysses’s cruiser <...>”. [3: 173].

Belacqua does not refuse from moving constantly, despite the significant physical problems that make walking painful, “his feet were in ruins, he suffered with them almost continuously.” [3: 10], “His feet pained him so much that he took off his perfectly good boots and threw them away <...>” [3: 72]. The road is associated for him with “<...> the deep weal <...>” [3: 95]. A tramp whom Belacqua finds under a cart in a field seems to him “<...> real man at last” [3: 96].

Belacqua’s wandering is also cyclical. He marries three times and brings his wives three times to his home: Lucy, Thelma and Smeraldina. The first two wives die shortly after the wedding notably while travelling. Lucy, riding, goes to meet Belacqua, thinking if she is in a hurry to get married because she is worried about his secrecy and quirkiness, gets under the wheels of a car and becomes disabled, they marry, and a year later she dies. And Thelma dies during the honeymoon in Connemara. Essentially, Belacqua puts Lucy’s wedding ring on her finger, which even has the minting “Mens mea Lucia lucescit luce tua” [3: 128] “Lucia, your light enlightens my mind” [1: 353]. The wedding ring here also emphasizes cyclicity, serves as a sign of the recurrence of Thelma’s destiny to Lucy, shows that Belacqua walks in a circle. Another Belacqua lover, Alba, dies during her way home after Belacqua and Thelma’s

wedding. The motif of return is thus combined with the thanatological one: all Belacqua's beloved women, except Smeraldina, die. It should be noted that to some extent their deaths are related to Belacqua. However, they are not the only ones who die while coming back home: Belacqua becomes a casual witness of a girl's death under the wheels of a bus she was hit by. Women are connected with death. They make Belacqua move and die.

Significantly, Smeraldina does not like travelling, "I hate walking" [3: 144]. She is not included in this circle of Belacqua's travel companions, where Belacqua is a particular center.

Cyclicity is emphasized in his meeting with a mentally ill woman in a pub. A woman who is described as a woman without a hat, what can indicate that it was unusual and that, figuratively, no one is above her, her mind is free, slowly heading in his direction: her boots, too big and awkward for her, it gives him a negative impression. This may mean that the boots were not purchased for her and got to her by accident. The face of a woman that Belacqua calls "full of light" [3: 37] radiates "her face, ah her face <...> it was so full of light" [3: 37] and testifies that "<...> have come a long way <...>" [3: 38]. The woman talks to him, whirling her arm, "Heaven goes round <...> and round and round and round and round and round <...> getting more of a spin into the slogan <...>" [3: 38]. This can emphasize the cyclical nature of Belacqua, which attracts a woman, actions, words, and most importantly, whose thoughts are constantly rotating in a circle. Moreover, she does not belong to herself but to this spin of her thinking. Her look, her words impress Belacqua so much that he finds himself in her power, "He was altogether disarmed, unsaddled and miserable. <...> he was at her mercy" [3: 38]. A mentally ill woman sells him tickets to paradise, which may be an allusion to the image of Homer's Circe, who sent Odysseus to Hades so that he would learn his fate from the seer Tiresias.

In addition, the pub as a place where the character accepts his fortune in *Ulysses*, is imitated in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, where Belacqua suddenly realizes that he does not feel the usual miraculous influence of the pub, he is overwhelmed with a passionate desire to move, but is kept in one place by an unknown force. It may be a reaction to a girl's death under the wheels of a bus he saw.

Cyclicity is also evident in the episode of Belacqua being beaten by a police officer (Stephen is beaten by soldiers in *Ulysses*). It does not hurt him, on the contrary, makes him feel " <...> amiable weakness" [3: 62]. He speculates that the place of his fall has become the place from which he rose up " <...> at its most agreeable point" [3: 64], comes to a conclusion that " <...> the drink-line looped the loop like an eight <...>" [3: 64]. But this idea is not in a simple return for Belacqua, but a meeting with himself, " <...> coming down you met yourself going up" [3: 64].

It is worth noting that Belacqua seeks death: he almost commits suicide by finding an accomplice in the face of his friend Ruby, whose doctors predicted a short life because

of an incurable disease. But then their suicide plan is not realized because of the sudden physical mutual attraction that encompasses them.

The image of a bicycle, as a symbol of mechanization, is manifested in *Dante and the Lobster*, when Belacqua on his way to his aunt, at the crossroad sees “<...> a horse was down and a man sat on his head. <...>, lamplighter flew by on his bike, tilting with his pole at the standards, jousting a little yellow light into the evening” [3: 14].

If for J. Joyce the final of journey is “exile”, then for S. Beckett it is “begging”. According to Belacqua, “No man could settle down to scrounge properly in a foreign land. The Wanderjahre were a sleep and a forgetting, the proud dead point” [3: 78]. (Wanderjahre (Germ) — years of wandering. An allusion in J. W. Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years* (translator’s note)).

So, wandering and return for Belacqua is a way of life, a cure for the blues. It is significant that his whole life is haunted by pain in his legs that does not stop him. Women close to Belacqua are drawn into his gravity, go through a certain cycle, for someone shorter, for someone longer, and die. It is important that women die while coming back home. Even a girl who crosses the road gets under the bus right in front of Belacqua is going home. And Smeraldina, Belacqua’s third wife, who does not like traveling, ‘survives’ and becomes a widow. In the finale Belacqua dies instantly and painlessly. On the same day his house is set on fire by a servant who goes crazy.

Murphy, the main character of the Beckett’s novel with the same title, strives for static, apathy, but at the same time believes that life is “<...> a wandering to find home” [4: 3]. Murphy, for whom static, immobility, is the goal, the desire, is, in essence, the final embodiment of Dante’s Belacqua. Thus, the image of Belacqua, presented in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, More Pricks Than Kicks*, acquires a definitive development in Murphy’s novel. His teacher and fellow student calls him “<...> a knight-errant <...>” [4: 33]. Murphy’s wanders are motivated by his search for a home and escape from his ex-girlfriend Counihan and former teacher Neary. He chooses to live in a “small world”, the world of the mentally ill, Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, where he works, but in the finale he intends to return to his beloved Celia. Despite his desire for numbness, calming the body and freeing his mind, that Murphy gets in his rockig chair, Murphy strolls through the city all the time in search of work, “Goaled by he thought of losing Celia <...> to drag <...> among the agencies, a dog’s life without a dog’s prerogative” [4: 46—47]. Murphy’s wanders can be considered as an escape from the real world, where he is haunted by his ex lover Counihan, a former teacher Neary and a classmate Wylie. They almost catch the fugitive, but Murphy slips out of their hands.

In Murphy’s wanders there is also a certain cyclical nature. From June to October, Murphy looks for a job every day and returns home at the same time, deviating only “<...> a few seconds from day to day” [4: 43]. Celia is amazed at how careless someone

can be “<...> inhuman regularity in this one instance” [4: 43]. Murphy explains it with his love for Celia, which demands “<...> the product of love which forbade him to stay away from her a moment longer than was compatible with duty <...>” [4: 43], and trying to cultivate a sense of time. Celia’s thoughts keep coming back to Murphy “<...> everything led to Murphy <...>” [4: 41]. At the Psychiatric Hospital, Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, playing chess with a patient Endon, he performs his duties and returns to the board from time to time to make his move, “<...> throughout the day” [4: 112]. During fatigue attacks, Murphy dreams of returning to his chair “would willingly have waived his expectation of Antepurgatory for five minutes in his chair” [4: 47]. After Murphy’s death, he is identified by his birthmark, and in a way it is the emblem of his birth and death and closes the cycle of his life. Thus the motif of return is combined with thanatological one. Eventually, Murphy returns to the “bosom” he seeks, Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, “<...> M.M.M. stood suddenly for music, music, MUSIC <...>” [4: 141], where soft upholstery of the wards which creates a certain bosom metaphor and gives “<...> bowers of bliss” [4: 109].

However, he plans to return to Celia, “It continued to divide him, at witness his deplorable susceptibility to Celia <...>” [4: 108], in the ending of the novel he is “<...> dimly intending to <...> go <...> to Celia <...>” [4: 151], but that very morning he dies in the fire. The motif of return is combined with thanatological one. Notably, in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Belacqua’s house is burned after his death by a gardener who loses his mind, rapes a maid, sets a fire, and locks himself in a locker room, awaiting arrest.

The pub as a place where the character accepts his fortune at *Ulysses* is also inherited at Murphy, where his ashes, which he orders to drop in the toilet of the Abbey Theater in Dublin, are scattered on the floor of the bar and at dawn he is swept along with cigarette butts and other debris. Also, Murphy and Celia live on Brewery Road.

The image of a bicycle here is the image of a rocking chair. Murphy refuses to move quickly in favor of moving in one place, rocking in a chair.

Thus, the motif of return in *Murphy* performs a structuring function. Murphy escapes Ireland from his pursuers who make him abandon his home. In London, where he moves, Murphy is forced to look for a job under Celia’s pressure.

Conclusion

Thus, in *Ulysses* the motif of return serves as a plot and a compositional guideline. In S. Beckett’s early novels *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Murphy* it is also the compositional structure of the novel, and the playing up the wanders of Odysseus through the prism of *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri.

In *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Murphy*, the *Ulysses* motif of return is inherited and reconsidered, seen through the lens of absurdity, and has another ending. Bloom is trying to escape from Molly’s betrayal, Stephen — his faith, family and past, Belacqua

— from the “Furies’ raid”, the blues, Murphy — from the persecutors. Belacqua and Murphy die in the end of the novels. Lucy, Alba, a girl in the street die on their way home. The return motif is combined with the thanatological one.

S. Beckett rejects J. Joyce’s ‘exile’ and chooses ‘scrouning’ which is possible only in homeland. S. Beckett’s refusal from movement derives from the Ulysses philosophy of the movement, after all, his character chooses to move on the spot and return to the other side. The development of this tendency can be traced in S. Beckett’s two novels: Belacqua is delighted with bicycles, movement is presented as meaningless, Murhy is delighted with his rocking chair, movemet is absurd, the one, that immerse in a trance, sleep.

References

- [1] Ackerley C. J., Gontarski S. E. (2004). *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett. A Reader’s Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought*. New York: Grove Press.
- [2] Bariselli M., Bowe N. M., Davies W. (2017). *Samuel Beckett and Europe: History, Culture, Tradition*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- [3] Beckett S. (2010). *More Pricks Than Kicks*. New York.
- [4] Beckett S. (2010). *Murphy*.
- [5] Blamires H. (1996). *The New Bloomsday Book*. London: Routledge.
- [6] Boulter J. (2008). *Beckett: a guide for the perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury.
- [7] Dante Alighieri. (2003). *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [8] Ellmann R. (1982). *James Joyce*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [9] Gilbert S. (1955). *James Joyce’s Ulysses*. New York: A Devesion of Random House.
- [10] Joyce J. (2018). *Ulysses*. Middletown: Digireads.com Publishing.
- [11] Makarova L. Yu., , “A Genre Experiment In Early Prose By S. Beckett (More Pricks Than Kicks)”: Ph.D. thesis, 2008. 246 p.
- [12] Meletinsky E. M. (2000). *Poetics of Myth*. Moscow: Eastern Europe.
- [13] Nabokov V. (1998). *Lectures on Literature*. Moscow: Nezavisimaya Gazeta.
- [14] Tindall W. (1959). *A Reader’s Guide to James Joyce*. New York: The Nooday Press.