



## TURNING LANGUAGE INSIDE OUT IN BECKETT'S NOT I

### BECKETT'İN NOT I OYUNUNDA DİLİN TERSYÜZ EDİLMESİ

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#### Abstract

Beckett's dramatic works push the limits of language and subjectivity so far as to reach a point of total rupture from within. The stretching of these limits is indeed a bold attempt at overthrowing epistemological categories structured within and through them. *Not I* (1972) is one of such works in which the possibilities of language and subjectivity are taken to the furthest extent in which both turn upside down and inside out and finally reach their limits. The radical experiment with the inside and the outside of language and subjectivity in *Not I* becomes almost a metonymic embodiment of Lacan's ideas with regard to the formulation and dissolution of the self. In exposing how language and subjectivity go exhausted and are torn apart, however, Beckett, compared to Lacan, assumes a relatively affirmative position. While language and the subjects in fragments mark a psychotic breakdown and constitute a source of pain and lament in Lacanian psychoanalysis, they function as a creative and transformative resistance in Beckettian world. In this regard, this paper aims to examine *Not I* in the light of Lacanian theory and illustrate how the play both literalises and criticizes the problematic position of the female subject in language, exposing the points of intersection and divergence between Beckett and Lacan.

#### Öz

Beckett'in tiyatro oyunları dilin ve özneliğin sınırlarını, dil ve öznenin içten yıkımını gerçekleştirene değin zorlar. Bu sınırların zorlanıp esnetilmesi, aslında bir bakıma bu sınırlar içerisinde ve bu sınırlar sayesinde yaratılan epistemolojik kategorilerin ortadan kaldırılma girişimidir. *Not I* (1972), dilin ve özneliğin olasılıklarının en son noktasına kadar zorlanıp esnetildiği ve sonuç olarak dil ve öznenin ters yüz edilip kendi sınırlarının dışına ulaştığı oyunlardan biridir. Dilin ve özneliğin içi ve dışıyla yapılan bu radikal oynamalar, Lacan'ın özün oluşumu ve yıkımına dair teorilerinin somut birer yansıması gibidir. Ancak dilin ve özneliğin sınırlarını irdelerken, Beckett Lacan'a göre oldukça olumsuz bir yaklaşım sergiler. Lacancı psikanalizde, parçalanmış dil ve özne psikotik çöküntünün belirtisi olarak kabul edilip bir acı ve sorun kaynağı olarak görülürken, Beckett'te yaratıcı ve iyileştirici bir karşı geliş temsil eder. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma *Not I* oyununu Lacan'ın teorileri ışığında incelemeyi ve oyunun öznenin dil içerisindeki konumunu bir yandan nasıl somutlaştırdığını ve bir yandan da nasıl sorunsallaştırdığını, Lacan ve Beckett'in düşünceleri arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıklara ışık tutarak irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

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## Introduction

Samuel Beckett, who is a threshold figure of twentieth-century literature and drama, is the creator of intriguing literary myths, the obscurity of which has made critics have a rough time interpreting his works. The obscurity of Beckett's literary works primarily stems from his idea that there is “*nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express*” (Beckett, *Disjecta* 139). This expression of nothingness is concretised in his prose and plays through the act of refusal; refusal of one's existence, of one's metaphysical, transcendental and religious foundations, and more importantly of one's self. Several studies interpret this refusal as a form of “*self-negation*” (Gillette 283) and associate Beckett's work with “*the art of the negative*” (Yuan 235).

Yet this study argues that the act of refusal in Beckett does not suggest a negation but rather it marks a significant attempt at negating the negative and coming up with the affirmative instead. In so doing, his works overturn ontology, abolish roots and telos by underpinning human subjectivity, and in return establish a new and affirmative logic of life. Beckett's overthrow of conventional notions of life and the self is achieved predominantly through his play with language. Beckett sees language as a means of constructing one's identity rather than a means of communication, and focuses on the question of the formulation of subjectivity by and within language in his artistic oeuvre. In this sense, his world-making is indeed less concerned with the creation of imaginary or absurd worlds than with the construction and dissolution of the self and language.

In Beckett, language fluctuates between a series of silences, incomprehensible babblings, bits and pieces of voices and repetitions as his subjects oscillate between the opposing positions of being and becoming. Not surprisingly, the moments in which fixed and foundational norms of subjectivity are paralysed coincides with the moments of linguistic paralyses. In this regard, Beckett's engagement with the processes of subjectivity and language becomes a point of intersection to think his works alongside Lacanian theory, which equally punctuates and conceptualises the role of language in the construction of human subjectivity. In most of his works, Beckett simultaneously uses and abuses language, and shows its impact on his subjects in ways that resonate Lacan's contentions on language and subjectivity. He often takes his use and abuse of language to such an extent that his works evolve into a form of writing that materialises, elaborates and sometimes even caricatures and mocks Lacan's psychoanalytic theories. His late play *Not I* (1972) is one of those works where Lacanian notions of subjectivity and human experience in language are literally embodied and embedded into narrative. Yet there are some significant moments in the play in which Beckett's treatment of subjectivity and human experience severely departs from Lacanian treatment. Beckett embraces a remarkably affirmative stance in the portrayal of fragmented subjectivities. Against this background, this paper entails reading Beckett's play in and against Lacanian stance. In this sense, this paper demonstrates how these theories are simultaneously literalised and transgressed in the play's narrative, and interrogates the possible functions of this literalisation and transgression.

### Beckett and Lacan on Language

In Beckett's works, one can observe a radical break from the traditional understanding of language. To be more precise, he moves from a Saussurean conception of language towards a Derridean one. He removes language from a fixed system of communication into a flux of endless associations, puns and wordplays, where it no longer functions to enable the transmission of meaning and communication but rather becomes a chaotic vehicle of incommunicability. Language is presented in fragments, full of contradictions, ambiguities, paradoxes, repetitions and silences to such an extent that words and dialogues fail in their correspondence to reality and become nothing but meaningless utterances. These utterances are often given in a form of logorrhea of his characters, which nullifies the positions of the speaker and the listener and leaves both in obscurity. Language is reduced merely to linguistic outpourings, where pauses and silences become more meaningful than words and utterances themselves. Therefore, the link between the signifier and the signified as suggested in Saussurean theory of language<sup>1</sup> is disrupted and reaches a point of non-functionality in Beckett's works. The signifier can no longer correspond to its pair, the signified, but falls into an endless chain of non-meaning and non-signification. This disrupted relation between the signifier and the signified recalls Derrida's critique of Saussure. Derrida boldly denies Saussurean sign system. For him, it is wrong to assume that the signifier necessarily arrives at a final signified or a final meaning. On the contrary, every signified is "*in the position of a signifier*" (Derrida, *Positions* 20). In his *Grammatology* (1974), he clarifies the position of the signified with the notion of "*the signifier of the signifier*": "*'Signifier of the signifier' describes [...] the movement of language: in its origin, to be sure, but one can already suspect that an origin whose structure can be expressed as 'signifier of the signifier' conceals and erases itself in its own production. There the signified always already functions as a signifier*" (7). In the absence of a final signified, language becomes a free play of the signifiers. The free play of the signifiers is felt so strongly in Beckett that language almost becomes a non-language, a language which is emptied of its internal mechanisms and hence reaches its outside.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure argues that linguistic sign is composed of the signifier and the signified, namely sound-image and concept. For Saussure, there is one-to-one correspondence between these two elements. In his own words, these two elements are "intimately related and each recalls the other" (66) just like two sides of the same coin.

Just like Beckett, Lacan brings a fresh look at the conventional perception of language, problematising the bond between the signifier and the signified. Dislocating Saussure's sign system in which the signifier and the signified are seen as two sides of a coin, Lacan defends that the signifiers do not refer to outer reality, namely to the signified, but to other signifiers. In Lacan's understanding, then, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the word and the world, which signals a radical dethronement of language from the realm of meaning and signification. As Lacan himself puts it, "[t]he sense [meaning] is always moving towards something, towards another meaning, towards the closure of meaning. It always refers to something that is out ahead or that turns back on itself" (Lacan, *Seminar III* 137). At times when meaning constantly passes from one signifier to another, pauses, silences, cries and incomprehensible voices attain a more powerful vocation in meaning making. Obviously, Lacan's views on language show strong resonances with Derrida. This is primarily because both share the same terrain but approach it from different perspectives. For Lacan, the unconscious is "structured like a language" (*Seminar III* 167), and there are no ultimate meanings and concepts other than "signifying chains" in the unconscious (*Seminar V* 388). Derrida is remarkably influenced by this view of Lacan in his stance towards language. Although he seems to criticise Lacanian psychoanalysis particularly in his *Positions*, he simultaneously builds his conception of language on Lacan's theories.<sup>2</sup>

In both Beckett and Lacan, the non-signifying aspect of language, or more precisely a kind of non-language, effectively operates not only in the processes of meaning making but also in the processes of subject-formation. At this point, both Beckett and Lacan seem to have embraced the poststructuralist idea that language does not represent but constructs the reality including subjectivity. In order to grasp why and how language is constitutive of subjectivity, it is necessary to make a short detour into Lacan's theorisation of human subjectivity. As Lacan conceptualises in his *Écrits* and *Seminars*, subjectivity is formed by the subject's passing through three registers, the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary hereby corresponds to a phase in which the subject's ego comes into

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<sup>2</sup> Derrida's idea of "the signifier of the signifier" strongly resonates with Derrida's view on language. Moreover, as he clarifies in *Positions*, Derrida embraces and reinterprets Lacan's notion of the Symbolic and the role of the phallus in his deconstructive theories. Just as Lacan calls phallus a metaphor that has a function (*Écrits* 220), Derrida argues that the centre does not exist but somehow functions outside the totality ("Structure, Sign" 279). Lacan's influence on Derrida looms larger in Derrida's short text "For the Love of Lacan". In "For the Love of Lacan", he openly tells it is "for the love of Lacan" that he embraces a deconstructive resistance to all the normalising practices (51).

being. The infant suffers from a huge sense of lack due to its separation from the perfect unity with its mother through birth, and cannot perceive itself as a whole entity for a long time. As Lacan himself puts it, “*the drama of the subject*” is the test of its “*lack of being*” (*Écrits* 29). It feels a deep urge to feel the sense of wholeness with the mother, and achieves a sense of psychic unity with the mother only through some images of objects and people, to be more precise, through “*the imaginary capture of the ego*” (*Écrits* 32). In other words, when the infant that has not fully mastered its own body looks at the mirror, identifies itself with the imago of its mother or of nanny in the mirror: “*The ego is absolutely impossible to distinguish from the imaginary captures which constitutes it from head to foot*” (*Écrits* 17). Even if this is indeed a “*misrecognition*” in Lacanian words (*Écrits* 32), it makes the infant imagine itself as a coherent and self-governing entity. Ego is constituted through this imaginary identification with another object, which makes it nothing but a false identification (*Écrits* 32). In the Imaginary register, thus, there occurs a movement from “*insufficiency to anticipation*” (Lacan, *Écrits* 3); the infant’s sense of what it is changes from a fragmented entity, that which it agonises over, into a unified entity, that which it has long been dreaming of.

Whilst the Imaginary designates the world of illusory images, the Symbolic corresponds to the world of language and ideology: “*It was certainly the Word that was in the beginning*”, as Lacan avers, “*and we live in its creation, but it is the action of our spirit that continues this creation by constantly renewing it. And we can only turn back on that action by allowing ourselves to be driven even further ahead of it*” (*Écrits* 45). That is, the infant is born into a linguistic realm in which language defines not only its identity but also its reality and the world it lives in. The moment the child enters into language, it automatically enters into culture and an enculturation process. The child’s entry into the linguistic realm is ensured through its recognition of the name-of-the Father, namely, the phallus which constitutes the very basis of the authority in the Symbolic register (*Écrits* 49). In order to be an obedient prisoner of language, the child should first go through the resolution of “*Oedipus Complex*” which guarantees its irrecoverable separation with the mother and its castration through the recognition of the Name-of-the Father (Lacan, *Écrits* 197). Now that the child is castrated and represses all the feelings and longings regarding its psychic unity with the mother, it is ready to be encoded by language which is itself loaded with ideology, social and cultural norms. As the child utters

the word “I”, it is ensured that *he* has now become the speaking subject of the society and accepted his constructed identity by and within language.<sup>3</sup> From now on, he comes to recognise himself in the way ideology projects, perceives everything through his castrated self and contents himself with only one distorted interpretation of reality. Therefore, much as this appears to be the formation of human subjectivity, it is actually the metaphorical murder of one’s authentic self.

The Real, at this point, stands for anything that is outside of and undefined by language, anything one experiences during what Freud describes as the “*pre-Oedipal phase*” (228), which cannot be described or understood in full terms. As Sarup notes,

The explanation of the Real is always in terms of impossible. [...] The Real is that which is excluded, the impossible to bear, Lacan’s notion of the Real has little to do with any assumption about the nature of the world, with ‘reality’. The Real is a concept that cannot exist without the barrier of the Symbolic, which predates the birth of the subject. (104).

Apparently, the Real is a reality that has no correspondent signifier in language, and is beyond any kind of symbolisation and hence ineffable and unimaginable. No matter how essential it is to the formation of human subjectivity, it is inaccessible due to the subject’s imprisonment in the Symbolic register. Lacan, therefore, considers the subject’s encounter with the unrepresentable and unreachable Real to be traumatic:

There’s an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn’t an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence. (*Seminar II* 194).

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<sup>3</sup> This paper deliberately uses a gender-specific pronoun in its delineation of human subjectivity from a Lacanian standpoint. This is primarily because, Lacan, in a similar vein to Freud, assumes the universal human subject to be male. Throughout his entire psychoanalytic oeuvre, he creates new paternal metaphors as alternative to those of Freud. One can sense the power of patriarchy in Lacan’s constellations of subjectivity. For instance, although he abandons the Freudian notion that the phallus is literally the penis, he still implicitly holds on the idea that the phallus now corresponds to a symbolic power which is attributed to man. Likewise, the Symbolic register in Lacanian psychoanalysis is primarily a male terrain.

Yet the return of the Real as a disruptive and painful occurrence could also be associated with the experience of *jouissance* (Lacan, *Seminar IV* 32), a painful pleasure that comes into being when one is freed from the chains of the Symbolic which is a restricting frame.

It is often mistakenly assumed that these three registers of human experience are independent from each another. But indeed Lacan resembles them to a Borromean knot,<sup>4</sup> foregrounding their interdependency and heterogeneity. Although these three registers remain interrelated with one another in a non-hierarchical fashion, there occurs a tendency to privilege the Symbolic over others in order to assure the healthy, coherent, namely Cartesian, sense of the self — which is imprisoned by and within language. The Cartesian understanding of the self is based upon the idea that the self is unified, autonomous, self-knowing, self-conscious and stable. Such an understanding is accompanied by a series of binary oppositions particularly between the mind and the body, the known and the unknown and the rational and the irrational. The primary Cartesian duality in the Lacanian notion of subjectivity is the one between the subject in language and the Other; namely the *je/moi* distinction. For Lacan, human subjectivity is always in an “impasse” between the *je* and the *moi* (*Écrits* 52). This inevitable impasse is indeed a result of the intricate bond between the Lacanian registers. This bond provides us with three important aspects with regard to human subjectivity and language. First, the self is never entirely stripped of and separable from the intrusions of the Real. That is, the self cannot be as static, fixed and stable as it is claimed to be. Second, language can never be claimed to be entirely logical and submitting to the assumed relation between the signifier and the signified. The reason for this failure lies in the third aspect: there is no outside world external to language, which is to say that language is not there to represent this supposedly-existent outside world but it is there to create the reality itself. The only thing that cannot be produced and articulated in and by language is the Real.

In this regard, one can claim that the origins of what this paper calls a “non-language” in Beckett lie in the subjects’ free oscillation between the registers and the expression of their experience of the Real. Beckett, just like Lacan, not only questions the role of language to represent the outside world and the assumed link between the signifier and the signified but also problematises the ontological status

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<sup>4</sup> In a Borromean knot, three rings are located in such a way that two rings cannot intersect and the breaking of any one of three results in the dissolution of the whole knot.

of language itself. In so doing, he also challenges the underlying ideology and epistemological categories which language creates and on which it is structured. He assumes a position of the writer as the one who deliberately stutters language. As he tells in a letter to his German translator,

It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write in an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. A mask. Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through. I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. (*Disjecta* 171).

Hence, the linguistic anomalies and dissolving subjects in Beckett's works are indeed an expression of a bold resistance to the dominant power. They are what Beckett proposes as an alternative to the hegemony of language, in which he explores and tears apart the limits of language in relation to 'being'. What is torn apart and exhausted is not simply language itself, but indeed all the power mechanisms, problematic relations and subject positions manifesting in language. At this very moment, Beckett gradually departs from Lacan's problematic stance, implying that the exhaustion of language does not always necessarily suggest a negativity but could very well become a harbinger of an affirmative resistance and an emergence of a bold and even inspiring individual agency. In Laura Salisbury's words, it does not mark "*an evocation of entropic decline towards heat death*" but promises "*signs of life*" (355), a life that is freed from the imprisonment of language and dominant power.

### ***Not I but She Unfolds the Borromean Knot***

Beckett undertakes a political and philosophical mission of questioning dominant discourses, disrupting language and rescuing human subjects from the epistemological categories of male/female, us/them and mind/body. Writing with these concerns, he ends up creating new conceptualisations of subjectivity and language. But he avoids falling into the same epistemological categories. These new



conceptualisations are reinforced by his frequent use of powerful imagery. The images he employs often function as a solid embodiment of his political projects and abstractions. *Not I* can be considered as one of his works where images take on a material existence and begin to represent abstract mechanisms behind the formation and dissolution of subjectivity. In order to solidify and reinforce the ideas behind his deconstructive activity in *Not I*, Beckett could be argued to have employed a literary technique of “attaching a buried, literal meaning to what is intended to be inert and meaningless”, namely, what Regina Barreca calls “metaphor-into-narrative” (243-244). The literalisation of metaphor corresponds to the moments in which a text begins to play out literally what is considered to be figurative. It is, in Barreca’s words, “a translation of metaphor from image to structure” (246). This literary device is frequently used by women writers such as Margaret Atwood, Fay Weldon and Muriel Spark in order to intensify their feminist critiques in their novels. In Fay Weldon’s *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, for instance, the main protagonist, Ruth’s problem is elaborated through the use of metaphor-into-narrative. The only problem of Ruth, who is often referred as a she-devil in the novel, is her inability to “look up to men”: “Little women can look up to men. But women of six feet two have trouble doing so” (Weldon 22). The inability of looking up to men takes on a literal meaning alongside its metaphorical connotations because Ruth has a gigantic stature, which makes it literally impossible for her to look up to her husband. In a similar fashion, this literary device helps Beckett not only to materialise woman’s problematic place in the realm of language but also to depart from a remarkably phallogocentric position of Lacan. In *Not I*, he depicts quite literally the subject’s freeing from the imprisonment of the Symbolic at the cost of the unravelling of what Lacan calls the Borromean knot. He literally and metaphorically depicts how the subjects are denied or deny access to the Symbolic and how they refuse to be culturally castrated and become the prisoner of language. In a way, he crystallises the afore-mentioned oscillation between the three registers of human experience, shows how this oscillation could conduce the subjects to be the outcasts living not only on the margins of society but also on the margins of language. In so doing, he also shows how the idea of being an outcast, despite its negative connotations in Lacanian theory, can be affirmatively positive.

One of such outcasts is the seventy-year-old woman in *Not I* whose existence is reduced to a body fragment, her mouth. *Not I* is one-act play of Beckett, consisting of Mouth’s monologue about the fragmented story of an unnamed old

woman who has spent her whole life in silence. During the play that lasts almost fifteen minutes, the disembodied Mouth is the only thing that is seen on stage in darkness, placed above the ground. As the play opens, Mouth's unintelligible voice is heard behind the curtains as the house lights begin to dim. The incomprehensible voice continues to be heard for 10 more seconds, and as the curtain rises, Mouth becomes visible and starts to utter its seemingly more audible yet still incomprehensible speech. Throughout the whole play, words in Mouth's speech fail in making sense and enabling communication, but rather float in the air. With her screams, silences, breaths, noises and outpourings, in a sense, language goes bankrupt.

Lacan's famous idea that the unconscious is "*structured like a language*" (Lacan, *Seminar III* 167) can become a starting point in unravelling the obscurity of Mouth's speech. Much of her speech is uttered as fast as the flash of thought which astonishes the audience and leaves them with a huge question mark; it indeed bears the traces of many repressed materials. Mouth frantically pours out almost insensible and unrelatable words especially at the very beginning of the play: "[...] into this [...] out into this [...] unheard of [...] thin air [...] almost to the tick [...] so no love [...] spared that" (*Not I* 376). These moments in which language becomes most distorted and most incomprehensible indeed correspond to the moments in which the text begins to materialise the subject's rejection to enter into language, which is ready to castrate and compels to assume a constructed identity. The entry into language, or what we might call the Symbolic register, is the initial point of socialisation and enculturation process during which the subject is encoded with linguistic, social and cultural laws. These laws enable the subject to become a speaking member of the Symbolic who would obediently recognise authority and pose no threat to the existing social system. Yet all these come into being only when the subject assumes the position of "I". The moment the subject says I, he willingly accepts his linguistically-constructed subjectivity by murdering his authentic self. Yet, Beckett's Mouth refuses not only to obey the commands of language but also to become a speaking member of the Symbolic, which is crystallised in her "*vehement refusal to relinquish third person*" (*Not I* 375). This refusal is not only reflected in the very title of the play, but also in Mouth's language. As Brater explicates, her language is primarily characterised with "nots", "nevers" and "nothings", namely with its abundance of negation (33). However, this profusion of negation gives us clues about the "nots" and "nevers" in the unconscious not in the sense that they designate the nots and nevers dictated by the name-of-the-Father. On the contrary,

they are the nots and nevers to the rules and laws imposed by the name-of-the Father.

To interrogate the reasons behind Mouth's refusal to be a subject of the Symbolic, it would be helpful to uncover the epistemological category of woman and female experience in the Symbolic. In the realm of the Symbolic, woman is "barred" from the subject position and hence exists as a "barred subject" only through her difference from and relation to man (*Seminar V* 373). To be more precise, it could be argued that the Symbolic is remarkably a male territory: it is structured by and for man. In Lacan's phallogocentric model of the Symbolic, as he clarifies in his 1970-71 *Seminar*, woman is situated outside of the Symbolic, functioning as the Other of her male counterpart: "The woman does not exist - that she exists is the dream of a woman, and it is the dream from which Don Juan emerged. If there were a man for whom the woman existed, it would be marvelous, one would be sure of one's desire" (*Seminar XVIII* 17). In the 1975 *Seminar*, he keeps elaborating on woman's inferior position by calling her "a symptom", to be more precise, a symptom of man (*Seminar XXII* 168). If the Symbolic or language, which is the origin of the speaking subject, is predominantly male, woman is then doomed to silence and a state of nothingness inside language. This means that woman is not allowed to become the speaking subject in language. On the contrary, she is regarded merely as an object of man, more precisely an object of enunciation. In *Not I*, the old woman in the figure of Mouth illustrates the muted position woman in language. She comes into the "godforsaken hole", that is the world, prematurely as a "tiny little girl", unloved and deserted by her "parents unknown" and turned into a "speechless infant" throughout her whole life, "looking aimlessly for cowslip" (*Not I* 376). She has never been situated in language and culture, where she "did not know [...] what position she was in [...] imagine what position she was in! [...] whether standing [...] or sitting" (*Not I* 377). The life of this old woman in the realm of language has been a life of suffering since it is this linguistic realm that positions her only to suffer and remain virtually mute in the face of troubles:

... she was being punished ... for her sins ... a number of which then ... further proof if proof were needed ... flashed through her mind ... one after another ... then dismissed as foolish ... oh long after ... this thought dismissed ... as she suddenly realised ... gradually realised ... she was not suffering ... imagine! ... not suffering! ... indeed could not remember .. .off-hand ... (*Not I* 377).

Mouth's position in the Symbolic obviously corresponds to a lack or an absence. This also necessarily bars her from experiencing feminine desire and pleasure. Just as she cannot become the subject of enunciation in patriarchal world, she cannot become the subject of pleasure either:

when she had suffered less ... unless of course she was ... meant to be suffering ... ha! ... thought to be suffering ... just as the odd time ... in her life ... when clearly intended to be having pleasure ... she was in fact ... having none ... not the slightest ... in which case of course ... that notion of punishment ... for some sin or other ... or for the lot ... or no particular reason ... for its own sake ... thing she understood perfectly ... that notion of punishment .. .which had first occurred to her ... brought up as she had been to believe ... with the other waifs ... in a merciful ... (*Not I* 377).

In the patriarchal Symbolic, pleasure is often limited with what Lacan calls “*phallic enjoyment*” (*Seminar XX* 8). This is tantamount to saying that feminine pleasure is either fully excluded from the Symbolic or simply beyond it. Lacan conceptualises this as follows: “*When I say that the woman is not-all and that it is for that reason that I cannot say the woman, it is precisely because I am raising the question of a jouissance which in regard of everything which serves in the phallic functions is of the order of the infinite*” (*Seminar XX* 94). In other words, woman can experience *jouissance* only beyond the phallus and beyond language because she is emptied of any position and any essence in the Symbolic. Mouth in *Not I* becomes almost a metonymic embodiment of the absent position of woman in the Symbolic. Apparently, it is only man that could have pleasure whereas she cannot have even “*the slightest*”. Until her outburst, hence, Mouth is observed to frequently call her problematic position a “*punishment*” of some unknown “*sin or other*” (*Not I* 377). What is meant by “*some sin or other*” could be only the sin of being woman in a phallogocentric society.

Throughout her life, Mouth’s forced muteness has been threatened with a few winter outbursts much as none of them has been a success until this very April. Whatever happened in April, becomes a trigger for her to start talking not in a fully-formulated phallic language but in a distorted and fragmented non-language. This event that triggers her outburst, though left in obscurity by Beckett, could be interpreted as an intrusion of the Real which reminds the old woman of her first encounter with the trammels of the Symbolic. There are several scholars like Boulter who relate Mouth’s speech to her “*trauma*” in the Symbolic from a very

Lacanian perspective (Boulter 72). Yet what this paper finds problematic in these Lacanian readings is that they interpret Mouth's linguistic outburst as undeliberate negative effect of the subject's oscillation between the registers. For Boulter, for instance, Mouth's logorrhea results from "*her inability to stop talking*" (72) and "*this produces in its turn her systematic denial of connection to her own narrative*" (73). But one can trace that it is not her narrative that Mouth denies to connect with but her underprivileged position as a woman in the Symbolic. As such, Mouth does not stop talking not because she is unable to do so but because her incomprehensible narrative becomes a powerful means of disrupting the phallic power inherent in language. Through her narrative, she guards herself against the confinements and punishments of the Symbolic, embodying a new self that refuses to identify with her constructed identity as a woman by refusing to utter the first person pronoun I.

Language, which is itself a masculine and phallic instrument of power, privileges man over woman by excluding the former from the Symbolic. Whereas man is the speaking I, woman is the unvoiced Other. In this context, Mouth's previous seventy years before her frantic outburst not only concretises but also resists woman's non-existing and barred position in the Symbolic. As a reaction to her life that has been frozen into a sculpture of silence and suffering, she now breathlessly produces an incomprehensible speaking, a form of speaking without being the underprivileged subject of language and without being subjected to language. As Mary Catanzaro puts it, Mouth "*inscrib[es] her language with music, repetition and variation, voice and laughter. Her (feminine) text knows no boundaries (no punctuation, no strict codes of the written), no beginnings and endings. The result is a cyclic, repetitive overflow of multiplicity and ruptures that defy phallogocentric notions of coherence and meaning*" (46).

Mouth's resistance to language becomes possible only through boring Beckettian holes in language and removing its veil to the point of total rupture from within. Indicating a revolt, resistance and frustration, these holes drilled on language definitely pose a threat to the authority of the Symbolic. This explains why Mouth is compelled to relinquish the third person pronoun and to shush four times by the auditor during the course of the play. Much as the auditor does not have an active participation in the play except his five movements, he could be seen as the phallic authority. Each time he repeats the gesture of simple sideways and raises arms from sides, Mouth becomes more and more insistent on refusing to identify with the first-person singular.

(1) “all that early April morning light ... and she found herself in the-  
- ... what? ... who? ... no! ... she! ...” (Pause and movement 1.) (*Not I*  
377).

(2) “the buzzing? ... yes ... all dead still but for the buzzing ... when  
suddenly she realised ... words were- ... what? ... who? ... no! ... she!  
...” (Pause and movement 2.) (379).

(3) “something she- ... something she had to- ... what? ... who? ... no!  
... she! ...” (Pause and movement 3) (381).

(4) “all right ... nothing she could tell ... nothing she could think ...  
nothing she- ... what? ... who? ... no! ... she! ...” (Pause and  
movement 4) (381).

(5) “keep on ... not knowing what ... what she was- ... what? ... who?  
... no! ... she! ... SHE! ... [Pause.] ... what she was trying ... what to  
try ... no matter ... keep on ...” (Curtain starts down) (383).

Even though the auditor has merely a passive and mute gesture, he still assumes a position of judgment and represents a phallic presence against which Mouth asserts herself as she, not I. In the fifth pause, finally, Mouth fully assumes her fragmented identity with a capital SHE.

### **Affirming Disjointed Body and Unleashing Female *Jouissance***

The refusal of being a speaking member of the Symbolic tears language apart with its nonlinear, asyntactic, incoherent and minoritarian use, and cuts one of the rings of the Borromean knot in Lacanian sense. This cut necessarily results in the unravelling of other two rings. Since the Real is a register immersion into which is stonewalled through the subject’s immersion into the Symbolic, a crack within the Symbolic paves the way for the Real to leak into the surface. This explains why Mouth freely oscillates between the Symbolic and the Real. In *Not I* Mouth’s encounter with the Real is observed in her fragmented, repetitive, asyntactic and nonlinear speech that is often interrupted with screams, music and laughter. The Real is both revealed and concealed in Mouth’s speech, which makes it both a presence and an absence. It is both a presence and an absence since it has no signifier within the Symbolic to correspond. It is unnamable, yet is felt through its after-effects. Mouth several times hears “*the buzzing...so-called...in the ears...though of course actually...not in the ears at all...in the skull...dull roar in the skull*” (*Not I* 378) the source of which she does not know, and constantly sees “*a ray of light came and went...came and went...such as the moon might cast...drifting...in*

*and out of cloud...but so dulled...feeling...feeling so dulled...*” (Not I 377). Whenever she fails in her interaction and communication with others in real life experience, the narrative of Mouth is impeded with repetitive act of scream:

More likely the machine ... so disconnected ... never got the message... or powerless to respond ... like numbed ... couldn't make  
 More likely the machine ... so disconnected ... never got the message  
 ... or powerless to respond ... like numbed ... couldn't make the  
 sound ... not any sound ... no sound of any kind ... no screaming ...  
 for help for example ... should she feel so inclined ... scream ...  
 [Screams] ... then listen ... [Silence.] ... [Screams again.] ... then listen  
 again ... [Silence.] ... no spared that ... all silent as the grave ... no  
 part-... what? [...] the buzzing? [...] yes ... all silent but for the  
 buzzing ... (Not I 378).

Likewise, a sudden burst of laughter follows each time she mentions God, a he God in the Symbolic that constantly punishes her without a particular reason: *“brought up as she had been to believe...with other waifs...in a merciful...[Brief Laugh]... God...[Good laugh]”* (Not I 377). This compulsion to repetition together with incomprehensible voices, inscrutable lights, sudden screams and laughters designate —if not the Real itself— its after-effects. Such frequent intrusions of the Real, thus, make the whole play a voyage from the realm of Symbolic to the realm of the Real.

These intrusions materialise themselves in the old woman's dispersed and fragmented presence on stage. Throughout the whole play, the old woman is seen as a fragmented entity reduced only to one part of her body, her mouth. Mouth's fragmented presence concretises her constant oscillation between the registers, defying the image of unified body. With Mouth's fragmentariness, in a sense, Beckett makes literal what Lacan formulates about identity-construction and its relation to the body. For Lacan, identity is *“forever situated atlas a precarious balance between the whole body and the fragmented body, the corps morcele. By the child's [...] identification with the imaginary mirage of the whole body, the 'real' fragmented body is repressed”* (Herzogenrath 31). Yet this illusionary image of the unified body is very feeble. It is often haunted by the images of the fragmented body. As Lacan underlines, the fragmented body *“appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions”* (Écrits 3-4). Likewise, as Mouth disengages herself from the dominance of language and the Symbolic, she also disengages herself from the

illusion of wholeness and unified subjectivity. Therefore, the disintegration of her subjectivity makes itself apparent in the disintegration of her body, allowing her to freely swing between the registers and experience a space of her own, her female *jouissance*.

At this point one needs to acknowledge that the dismemberment of the body following the distortion of language in the figure of Mouth functions more than simply to literalise Lacan's formulation of human subjectivity. It indeed becomes a simultaneous critique and affirmation of Lacan's negative metaphysics with regard to women and their positions. Lacan perceives oscillations between three registers quite negative in the sense that they signal a psychotic breakdown. This is why he calls these oscillations as "*the lines of 'fragilisation' that define the anatomy of phantasy, as exhibited in the schizoid and spasmodic symptoms of hysteria*" (*Écrits* 4). In contrast to Lacan's negation, however, the presence of Mouth as a disjointed body part suggests a rather affirmative position, where it possesses all the power to resist and go beyond the supposed status of woman and female *jouissance*. It almost reminds one of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of body without organs, which "*does not at all express lack but rather the positivity [...] an intensity, a band of intensity, a threshold of intensity*" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 31). Body without organs in Deleuzian sense, or fragmented body —or *corps morcele*— in Lacanian sense, is "*what remains when you take everything away*" (151). But quite contrary to what Lacan iterates with regard to the fragmented body, it is not the fragmented body that "*define[s] the anatomy of phantasy*" (*Écrits* 4): "*What you take away is precisely the phantasy [itself], and significances and subjectifications as a whole*" (Deleuze and Guattari 151). The phantasy is the assumption that the dissolution of the body and of the subject is always necessarily traumatic, and that woman knows nothing of *jouissance*. There is indeed nothing negative in becoming a Mouth without a body or a body without organs as long as it opens out to create a space of resistance and creation. This is most felt in the ferocity of Mouth during her simultaneous outburst of cries and silences. The materiality of her fragmented body is literally sensed in the outracious movements of "*the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose*" (Barthes 185). It is not fully-formed language but what Barthes would call "*the grain of the voice*" heard in and through her disjointed limbs that becomes the source of her female *jouissance*.



## Conclusion

The dissolution of Mouth's language and her body becomes a testament to a powerful affirmation of womanness. Mouth has been 'the other' in the society due to her sex and confined to voicelessness throughout her whole life. Her life has been filled with suffering, leaving no space for pleasure. Her condemnation to voicelessness, suffering and marginalisation, which corresponds to the idea that "the woman does not exist" (Lacan, *Seminar XVII* 17), comes to a halt once the long-established phantasy of wholeness is abolished. By refusing to articulate herself and her language as a unified and absolute entity, Mouth challenges the underlying discourse that reduces her to absence and silence. Rather than submitting to the organism of the body and the trammels of language, she ventures to live and speak in fragments. This denial of submission, which is literalised in her frequent rejection of articulating the first person pronoun, becomes a denial of patriarchy, of the name-of-the-Father, and of God. This denial lasts until the very last minute of the play which ends with Mouth's double enunciation of "she", not I: "what she was-...what?... who?... no!... she!... SHE!..." (*Not I* 382). With the final refusal, language as a system is collapsed and collapses the very foundation of the Cartesian sense of the self. Mouth's identity, just like her body, is no longer unified, rational and stable, but remains in flux, fragments with its full intensity. The Borromean knot is unrecoverably unfolded, and all the rings now freely dissolve not to lament, negate and destroy but to resist, affirm and cherish.

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