

The Specul(aris)ation of “I”

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, the main aim is to analyze Samuel Beckett’s short absurd play “Not I” (written as a dramatic monologue in 1972) through speculation/specul(aris)ation concepts of Luce Irigaray including also a Lacanian perspective. Under the light of the Irigarayan concept of *specul(ariz)ation*, the invisible and unknown nature of the dark hollow (vagina)/ Mouth as a reflection of the female self and sexuality will be explained. Irigaray herself defines the concept as a process of alienation because she thinks the “absence of the subject from its own image” gives *specularization* a “de-realizing power”. In other words, because women are defamiliarised to their own self as a result of not seeing their own image, they are invisible. Likewise, the Mouth (as a fragment) in Beckett’s play becomes alienated to her unrepresented body.

Actually, Luce Irigaray’s concept *specularisation* both unites *speculation* which means investigating and conjecturing the unrepresented truths about sexuality of women and *speculum* which means: “... a play on both the metaphor of narcissism and the ego; and the metaphor of the speculum, the instrument of female self-examination. The curved reflective surface of the speculum inverts the flatness of the mirror surface so that the self and not the other is reflected.”¹ Therefore, through specularisation both the hidden aspects (by speculation) and curved structure of the invisible female sexual organ (vagina) by a curved mirror (speculum) is examined. Through this examination, there becomes a chance to reach the unknown facts about the true nature of the women. Its importance lies in the fact that by this way the true self of the woman is reflected and understood.

Still, in her article “the Blind-spot of an Old Dream of Sexual Symmetry;” Irigaray defines woman as “the blind spot”: “The blind-spot is the point of vision which conditions all sight but remains unseen itself... it is the concept of woman.”² Therefore, women are

1. Elizabeth Gross, “Irigaray and Sexual Difference”, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 1/2 (1986), p.65.

2. Elizabeth Gross, “Irigaray and Sexual Difference”, p.65.

doomed to remain invisible within their relations in the society. Even if they are able to reflect their inner desires/jouissance,³ or unrepresented sexuality, because they are “the blind-spots”, it is impossible for the society to understand it (vagina/woman) and her sexuality.

Likewise, in Beckett’s play, there is a Mouth uttering some seemingly meaningless, fragmented and choppy sentences in a black void reminding the hollowness of the vagina/female sexuality. Mouth’s unrepresentable/meaningless existence comes into being only through the existence of the Auditor who serves as the “Phallus” representing the “Law-of-the-Father” (Lacanian terminology). His hearing activity (through which he judges the mouth) by standing aside with four movements puts him into the position of I/Phallus.

Within Mouth’s narration, as a result of its rejection of saying “I”, it positions itself as the subject of its sentences. In this respect, the old woman is positioned as the object. Through this way, Mouth “...establishes a relationship between spectator and spectacle predicated on positions of power/powerlessness and sexualized male/female respectively. In relating each of the major scenes from the woman’s life, in fact, Mouth describes gendered forms of looking.”⁴ As a result, in one way or another there is this sense of privileging one over the other becomes preeminent throughout the play. Either Auditor dominates Mouth (or vice versa), or spectators dominate spectacle (or vice versa), or even Mouth dominates the woman (or vice versa). This scheme of dominance versus subordination is achieved through “gaze”: “That privileging ultimately figures in the definition of the ‘Other’, the object acted upon by a subject through the medium of the gaze in the play.”⁵

On the other hand, the spectators function as the speculum showing the hidden truths of woman (jouissance/vagina) by reflecting her inside by specul(aris)ation. In that kind of an experience, because Auditor represents “Phallus”, he fails to understand the depths of Mouth’s speech. Besides, through their gaze, the spectators are positioned like

3. The term *jouissance*, in French, denotes “pleasure” or “enjoyment.” The term has a sexual connotation (i.e., orgasm) lacking in the English word “enjoyment”. Lacan develops his concept of the opposition of *jouissance* and pleasure. The subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go beyond the pleasure principle. Yet the result of transgressing the pleasure principle, according to Lacan, is not more pleasure but pain, since there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear. Beyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this ‘painful principle’ is what Lacan calls *jouissance* (www.enotes.com).

4. Kathleen O’Gorman, “So That People Would Stare’: The Gaze and the Glance in Beckett’s “Not I””. *Modern Language Studies*, 23/3: p.39.

5. Kathleen O’Gorman, “So That People Would Stare”, p.39.

the representatives of the "Symbolic Order" of Lacanian terminology, but at least through their positioning as the tool to obtain specul(aris)ation (by reflecting back the male gaze through curved reflection) they have the chance to realize the probable reality of the feminine essence..

"NOT I"

Samuel Beckett's play *Not I* takes place in a black void: "the stage is in darkness and 'the empty space' before us is almost literally empty."⁶ The audience sees an elevated red mouth with an imperceptible figure standing on one side. The play is made up of a monologue of a Mouth established with the unconscious, uncontrollable, and speedy sounds: because the Mouth is above the stage and there is nothing existent apart from lips and tongue producing the monologue, there is a sense of lack of existence (absence) of a character/ body/self. Besides, because of the rapid and uncontrollable movements, the spectacle of the Mouth resembles vagina. In both ways, it tells the events about a woman. Yet, because it is separate from a unified body and is not unique entity, it is non-representational.

On the other side of the stage, there is "... a silent, elongated, hooded figure, sex undeterminable" figure who stands as a "mysterious tower... interrupting the monologue at four strategic moments, raising its arms 'in a gesture of helpless compassion' then slowly returns them to its sides."⁷ The auditor on the other hand because of not representing a gender or not having any movements besides four brief movements creates a sense of detachment and alienation on the side of the spectators. "The auditor is the antithesis of Mouth. The latter speaks while the former is silent. The latter is disembodied mouth while the former is a tall standing figure. The latter is immobile while the former is capable of "four brief movements. The auditor is always other to the Mouth."⁸ The main image Mouth not only lacks the presence of the other human beings, but also its existence as an entity is questionable. The presence of the auditor means nothing because s/he doesn't have any contribution to her life.

Besides, in terms of lightning, the auditor is "'fully faintly lit' and only a sharp spotlight illuminates the Mouth... [and] the house lights go down as the play begins:

6. Enoch Brater, "The 'I' in Beckett's Not I", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 20/3 (1974), p.189.

7. Enoch Brater, "The 'I' in Beckett's Not I", p.189.

8. Derval Tubridy, "Words Pronouncing Me Alive: Beckett and Incarnation", in Marius Buning (ed.), *Samuel Beckett Today* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2000), p.99.

the voice continues unintelligible behind the curtain, '10 seconds'...as spotlight and comprehensibility both gradually gain in intensity."⁹ Through his usage of lights, Beckett reinforces the idea that vagina (the essence of women) is non-representable and it is like dark hollow which is associated with darkness or emptiness. The rapid, continuous brief movements of the lips are like the vain efforts of women to express and position themselves in the society: "Beckett's Mouth, that 'Godforsaken hole' hysterically speeding up the momentum..."¹⁰ of the story which the Mouth tells (recites) about a 'she' 'Not I'.

It is also significant that this seventy year old woman continuously tells the story of the third-person protagonist's story as if this is the only chance given to her by the symbolic order to voice this patch-worked experience of the women. The Mouth speaks in such a way that as if through this incomplete but straight away speech, she compensates the lost times. The crucial point is she could not dare to express herself as "I" (which is the Phallus the very representative of the symbolic order). In addition, because she is non-represented during her life within the symbolic order and regarded as the invisible, dark hollow (vagina), she avoids using the pronoun "I" now both because she never feels herself as the "I" and because she is afraid of feeling insecure by saying "I." Therefore, once she has the chance to express herself (as she), even before the beginning of the play, off-stage she begins uttering the words related to the woman. As Brater also points out:

"In the few years left for her, encapsulated for us in the few minutes of stage time, she must get in all the words she may needed to say during her lifetime of silence. Beckett has told us before that 'silence once broken will never be whole again'."¹¹

The thing that the Mouth refrains from is the "I" does not want to negotiate with the stories of the "she". In other words, the Mouth regrets being identified with the "she". By doing this, Beckett seems to surrender the symbolic order by positioning the dark hollow (Mouth/vagina) as an emptiness (uttering meaningless words), and through its narration of the third person, the Mouth positions the women as the object of the sentence of the symbolic order.

Mouth endlessly speaking without coherence, tells the events about "she" – "not I" as a "disembodied female orifice", she repeats an incoherent narrative, not saying anything

9. Enoch Brater, "The 'I' in Beckett's Not I", p.189.

10. Enoch Brater, "The 'I' in Beckett's Not I", p.190.

11. Enoch Brater, "The 'I' in Beckett's Not I", p.191.

meaningful as a "hysterical female."¹² As an invisible female within the society who fails to represent herself, she tries to express her desires but both the auditor and the spectators who are the representatives of the society could not understand her words, her life, her sexuality and her desires. Whereas the "practically speechless" Auditor functions as Zeifman states "to correct or add information"¹³ while listening the mouth. Although, the sex of the auditor is not explicit, it is staged in such a way that from his position s/he serves as the masculine gaze criticizing the mouth with his/her visible/unified body as "fully faintly lit".

After the curtain rises, the Mouth is seen and the words become audible: ". . . out. . . into this world . . . this world . . . tiny little thing . . . before its time . . . in a god for- . . . what? girl? . . . yes" ¹⁴ The mouth tells the story of an old woman in her seventies who suffered some kind of collapse while "wandering in a field . . . looking aimlessly for cowslips."¹⁵ While she was returning to consciousness, she understands that the mouth's words are actually spoken by her because words are her own words. However, this understanding does not happen during the mouth's speech; on the contrary it is reported in the text as a recitation: "The structure of *Not I* suggests that this performance consists of one recitation of a text that repeats it endlessly in the consciousness that belongs to Mouth... As the recitation discusses the character perceives that text as a sequence of words that her mouth speaks involuntarily."¹⁶

In the play, there is this lack of a coherent character portrayal and the woman's story: the spectators function to complete the fragmented individual divided to body/soul/consciousness/mouth/past/present and the gaps of her story that is presented in Mouth's speech. This fragmentation of the women's story and Mouth's depiction of her desires resemble Luce Irigaray's argument in her article "The Sex which is Not One" in the sense that this fragmentation shows her separate but multiple pleasures having derived from all of her body. "She is definitely other in herself.... What she says is never identical with anything, moreover; rather it is contiguous. *It touches (upon)*. And when it strays too far from that proximity, she breaks off and starts over at "zero": her body-sex."¹⁷ Likewise, Mouth cannot identify himself with the old woman, she only recites her

12. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", (London: Faber&Faber, 1973), p.33.

13. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.33.

14. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.216.

15. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.216.

16. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.155.

17. Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is not One* [translated by Catherine Porter] (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.28-29.

experiences. And she cannot position herself: “what position she was in... whether standing ... or sitting ... but the brain- ... what? Kneeling? ... yes ... whether standing ... or sitting ... or kneeling ... or lying”¹⁸

Because Mouth speaks, Auditor hears and audience sees, there is both a sense of even fragmentation on perception and Beckett uses both audible and visual sensation of the spectators.

“The most elaborate form of collusion between the figure of the woman and the anxiety of self is in Not I... while at the same time it is deprived of the means of its seeing, even of seeing itself being looked at. But this uncomfortable nakedness of the mouth ... and its failure to return the viewer’s gaze is itself a threat.”¹⁹

In terms of the gender of the Mouth, although it is evident that it is telling about the past memories of an old woman, Beckett does not portray the woman as “a fixed representation of female embodiment” instead it is fragmented as Makward’s defining the feminine writing as “fragmented, polysemic, attempting to speak the body.”²⁰ In addition to this, in stage directions it is stated that Auditor’s “sex [is] undeterminable”²¹ but it is supposed to be a male gazing the involuntarily speaking mouth revealing the hidden desires of the feminine self. Actually, the fragmented Mouth within her usage of “she” in her speech, unites with her inner self/other. She expresses this desire/jouissance as: “[to seek an] other that I am and am not ... but that I feel passing, that makes me live – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me.”²²

From a Lacanian perspective, within the language which is the symbolic order during the formation of the self “the Name-of-the-Father [functions as the] ... representative of language, culture and authority.”²³ Through her speech, the Mouth enters the domain of the symbolic order governed by the Phallus. Because in “symbolic order”, the “I” is the separate entity who is accepting the “law of the father”, Mouth in this play cannot express her as “I” and depicts her life with negative evaluation like a non-entity:

“Out ... into this world ... tiny little thing ... before its time ... in a godfor ... what? ... girl? ... yes ... tiny ... little girl ... into this ... out into this ... before her time ... godforsaken hole ... called ...no matter ... parents unknown ... unheard of ... so no love.”²⁴

18. Samuel Beckett, “Not I”, p.217.

19. Mary Catanzaro, “Recontextualising the Self: the Voice as Subject in Beckett’s ‘Not I’”, *South Central Review*, 7/1 (2011), p.39.

20. Mary Catanzaro, “Recontextualising the Self”, p.39.

21. Samuel Beckett, “Not I”, p.216.

22. Samuel Beckett, “Not I”, p.216.

23. Mary Catanzaro, “Recontextualising the Self”, p.40.

24. Samuel Beckett, “Not I”, pp.214-215.

Because, the woman represents the other as a silenced figure in the society, she is condemned to silence and within the order of the language, she is reduced into a Mouth unconsciously expressing her hidden fears, desires and emotions. This mouth proves the Lacanian fact that "Woman does not exist".²⁵ As Lawley puts forth: "the text runs together the mouth and the eye, making us see the mouth as an eye, and the eye as a mouth-like orifice."²⁶ While conveying her inner feminine desires (as Pirandello says) she feels that: "There is someone who is living my life, and I know nothing about [her]."²⁷ Mouth cannot stop her uncontrollable voice telling the old woman's desires which are foreign to her: "imagine! ... no idea what she is saying! ... and can't stop ... no stopping it ... she who but a moment before ... but a moment!"²⁸

There exists a break in Mouth's past experiences because of her confusing the reality/fantasy and the memory. Although the Mouth speaks in the symbolic order dominated by the phallus, she uses the words with repetition, screaming, laughter and unfinished, fragmented sentences. In this sense, "Her feminine text knows no boundaries, no punctuation, no beginnings and endings."²⁹ Also, her sexuality is different, unique to her own and limitless which could not be understood by the male gaze. All her body is separated signifying the multiplicity of her *joissance*: "whole body like gone ... just the mouth ... lips ... cheeks ... what? ... tongue? ... no idea what she is saying ..."³⁰ As if all her multiplicity is collected within her mouth/vagina through her meaningless overflow of words.

If this isolated figure on the stage is a vagina, the overflowed words that she utters are functioning as the traces of her feminine *joissance* which is full of suffering. Although her body is invisible in the symbolic world, she tries to exist with her sexual existence reduced as a mouth/vagina signifying the difference of the female *joissance*/sentence: "Her body is displaced because there seems to be no place or space for it. Mouth has filled the textual space with her imaginations and memories of time..."³¹ Also, she confesses that she never has the *joissance*: "... 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 ..."³²

25. Mary Catanzaro, "Recontextualising the Self", p.42.

26. Mary Catanzaro, "Recontextualising the Self", p.42.

27. Mary Catanzaro, "Recontextualising the Self", p.43.

28. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.220.

29. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.46.

30. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.220.

31. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.48.

32. Samuel Beckett, "Not I", p.217

Generally, within the Western representational system, spectator represents masculinity whereas the spectacle represents femininity because of the fact that through gazing the spectators have the chance to speculate about the spectacle. Meanwhile, the spectacle passively admits these speculations and gazes. Also, it is striking that this gazing/speculation issue is one-sided: the spectacle cannot gaze back. In “Not I”, Mouth/vagina is gazed by the spectators being placed: “...in a position of power or subjectivity, and the spectacle in a position of powerlessness, constituted as an object, as the Other.” Furthermore, because the spectators’ act is a gaze, it is assertive. As Norman Bryson differentiates the meanings of gaze and glance: “The gaze tends towards a certain violence (penetrating, piercing, fixing) [associated with masculinity] ...The glance is a furtive or sideways look whose attention is always elsewhere, which shifts to conceal its own existence [associated with femininity].”³³ If the spectators’ position in terms of this gazing mechanism is analyzed, the female ones are in-between because they can identify themselves with mouth and her lack of subjectivity and with auditor who because of his position serves as a masculine structure of viewing.³⁴

As a result of the symbolic order’s positioning the listeners and spectators as the passive objects who surrender all the justifications of the realities, they fail to understand the existence of the Mouth/vagina: women. This may be the result of the lack of the representation of the women within the symbolic order:

“*Not I* brings to the surface our own difficulty in seeing, in perceiving, for this is our annoying situation as members of the audience. Like the “she” of Mouth’s monologue, we have no idea what position Mouth or “she” is in – whether standing, or sitting, or kneeling. We see merely “whole body like gone.”³⁵

In spite of the audience’s efforts to unite the fragmented words uttered by the Mouth, Beckett presents it as something loose in itself like a reaction to the generalizing attitude of the existing order of the language.

When then mechanisms of glance/ gaze is evaluated, it is seen that especially the old woman functions to glance (which is a passive and surrendered activity), whereas Mouth totally lacks the capacity to return the glances and gazes. The spectators on the other hand, gazes the spectacle with their powerful outlooks. Mouth describes the woman in the field as: “looking aimlessly for cowslips ... drifting around.”³⁶ This part indicated

33. Norman Bryson, *Vision and Visuality* in Hal Foster (ed.), (New York: The New Press., 1988), p.93.

34. Norman Bryson, “The Gaze in the Expanded Field”, p.35.

35. Enoch Brater, “The ‘I’ in Beckett’s Not I”, p.199.

36. Samuel Beckett, “Not I”, p.216

that she does not fixate her looks instead she aimlessly, without privileging any perspective looks the scenery. As O’Gorman asserts: “... it does not function as a totalizing, masculine force...The gaze ... is clearly disempowered, so explicitly is it identified with subordination to a perceived need.”³⁷

Throughout, she “stares into space”³⁸ indicating the general powerlessness of women. Because she fails to identify herself as the subject, she directs her stares to a neutral space without fixating it in a specified point: “her stare is feminized.”³⁹ On the other hand, Mouth is also helpless because she is subjected to both the gazes of Auditor and the spectators, but as the spectacle it has to accept these passively. The only chance of Mouth as the spectacle is to express the passivity of the old woman regarded as “she” within her monologue.

The position of the female spectators of the play “Not I” is two-fold: on the one hand, if the female spectators identify themselves with the Mouth, they feel the Mouth as the representative of their own invisible self within the society. On the other hand, if they associate themselves with the auditor, they feel themselves as being observed with the existence of the Auditor as the Phallus. From this perspective, they either feel themselves as the active participants who share the miseries of the old woman uttered with the Mouth/vagina’ speech, or as the passive watcher who is defined by the Auditor/phallus. Or else, if they are identified with Auditor, the female spectators “... ratify patriarchal paradigms of vision predicated on a dominance/submission, subject/object mode of apprehension ... She is complicit in engendering her own invisibility.”⁴⁰

The male spectators, on the other hand, do not have difficulty in identifying themselves with Auditor, because they got used to speculate women through their “male gaze.” However, they feel themselves totally alienated from the Mouth who is not making any sense on their male-perceptions. The Mouth is neither attractive nor familiar to these subjects (male spectators) of the symbolic order. Therefore, it could be deduced that within the specul(aris)ation process of the spectators; there is both the male and the female gaze within which the former is the one who represents the conventional positioning of the spectators who are active through their gazes. Whereas the latter is the one who used to be passively objectifying process of male gazes, now have the chance to use the female gaze either in order to speculate the Auditor (as the Phallus) or their own dark and

37. Kathleen O’Gorman, “So that People Would Stare”, p.40.

38. Samuel Beckett, “Not I”, p.219-221.

39. Kathleen O’Gorman, “So that People Would Stare”, p.40

40. Kathleen O’Gorman, “So that People Would Stare”, p.35.

unknown Body part Mouth/vagina. Still, both genders within the spectators have the chance to experience a new perspective about the unrepresented/invisible.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the play, Mouth cannot find anything meaningful and she cannot find her unique identity as well. Through specul(aris)ation mirrored in a curved way by the audience, she only achieves to tell her desires, pleasures and fears in a fragmented way. Within the symbolic order, there is no room for this fragmented Mouth/vagina in a unified way. She could only retell the feminine experiences of her separate body by specul(aris)ation of them within the stage. Otherwise, her existence is doomed to become forgotten. Finally, she says: “what she was - ... what? ... Who? ... No! ... she! ... SHE! ...”⁴¹ The invisible, unspoken, and hidden feminine self reflects itself through specul(aris)ation but still in a fragmented way.

As Lessing states, Beckett achieves to depict what he wants to indicate in a reduced/minimalised way:

“In nature everything is connected, everything is interwoven, everything changes with everything, everything merges from one into another. But because of this endless variety it is only a play for an infinite spirit. In order that finite spirits have their share of this enjoyment... Genius is concerned only with the events that are rooted with one another, that form a chain of cause and effect. To reduce the latter to the former, to weigh the latter against the former... to cause everything that occurs to occur so that it would not have happened otherwise...”⁴²

In “Not I”, in spite of the fact that Beckett reduces all the theatrical conventions, even the body of the character; he achieves to convey his message clearly. However, he constructs this in such a way that the effect is greater than the cause: especially through the mechanism of the specu(laris)ation including the gazes of the spectators, involve in this chain of meaningless events. Yet, the play’s success lies in the fact that it achieves to create a sense of alienation on the side of the spectators (passively or actively) and although fragmented, the mysterious body and soul of the woman becomes the centre of the discourse and stage.

41. Samuel Beckett, “Not I”, p.222.

42. Thomas Postlewait, “Self-performing Voices: Mind, Memory, and Time in Beckett’s Drama”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24/4 (1978), p.481.

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