

# Beckett's *Not I* as a Dramatic Rendition of Kristeva's Semiotic Chora

Kristeva'nın Semiyotik Chora Kavramının Teatral Sunumu Olarak  
Beckett'in *Ben Değil* Adlı Oyunu

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## Abstract

Samuel Beckett as a dramatist is well-known with his contributions to the landscape of British theatre. His plays reverberate with voices of traumatized, marginalized and war-stricken characters, which function as an implicit criticism of the turbulent atmosphere of the 1900s. When Beckett addresses the problems of his time in a covert way, the playwright deconstructs conventional elements of drama by specifying no plot, no setting or no theme. This Beckettian style also becomes manifest in his use of language which is characterized by the presence of segmented structures, pauses, ellipses and even silence. Considering these tenets of Beckettian drama, the thematic concerns of his theatrical productions are assumed to primarily revolve around the issues of nihilism, language, and ontology. Therefore, Beckett's plays are thought to be read through the lenses of distinguished theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva. From among these theorists, the concepts of the semiotic, the symbolic and the semiotic chora of Julia Kristeva as a poststructuralist thinker provide a fertile ground for a theoretical reading of Beckett's play *Not I* (1972). Relevantly, this paper principally examines the applicability of Kristeva's "semiotic chora" into Beckett's *Not I* in all aspects.

**Keywords:** Samuel Beckett, Julia Kristeva, *Not I*, the Symbolic, the Semiotic Chora

## Introduction

Samuel Beckett, who is a well-established figure of the twentieth-century literature and drama, is the writer of many controversial texts, the elusive nature of which raises critical difficulties of interpretation for thinkers and scholars in the literary realm. One of the most fundamental reasons behind the origin of the idea that Beckett's works are hard to conceive is related to his subjugation of plot, character and theme. Beckett is known to pay no attention to developing an identifiable plot, characterization or theme, especially in his theatrical productions, as can be seen in one of his most famous plays *Waiting for Godot* (1953). The playwright's rejection of any readily definable pattern is also compounded by his rejection of surrendering oneself to hypocrisy in the world as he chafes at the decadence in society. He concentrates sharply on the implausibility and absurdity of mundane events by questioning the veracity of assumptions made with respect to ontology, religious doctrines, and more strikingly to one's building a sense of self. Beckett's nihilistic attitude and constant interrogation of the psychological drives of his characters within his works, therefore, enable him to expose the meaninglessness and helplessness of human life to a serious extent.

To understand the potential scope of the theatrical practice of Beckett and how he mirrors emptiness of everything to humanity, critics and readers must initially make sense of Beckett's use of and experimentation with language. The concept of language as the most powerful means of communication is evidently deconstructed in Beckettian oeuvre in that he employs linguistically complex structures and words, which renders it difficult to interpret what he precisely means through his characterization. The presence of

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fragmented sentences, silence, pauses and wordplays as integral components of Beckett's theatre and fiction is also accompanied by his interest in reconfiguration of human subjectivity. In other words, Beckett's deployment of a non-linear language becomes a useful instrument of his conceptualization of the issue of subjectivity. As Rahime Çokay Nebioğlu likewise points out that "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" (2018, p. 1629). Not feeling obliged to follow a traditional pattern of written language composed of grammatically coherent elements intelligible to all readers, Beckett foregrounds a poetic language with linguistic disruptions that are symbolic of the disrupted sense of selves of his characters. It seems fitting to claim that when Beckett's characters articulate their ideas through overlapping dialogues in the context of an unfathomable language, it gives readers the impression that they try to speak what their fragmented sense of selves want to speak, basically the unspeakable.

Beckett's concern with the relationship between language and subjectivity becomes manifest in his going deeper into the recesses of the minds of his characters and turns most of his works into a sort of fertile ground for theoretical analysis. In the light of theoretical framework of distinguished thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, Beckettian productions resonate with psychoanalytic theory and poststructuralist approaches. The origin of Beckett's enthusiasm for psychoanalysis can be traced back to the years during his treatment at clinic. As Angela Moorjani stresses that "The notebooks Beckett kept on his readings in psychology and psychoanalytic theory at the time of his treatment were discovered only after the author's death" (2004, p. 173).

The influence of Freud as the father of psychoanalysis on Beckett's writings is so vast that the language he uses with its repetitive and complex patterns, particularly within his plays can be said to serve to read psychic condition of his characters in line with Freudian concept of unconscious or repression. Likewise, Beckett accommodates certain aspects of the analysis of his characters with Jung into his works inasmuch as he is known to have a good command of Jungian archetypes. Given the fact that the aforementioned language style of Beckett as a literary figure of modern period aligns with Freudian or Jungian approaches, it must be noted that Beckett's turning his head away from a conventional use of language also makes his work closely associated with Lacanian theory. Akin to Lacan, Beckett problematizes the traditional conceptualization of language with the strong emphasis upon the signifier and signified by drawing attention to the boundlessness of meaning making. This firm belief in the endlessness of signifiers that create meaning out of other signifiers rather than pointing to the fixed signified results in both thinkers' feeding on this side of their argument for the theorization of human subjectivity. Pertinent to this point, Çokay Nebioğlu underlines that "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" (2018, p. 1631). Furthermore, from among the listed theorists, Bulgarian-French philosopher, linguist and scholar Julia Kristeva's contribution to the theory of language and poststructuralist psychoanalysis cannot be underestimated as explorations of Kristeva's contribution are closely intertwined with Beckettian literary texts.

The post-Lacanian thinker Kristeva, who is believed to develop her ideas based on her intensive studies of Freud and Lacan, postulates her theory of the speaking subject and signification with the distinction she makes between the semiotic and the symbolic as two modalities of signification. In Kristevan perspective, the semiotic is the maternal aspect of language that incorporates unconscious drives whereas the symbolic is the paternal aspect

of language that is marked by rule-bound and patriarchal structures. In line with Kristeva's theory, the semiotic also represents a sense of self that is not developed yet since the child in question is not separated from his/her mother. However, the symbolic represents the child's entrance into the patriarchal world with his/her use of language people use in daily life and separation from the mother. For Kristeva, in the semiotic realm, the child uses a language formed by babblings, certain sounds unbeknownst to listeners and non-grammatical components that evokes Beckettian language characterized by fragmentation and non-linearity. Julia Kristeva sheds light on the dyad between the semiotic and the symbolic as follows:

It is simply an attempt to think of "meaning" not only as "structure" but also as "process" or "trial" [...] by looking at the same time at syntax, logic, and what transgresses them, or the trans-verbal. [...] The semiotic is not independent of language, but underpins language and, under the control of language, it articulates other aspects of "meaning" which are more than mere "significations," such as rhythmical and melodic inflections. (2010, p. 11)

The bond between Kristeva and Beckett is important to state in that Kristevan theory of language and subjectivity stands out as quite applicable to Beckett's drama. The playwright's indeterminate and non-conventional language in the plays ranging from *Waiting for Godot* to *Footfalls* renders it possible to contend that Beckettian dramatic language can be studied in accordance with Kristevan semiotic chora which will be explained in detail within the present study. Amongst the plays of Beckett that can be analysed by use of Kristeva's theory, *Not I* (1972) is a remarkable one since the play concentrates upon the narration of traumatic memories of an old woman through the reflection of the woman's mouth onto stage as the main character when it is performed in theatre. It is the mouth as the speaking organ that accentuates the pain of the woman with an incomprehensible language all throughout the play, which is reminiscent of how a baby is assumed to speak in Kristevan semiotic realm. Hence, this study aims to examine the ways in which Kristeva's theory of language, particularly her notion of semiotic chora fits into Beckett's *Not I*. In line with the purpose of this study, it must be noted that the study draws on the existing scholarship about *Not I* by major Beckett critics such as Derval Tubridy, Enoch Brater and Gina Masucci MacKenzie. However, it largely differs from them in terms of its specific appropriation of the concept of "the semiotic chora" to *Not I* by extending the scope of their discussion to weave an original contribution.

### **Kristeva's Notions of the Semiotic, the Symbolic and the Semiotic Chora**

The Bulgarian- French philosopher Julia Kristeva, who is famous for a series of seminal works such as *Desire in Language*, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and *Powers of Horror*, is one of the most distinguished contributors to the fields of linguistics, semiotics and psychoanalysis. Kristeva's influence is strongly felt in discussions pertaining to poststructuralism in that her view of language, speaking subject and the link between language and subjectivity evoke that of Derrida and Lacan to a large extent. Clinging to the notion that language has a prominent role in creating subjectivity, Kristeva looks at speaking subject from a psychoanalytic perspective. She regards the speaking subject in a constant flux and draws attention to the bodily drives fighting against the patriarchal culture by inhabiting a realm she identifies as "the semiotic." The theorist primarily uses this term as an integral component of her studies of the development of the subject in relation to language and identifies the semiotic as the realm of the pre-linguistic phase where signification does not exist. In Kristevan perspective, there is the semiotic angle of signification that permits "the speaking animal to sense the rhythm of the body" (Kristeva

1980, p. 34). The subject in question, basically an infant who has not reached “the mirror phase” in Lacanian terms, discharge bodily drives into language that one can find in the language of poetry, dance or music. As Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* states that the semiotic is “rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a single guarantee, syntax” (1984, p. 29). The musical or rhythmic elements of the semiotic are completely liberated from rules of syntax that a child is conditioned to follow upon entrance into “the symbolic order” in Lacanian thinking as well. The child makes some sounds that do not mean anything to users of a rule-bound language in daily life or merely tries to sound like other people around him/her to communicate with them. This language, for Kristeva, is poetic and it can be associated with archaic phases of the process of the construction of the subject as the theorist herself alludes to this point in a recorded interview named as *On Pre-Oedipal Language* as follows:

We all know that poetic language is musical and that the music can often dominate the meaning. If you take Mallarmé, for example, you often understand the music, but not the meaning. This dominance of music led me to recognise a resurgence of pre-language, of the music of infant echolalias in poetic language. (Kristeva 2011)

Kristeva examines literary texts belonging to certain poets like Mallarmé in *Revolution in Poetic Language* so as to solidify her argument regarding the notion of the semiotic by underlining that the semiotic harkens back to pre-linguistic state of childhood. Aside from her emphasis upon the correspondence between the semiotic and pre-verbal conditions of the subject, the theorist brings to the fore the fact that the semiotic is affiliated with the matriarchal side of language which makes it different from the language the child uses by being a member of the patriarchal society. At this point of her discussion, Kristeva elaborates upon the other component of the signifying process that she identifies as “the symbolic.” Unlike the semiotic, the symbolic represents clarity and proper syntax which are characteristics of the paternal side of language the subject begins to use when he/she is cognisant of the difference between self and other. More precisely stated, it designates the language the child uses following the separation from the mother and this language is structured based on certain rules of grammar and communicability. Moya Lloyd (2006) effectively explains the significance of the symbolic within the signifying process in line with Kristevan approach and notes that the symbolic is

the realm of language understood as a rule-governed system, of grammar and syntax and what Kristeva refers to as “propositions” and “positions.” In a more general sense it is also the realm of social order and law. It is, in psychoanalytic terms, post-oedipal, that is, it relates to a time when the mother/baby dyad is separated and the child becomes conscious of itself as an individuated, linguistic being. (2006, pp. 138-139)

Lloyd’s explanation clarifies the point that the child gets ready to build his/her own sense of identity thereby separating himself/herself from the mother. From this point onwards, the symbolic occupies a leading position in the child’s life since the child makes use of language so as to turn into a speaking subject in the social order. In other words, when the child enters into the realm of the symbolic that stands for the paternal, the dynamics of mother-child relationship changes and the child starts to use a rule-bound language.

It is important to note that even though the semiotic and the symbolic are two different components of the signifying process, Kristeva does not mean that they can be discussed separately. The two complement one another as the opposing poles with their own functions in signification. Kristeva underscores that “because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic

or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (1984, p. 24). This approach is supported by Spyridoula Athanasopoulou Kypriou who highlights "the interrelation (dialogical relation) of the semiotic and the symbolic is what makes signification possible. That is, the semiotic is the precondition of the symbolic and provides the motivation for engaging in the signifying process" (2005, p. 317).

The semiotic/the symbolic dyad of Kristeva ostensibly foregrounds the semiotic as the infrastructure of the rule-determined language of the symbolic and the interplay between them corresponds to the essence of the process of signification. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the stress Kristeva lays upon the significance of the semiotic as the modality of the signification repressed by the symbolic brings to the fore her explication of the existence of another realm that she names as "the chora" or "the semiotic chora." Despite the fact that much of what Kristeva studies in her exploration of the semiotic as the pre-lingual realm matches with what she identifies as the semiotic chora, the chora in Kristevan understanding of the concept narrows it down a bit and focuses upon the baby/mother relationship in the mother's womb before birth. To put it more clearly in Kristevan terms, the first eighteen months of the developmental stage of a baby, which is named as the Imaginary for Lacan, can be regarded as the period characterized by the non-existence of phallogocentric language-dependent system, basically of signification. As has been stated, this period comes before the entrance into the symbolic and the cognitive mechanism of the baby enabling him/her to differentiate between self and (m)other is not developed yet at this time. The articulation of the baby prior to the engagement with the language of the symbolic is the representative of the material and poetic side of the language used in the semiotic and Kristeva contends that this actually begins when the baby resides in the mother's womb and goes on more actively in the first six months following birth. It must be underscored that the chora as the stage or place where all these takes place is unknowable, unfathomable and unrepresentable to a large extent. Vincent B. Leitch in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* addresses Kristeva's notion of the chora as follows:

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva thus maintains that all signification entails the dialectical interaction of the symbolic and the semiotic. The semiotic represents the discharge of pre-Oedipal instinctual energies and drives within language; it is associated with what Kristeva, following PLATO, designates as the chora (literally, "space"; Greek)- receptacle, space, womb. This semiotic *chora*, which "precedes and underlies figuration," is, in turn, connected to the maternal body, to the feminine in general, and to what remains mysterious, unintelligible and unsignifiable. (2001, p. 2166)

It is seen that the semiotic chora has a constitutive function in the construction of language and subjectivity. This realm of the mother is a place of chaos where expressions prior to language abound and poetic dimension of language becomes manifest. Characterized by fragmentation, non-linearity and musicality, the chora seems to embody a nonexpressive whole. As Adriana Cavarero expresses:

For Kristeva, the semiotic *chora* is the preverbal and unconscious sphere, not yet inhabited by the law of the sign, where rhythmic and vocalic drives reign. This semiotic *chora* has a profound bodily root and is linked to the indistinct totality of mother and child. It precedes the symbolic system of language, or the sphere of the semantic where syntax and concept rule- the paternal order of the separation between the self and the other, between mother and child, and between signifier and signified. (2005, p. 133)

Based upon Cavarero's description of the chora in Kristevan theory, it can be claimed that the chora represents the very functioning of language deep down. Despite the fact that the language people use in daily life appertains to the sphere of the Other, basically to the language of the Father in Lacanian thinking and to the symbolic for Kristeva, the semiotic chora incorporates what is indefinably essential to the formation of the concept of "I" in the psychosexual development of a child.

Considering all the points made with respect to the notions of the semiotic, the symbolic and the chora, it must be restated that Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* lays bare two interdependent sides of language. She names them as the semiotic and the symbolic which are indissociably connected to each other in terms of their mutual function in the process of signification. The semiotic is designated as representative of infant/mother relationship that is marked by discharging the inner and bodily drives of the infant into the language while the symbolic is designated as the realm of the paternal laws the infant enters upon realization of the fact that there is a difference between self and the other. As an essential part of the notion of the semiotic, Kristeva also introduces the notion of the semiotic chora as the space in which the baby builds a special communication with the mother in the mother's womb and just after the birth which results in the formation of an elusive language evocative of musical and poetic language of literature. Before the acquisition of language skills, the baby communicates through babblings, unintelligible sounds and non-grammatical expressions in the semiotic sphere which Kristeva regards as the ultimate root of the language of the symbolic and of the process of identity construction in her research pertaining to the link between language and subjectivity.

### **Beckett's *Not I* Studied through Kristeva's Semiotic Chora**

Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972) is a short but complex play which is primarily concerned about issues of language, body and subjectivity. The title of the play is highly suggestive of the fact that Beckett is interested in studying the formation of the concept of "I" from a different angle. What lies behind this assertion is that there is an evident emphasis upon the difficulty of acknowledging one's sense of self in "Not" part of the title and makes readers/audiences feel curious about how the events unfold. When the main character appears on the stage as a disembodied mouth accompanied by an auditor rather than a person in flesh and begins to speak by using a completely incomprehensible language reminiscent of the language of a traumatized mind, anyone faced with the scene is certainly thunderstruck by what is shown to them. The articulations of Mouth as the narrator of the story do not follow any logical patterns of the language used in daily life and seem to be lexical representatives of traumatized self of a character that struggles to speak the unspeakable. Enoch Brater in the astute article entitled as *The "I" in Beckett's Not I* makes a direct allusion to the structural aspect of the play that makes it hard to understand and points out that

In *Not I*, completed in 1972, the stage is in darkness and "the empty space" before us is almost literally empty. To one side is a mouth, disembodied, suspended in space and throbbing with an undulating pulsation of lips, teeth, and tongue. Never formulating any integer as unified or coherent as a sentence, Mouth gives shape to words and phrases as segmented as itself; they begin as an unintelligible verbal onslaught, get beaten into life as they rise in crescendo toward an agonizing scream, then settle themselves down once more into their dull incomprehensible drone. (1974, p. 189)

The opening part of Mouth's above-mentioned inconceivable monologue composed of incomplete segments of sentences awake the attention of readers/audiences as it incorporates hints about what and who is being mentioned indeed. Given the initial portion

of the speech that seems to concentrate upon a parentless girl with the ups and downs in her life journey as a whole, it can be alleged that Mouth in the play represents an old woman who is challenged by the hardship of putting into words her mental distress. The old woman disguised as a mouth salutes her listeners with her agonizing story which can be hitherto repressed because of the inadequacy of language to accentuate it properly. Despite the broken language used by Mouth from the outset of the play, the veracity of the assumption that it gives an account of the life of a person devoid of affection in her upbringing can be endorsed by reading between the lines of what Mouth says in the initial part of the speech which is as follows:

out ... into this world ...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 ... called ... no matter ... parents unknown ... unheard of ... he having vanished ... thin air ... no sooner buttoned up his breeches ... she similarly ... eight months later ... almost to the tick... so no love ... spared that ... no love such as normally vented on the ... speechless infant ... in the home ... no ... nor indeed for that matter of any kind ... no love of any kind ... at any subsequent stage ... so typical affair ... nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when- ... what? ... seventy? ...good God! (Beckett 1990, p. 376)

The above-cited fragmented opening statements constantly separated by suspension points demonstrate that Beckett's *Not I* revolves around the story of the disrupted-self which can be exclusively expressed through such an anti-logocentric language. As has been indicated, though much of what Mouth verbalizes sounds like nonsensical starting from the first lines of the play, it is clear that the selected words for the narration of the speaker's trauma serve to convey a certain meaning when put together. As Jonathan Boulter states "What *Not I* explores is the intimate connection between Mouth's traumatic story-which is about how she one day began to speak after years of silence- and the image of the traumatized, fragmented body" (2008, p. 71). What is also remarkable in the given part of Mouth's speech is that it includes wh-question components like what or when as self-interrogative items and they can be said to symbolize Mouth's tendency to deny that what is narrated here denotes her own experiences. In other words, the symbolic function of the play's title as *Not I* come into play in Mouth's inaugural and becomes more manifest in the ensuing lines. To illustrate, Mouth goes on speaking by emphasizing an event taking place in an unidentified year in the month of April and utters that "when suddenly ... gradually ... all went out ... all that early April morning light... and she found herself in the- ... what? ... who? ... no! ... she! ... found herself in the dark ... and if not exactly ... insentient ..." (Beckett 1990, p. 377). Mouth's directing questions to herself repetitively corroborates the assumption that this speaker does not want to come to terms with the facts of her own life. By drawing attention to these lines as well, Boulter underlines that "Notice how this initial anxious refusal to admit to herself that she is speaking of personal experience- for surely the questions she asks here, what? who? are responses to herself- is initiated by a crucial crisis in her life" (2008, p. 72). This being the case, Mouth's utterances on the first page of *Not I* even suffice to maintain that this language employed by Beckett can be deemed as a sort of theatrical tool in his engagement with the construction of subjectivity and makes his work align with theoretical approaches. More clearly stated, what is peculiar to *Not I* is that Beckett's use of language within this work turns it into apt forum for relating the ways in which Mouth verbalizes events to Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic chora in certain aspects. As MacKenzie broadly speaks about Beckettian style and argues that "The comitragic abjections of Beckett's characters are verbalized through a series of word usage and association that sound like Kristeva's chora" (2009, p. 168).

Considering how Mouth gives utterance to the befallen events from the right outset, it would be plausible to argue that the character's linguistic performance resonates with Kristeva's the semiotic chora in that her utterances are released from the rules associated with the language of the symbolic. When this is more precisely explained in accordance with the semiotic/symbolic dyad for Kristeva, Mouth speaks the language of the self that is not constructed at all yet which is akin to the language of a baby in the realm of the chora. The absence of fidelity to the rule-bound aspect of the patriarchal language is the main characteristic of Mouth's speech all throughout the narration and the totality of all such utterances symbolizes the articulation preceding language. The rhythmic quality of the collection of non-grammatical linguistic components vehemently evokes what Kristeva finds as poetic side of literary language and as representative of her concept of the chora in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. As Kypriou underscores:

Beckett's play offers a visual and acoustic image of the semiotic *chora*, whatever else it also does. Since *chora* is pre-linguistic and ignores grammatical and syntactical rules, the segmented phrases that Mouth utters remind the readers and the audience of the stage that people go through when they are very young. Moreover, by using short elliptic phrases, Beckett shows that words may have meaning but are also sounds. By pointing to the sensible elements of language and by choosing a disembodied mouth to become his protagonist, Beckett stresses the bodily aspect of language. (2005, p. 318)

The emphasis upon Beckett's foregrounding the bodily aspect of language is crucial since this feature in *Not I* makes one contemplate the range and influence of bodily communication activated by Mouth in different scenes. To demonstrate, when Mouth introduces another unknown incident which occurs at a supermarket during adulthood years of the character, the woman's posture as a standing figure which is both preceded and then interrupted by her reminiscence of what she has experienced on an April morning during childhood while lying face down in the grass is striking and it can be said to be relevant to the discussion of Kristeva's semiotic chora as well. The bodily movements of lying down and standing up as potentially symbolic nonverbal elements for the expression of the vicissitudes in the woman's life are transposed into the narrative concurrently with the fragmented language of the speaker. Mouth deconstructs the notion of I while verbalizing the incidents and whenever a new brief incident is introduced, it directly goes back to the event taking place in April. As Jennifer M. Jeffers puts it "What spews from Mouth's mouth is a tangled group of images that at the core are repeated" (2009, p. 145). Even though what has exactly befallen to her on that April morning remains a mystery, it makes sense to suggest that it comes to the fore as a sort of repressed trauma and verbal language with a proper syntax fails to give voice to it. As language of the symbolic operates in conjunction with specific linguistic regulations, it is merely the semiotic chora of Kristeva as a stage of bodily sensations and syntax-free phrases where a traumatizing event can be articulated. Mouth's expression of this incident in *Not I* is as follows:

out shopping... busy shopping centre... supermarket... just hand in the list... with the bag... old black shopping bag... then stand there waiting... any length of time ... middle of the throng... motionless ... staring into space... mouth half open as usual... till it was back in her hand... then pay and go... not as much as good-bye... how she survived!... and now this stream... not catching the half of it... not the quarter... no idea... what she was saying... imagine!... no idea what she was saying!... till she began trying to... delude herself... it was not hers at all... not her voice at all... (Beckett 1990, p. 379)



Mouth's vague memories lingering at the back of the mind are presented to readers/audiences with the third strange incident that pivots on the character's sitting on a hill in Croker's Acres. Perpetually disturbed by a buzzing tone in the ears, Mouth seems to verbalize another unspecified experience fully evocative of the former one and still interpellated by the remembrance of the April occurrence. The disjointedness of Mouth's narration characterized by its readability through the semiotic chora leaps to the eye in the lines below:

One evening on the way home... home!... a little mound in Croker's Acres... dusk... sitting staring at her hand... there in her lap... palm upward... suddenly saw it wet... the palm... tears presumably... hers presumably... no one else for miles... no sound... just the tears... sat and watched them dry... all over in a second... nothing there... on to the next... bad as the voice... worse...as little sense... all that together... can't... what?... the buzzing?... yes... all the time the buzzing... dull roar like falls... (Beckett 1990, p. 381)

The buzzing sound Mouth hears is worth commenting upon in so far as it is not only a type of annoying sound but also emblematic of the character's feeling unable to focus on the present moment with a well-constructed sense of self. As Rhys Tranter in the comprehensive book entitled as *Beckett's Late Stage: Trauma, Language and Subjectivity* points out, "In Mouth's monologue, the phrase all the time the buzzing denotes both an endless stream of words heard by the protagonist, and an inability to stabilize the present" (2016, p. 125). Furthermore, the mention of Mouth's being bothered by this sound with such a fragmented language conjures up the image of a newly-born baby devoid of a sense of self and making incogitable sounds to express his/her distress in the realm identified as semiotic chora by Kristeva. The language of Mouth is as unfathomable as the language of a baby communicating via babblings in the chora and as Tranter adds that "Language here is not recognized as language at all, but a deep and resounding noise that carries no meaningful message" (2016, p. 125).

The last incident in *Not I* that Mouth addresses locates the character at a court where she is being interrogated for an unspecified reason. What is clear in the scene is that the woman is believed to be guilty of something which she has not done indeed as Mouth says that "that time in court... what had she to say for herself... guilty or not guilty... stand up woman... speak up woman... stood there staring into space... mouth half open as usual..." (Beckett 1990, p. 381) Mouth's reference to what transpires at the court with the broken language is quickly followed by the infiltration of the traumatic scene of April into the narration again and this part of the play towards the end requires to ponder why Auditor has always been silent. The auditor is identified neither as a male nor as a female and its only reaction to what Mouth accentuates is raising arms and making a few bodily moments. However, in theoretical readings of *Not I*, especially in terms of its affinity with Kristeva's the semiotic, the Auditor is considered to be a male figure representing the language of the Father whereas Mouth represents the semiotic superseded by the symbolic. The indifference of the Auditor to the poetic language of Mouth neatly coincides with Kristeva's theory of the semiotic. As Derval Tubridy in *Samuel Beckett and the Language of Subjectivity* evinces:

The Auditor is described in the stage directions as being of indeterminable sex, but many scholars have assigned this figure a masculine gender. This assignation often results in a reading of this play as an enactment of the tension between two aspects of language, the symbolic and the semiotic. The former is represented by the figure of the Auditor who stands in the place of the Law; the latter is represented by the Mouth

the speech of which approximates the undifferentiated somatic language which undermines the symbolic language of the Law. (2018, p. 102)

When viewed from this aspect, the Auditor can be said to be cocooned within phallogocentric world whereas Mouth speaks through a symbolic discourse that represents an attempt of liberation from the world of the Auditor. An overwhelming sense of insecurity Mouth feels in the presence of the Auditor points to the existing antagonism between them especially because the Auditor is a model of the self dominated by patriarchal precepts.

### Conclusion

Samuel Beckett's experimentation with theatrical techniques, particularly with language in his dramatic oeuvre makes his readers/audiences regard him as a playwright of an innovative style. The concept of language constructed with syntactical rules as a conveyor of meaning is substituted by a fragmented language composed of incomplete phrases, sudden cuts and silence in his plays. This aspect of Beckettian drama raises critical questions as regards the readability of Beckett's works in line with the postulations of modern and postmodern or poststructuralist theorists ranging from Sigmund Freud to Julia Kristeva. The consensus of many scholars and literary critics is that his plays coincide with the theoretical perspectives of these thinkers and can be discussed in relation to the fields of ontology, linguistics, and language and subjectivity as well. The best exemplification of the extent to which Beckettian drama can be studied with theoretical framework is *Not I* published in 1972. Despite its conciseness, this play is invariably deemed as one of the most baffling works of Beckett in that it excludes a human character and presents the flow of the events through a speaking mouth and bases all of the work upon a kind of unintelligible language that evokes language of a baby. From the very first set of utterances of Mouth as a character, it is understood that what is verbalized is actually what cannot be verbalized through language dependent on grammar rules to convey clear messages. Hence, Mouth's narrative falls under the category of the narrative of trauma and all the unspecified incidents articulated by this character are transmitted into the narrative via a totally broken language lacking in clarity. When Mouth speaks, it sounds like an anguished figure trying hard to articulate primal repressions. More importantly, Mouth struggles to put into words a series of horrid experiences an old woman seems to have had throughout all her life with a sign of rejecting that these experiences are her own thereby bringing to mind Beckett's deconstruction of a sense of self in *Not I*. In other words, when Mouth does this, it gives the impression that the character aspires to articulate what comes before language acquisition or the symbolic in Kristevan terms. Mouth also sounds like a baby who is incognisant of the distinction to be made between subject and other in that respect too. Highly evocative of the musical baby language Kristeva explicates in her theory of the semiotic chora, the language of Mouth seems to operate on this realm representing the lack of the sense of I and unity with the mother. Kristeva's notion of chora fits into *Not I* and Mouth's voice as the voice of the semiotic realm resounds ever after.

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