

A Comprehensive Reading of The Confusion of The Split Identity in Samuel Beckett's "Not I"

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Abstract

This study is distinctively restricted to the study of the split identity in investigating the relationship between the character and its numerous identities as in Samuel Beckett's "Not I". It aims to find out a solution for its problematic complex of identity in various ways. This study hypothesizes that the mystification of the split identity becomes a reference to more than one identity. It also shows the character simply involves some kind of ambiguity. The character focuses on the movement that breaks the monotonous rigidity of the play. It is divided into four sections, each analyzing a topic. Finally, the study has reached some conclusions that verify the hypothesis of the study.

Keywords: *Confusion, Identity, Bekett.*

1.Introduction

1.1 Reduction and Mystification

Reduction and mystification in the field of dramatic personae becomes a common feature that apparently distinguishes Samuel Beckett's recent plays and prose works. Virtually, this disposition takes various forms ranging from using rather an abstract or a symbolic piece of décor (such as the tree in *Waiting for Godot* to substituting a whole blood- and – flesh character by a mere single organ (as the Mouth in *Not I*).

Along with this disposition, Beckett purposely intends to mystify his characterization with the aim of reducing their identity. He must have inevitably come across the semantic implication of the word ' identity', whose root trucks back to the Latin ' idem' which imports ' same' or ' sameness'. (Elovaara, 1976) Hence, Beckett has placed his characters into the process of a never-ending inferno of struggle to negotiate about the validity of their existence and then to negate any organic relationship with the only peculiar identity they belong to. He, in other words, removes all that may identify these dramatic personae. The preliminary step in this regard is the definite names which are entirely dropped from his recent plays (Beckett, 1973) or symbolically blurred as is indicated in the characters' names of the early plays. This study investigates on this feature as reviewed with regard to *Not I* (1973).

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Apparently, Beckett attaches no definite names to his dramatic characters, probably because he holds that the dramatic situation demands unnamable characters, any ambiguity, however dramatic, is intentionally created at least around the characters' names in order to render such names more flexible to controversial interpretations.

In *Not I*, his attempt of name-abolishing turns to develop into a more confusing feature by restoring to personal pronouns as a non- definite alternative. But such substitution does not suit or fit into the matrix of the play without ambiguity which is thematically justified on grounds of uncertainty of the characters' being. These characters, however, are hard at work to find out a solution for their problematic complex of identity in various ways. (Elovaara, 1976)

1.2 Beckett's Style

Beckett's style is characterized by the use of ordinary words and short sentences. His characters do not indulge in philosophical or moral arguments but they seldom soliloquize and they never preach. It focuses on movement as much as speech that is one of his main element in his plays by which Beckett keeps his characters busy. Beckett presents an experience not an argument, truth not a statement. Beckett reduces the specific to a minimum in plot and characterization. Beckett changes between the acts that do not produce a new situation. His plays are full of despair, pessimism, misery and the unnecessary complexity.

Beckett's style is shown in *Waiting for Godot*:-

Vladimir: What do you do when you fall far from help?

Pozzo: We wait till we can get up. Then we can go on.

1.3 Functions of Pronouns

Functionally, the personal pronoun is used either to refer to an antecedent noun or to substitute the noun *per se*, provided that the noun has already been mentioned. (Quirk, 1972) Yet, "*Not I*" falls short of this linguistic restriction. The pronoun determines the case of nouns in constructions where such nouns show no help in giving any clue for indication. It, therefore, enjoys the force of person- distinction. (Onions, 1971) But the failure to correspond to this rule has primarily been touched upon at the beginning of the play. (Quirk, 1972) "*Not I*" starts with introducing one visible quasi-character, a mouth. Yet another character, though invisible, seems to be present too. (Elovaara, 1976)

Beckett conspicuously refers to this second character as an Auditor, any auditor. While the Mouth is spotlighted, the Auditor is 'enveloped' in black djellaba (the Tunisian Wear). (Barter, 1974) The audience, on their part, are not given the slightest chance to see for themselves, early at the beginning whether the Mouth basically belongs to a man or a woman. It is rather referred to within the context of the play as a neutral 'it'. Only a few seconds later and through the constant tirade of the Mouth, one may become able to infer that 'it' refers to a feminine character who has absurdly shrunk into a mouth, something not completely understandable in the Beckettian tradition. However, the 'idem' or 'sameness' between the Mouth narrating and the woman narrated about, or between the neutral 'it' which never stops blabbing and the third person singular 'she', is intentionally shattered.

Indeed, the possibility of confusion in the belonging of the pronoun is very high. It originally stems from the precarious relation between the character and its numerous identifies. First and foremost, the neutral 'it' which is contextually attached to the Mouth departs widely from this attachment in the later pages of the play.

In other words, it becomes clear that 'it' would turn into a problematic feature when it leaves its neutrality; it becomes a reference to more than one identity 'the brain' as in :

(" but the brain still Still sufficiently.. oh very much so ..

at this stage.... In control.. under control to question even this.(11-12.p.9)

for on that April morning.. so it reasoned... "); ' the voice' as in

(" ... no idea what she was saying! ... till she began trying to ...

Delude herself. It was not hers at all... not her voice at all..");(13-14.p.10)

'the existence' as in (" something she had to tell.. could that be

It? ... something that would tell... how it was.. how she.. what?

... had been? Yet.. something that would tell how it had been..

How she had lived") (39-40.p.14);

'the unknown solution' as in ("hit on it in) (42-43.p.15)

These are not, J. Fletcher et al write, " the only four shifting identities which issue from the Mouth, there are others implicit in the contradictions of narrative, of time, of ability, and sensibility". (Fletcher, 1978) Yet throughout all this confusion the text aims at leading us again to the previous negation of the character to her identity or identities: ".. what? ...who? no! ... she!"

The confusion aroused because of these intermingled relationships does not go without justification. The play is primarily taken to present " an aural mosaic of words" that should involve some kind of mysteriousness. (Fletcher and Spurling, 1976) And this is not thought to be a necessary and an inevitable factor to counter-poise the manifestation of the first hearing of the play. At least part of this state of mysteriousness is satisfied through the confusion created by the pronoun-game. (Fletcher and Spurling, 1976)

More precisely, John Fletcher (a British author, 1937-), in a rather brief essay, believes that the Mouth is " Beckett's most defenseless creature; alone now, alone in the past, not attempting to justify herself, hardly even a story to tell. All the same one defense remains she speaks in the third person throughout crying suddenly at intervals in a little rush of desperation:" what? .. who ...no! ..she!" fending off the final nakedness of being 'I', therefore, confusion created by pronouns is pre-planned as the only cautious prerequisite of self-protection against the teething " buzzing in the skull". (Fletcher and Spurling, 1976)

1.4 A Comprehensive Study of Beckett's " Not I"

The play, as aforementioned, introduces a vague feminine character who, in a monologue-wise cadence, narrates of a birth experience. It, afterwards, shifts its emphasis to denying any relation whatsoever between the newly-born she- child and the Mouth which by then comes to the verge of senility age or the summary of her days on earth:

" till coming up to sixty when ... what?seventy?good God!"(p.6). This denial is simultaneously occasioned with the movement which is statistically given number one: " ...all went out ...all that early April morning light.. and she found herself in the .. what? .. who? ...no!.. she! (pause and movement)(p.7) . Besides there are some more three movements which are proportionately distributed all over the play. These all likewise given numbers two, three and four respectively. In fact, these movements are not only to break the monotonous rigidity of the play, but also they become parts of a theatrical inevitability to add a colourful touch to the play and to save it from what Martin Esslin (a dramatist, 1918-2002) has labelled " the narrative form". (Abbas, 1977) They also function in correspondence with the stage directions given by Beckett himself at the very end of the play. These stage directions read as follows: " Movement: this consists in simple sideways raising of arms from sides and falling back, in a gesture of hopeless compassion. It lessens with the recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third. There is just enough pause to conation it as Mouth recovers from vehement refusal to relinquish third person."(p.16)

Moreover, the significance of the movement and its relation to the thematic current of the play are among the numerous characteristics of Beckett's theatre.

The four movements are thematically involved to signify the high pitches of embracing no conformity amidst the problematic pronouns, i.e., 'she' and 'it' on the one hand, and 'she' and 'I' on the other. And since the first 'she-it' relation has been introduced, concentration now will be on the second, that is, on that of "she-I", because it seems that conflict is more acute between them than between any others.

Though the 'she' pronoun has frequently occurred in the play- even more than the occurrence of any other word- it seems to play a particular impetus when mentioned before any of the three movements.

The Mouth, however, was roughly involved, before the first movement, in describing a course of life that extends from the very moment of love-making up to giving birth to a she- child then to her unconscious growth to the age of seventy. Despite the shortness of this part, the audience, on their part, are able to depict the three stages of the life of this desperate waif: conception, birth and growth to an old age. For her or rather its part, the Mouth is mainly interested in the last stage; first because it is her remarkably unfamiliar stage where she breaks the iron gates of her silence or probably dumbness and explodes into this " steady stream of mad stuff" and second she can only vaguely remember her past: " parents unknown... Unheard of" (p.6) . However, the last stage seems also a reason for arousing a sense of revolt against what she really is and what probably the Auditor might think of her. Yet this revolt assumes confusion of pronouns because they may define who she is, thus destroying all the possible bridges linking the different pronouns cast before the audience.

Furthermore, the sexual intercourse which resulted in the retarded mousy child, does not indicate any gesture of previous love relationship. It happens abruptly so that it leaves the audience with very little to ponder on.

More concentration, instead was laid on the state of the newly- born infant which was described as ' speechless' and deprived of ' love of any kind.... Any any subsequent stage'. However, growth of the ' speechless infant goes on until she reaches the age of seventy which is the crucial stage or juncture of all the dark past with the whole futile and hopeless present. Yet, the woman, oy the Mouth, objects, claiming that ' she' does not necessarily correspond to, belong to or reflect ' I', in the closet sense of the word. With this assurance the Mouth catches breath only to resume the narration of the life-story of third person. And this is the introduction of the second movement.

The key to this movement is the word ' buzzing'. In this word lies the Mouth's psychodynamic problem which has probably influenced her later behaviours and was the reason of her later coming to consciousness. The Mouth, before being urged probably by the Auditor who is placed as the " other actor..., writer, director or member of the audience", concentrates on the concept of sin and punishment. (Praninskas, 1975) Though aware of the sins the Mouth does not seem to have a feeling of suffering or punishment " unless of course she was ... meant to be suffering.. ha! .. thought to be suffering" (p.8) ; she feels she is considerably numbed.

It is not the physical punishment that she is afraid of now but " that notion of punishment... for some sin or rather... or for the lot... or no particular reason, for its own sake".(p.8)

Yet the nature of either the sin or the punishment is not defined in this regard; what is of a particular interest to the Mouth now is the obsession with the notion of punishment. She, nevertheless, does not refer to a particular or real crime that she committed in the past in return for which she deserves punishment. All what she remembers now is her miserable childhood with 'other waifs'. Yet, the feeling of misery is only the outcome of a recent discovery: that she can recollect her past memories vividly and thread them together with her current and culminated misery of the present.

Now, the nagging of ' buzzing sound' in the ears or in the skull worries her. Obsessed with idea of punishment, she realizes that the buzzing sound, which may be the power of the brain to remember, has become ever throbbing. And it seems that she cannot do without it because it is displayed as the only tool that remains alive and conscious in her. Yet, with the entire awareness of the possible ' agony' or ' torment' she had or she might have had, she tries again to negate any possible, ' sameness' between the waif of the past and herself now. She has to declare this disconnection between the two different persons, i.e., pronouns, every then and while.

Here it appears that the brain, pointed out by ' it', plays an important role in indirectly juxtaposing the two pronouns of the naked being of ' I' and ' she' spoken about. This is because both ' I' and ' she' are always mentioned concomitantly and are presumably taken to have witnessed and suffered from the same past experiences. This witnessed and suffered from the same past experiences. This naturally makes any convergence between the strongly, possible. It however, becomes the reason, though not the only one, for the second revolting movement.

The brain here works and arouses a sense of feeling and pain in the female speaker, something she is terrified to have now because it stands for a failing experience to her. Therefore, she reacts against the mere recollecting of it in an attempt to obliterate it. (Graver and Raymond, 1979) So the past backed by the present powerful brain with all its intolerable obsessions becomes a vital factor that revoltingly spurs a painful refusal of self-identification. And this is because the monologue of the Mouth has gradually become or is becoming " a trial of some kind, when all that was required... of her was to say ' Guilty' or ' Not Guilty', and she stood there, her mouth half open, struck dumb. " Thus denial which culminates in establishing a basis of confusion in the reference of the pronouns has been naturally assumed as a means of self-defense.

It seems that the Mouth, despite the huge effort she exerts in acknowledge none of the things or memories described, could afford, probably unconsciously, to describe them vividly and elaborately. (Graver and Raymond, 1979)

This is its fatal mistake in the game; she has created her self- trap. Yet it seems that the ' Cartesian split' between 'she' and ' I' raises severe problems to the Mouth whose present suffering under the investigating spotlight is to speak on and on, in a confessional style, with no control on the ' stream that comes'. And while the body has lost the feeling, the mind is left capable of raving away on its own.

Yet, the huge burden was laid on the Mouth because what is mostly incriminating for her is not only the possibility of ' sameness' or striking similarity between the child and herself but also the co- existence of both. Hence, the thing that has agitated the Mouth before the second movement is, as aforementioned, the buzzing sound or the brain which on its parts is responsible for producing words that are to be articulated compulsorily by the Mouth, or other third person available. The Mouth, therefore, rejects and denies even though mechanically.

In her tirade before the third movement, the Mouth similarly concentrates on the process of the growth to old age which is characterized by unconsciousness. That is why she wonders " how she survive!". Yet it seems that she is not quite enthusiastic to recollect the past though it may involve some excitement now she can feel. She is busy now with ' this stream' which looks incomprehensible and leaves her with the problem of finding out what it means. She admits that she is" not catching the half of it ...not the quarter... no idea.. what she was saying". (p.10).

Again, ' the buzzing' keeps on, particularly at this stage of her age, nagging as if to remind her of a mystery she wants to hide altogether with her unseen body:

" whole body look gone... just the mouth".

Here she seems to lose control over the ' stream' of the Mouth which is ' like maddened and can't stop... no stopping it'. What breaks the monotony of the tempo of this movement is the Mouth's unusual

effort to reach an epiphany. The attempt, however, doesn't succeed; it seems that the 'buzzing' interferes and invokes a complete negation of any possible self-identification, although she believes that there is something she had to ...' probably reveal or tell.

The obsession with an evasive kind of guilt seems to be so overwhelming that she desires to keep it folded despite her particularly present excitement for the sudden uncontrolled ability of speaking. Here again, she goes back to the same thematic refrain of recollecting her past experience of dumbness. Yet she refers to the 'sudden flash' which seems to form the turning-point in her peculiar life. Probably, she becomes confused because of the sudden change being inflicted upon the Mouth whose articulateness is unusual at this particular era of her age. Perhaps this is the reason of her confusion and therefore mistaken identity. She was not ready, neither mentally nor psychologically, to accept her present situation.

After the fourth movement, the Mouth presents nothing of a particular significance. It is the same story of the tiny little girl who was left alone to fight against life and ironically with speechlessness. If in the third movement she mentions the 'sudden flash' which seems responsible for the extraordinary vitality of the mouth, now it is 'this' in the fourth one. However, the demonstrative here is not quite clear in its reference, owing to the fact that 'she' or the 'Mouth' is not entirely sure whether it refers to the 'sudden ability of speaking' or to the 'brain' which controls and orders the Mouth to speak.

Marking the end, probably of 'she' or the Mouth or the play the visible Mouth now specifies the nature of the 'buzzing'; it is the 'dull roar like that falls in the skull'. Yet she still has no idea what she was trying to say. At this decisive point she could not escape the chasing of an unknown and unheard investigator who has driven the same question for four times and has got the same unchanging and confirming answer which stresses the separation of two different identities, 'I' and 'she'.

Hence, though Beckett has unevasively aimed at this identity-split, he still does not manage to obliterate the indispensable organic coherence of the 'idem'.

But in response to questions like 'where are those beings?' and 'what kind of connection is there between them?'

Katharine Worth (a British academic, 1922-2015) 'wrestles' to find out that "we are forced to by an arrangement that keeps us looking across the stage at an awkward angle from the mouth without a body to the body apparently without a mouth, we are drawn pretty far into the terrible experience of dissociation Mouth tells of: how at seventy, strangely wandering in a field picking cowslips, she suddenly found herself in the dark'. (Worth, 1975)

Conclusion

The confusion of the split identity gives an easy and comprehensive understanding for the readers because the character shows some kind of mysteriousness. This study shows the movement of the pitches of the character clearly and properly to help the readers in understanding this kind of ambiguity. So the hypothesis of this study is accepted.

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