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**ABSTRACT**

*Not I* is one of Samuel Beckett's one act plays. It is a dramatic monologue played in fifteen minutes. The play commences with the mouth of a speaker alone on a dark stage, while the rest of the head and the body are removed and accompanied with an Auditor who is totally enveloped in darkness. The Mouth utters broken and meaningless utterances. Beckett wants to prove that the suffering of the man has been more than anything to be expressed by a language. Beckett uses the Mouth in darkness, an Auditor in black robe and silence more than broken language to create a dramatic communication. He makes a language out of silence and a dramatic communication out of such silence.

**Dramatic Communication in Samuel Beckett's  
Play *Not I***

***" Words are all we have"***<sup>1</sup>

Beckett's plays have extended the ways of communication in drama in unprecedented ways. They provide theatre an acute awareness of the absurdity of human existence, the futility of human action and the dullness of routine. Beckett always captures the ridiculous aspect of human life in a dramatic way and reflects it on the stage.<sup>2</sup>

Beckett considered drama the only way to achieve communication in realistic style of performance and interpretation. Beckett's works were described by himself and others as an art of impoverishment. They are nihilistic, pessimistic and depressing.

To make compelling drama, Beckett wanted drama to break, not to follow, the accepted or the traditional laws of incidents, characterization, plot, and climax on the theatrical stage. So, in *Not I* we see:

*Stage in darkness but for Mouth, upstage audience right, about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close up and below, rest of face in shadow. Invisible microphone. AUDITOR, down stage audience left, tall standing figure, sex undeterminable, enveloped from head to foot in loose black djellaba with hood, fully faintly lit, standing on invisible podium about 4 feet high shown by attitude*



*alone to be still throughout but for four brief movements.*

*As house lights down MOUTH'S voice unintelligible behind curtain. House lights out. Voice continues behind curtain 10 seconds. With rise of curtain adlibbing from text as required leading when curtain fully up and attention sufficient into.*<sup>3</sup>

On a dark space high above stage, the Mouth pours out a breathless account of a miserable life. She does not know that she is heard by the Auditor, on the opposite side. The Auditor listens and throws out his arms "in a gesture of helpless compassion". (p.1.) The Mouth refuses to acknowledge her own story that she is telling.<sup>4</sup>

In 1971, Beckett and Suzanne Dechevaux- Dumesnil, who knew Beckett slightly from his first stay in Paris, went on a holiday in Malta. There, Beckett saw an Italian artist's Michelangelo Caravaggio's painting *Decollation of St. John the Baptist*. The painting provided Beckett with the main image of *Not I*.<sup>5</sup> In *Not I*, the Mouth tells us the birth of a girl who was, as Beckett described, born a bastard and deserted by her parents and brought up in a loveless heavily religious orphanage. She was trudging around the countryside and avoiding the others.

*Busy shopping center ... supermart ... just had 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 bag in her hand ... the bag back in her hand ... then pay and go ... not as much as good-bye. (p.3)*

The Mouth's life was ordinary till seventy. She was wandering in a field, when she was seventy. Unaware of her position. Suddenly, the morning sky became dark; she saw nothing except a ray of light. She appeared in a court on some unnamed charge. Instead of speaking, she was weeping only. She was mouthing broken vowels and wanted to scream.

The Mouth did not feel pain and could not make sound. She could not hear anything except a dull buzzing in the head. The Mouth pours out a lot of words so quickly that her brain could not grasp. She sensed some revelation and her "feeling was coming back . . ." (p.3) to her body but not to her numb heart. At the beginning, we saw the Mouth speechless, but she can't stop talking at the end. The story is entirely told in the third person. The speaker repeats the same words but with rising horror: 'what?.. who?.. no!..she!.. SHE!' (p.5). She does not want to utter the pronoun 'I' because it refers to wilderness of a life and the life which is hers alone. The Mouth

## Kirkuk University Journal- Humanity Studies

talks to herself as “*machine...so disconnected*” (p.2) from sense and speech.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike other plays, the dramatic structure of *Not I* is determined by the brief pauses in which the Auditor moves his arms in “*helpless compassion*” (p.1). The first section is a minute. It begins with unintelligible fragments. It continues till the Auditor’s first pause. Section two lasts for four minutes. It describes the basic situation. Section three is longer than the previous. It lasts for five minutes in which the Mouth realizes “*words were coming*” (p.3). Section four lasts one and a half minutes only. It is the section of most desperate anguish. Section five has the same length as section four in addition to the pronoun of the climax ‘*SHE*’(p.5). After a few repeated fragments are heard, the voice fades to be unintelligible again. While the sections of the play last for eleven and a half minutes, the brief pauses last for three and a half minutes.<sup>7</sup>

In speaking about the woman of the Mouth, Beckett stated:

*I knew that woman in Ireland, I know who she was- not ‘she’ specifically, one single woman, but there were no so many of these old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And, I heard ‘her’ saying what I wrote in Not I. I actually heard it.*<sup>8</sup>

The character of the Auditor (who is played by a male) wears a black robe and can be dimly seen on the left of the stage. Later on, Beckett found that he is unable to fix a place for the Auditor on a stage position. At the end, he accepted to omit the character from the productions but not from the text.<sup>9</sup> As a result of that, in 1986 Beckett wrote to two American directors telling them:

*He [The Auditor] is very difficult to stage (light-position) and may well be of more harm than good. For me, the play needs him but I can do without him. I have never seen him function effectively.*<sup>10</sup>

To create a superior communication on stage, Beckett placed the Mouth and the Auditor in contrast to each other in a total blackness. The Auditor seems to move on the sideways, floats, and changes size or shape. Throughout the play, the Auditor is intended on the Mouth as well as it (the Auditor) is the cause of Mouth’s existence and anguish. The Mouth is not a character or even a reduced one. It is the producer and consumer of the words. It is a physical Mouth controlled by the brain. She articulates the words which are produced by the brain.<sup>11</sup>

## Kirkuk University Journal- Humanity Studies

One of Beckett's assumptions is that the play should necessarily strip and show all of its contents since the first encounter. To enhance the dramatic communication in *Not I*, Beckett links breathless pace with the incoherence of the character's thoughts. The play has nothing definite to state about society or the universe around her in which the Mouth spins out her existence. She is talking in voices never heard before in drama. The play has no action except compassion to be expressed through communication.<sup>12</sup>

The dramatic communication in *Not I* is unlike dramatic communication in other plays. It is not based on dramatic dialogue between characters, but is based on the Mouth's rapid uttering of short phrases accompanied by the Auditor's raising arms. Beckett wants the words to be spoken so quickly with half broken and rather incomprehensible vowels to the audience to introduce a distinguished and an untraditional communication. To form a realistic communication, the Mouth does not use metaphorical words in her storytelling; on the contrary, she uses words which constitute actual shape of life in her consciousness from birth to something like death. Like Beckett's other characters, the Mouth must not only be accepted, but also talked about. The audience look at the Mouth a "*whole body like gone ... just the mouth ... stream of words ... no idea but she's saying*" (p.3)

In order to make metaphors something recognizable not only textual, metaphorically and metonymically, Beckett uses unwritten metaphors like "*darkness*" and "*Mouth*" (P.1). Beckett uses a lot of contrasts new techniques of communication. He used silence vs. sound, darkness vs. light, whiteness of the teeth vs. the darkness of the stage. He also uses the lack of activities instead of interaction, absence of the bodies instead of presenting them, and the Mouth instead of the rest of the body.<sup>13</sup>

Beckett uses the pronoun 'She' in *Not I* more than other words except the definition article to identify the Mouth's sex. The events that the Mouth narrates are in the past tense, but they have relations to the present time. The brain raves and the Mouth rants phrases without stopping ; even we do not know the beginning and the end of the phrases. They move from past tense to the present and from birth to the age of seventy which recurs. The play has a tension between what is told in the past and the experience of the present. Instead of using meaningful utterances to communicate, the Mouth utters the following broken and meaningless utterances "*now this stream ... steady stream... not catching half of it ... not the quarter ... no idea ... what was she saying*" (p.3)<sup>14</sup>

Beckett makes darkness an expressive media of communication more than light. The Mouth narrates her sufferings, which are as dark as the stage, that are heard by the dark dressed listener, the Auditor. The audience listen

to the Mouth in darkness while they are also surrounded with four dark walls.

The play has a fabric language. It has a process of continuing thoughts with the sudden jump of the brain to cut the process from objective sophistication to the colloquial expression. The script has a lot of repetitions; like repetition of phrases and concepts which are differently expressed "*and a ray of light came and went ... came and went...what position she was in!... whether standing ... or sitting... but the brain- what? Kneeling?... yes...whether standing ... or sitting ... or kneeling ... but the brain- what? Lying?... yes... whether standing ... or sitting... or kneeling*" (pp.1-2). The play does not repeat the same phrases or words only, but it also shifts and adds new words as well as new information to keep the continuity of the play.

One of the Mouth's linguistic strategies is that she tries to avoid 'I' as the only way to avoid pain Murphy stated that Beckett hated the pronoun 'I' and referred to it as '*cursed first person*'.<sup>15</sup> The Mouth speaks to herself. She insists on being away from 'I' to release her suffering. Beckett stated '*I shall not say I again, ever again*'.<sup>16</sup>

The Mouth tries to make a connection between her past and future, so the play is an expression of the difficulties that the Mouth has in comprehending her past and an apprehension of her future. The Mouth tries to make a communication with her surroundings through language; but she can't do that since her language is the product of an anguished brain.<sup>17</sup>

In an interview with the *Sunday Times* 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1973, Billie Whitelaw, the actress who played the role of the Mouth at the Royal Court Theatre, stated:

*It goes this tremendous pace, I have been practicing saying words at a tenth of a second, I could see myself spelling them out like an Olympics clock. No one can possibly follow the text at that speed, but Beckett insists that I must speak it precisely. It's like music, a piece of Schoenberg in his head.*<sup>18</sup>

The futility of action and the meaningless language are the main themes in *Not I*. Beckett wanted the techniques of the theatre to communicate more than the broken language.<sup>19</sup> In his definitional study on absurdism, Martin Esslin wrote:

*The theatre of the Absurd... tends towards a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself. The element of language still plays an important*



*part in this conception, but what happens on the stage transcends and often contradicts the words spoken by the characters.*<sup>20</sup>

*Not I* is also a drama of non-action. There is nothing to change, the Mouth wants to “*try something else*” (p.4). Beckett wants to show us that nothing happens except the words. The tongue, teeth, lips and the Mouth are the only things that can be seen but not the eyes, nose and chin. The play gives a new meaning to soliloquy.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Beckett’s other plays, *Endgame*, for instance, *Not I* has an extent to which the Mouth is individualized, the code is cracked, and the stream of consciousness is channelled to make a shocking communication. So, the play is a hard and pessimistic one. In *Endgame*, we have Hamm’s room which is the same, a dying man’s skull, the family heart, society and the planet Earth, all these force the spectator to increase his poor and bewildered wits over four or five levels at once. Unlike *Endgame*, in *Not I* the stage is barrenly furnished human mind and the barest scratch on the dark glass which is the only way through which Beckett wanted to survey society.<sup>22</sup>

In *Not I*, Beckett wanted to find new ways of communication equivalent or better than the oral utterances. The speaker is not well heard and not answered at all. The absent voices of the script can work better than the present voices.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Through *Not I*, Beckett wanted to prove that dramatic extracts are not the only means of communication on the stage. Everything on the stage can create a communication. He wanted the stage to produce a communication better than the dramatic script since we have broken utterances. In *Not I*, the black stage has the power to communicate, the Mouth desires to communicate. The Auditor also raises “*his arms in compassion*” to communicate. As a result, the audience must have the ability to communicate and comprehend what is going on the stage.

### **NOTE**

1. Nancy White , *Writing Power*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster,2001), p.290.

2. Wikipedia Encyclopedia, *Samuel Beckett: Not I* , [URL:\\www.Wikipedia Encyclopedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia Encyclopedia.com).2008.

3. Samuel Beckett, *Not I* , [URL:\\www.Samuel-Beckett.net](http://www.Samuel-Beckett.net).2008. Subsequent references to this cite will appear in this text.

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4. Marry Luckhurst, ed. *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama :1880-2005* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), p. 244.
5. David Pattie, *The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2000), p.43.
6. L. Graver and R. Federman, eds. *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, (New York: Taylor and Francis Library publishing, 2005), pp.370-71.
7. Berly S. Fletcher, John Fletcher, and Barry Smith, *A Student Guide to the plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber Publication, 1978), pp.194-95.
8. Pattie, p. 43.
9. C. J. Ackerley, and S. E. Gontarski, eds. *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber Publication, 2000), p. 411.
10. Fletcher et al., pp. 193-94.
11. Graver and Federman, pp.372-73.
12. Tia Ballantine, *To and From in Shadow: Not I* , [URL:\\www.Samuel Beckett Apmonia. com](http://www.SamuelBeckettApmonia.com).2008, pp.2-4.
13. Ibid, p.5.
14. Fletcher et al., pp. 196- 97.
15. Vincent J. Murphy “*Being and Perception: Beckett’s Film*” *Modern Drama*, No. 18. (1975), p. 44.
16. Samuel Beckett, *Trilogy*, (London: Calder Publication, 1994), p. 358.
17. Katherine Kelly “*The Orphic Mouth in Not I*” *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No.6.(1980), pp.65.
18. Berly S. Fletcher, John Fletcher, and Barry Smith, p. 197.
19. Stephaine Arnold, *The Creative Spirit: An Introduction to Theatre*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (California: Mayfield Publishing, 2001), p.194.
20. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Penguin Press, 1988), p.26.
21. Michael Alexander, *A History of English Literature* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), p.363.
22. Graver and R. Federman, p. 373.
23. Elizabeth Barry, *Beckett and Authority: The Use of Cliché* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2006), pp.156-57.

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### التواصل الدرامي في مسرحية صموئيل بيكيت "لست أنا"

تاج الدين صلاح الدين نوري

مدرس مساعد

جامعة كركوك / كلية التربية

### الخلاصة

مسرحية "لست أنا" هي من أكثر مسرحيات بيكيت غرابة وطرافة في التجريب. وهي عبارة عن منولوج درامي لمدة ١٥ دقيقة. المسرحية تحتوي على فم واحد لشخصية واحدة فقط وبدون رأس وجسم على مسرح مظلم. في الجهة الأخرى هناك مستمع في الظلام وهو مغلف بالظلام أيضا. على مدار المسرحية، يتفوه الفم بلغة يعوزها التماسك وبدون معنى. أراد



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بيكيت من خلال هذه المسرحية أن يبرهن بان معاناة الإنسان أصبحت أكثر من أن تعبر بأية لغة. يستخدم بيكيت في هذه المسرحية فما في الظلام ومستمعا بعباءة سوداء وصمت أكثر من اللغة كوسيلة للتواصل الدرامي. إذا، في هذه المسرحية أراد بيكيت أن يخلق من الصمت لغة، ومن هذه السكتات اللغوية وسيلة للتواصل .