

Word, Self, and Silence in Samuel Beckett

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Abstract

The article focuses on the relationship between language and self in Samuel Beckett and explores how the writer both represents and undermines the concept of self as contingent on words. Issuing from the ego and ultimately leading to the ego, language in Beckett is arbitrary and tautological, and solipsism seems to be the inevitable result. Beckett shares a deep skepticism of language with such philosophers as Fritz Mauthner and Ludwig Wittgenstein. It is however difficult, if not outright impossible, to determine the degree of influence that their ideas might have had on Beckett. Rather than rigorously using them as theoretical bases which might serve as a key to ‘unlocking’ Beckett, the article eclectically makes use of them, seeing them as springboards for a better understanding of his work. The article also discusses how Beckett transcends the idea of solipsism. In his plays and prose works there is a radical annihilation of the self, and the concept of a unified ego is undermined. Several characters/narrators/voices speak with a voice they cannot claim as their own and often they do not even relate to themselves with the pronoun ‘I’. Since language is an arbitrary and inadequate system, silence seems to be the inevitable result and, possibly, escape.

Keywords: self; solipsism; silence; the unnamable; the unsayable; critique of language

I

Language and self are inextricably linked in the works of the most important twentieth-century writers and their interrelationship is a major concern with most modernist and post-modernist writers. The creation of a self with and through language occupies a central position in Samuel Beckett’s literary oeuvre and his critical writings. His works significantly transformed the landscape of literature in the twentieth century by undermining the ways readers approach literary texts. In Beckett, the very concept of selfhood is deconstructed and the unraveling of the layers of being open up to nothingness and the void. He defines language as a ‘veil’

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which should be ‘torn apart’ in order to get to that ‘something or nothing’ behind it. (qtd. in Fehsenfeld 2009: 518) Therefore, his whole oeuvre might be regarded as a critique of language in that it is constantly probing and pushing the limits of the sayable.

In this probing of the limits and limitations of language, Beckett shares many concerns with those writers and philosophers who have shown skepticism about language as an adequate means of communication. Such philosophers as Fritz Mauthner and Ludwig Wittgenstein were especially skeptical of the existence of a stable relationship between language and reality and their writings—especially those of Wittgenstein, with Mauthner remaining a relatively obscure source—exerted considerable influence in the twentieth-century history of ideas. Several articles and book chapters are devoted to whether Beckett’s attitude on language was conditioned and shaped by the ideas of the two philosophers or whether, without denying the author’s familiarity with these concepts, their impact was marginal to Beckett’s worldview. It should be noted, however, that this article’s objective is not the exploration of those philosophical ideas per se, but only insofar as they prove valuable when analyzing Beckett’s work. Thus the premise of the article is not to start from Wittgenstein or Mauthner’s theories and to try to find examples from Beckett’s oeuvre which serve to illustrate these theories. Instead, this article draws attention to Beckett’s attitude towards language and tentatively suggests points in common his work might have with the two philosophers’ *sprachkritik*. It is undeniable that many of the ideas of Mauthner and Wittgenstein are also a major preoccupation in Beckett and these considerations are inevitably linked with his concept of self. The exploration of self through and beyond language will also be dealt with in the second and third part of the article. It should be noted from the very start, nonetheless, that the philosopher in Beckett was always subordinate to the artist. His works are *sui generis* and are first and foremost artistic products, in which, philosophical ideas—which are variegated and might include those of Heraclitus, Descartes, Geulincx, Kant, Berkeley, Husserl, or Mauthner—can only be cautiously traced. Rather than asserting that Beckett’s works have clear references to these various philosophical ideas the reader might only detect their echoes and shadows in his literary works. Consequently, to steadfastly persevere in making it a point that such and such philosophy is the key to getting at the meaning behind Beckett is to be wide of mark.

It is necessary to give a brief overview of a number of critical works that have dealt with the ‘language problem’ in Beckett’s oeuvre. From such early readers and critics of Beckett as Martin Esslin onwards there has been a growing and renewed interest in this realm of Beckett criticism. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon state that Beckett’s reading of Wittgenstein not only ‘affirmed his own views and purposes’ but also served to ‘embolden’ his skeptical attitude towards language (qtd. in Furlani 2015: 66). Van Hulle also writes about the possible influence of Mauthner’s *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (*Contributions to a Critique of Language*) on Beckett’s linguistic skepticism and gives a list of critical works that have treated similarities between Mauthner’s ideas and Beckett, some of which will also be treated here (Van Hulle 2011: 210–211). In her article ‘Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language’, Linda Ben-Zvi gives a useful account of these similarities and all references to Mauthner here have been taken from Ben-Zvi and Gershon Weiler’s work. An interesting debate between Jenny Skerl and Ben-Zvi followed the publication of Ben-Zvi’s article. Skerl focuses on Beckett’s novel *Watt* and claims that Ben-Zvi ‘[had failed] to point out that Beckett first becomes a ‘Mauthnerian’ artist in *Watt*’. In her reply, Ben-Zvi however cautions against any such pigeonholing of Beckett’s works (Van Hulle 2011: 225–226). Suggesting that critics depart from the verifiability method when analyzing Beckett, Matthew Feldman has drawn attention to the historical contextualization of facts, that is, archival facts, in Beckett studies. He warns critics against setting out to find ‘verifications’ of their own preferred theory or system in the works of Beckett, a method which, after all, aims to corroborate the validity of the theory they start with. Bruno Clément expresses the same concern when, referring to Beckett criticism in the last two-three decades, declares that ‘modern criticism is making the work of Beckett do what they want it to do.’ (120) Feldman, for instance, challenges Ben-Zvi’s theory that Beckett had already come into contact with Mauthner’s work as early as 1929 and, by following the archival evidence, including Beckett’s manuscripts and letters, favors a much later date: 1938. (Feldman 2006a: 377–382) He, however, affirms that ‘Mauthner’s hand in Beckett’s literary development is unequivocal.’ (Feldman 2006b: 144).

It is not easy to throw light on any affinity Beckett might have with Mauthner and Wittgenstein, considering that the writer himself was reticent and reluctant to elucidate his work. John Pilling traces the possible

evidence that might link Beckett with Mauthner. Pilling opens his article 'Beckett and Mauthner Revisited' by asking the question: 'How much did Beckett actually owe to Mauthner?' (Gontarski 2006: 159). He shows that Beckett had read whole passages from Mauthner to Joyce when both writers met in Paris. Pilling however modified his stance concerning Mauthner's influence on Samuel Beckett by dismissing it as 'little more than a ghost for Beckett.' (165) Beckett himself has given hints of having read Mauthner in his novel *Watt* and in his radio piece *Rough for Radio II*, in which the author mentions his name. Van Hulle also refers to the 'Whoroscope' notebook in which Beckett jotted down a phrase from Mauthner as well as Beckett's typed notes preserved at Trinity College Dublin (Van Hulle 2011: 210, 218). His knowledge of Wittgenstein's ideas and their impact on his work is also a disputable matter, considering that Beckett himself declared that he came into contact with his work as late as the year 1961, when he had already written his best-known prose and theater works (Fletcher: 87–88). Finding affinities between Beckett and Wittgenstein or Mauthner is further complicated by the relationship between the two philosophers: Wittgenstein attacked Mauthner's views on language. It might be argued, however, that for all his dissociation from Mauthner, Wittgenstein is indebted to Mauthner's emphasis upon critique of language as the ultimate purpose of philosophy. This article however does not undertake a discussion of the differences between Mauthner and Wittgenstein, a task that is better left to experts in philosophy. What is pertinent here is what these two philosophers have in common: their skepticism of language and their common belief that, unless the fundamental issues related to language are explored, one can never achieve meaningful insight into philosophy. It is this aspect of their thought that will be of use here. What Beckett shares with the two philosophers is their insistence on querying the limits and efficiency of language. This was the fundamental question that all philosophers should put to themselves before trying to solve whatever philosophical issues they set out to analyze. Furlani writes that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* 'could offer to Beckett the most auspicious philosophical corroboration of what he regarded as the mandate of the arts, to run up against the limits of language' (Furlani 2015: 71–72). Probing the boundaries, tautologies, and inadequacies of language would inevitably lead them to a radical skepticism of language and, ultimately, to silence, a topic which is discussed in the third and last part of the article.

II

Sometimes Beckett's characters endow words with personal meaning. Even though the characters are aware of the shared meaning of the words they exchange, conversations in Beckett's plays often sound more like parallel monologues than real conversations. The solipsistic shell hinders any possibility of a language that is mutually intelligible and that could serve as a common ground of understanding. Mrs Rooney in the radio play *All That Fall* clearly expresses this plight. She asks her husband: 'Do you find anything ... bizarre about my way of speaking? [...]' [Pause.] No, I mean the words. [Pause. More to herself.] I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very ... bizarre' (Beckett 1990a: 173). And later in the play the dialogue between Mr and Mrs Rooney follows in the same vein:

MRS ROONEY: No, no, I am agog, tell me all, then we shall press on and never pause, never pause, till we come safe to haven.

[Pause.]

MR ROONEY: never pause ... safe to haven ... Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.

MRS ROONEY: Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating.

MR ROONEY: I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying. (Beckett 1990a: 194)

According to Mauthner, people cannot ascribe the same meaning to words, first, because words emerge out of individual experiences and, second, because words are, at best, only metaphorical representations of previous sense experiences. Thus, even though people assume that they communicate with one another, this is not the case since they are not thinking about the same thing even when using the same words (Ben-Zvi 1980: 195). Mauthner maintains that '[o]ne cannot be sure that any word is used by someone else in the same sense,' (Weiler 1958: 82) thereby confirming the idea of a self unable to communicate, closed in a solipsistic shell.

However, arguably, the very act of communication of solipsism paradoxically refutes the very basis of solipsism. Referring to Beckett's

novella *Company*, Furlani maintains that Beckett finds a way out of solipsism precisely by following ‘a Wittgensteinian route’ and that this whole process entails ‘an encounter’, one which ‘textuality multiplies’ (Furlani 2012: 47). Beckett’s characters, especially those of his later works, are never alone, since they are always in the company of words. Thus there is a contradiction between the professed uncommunicability of the ‘I’ on the one hand, and the very act of communication which negates that uncommunicability on the other. Ultimately it is this negation of uncommunicability that seems to relieve the gloom and impasse in Beckett’s work. There is, however, much in Beckett that counters this idea. In *The Unnamable*, for instance, the solipsistic shell is impermeable:

The whole world is here with me. I’m the air, the walls, the walled-in one. Everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows. Like flakes. I’m all these flakes [...] Wherever I go I find me, leave me, go towards me, come from me: nothing ever but me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray. (Beckett 1965: 335)

It’s I who am doing this to me, I who am talking about me [...] there’s someone there, someone talking to you (about you, about him). Then a second, then a third. [...] Then all three together [...] talking to you (about you, about them) [...] Then they depart, one by one, and the voice goes on. It’s not theirs: they were never there. There was never anyone but you, talking to you about you. (Beckett 1965: 343)

Mauthner and Wittgenstein are skeptical of language being an adequate system of representation. Wittgenstein’s philosophical thought altered significantly from his earlier work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to his later influential *Philosophical Investigations*. In *Tractatus* Wittgenstein affirms that words grouped in sentences correspond to objects. Every single sentence refers to a single object. But in *Philosophical Investigations*, he refutes this idea by claiming that there is no essential link between words and objects. Here he affirms that words do not have well-defined meanings but only uses. He, moreover, adds that misunderstanding originates because of the incorrect use of language and that before trying to solve philosophical problems, philosophers should be concerned about the language they use. For Wittgenstein, most of the philosophical issues arise out of the incorrect uses of language and inaccurate linguistic formulation. Thus, these philosophical problems ‘result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language’ and he declares that ‘all philosophy is a “Critique of language”’ (Wittgenstein 2001: 4.0031). Similarly, in his monograph on Proust,

Beckett asserts that that ‘the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic’ and that ‘art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication.’ (*Proust*: 46–47). Characters in Beckett find it very difficult to use language. In *Endgame* Clov tells Hamm: ‘I use the words you taught me. If they don’t mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.’ (Beckett 1990b: 414). The struggle with and for words is one of the foremost concerns in Beckett and, in a way, all of his works represent ‘a critique of language.’

Commenting on this distrust of language that Beckett shares with Mauthner and Wittgenstein, Lawrence Harvey writes that Beckett opts for a ‘literature of the unword’ (433). In his *Critique of Language* Mauthner writes:

In the Beginning was the Word. With the word, men stand at the beginning of their insight into the world, and if they stay with the word they’ll stop there. He who wishes to move on [...] must try to redeem the world from the tyranny of language. (qtd. in Ben-Zvi 1980: 187)

Beckett, too, wishes to go beyond the limits of the word. In his works he explores what lies beyond words or before words, a move which leads to silence. Beckett aims at dethroning language from the favorable position it has traditionally occupied and at freeing himself from its tyranny. Both Beckett and Mauthner believe that the linguistic system must not be a priori accepted as an adequate and natural system of cognition and representation. According to Mauthner, ‘[h]e who sets out to write a book with a hunger for words, with a love of words [...] in the language of yesterday or of today or of tomorrow [...] cannot undertake the task of liberation from language.’ (qtd. in Ben-Zvi 1980: 183) He goes on to propose what we can do in order to liberate ourselves from the trap of language: ‘I must destroy language within me, in front of me, and behind me step for step if I want to ascend in the critique of language, which is the most pressing task for thinking man; I must shatter each rung of the ladder by stepping upon it.’ (qtd. in Ben-Zvi 1980: 187). In a letter to Axel Kaun, Beckett expresses the same idea propounded by Mauthner. Beckett proclaims the need to abuse language:

More and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it. [...] It is to be hoped the time will come [...] when language is best used where it is most efficiently abused.

Since we cannot dismiss it all at once, at least we do not want to leave anything undone that may contribute to its disrepute. To drill one hole after another into [language] until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through. (in Fehsenfeld 2009: 518)

Indeed Beckett explores this ‘something or nothing’ that stands behind or beyond language in almost all of his works. This attempt to come to terms with that ‘something or nothing’ is a topic that has attracted much discussion in the critical works on Beckett and one which remains open to various interpretations. The contradictory idea is that on the one hand the ‘I’, or the ego, is only found in words or is made of words, while, on the other, that ego transcends words, so that language ultimately veils and distances. Thus the narrator in *The Unnamable* cries: ‘No need of a mouth: the words are everywhere, inside me, outside me. [...] I hear them? No need to hear them, no need of a head. Impossible to stop them [...] I’m in words, made of words [...]’ and ‘[...] with regard to me, that it has not yet been our good fortune to establish with any degree of accuracy what I am, where I am: whether I am words among words, or silence in the midst of silence [...]’ (Beckett 1965: 335). Thus not only are words the sole means to express the very elusive ‘I’ but this ‘I’ is wholly made of words and can only be found in words. Words encapsulate, enshroud the ‘I’ or, rather, the ‘I’ is a non-existent entity and can only form an identity of itself through words. Language is what constitutes the ‘I’ and, ultimately, there seems to be no escape from the tyranny of words. Molloy in the eponymous novel says: ‘Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten’ (Beckett 1965: 29).

For Ruby Cohn, the narrator of *The Unnamable* is ‘in the search for a language to pinpoint himself, even while yearning for and rejecting a self beyond language.’ (185). This is what the speaker in *Text 10* of *Texts for Nothing* says:

Me, here, if they could open, those little words, open and swallow me up, perhaps that is what has happened [...] It’s not me, it can’t be me. [...] all I say will be false and to begin with not said by me, here I’m a mere ventriloquist’s dummy, I feel nothing, say nothing, he holds me in his arms and moves my lips with a string, with a fish-hook [...] (Beckett 1995: 122)

Here Beckett moves beyond a solipsistic account of self towards an annihilation of the 'I', which is swallowed up by words. *Text II* shows the failure to connect with the 'I': 'I don't speak to him any more, I don't speak to me any more, I have no one left to speak to' (Beckett 1995: 130), whereas in *The Unnamable* the narrator asserts: 'There is no one but me. (Here I mean: elsewhere is another matter. I was never elsewhere, here is my only elsewhere.) It's I who do this thing and I who suffer it' (Beckett 1965: 352). This failure to connect with the self often leads these characters to speak with a voice which they cannot claim as their own and thus they do not even refer to themselves with the pronoun 'I.' In Beckett's theater piece *Not I*—the very title of which indicates this distancing of the voice from the self—the protagonist-mouth is severed from her ego and always refers to herself in the third person. There is no question here of trying to communicate one's inner self to the Other, the woman in *Not I* cannot even come to terms with an idea of selfhood:

all dead still but for the buzzing ... when suddenly she realized ... words were—what? who? ..no! .. she! [...] realized words were coming ... [...] a voice she did not recognize ... so long since it had sounded ... then finally had to admit ... could be none other ... than her own [...] not catching the half of it ... not the quarter ... 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 1990d: 379)

Similarly, in the other highly experimental play *That Time*, one of the three voices that talk to the protagonist—who remains speechless throughout and whose head is everything we see on stage—asks him: '*did you every say I to yourself in your life come on now (Eyes close.) could you ever say I to yourself in your life*' (Beckett 1990e: 390).

This quest for a/the voice is a major concern in many of Beckett's prose works and theater pieces. The voice is ambiguous in that it is at times within and at other times without: the voice seems to be the narrator's but, as often happens, the narrator disclaims any association with it and ascribes it to a 'he' or 'they'. In *The Unnamable* the narrator talks about the voice, which

issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls. It is not mine. I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none: I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know. It's round that I must revolve, of that I must speak - with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me. (Beckett 1965: 252)

The voice belongs to the narrator and issues from him but paradoxically, at the same time, it is not his. It is not '[his] but can only be [his]'. The quest for this ambivalent voice which is often split in many voices can be seen as the quest for a self, for an 'I', which, as already stated above, will forever remain elusive and beyond reach. That is the reason why the narrator forcefully enunciates that 'I shall not say "I" again, ever again, it's too farcical. I shall put in its place, whenever I hear it, the third person' (Beckett 1965: 301). Vowing that he will never use that pronoun anymore, he exclaims: 'enough of this cursed first person: it is really too red a herring' (Beckett 1965: 288). The antinomian condition seems to be such that self (or being) is perceived both as a subject from which the voice issues and an object, reified and dissociated.

Characters in such early plays as *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame* engage in verbal exchanges that are merely verbal games. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein asserts that words are tools and they function as games and, as such, they have definite rules. The dialogues between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* do not follow the common and expected patterns of dialogues but seem more like stylized word games. Trying to pass the time while waiting for Godot, the two protagonists, after unsuccessfully playing 'Pozzo and Lucky', begin a new game, composed wholly of words and role playing:

VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON: (Turning simultaneously.) Do you—

VLADIMIR: Oh, pardon!

ESTRAGON: Carry on.

VLADIMIR: No no, after you.

ESTRAGON: No no, you first.

VLADIMIR: I interrupted you.

ESTRAGON: On the contrary.

(*They glare at each other angrily.*)

VLADIMIR: Ceremonious ape!

ESTRAGON: Punctilious pig!

VLADIMIR: Finish your phrase, I tell you!

ESTRAGON: Finish your own!

(*Silence. They draw closer, halt.*)

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's abuse each other. (Beckett 1990f: 70)

And after they 'abuse' one another, the word game follows another direction and they 'make it up'. The function of conversation as a means of communicating messages is totally undermined and resembles a well-known and often-performed routine or ritual that both characters know full well. Dialogue, conventionally seen as one of the most important elements of playwriting, is turned into hollow and absurd role-playing in which both motivation and a cause and effect relationship are thoroughly lacking. When discussing the main features of the absurd in literature, Martin Esslin writes that 'the dialogue itself [...] again and again breaks down because no truly dialectical exchange of thought occurs in it [...] In a purposeless world that has lost its ultimate objectives, dialogue [...] becomes a mere game to pass the time.' (45).

Even though language is inadequate and insufficient, words are the only thing people have: 'all words, there's nothing else', says the narrator of *The Unnamable* (Beckett 1965: 414). Beckett's characters feel a compulsion to talk. The 'I' requires verification and they can only do that through language. This endeavor is however doomed to fail. Yet, they constantly resort to this means—the only one at their disposal. The paradox of believing that language is inadequate and, at the same time, of resorting to it as the only means of expression was one that Beckett could have found in both Wittgenstein and Mauthner. Such theater pieces as *Not I* or *Rockaby* attest to this paradox. In *Happy Days* the protagonist, Winnie, muses: 'What would I do without them, when words fail? (*Pause.*) Gaze before me, with compressed lips. (*Long pause while she does so.*) I cannot.' (Beckett 1990c: 162). The narrator in *The Unnamable* proclaims that, '[t]hat's all words, they're all I have - and not many of them: the words fail, the voice fails.' (Beckett 1965: 364), while in another passage, doubting that the voice might even be his own, he utters these words: 'and

how it happens (if it's I who speak - and it may be assumed it is, as it may be suspected it is not), how it happens [...] that I speak without ceasing, that I long to cease, that I can't cease' (Beckett 1965: 337).

The compulsiveness to talk is masterly expressed in the play *Not I*, in which the female protagonist pours an incessant flow of words. Her mouth is the only thing appearing on stage—simultaneously a protagonist and a setting. From her disjointed and incoherent outpourings, the audience gathers that she has lost the faculty of speaking normally. In those cases in which she does speak, the result is an interminable logorrhea. Another example of such compulsive outpourings is the pseudoscientific speech Lucky delivers in *Godot*. This is taken to an extreme in Beckett's *Play*, in which the three parallel monologues of the three protagonists (who may be dead now and whose heads appear from three separate urns in which they are embedded) continue even after their death. These are not the only instances in which readers and theatergoers are faced with this sort of interminable stream of words that the characters-voices cannot seem to stop. Theater pieces such as *That Time*, *Happy Days*, as well as most of Beckett's prose works are also similar in that respect and readers are unable to tell whether what they read is a speech or whether they are inside the characters' mind, in a kind of interior monologue. Mauthner's proposition that thinking and speaking are the same thing and that men 'all believe they themselves think, when actually they only speak' comes to mind here. Mauthner opposes this commonly-held postulate by boldly declaring that 'there is no thinking without speaking, i.e., without words. There is no thinking, there is only speaking.' (qtd. in Ben-Zvi 1980: 188).

Mauthner declares that even though the self is at the center of innumerable sense perceptions, which, at every single moment vie for its attention, only one perception is possible at any single moment so that,

the ego in 'I am' would be lost again if I did not have a memory of the fact [...] that *I was*. Thus, my ego plunges from the full of life of the present into the black nothing of the past in order to find itself. And he who wants to clarify to himself this most common process either stands unconscious and silent or must erect bogeys of words as if he were a philosopher. (Ben-Zvi 1980: 192)

Thus the self verifies its own selfhood through memory, an idea which Beckett also found in Proust. But memory can only be shaped through words since words are the only means people have to resort to the repository of memory, which would eventually assist them in creating a

sense of identity. Considering the (in)ability of words to express the reality, memory, too, appears as an uncertain and insecure agency in this attempt at shaping self. Often characters in Beckett try to hold on to memory, and through memory, to reach an understanding of and confirmation of an elusive self. Vladimir and Estragon desperately try to give a sense to their existence and cling to memory in order to substantiate their selves. Godot's messenger Boy appears first in Act I, and after reappearing in Act II, he seems to have no recollection of having met Vladimir and Estragon. Before leaving, there follows this exchange between Vladimir and the Boy:

BOY: What am I to tell Mr Godot, sir?

VLADIMIR: Tell him ... [He hesitates] ... tell him you saw me and that ... [He hesitates] ... that you saw me.

[Pause.] [...] With sudden violence.] You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me! (Beckett 1990f: 86)

Unable to find that anchor that would give coherence to self in memory, Beckett's characters can only resort to erecting 'bogeys of words'. Words are all they have to talk about the past, to retrieve it or (re)create it, in order to find in it a foundation for their present and future. One can certainly find here an analogy between Beckett and Mauthner and the latter's discrediting of memory as something which serves as a grounding for reaching a cognition of self. Weiler states that '[t]he ego, as a kind of substance, does not exist. The ego is nothing but memory [...] and this in turn equals to reason and that to language' (Weiler 1958: 81). This is a circle from which it is unable to break out of—memory is words and words (language) are inevitably tautological.

III

Joyce obviously had an influence on young Beckett, until the younger writer decided to take a different path. Beckett's biographer James Knowlson notes that Beckett called this a 'revelation', since he understood his own 'folly' in following Joyce's method. In Beckett's authorized biography, Knowlson cites Beckett from one of their conversations in which he revealed that 'Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always

adding to it', whereas Beckett had 'realised that [his] own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding' (qtd. in Knowlson 1997: 319). Beckett calls Joyce's art the 'apotheosis of the word' (Oppenheim 2000: 47), while his own way was going to be that of skepticism towards the word and radical minimalism. In an interview, Beckett asserts that while Joyce tended 'toward omniscience and omnipotence', he saw himself as working with 'impotence, ignorance', exploring 'that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unuseable—as something by definition incompatible with art.' (qtd. in Uhlmann 2006: 56).

Since, as discussed in the first two parts of the article, in Beckett language is inadequate, linguistic utterances are verbal games, memory is unreliable, and self is unverifiable, silence is the inevitable result and, probably, escape. It is interesting to note that during the 1960s Beckett was only able to write about a hundred pages in prose and no more. The (Wittgensteinian and Mauthnerian) disenchantment with language and its discrediting as the natural medium of representing the world and self lead to fragmentation, dissociation and, inevitably, to silence. In *Three Dialogues*, when commenting on Pierre Tal-Coat's paintings, Beckett tells Martin Duthuit that the artist should accept the fact that 'there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express' (1984: 139). In his striving to express the ineffable, words fail him as they annihilate what they purport to communicate. In Beckett, the only thing language is able to affirm is precisely its inability to represent anything beyond itself. Therefore, Beckett's art is necessarily an *art of failure* and of silence. His exploration of the limits of language takes him closer to the Nothing(ness), to the brink of the abyss, which, whatever it might be, seems closely connected to silence. The narrator in *The Unnamable* forcefully insists on this silence:

I can't stir [...] There is nowhere but here [...] I don't know where it is [...] I don't know [...] if it's closed, if it's open. [...] Open on what? There is nothing else, only it. Open on the void, open on the nothing. (I've no objection: those are words.) Open on the silence, looking out on the silence, straight out - why not? All this time on the brink of silence. (1965: 361)

Furlani puts it that '[i]t is in signifying the unsayable by clearly representing the sayable that Beckett's ethics may be located. He never

“budges” from this outermost boundary.’ He carries out a Wittgensteinian reading of Beckett by pointing out the similarities between the two. Wittgenstein asserts that ‘[Philosophy] must set limits to what can be thought ... It must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought. It will signify what cannot be said, by presenting clearly what can be said.’ (4.114–4.115). According to Furlani, Beckett follows Wittgenstein in that he tries to find a means to express the contours of the sayable. This idea can be compared to what Mauthner has to say about *the unsayable* and it is interesting to see how this applies to Beckett’s works. Molloy’s statement ‘[a]ll I know is what the words know’ (1965: 29) might be said to express precisely the Wittgensteinian well-known axiom that ‘[t]he limits of my language mean the limits of my world.’ (Wittgenstein 2001: 5.6). Arguably, Mauthner’s skepticism is more radical than Wittgenstein’s. Whereas the latter’s dictum is ‘[w]hat we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’ (1974: 89), Mauthner proposes the abolishment of speech altogether and an inevitable move towards silence: ‘Truth is tautology, the world eludes us, we are left with language alone, and language which cannot grasp a thing, not even itself, is not worth while being spoken any more’ (qtd. in Weiler 1958: 85). In Mauthner, there is a radical skepticism of language which carries him to the threshold of mysticism: ‘I will try again to say the unsayable, to express with poor words what I have to give to godly heretics [...] in sceptical mysticism’ (qtd. in Weiler 1958: 85–86).

One needs to be cautious of giving a conclusive and exhaustive explanation when it comes to any theory or philosophy that Beckett may have favored and of (mistakenly) simplifying Beckett’s worldview to fit it into different philosophical systems. My view is, however, that to a large degree he seems to be closer to Mauthner in his reservations of ever finding those ‘boundaries of the sayable’, which would then delineate the unsayable. In Beckett’s works there exists no such boundary and, if such a boundary did exist, then it would be constantly shifting and impossible to determine. Mauthner’s idea that language ‘cannot grasp a thing, not even itself’ seems to echo in several of Beckett’s works. It might even be argued that his work undermines the dichotomy sayable–unsayable, as the unsayable, which is related to nothingness and to silence, has eroded the legitimacy and plausibility of what can be defined as ‘the sayable’.

The inability to find that boundary which would mark off the sayable from the unsayable, the real from the void and nothingness, is also closely

related to the perception of self. In such works as *Texts for Nothing* or *The Trilogy*, quoted earlier in this article, solipsism is made even more severe as the 'I' is not taken as an integral part of one's being and what constitutes the self remains problematic. Here, again, Mauthner's views prove useful, especially his resignation when it comes to any possibility of reaching an understanding of the self. For him the self (or the ego) is without substance and does not exist, since it is ultimately 'nothing but memory' and memory in turn is nothing but reason, that is, language. Beckett's narrators, too, contradict the Kantian—as well as Romantic—concept of the centrality and the necessary existence of a self through which all experience is filtered in the form of phenomena and which can be grasped and reached through language. Husserl's phenomenology—another important philosophical reading of Beckett—might be of use here and especially his concept of the bracketing of reality. Phenomenologically, Beckett's narrators in the above works might be said to undergo a Husserlian 'bracketing', which would lead to an understanding of the 'pure self', divested of all contingent layers. However, until the end these narrators are never able to find that 'real self'. Phenomenologically, they are distanced from their own selves but that does not lead to any higher understanding or cognition, which was, after all, Husserl's aim of phenomenology. This core self the characters try to reach is only composed and built out of words and the more they seem to delve into it, the more that self or 'I', disintegrates. The more these verbal layers of an assumed self are unraveled, the more one comes to the realization that the self is ultimately made up of words. Thus behind the complex and arbitrary web of words, it is impossible to reach a core self that can be grasped once language is shed, because such a core does not exist, consisting entirely of words.

In one of the quoted passages (in Part 2) from his *Critique of Language*, Mauthner proclaims that the highest aim is to destroy the legitimacy of language, by 'destroy[ing] every rung of the ladder while climbing upon it'. Every (philosophical and linguistic) rung is stepped on so as to achieve an insight into the nature of truth and knowledge. However, the consecutive annihilation of the rungs leads to a lack of coherence and to a method which annihilates the very possibility of ever getting at a method by which the climber could reach a higher understanding. For Mauthner, true knowledge 'eludes us for ever, for the very simple reason that what we get at every new step is nothing but

words' (Weiler 1958: 80) and from this proposition derives his deep distrust of language. Similarly, Beckett's works, such as *The Trilogy*, *Texts for Nothing*, or *Watt*, constantly and relentlessly undermine any assertion of truth or understanding. These texts, sometimes metafictionally, refer to the inability to state any truth by undercutting and, as it were, discrediting themselves. They are self-annihilating in that they undermine any expectation aroused in the readers that a conclusion might be reached or something solid is being built out of them. Thus Beckett's works seem to echo Mauthner's 'ladder' metaphor and Mauthner's resignation that, as the narrator in *The Unnamable* puts it, 'it all boils down to a question of words.' (Beckett 1965: 335).

It is not an easy task to clarify whether Beckett had mysticism in mind in that longing for silence that is usually present in his works. This is what the narrator/voice in *The Unnamable* says: 'Ah if only this voice could stop! This meaningless voice which prevents you from being nothing, just barely prevents you from being nothing and nowhere - just enough to keep alight this little yellow flame feebly darting from side to side.' (Beckett 1965: 318). 'Being nothing and nowhere' is for the narrator/voice something to be wished for. It is, of course, a moot point whether this 'nothing' refers to the annihilation of self, or death, or the Kantian noumenon [the thing-in-itself] that, for Kant, lies beyond our reach, or any possible mystical experience either in the (godless) Mauthnerian or in the (quasi-religious) Wittgensteinian sense which would transcend all contingency. Beckett gives us no glimpse as regards the possibility of what lies beyond and, therefore, his literary work offers no solution. It might even be argued that the parodic character of many of his plays and prose texts works to undercut any hint of mysticism. One of the meanings of the very title of the novel *The Unnamable* echoes Mauthner's statement 'The unsayable cannot be said because one cannot define the boundaries of the sayable'. (Weiler 1958:86). This state of nothing and nowhere, a state that transcends language, will forever remain precisely that—*unnamable*. The moment that language steps in and tries to grasp it and express it, it disintegrates. Thus, indirectly, Beckett's work, too, seems to represent a critique of language. Just like Mauthner wishes to kill the sphinx of language by forcing him into silence (Weiler 1958: 85) so does Beckett destroy any rationalistic or foundationalist idea of the possibility of grasping self through language.

In spite of his affinities with and potential influences by various philosophical thoughts, Beckett remains a writer and not a philosopher and therefore he does not set out to elucidate and to solve these fundamental philosophical riddles but rather to aesthetically represent them in their complexity. He does not propose solutions to philosophical problems but artistically portrays the human condition, which he sees as fraught with meaninglessness and absurdity. Thus, though Beckett undoubtedly shares many concerns with the philosophical ideas of Mauthner and Wittgenstein, any analysis of his works should not however impose a theoretical approach on a writer whose writings can never be subsumed under a philosophical system. It is moreover difficult, if not altogether impossible, to identify the degree of influence that the two philosophers had on Beckett's artistic development. It is impossible to clearly state the influences that his extensive and various reading had on him, influences which might have worked undercurrent and might have even gone undetected over long periods of time. Thus, for all their similarities, the philosophical writings of Mauthner and Wittgenstein should not be regarded as magical keys to unraveling and understanding the work of Samuel Beckett.

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