

SAY FOR BE MISSED

minimalism and representations of identity in beckett



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Introduction

What happens to the sense of identity when language is pared down to a minimum? That is the central question posed in this essay which aims at investigating the relationship between literary minimalism and representations of identity as it is portrayed in the late fiction of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). My discussion will focus on Beckett's short play *Not I* (1973), and on two longer prose texts, *Company* (1980) and *Worstward Ho* (1983), that were published collectively (along with *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981)) in Beckett's so-called 'second trilogy' under the titled *Nohow On* (1989). It may seem odd to leave out the middle text of a trilogy and instead turn to an earlier text, but I wanted to trace a development in the attitude towards the representation of identity and analysing four demanding texts proved to be beyond the limitations of this essay. Also, although the main weight of my argument will be carried by other texts, *Ill Seen Ill Said* will not be left totally unaddressed.

Arguably, the texts in *Nohow On* show that it is only possible to construe subjectivity and identity in terms of *différance*. That is, by a potentially endless process of deferral and differentiation that leaves the subject unnamable. The representation of this conception of identity is simultaneously established and criticized—or constructed and deconstructed—by the subtractive narrative strategy employed by Beckett.

The works by Beckett which are considered in the course of this essay mark a transition from a subject's violent refusal to say 'I' in *Not I* through the constantly oscillating positioning of narrative traces that come to constitute the sense (or trace) of an 'I' in *Company*, and the preoccupation with observation and articulation in *Ill Seen Ill Said* to the series of 'better failures' that continually strive to pare down existence and the representation of existence to an 'At most mere minimum. Mere-most minimum.'¹ in *Worstward Ho*; although the conception of identity as malleable and unstable remains consistently more or less unaltered.

Preliminaries: on Literary Minimalism

Minimalism is a term often associated with the works of Samuel Beckett, but what is meant by this phrase? What makes 'minimal' applicable to texts such as *Company*, *Not I*, or *Worstward Ho*? One immediately obvious—superficial—reason may be their diminutive size, and sparseness of language. Beckett's so-called 'second trilogy' comprises three "novels" within the space of 116 pages, but the question of minimalism cannot be one of the mere size of the individual works, there must be some intrinsic quality to these texts that sets them apart from other types of short fiction.

In *Nohow On* language is pared down to a minimum resulting in a lucidity of expression that makes the words on the page stand out with a brilliant luminosity. At the same time, the reduction of language, according to a 'typically Beckettian poetics of subtraction'², results in a sense of impermeability, in a text which is 'perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable.'³ Characteristically,

[t]he metafictional world created by them, [Beckett's late texts] outside normal space and time, full of detached observers, self-conscious narrators, and self-reflexive metaphors, is founded upon rituals of language and motion which have intensified, stylized and formalized many of the thematic concerns of Beckett's earlier works.⁴

The close attention paid to language may be seen as constitutive feature of a literary minimalist art marked, according to Peter Andrew Williams, by a profound skepticism toward representation which effects an ongoing interrogation of (im-)possibility of representation by employing 'linguistic strategies' that engender 'the constant subtraction of representational components from representation itself.'⁵ This interrogation of representation is often achieved through a reductive narrative strategy which, through 'duplication and repetition,'⁶ holds a distorting mirror up to representation. At the same time, minimalism is an art in which

[t]hemes, rhythmic patterns, stylistic patterns and fragmented or absent narrative patterns are all employed [...] to simultaneously assert and deny form and content. The resulting emphasis is on a constant deferral of closure and climax, and on the benefits that accrue upon recognition of an indefinite postponement of conclusions and fixed or static meanings.⁷

²Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works after the Nobel Prize*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 225.

³Samuel Beckett as quoted in Locatelli p. 3.

⁴Peter Andrew Williams, *A Few Words about Literary Minimalism*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1994, p.1. I refer to Mr Williams' points on literary minimalism because they fit in well with my own analysis of the relation between literary minimalism and identity in the work of Samuel Beckett. I have, however, discovered extensive plagiarism in a subsequent chapter of Mr Williams' dissertation, and I can therefore in no way guarantee that the referred points represent Mr Williams' authentic own intellectual work.

⁵*Ibid.* p.1.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 8

⁷*Ibid.* p. 10.

This goes a long way towards the sense of fluidity and resistance to solidification that accompanies the reader when encountering a text like *Worstward Ho*, or *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Meanings in these texts are infuriatingly elusive, and the texts themselves seem to be dissolving even as they are read. This aspect of Beckett's "minimalist" art comes about mainly because the texts foreground an immediacy and presence of language, thereby achieving very little permanence, even though they cannot escape the temporality of language. This can be seen in the opening words of *Worstward Ho*: 'On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.'⁸ where the imperative of 'On.[...] Somehow on. Till nohow on' negates any permanence or fixity of language, at the same time, the meta-linguistic focus on enunciation indicated by 'Say on.' directs our attention to the inescapability of temporality because of the shift from *Say* to '*Said* nohow on.' Saying has always already been said, thus we are presented with '[a] "saying which is in the necessity of always unsaying itself."⁹ The fluid instability of the textual universe forces us to perceive of 'constructive strategies' that 'demonstrate the potential to open into a reality where presence begins to be felt around the periphery of the absent centers of these texts.'¹⁰ Beckett's texts continually displace their centre, or indeed, centres as these are always in flux. This is certainly true of *Company* where constantly oscillating narrative traces come to indicate the sense (or trace) of an 'I' without ever naming it 'I'.

If minimalist art by virtue of its self-reflexive attitude towards language and representation establishes a sense of absence as presence, then it is also an art that is preoccupied by questions of ontology and epistemology. Indeed, Locatelli describes Beckett's late texts as 'epistemic spatial tales'¹¹ in which 'a purely objective space or a purely metal space is transformed into the vision of a relational, functional space, no longer objective or totally abstract.'¹² The blurring of the boundary between the objective and the abstract is an important aspect of the representation of identity in Beckett where there is no longer a sharp line of demarcation between object and subject. This may be seen in *Ill Seen Ill Said* where the 'she' of the text is simultaneously observed and observing: 'From where she lies she sees Venus rise.'¹³ Identity, then, is inextricably linked to a minimalist focus on articulation, observation, perception and representation, and it is to these relations between minimalism and identity in Beckett's art that we must now turn.

⁸Samuel Beckett. *Nohow On*. p. 89.

⁹Emmanuel Lévinas as quoted in Locatelli p. 230.

¹⁰Williams. p. 15.

¹¹Locatelli. p. 10.

¹²*Ibid.* p. 10.

Beckett. *Nohow On*. p. 49.

***Not I*: the 'vehement refusal to relinquish third person'**

Existence in Beckett's works is invariably associated with pain and suffering, whether it be Malone waiting for the 'throes'¹⁴, or the body seen to be trembling all over in *Still*. But nowhere is the suffering of existence more extremely pronounced than in *Not I* where the agonizing torrent of words emitted by MOUTH, leaves the impression of a subject in intense pain vainly casting about for a release; desperately trying to achieve a unified 'I' while simultaneously violently refusing to recognise any such unified whole.

The central theme of *Not I*, then, is the effects, causes and consequences of a radically fragmentary sense of identity. This theme is underscored by the disparity of AUDITOR, a 'tall standing figure [...] dead still throughout but for four brief'¹⁵ 'gesture[s] of helpless compassion'¹⁶ and the stark minimal image of MOUTH, hanging detached in mid-air, spewing out words at an insane pace; the repetitions, the broken syntax and fragmented narrative patterns. In this way, *Not I* exhibits the simultaneous assertion and denial of form and content identified by Williams as a constitutive element in literary minimalism. The subject of *Not I* is denied a cohesive form and content by being made up of so many disparate elements, yet at the same time, the possibility of cohesion is asserted by the necessity of MOUTH's 'vehement refusal to relinquish third person.'¹⁷ One of the many cruel ironies that issue from this problematic relation between form and content lies in the tortured impression left by MOUTH's performance and her repeated insistence that 'she was not suffering... imagine!.. not suffering!.. indeed could not remember... off hand... when she had suffered less.'¹⁸ The 'imagine!' directed at the reader focuses our attention precisely on this incongruence between the form and the content, the saying and the said, by forcing us to reflect on the reliability of MOUTH's narrative. At first, this narrative seems to be unrelated to the narrator, but as the play progresses it effects the gradual realisation that the 'she' of the text and MOUTH seemingly coincide as MOUTH verges on saying 'I', only to violently refuse the first person ('what?.. who?.. no!..she!'¹⁹). According to Locatelli, *Not I* comes to a tragic climax when Mouth acknowledges herself but goes on refusing self-perception, incapable of appropriating her own words about herself.²⁰ This may be seen in the instance when

¹⁴Samuel Beckett. *Triology: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. (London, Calder Publications Ltd., 1994.) p. 180.

¹⁵Samuel Beckett. *Not I* in Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 376. (Reprinted in the course compendium to *Romantic to Postmodern Identities* compiled by Aidan Day).

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 375.

¹⁷*Ibid.* p. 375.

¹⁸*Ibid.* p. 377.

¹⁹*Ibid.* p. 377.

²⁰Locatelli. p. 132.

suddenly she realized... words were—... what?... who?... no!... she!... [Pause and movement 2] ... realized... words were coming... a voice she did not recognize... at first... so long since it had sounded... then finally had to admit... could be none other... than her own [...] till she began trying to... delude herself... it was not hers at all... not her voice at all.²¹

The passage shows that the refusal of identity is at the same time a refusal of language's powers of accurate representation, since the recognition of her own voice is not enough to convince the 'she' of her being. Representation is thus problematised by the very possibility of delusion. However, the attempt at self-delusion is undercut by language, because already in the act of articulating the attempt, the choice of words (*trying to... delude herself*) negates the possibility of a successful outcome. The passage thus makes explicit the self-conscious use of language in *Not I*.

MOUTH is continually revealed to be at one and the same time a highly self-conscious narrator showing a 'concern throughout for accuracy in the words used, with [...] consequent qualifications, cancellations and corrections,²² ('what?... the buzzing?... yes... all the time the buzzing... so-called... in the ears... though of course actually... not in the ears at all... in the skull... dull roar in the skull.'²³) and an automaton unremittingly spewing out words

whole body like gone... just the mouth... lips... cheeks... jaws [...] mouth on fire... stream of words [...] no idea what she's saying... imagine!... no idea what she's saying... and can't stop... no stopping it [...] and the whole brain begging... something begging in the brain... begging the mouth to stop.²⁴

The problem of the brain 'flickering away on its own'²⁵ trying to make sense of MOUTH's monologue is central to the crisis of identity in *Not I*. By 'dragging up the past... flashes from all over'²⁶, the brain is trying to piece together a cohesive 'I', but, paradoxically, the effort of achieving unity only produces a jumble of pasts and presents (the supermarket, the public lavatory, walking in a field) that endlessly defers meaning and unity. The result is that 'she' is confined to a 'strange limbo world'²⁷ in which language, representation and identity are highly unstable structures under continuous deconstruction. The 'vehement refusal to relinquish third person' can thus be seen as both the cause and effect of MOUTH's affliction, simultaneously furthering the fragmentation of the subject and constituting a form of resistance to suspect representation.

²¹Ibid. p. 379.

²²James Knowlson and John Pilling. *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*. (London, John Calder Ltd., 1979). p. 202.

²³Beckett. *Not I*. p. 378.

²⁴Ibid. p. 380.

²⁵Ibid. p. 381.

²⁶Ibid. p. 380.

²⁷Knowlson and Pilling. *Frescoes of the Skull*. p. 201.

Enacting the Self: Identity as *Différance* in *Company*

'To one on his back in the dark a voice tells of a past. With occasional allusions to a present and more rarely to a future....' The narrative situation in *Company* is very similar to that of *Not I*, but for the self-consciously present narrator in another dark or in the same another devising it all for company.²⁸ And *Company* may in many respects be seen as continuing the central thematic preoccupations of *Not I*.

If *Not I* investigates the existential crisis of a subject under "deconstruction" by a narrative voice refusing cohesion, then Beckett takes this investigation a step further in *Company* by more or less abandoning the existential subject and positing identity only in terms of constantly shifting positions in/of language (which, of course, also has unavoidable existential implications). According to Locatelli, this means that in *Company* 'the protagonist is "enacted" rather than narrated, and the conventions of literary portraiture are challenged but not denounced' by strategy of 'critical mimesis'²⁹ employed by Beckett. The result of this "enactment" of the protagonist is that gradually, through the process of speaking, the sense of an 'I' is invoked without ever naming it. The subject is articulated into being and yet, the 'I' remains 'Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him.'³⁰

The multiple positions that gradually articulate the absent 'I' are indicated from the very beginning of the "novel" with the sentence: 'A voice comes to *one* in the dark. *Imagine*'³¹ The narrator instigates a speaker/listener duality of 'voice' and 'one' which is immediately revealed to be devised by the narrator (imagine). The call to imagine simultaneously directed at the reader further focuses attention on the act of perceiving through language, and on the act of imaginative creation. Not only does the text reveal a highly self-conscious attitude, it also questions the reliability of representation by relating that

only a small part of what is said can be verified [...] when he hears, You are on your back in the dark. Then he must acknowledge the truth of what is said. But by far the greater part of what is said cannot be verified. As for example when he hears you first saw the light on such and such a day. Sometimes the two are combined [...] A device perhaps from the incontrovertibility of the one to win credence for the other.³²

This unreliability permeates the entire text as the narrator 'in *Company*'s most persistent pun' is "lying" from the first.³³ It is only at the end of text that the opening 'pro-

²⁸Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 4.

²⁹Locatelli, p. 4.

³⁰Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 17.

³¹Ibid. p. 3. (My emphasis)

³²Ibid. p. 3.

³³S. E. Gontarski in the introduction to *Nohow On*, p. xxi.

position³⁴ with all its precautions can be reinterpreted to reveal that the process of identifying the subject lies not only within the boundaries of the text, but also outside them in the imagination of the reader, as the text concludes with 'and you as you always were. Alone.'³⁵ The subject remains unnamable 'to the last syllable of recorded time'³⁶, yet the text ends with the revelation that the various narrative positions are all fractions of the same subject. *Company* thus shows itself as an extremely self-reflective text involved in marking out its fictional world and its character through linguistic demarcations:

Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not.³⁷

As with *MOUTH* in *Not I*, the sense of self is plural, but here the plurality of selves is even more marked as the self is divided and deferred not only onto a 'she', but onto 'he', 'you', 'one', 'voice'. Thus the text shows that identity can only be construed in terms of Derridean *différance*, and that it is through a process of continuous differentiation and deferral that the 'I' can constitute 'company'. In Locatelli's words, '[t]he narrative shows that it is only through relations that the self can experience itself, and the pronominal shifts and the interplay of voice and hearer signify (in the double sense of "to mean" and "to structure") this relation.'³⁸

The relational constitution of identity—it may even be rewarding to think of the subject as structure—means that the subject is open to the play of language, which is perhaps why the subject must remain unnamable. Naming it 'I' would establish the 'I' as a neutralising and reductive centre.³⁹

The problem of self-identification is linked with the fragments of a past that the voice relates to the hearer

Repeatedly with only minor variants the same bygone. As if willing him by this dint to make it his. To confess, Yes I remember. Perhaps even to have a voice. To murmur, Yes I remember. What an addition to company that would be! A voice in the first person singular. Murmuring now and then, Yes I remember.⁴⁰

³⁴Beckett. *Nohow On*, p. 4.

³⁵*Ibid.* p. 46.

³⁶William Shakespeare. *Macbeth* (London, Penguin, 1995), V.5, 21, p. 132.

³⁷Beckett. *Nohow On*, p. 4.

³⁸Locatelli, p. 167.

³⁹[...] structure—or rather the structurality of structure—although it has always been at work, has always neutralized and reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences' in David Lodge, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, (Harlow, Longman, 1988), p. 109.

⁴⁰Beckett. *Nohow On*, p. 10.

The 'voice in the first person singular' would indeed be 'an addition to company'. Yet another pronoun to add to the others flickering through the text, but at the same time it would be the end of company. As the first person singular is by definition *singular*, the voice claiming the 'I' would obliterate any other ones. The memory traces serve as prompts to make the subject acknowledge origin and thus establish himself as a presence. What is at stake in *Company*, however, is not just the issue of identity, but the positioning of a sense of identity in opposition to the logocentric assertion of stability, presence and origin as privileged over absence, chaos etc. According to Derrida,

There are [...] two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history metaphysics or of ontotheology — in other words, throughout his entire history — has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play.⁴¹

Beckett's narrative clearly adheres to the second of these possibilities by representing its protagonist in terms of *différance*, thereby creating a fluid, ever-shifting site for the enactment of the relational self. *Différance* is also at play in the convoluted narrative structure of *Company* which generates a potentially endless postponement of fixing a point of view. Observe the complex intertwining of narrative levels and temporal planes within the space of a few lines:

If he were to utter after all? However feebly. What an addition to company that would be! You are on your back in the dark and one day you will utter again. One day! In the end. In the end you will utter again. Yes I remember. That was I. That was I then.⁴²

The paragraph exhibits the enactment of the play of identity as voice and hearer engage each other dialogically in an instance of 'intra-psychic communication'⁴³ which ultimately displays the impossibility of representing a permanent self. As soon as the affirmation of self is posited (That was I.) it is immediately deprived of any permanence and cohesion through a repetition with a slight temporal variant (That was I *then*).

Company, then, accepts the ineliminable play of language as a constituting force in the creation of identity and through the relay of a 'Devised deviser devising it all for company'⁴⁴ carries it through to a kind of positive conclusion in which the sense of an 'I' is given without ever naming it. In this way, *Company* forms a less negative counterpart to *Not I* where the failure to relinquish third person is the cause of anguish.

⁴¹Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences' in David Lodge, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. (Harlow, Longman, 1988). p. 122.

⁴²Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 14.

⁴³Locatelli, p. 176.

⁴⁴Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 33.

Better Failures: the Reduction of Identity in *Worstward Ho*

In *Worstward Ho*, Beckett achieves his most radical critique of representation by effecting the most radically minimal prose in his entire body of work. The text, deemed untranslatable by Beckett himself, moves through a series of subtractions, repetitions, mis-sayings and unsayings in a continuous effort to 'Fail better worse'⁴⁵. It is through this minimalist narrative strategy that Beckett simultaneously constructs and deconstructs time and space as he explores the fragile existence of 'shades' in a 'Thenceless thitherless'⁴⁶ void. *Worstward Ho* may be perceived as a crystallisation of

[t]he expression 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.⁴⁷

This perception of the impossibility of expression coupled with the obligation of expression is at play in *Worstward Ho*'s emphasis on articulation and on the imperative of moving 'On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.'⁴⁸, which, along with the fragmented structure of the piece, creates the sense of a narrative that continually breaks down only to struggle on again and break down again. The impossibility and obligation of expression may also be seen to affect the interrogation of representation in *Worstward Ho*.

Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid.
[...]
See for be seen. Misseen. From now see be misseen.⁴⁹

Saying is missaying, seeing misseeing in *Worstward Ho*, thus faithful representation is unachievable. Yet, as the text struggles to rid itself of representation, it simultaneously seems to affirm the ineliminability of representation. Try as it might to unsay it, the narrative must finally concede an 'Unmoreable unlesable unworsenable evermost almost void.'⁵⁰ Thus the text must effect a deconstruction of representation by way of an unremitting unsaying of what has always already been missaid. Endlessly striving "worstward", the text shows a persistent concern with ontology and epistemology. As for example, in this description of the void, which at the same time pertains to the ontological make-up of the void and the epistemological problems of description:

⁴⁵Ibid. p. 91.

⁴⁶Ibid. p. 92.

⁴⁷Samuel Beckett as quoted in Andrew Renton, 'Disabled figures: from the *Residua* to *Stirrings still*' in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 168.

⁴⁸Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 89.

⁴⁹Ibid. pp. 89 & 93.

⁵⁰Ibid. p. 113.

Part of the defamiliarising strategy employed by Beckett in *Worstward Ho* stems, strangely, from a persistence of bringing everything to a logical conclusion (even if logical connections are not immediately apparent on first approaching the text). As the pastures must remain once they have been articulated into being in *Ill Seen Ill Said* even though the narrator is not happy with them,⁵⁴ so anything that has been said in *Worstward Ho* must be tried unsaid, or better failed. An example of this imperative of logical conclusions may be seen in Head sunk on crippled hands. [...] Eyes clenched. Seat of all. Germ of all.⁵⁵ Once the head is made a presence, the narrative must go

On back better worse to fail the head said seat of all. Germ o' all. All? If of all of it too. Where if not there it too?. There in the sunken head the sunken head. The hands. The eyes. Shade with the other shades. In the dim. The same narrow void. Before the staring eyes. Where it too if not there too?. Ask not. No. Ask in vain. Better worse so.⁵⁶

By virtue of the narrative logic, the statement that the head is 'Seat of all. Germ of all' must be investigated, but the investigation itself creates a strange doubling effect by which the head literally becomes the seat and germ of all (There in the sunken head the sunken head). Through this doubling, the 'Shade-ridden void'⁵⁷ is paradoxically both inside and outside the head by now reduced to 'Skull and stare alone. Scene and seer of all.'⁵⁸ The doubling achieves a situation that raises renewed ontological questions about the narrative, since the skull is both 'Scene and seer of all'—a phrase which causes yet another doubling by punning on scene/seen and thus creates the double paradox of an observed observer who simultaneously accommodates the observer of the observed observer. The scene and seer of all, then, is ultimately the text of *Worstward Ho*, which through the doubling acquires another meta-fictional level marking it as self-conscious, self-reflective as well as self-reflexive. This also implies that the fleeting sense of subjectivity that the text 'secretes'⁵⁹ is inseparable from the process of moving worstward. Subjectivity is nothing but the 'Longing that all go. Dim go. Void go. Longing go. Vain longing that vain longing go.'⁶⁰ The last 'Nohow on. Said nohow on.'⁶¹

⁵⁴The cabin. [...] at the inesistent centre of a formless place. [...] Meagre pastures [...] In the way of animals ovines only. [...] A moor would have better met the case. [...] There had to be lambs. Rightly or wrongly. A moor would have allowed of them. Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 50-52.

⁵⁵*Ibid.* p. 91.

⁵⁶*Ibid.* p. 97.

⁵⁷*Ibid.* p. 101.

⁵⁸*Ibid.* p. 101.

⁵⁹*Ibid.* p. 104.

⁶⁰*Ibid.* p. 109.

⁶¹*Ibid.* p. 116.

Conclusion

This essay has aimed exploring the relationship between literary minimalism and representations of identity by first outlining central aspects of Peter Andrew Williams' and Carla Locatelli's theories and definitions of literary minimalist and subsequently analysing three texts by Samuel Beckett from the view point of these theories.

According to Williams literary minimalism is characterised by a foregrounding of a profound skepticism towards language and representation, a simultaneous assertion and denial of the relationship between form and content, a continuous investigation representation by means of 'poetics of subtraction' and an engendering of 'constructive strategies' that begins to establish absence as presence. Thus minimalist art may be seen to be deeply skeptical about: logocentric valuing of presence, origin, a stable centre and closure.

Samuel Beckett's art corresponds well with these attributes of literary minimalism, which admittedly is hardly surprising as they were primarily formulated through analyses of his works.

My investigation of the relations between minimalist art and representations of identity, revealed that identity and subjectivity in Beckett is affected by the paring down of language and the subtraction of representational elements. The texts also mark a shift in Beckett's thematical preoccupations from the publication of *Not I* in 1973 to that of *Worstward Ho* ten years later. The earlier work shows a concern with identity in existential terms of alienation from both the self and language, resulting in the subject being confined to a 'strange limbo world' in which language, representation and identity are highly unstable structures under continuous deconstruction. The 'vehement refusal to relinquish third person' can thus be seen as both the cause and effect of MOUTH's affliction, simultaneously furthering the fragmentation of the subject and constituting a form of resistance to suspect representation.

The *Nohow On* texts mark a turn from an existential positioning of self to a representation of identity primarily constituted by language. In *Company*, identity is posited in terms of *différance* and shown to be of a relational nature as the protagonist is 'enacted' through constantly shifting positions of language without ever naming him.

Finally, in *Worstward Ho*, subjectivity is posited somewhere in-between representation and the deconstruction of representation. Again, identity can be interpreted as *différance*, but unlike *Company* it is a *différance* which lies beyond the structure of the text as an unstated, unstatable implication. Minimalist constructive strategies may thus be seen to inform every aspect of the investigated text from the configuration of words on the page to the representation of identity. And now in the words of Samuel Beckett: 'If there may not be no more questions let there at least be no more answers.'

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