"Not I"—Says Beckett

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In 1972, Beckett's play *Not I* saw its world premiere in New York City on the occasion of a festival organized in the author's honor by Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn. The staging of the play—an unusually short one acter—caused some frustrations even to Alan Schneider who had long since established himself as the American Beckett director par excellence. But it proved even more perturbing to its cast upon whom it made demands that prevented any display of their thespian skills and that put them instead under great physical strain.[1] For *Not I*'s cast, consisting of only two actors—a woman referred to in the program notes as Mouth (played in 1972 by Jessica Tandy) and a man designated as Auditor (whose part was taken by Henderson Forsythe), is not permitted to present the audience with interpretations of any kind, certainly not of any visual or physical nature. The actors cannot move their bodies or use any facial expression to convey meaning, mood, or emotion, for the simple reason that they are almost invisible and by far more impersonal than any commedia dell' arte masks, behind whose rigid exterior the actor's personal presence is still felt. During the performance of *Not I* only a female voice is heard. We see of the actress no more than an incessantly chattering mouth, placed, according to stage directions, "upstage audience right, about eight feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow."[2] And it is only if the audience—perhaps alerted by the Program Notes—strain their eyes that they recognize downstage left (stage directions) the figure of Auditor, totally inert—except for four brief moments of agitated screaming—completely enveloped in a black djellaba, his back turned almost entirely to the audience, as he stares diagonally across the stage at Mouth.[3]

Beckett had freely admitted to some critics that the figure of Auditor had been suggested to him by a Caravaggio painting, "The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist,"[4] and in a recent note to me added the personal explanation

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that, on beholding that painting one day, "showing at a safe distance, a group of watchers intent on the happening" (i.e. the beheading), he felt "from another outsidedness, . . . both the horror and its being beheld." We cannot but feel that, with such observations, Beckett makes *us*, the audience, part of his intricate game of ironies, wherein we become beholders of Beckett's beholding of Auditor who, in turn, from a safe distance, beholds the drama of Mouth. We are forced as it were to assume an attitude of "not I" in the manner of the onlookers in Caravaggio's painting, who distance themselves as they avert their eyes from the beheading. Those of us who have watched Vincent Price as host of the mystery series "Death of an Expert Witness" are also reminded of his mentioning in conclusion the author's (P.D. James's) hope that, upon perusing her novels of crime, the reader might proclaim "not I."

But what is Mouth's drama? What is the crime? Wherein consists the horror? What, indeed, is the sense of that verbal avalanche that bursts forth from Mouth's lips, teeth, and tongue in their unceasing, obsessive and almost obscene motion? As we are assaulted by the painfully rapid staccato of her incomplete and disjointed phrases, we find it impossible to discern any of the traditional trappings of theater. Mouth's lines convey neither character nor plot with a happy or unhappy ending. If one of those waiting in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* could rightly lament "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful," then *Not I* deserves to be declared even more awful. For it lacks the earlier play's fascinating clowning and the intriguing dialogues between Estragon and Vladimir with their mixture of the tragic, the lyrical, and the farcical. Even the title "Not I" remains puzzling, for these words are nowhere to be found in the lines of Mouth's monologue. Yet Beckett—no matter how reticently—has hinted at deeper meanings and has provided links between text and title. Some of these links are indirect, such as the unspoken "not I" inherent in the ironic relationship that we have noticed between the drama of Mouth, the Auditor, Beckett himself as author, and the audience; or as the duress under which the actors have been placed in order to deny themselves any expression of individuality in their acting, their obligation to deny their egos and say "not I" as it were. But other links are more directly a part of the text and entice us to look for hidden meanings. First among those, and particularly startling on stage, is the fact that Mouth, though speaking exclusively of herself, uses the third person rather than the first person pronoun and thus never says "I" and, by implication, seems to be saying "not I." We may well assume, therefore, that Mouth's outpourings contain further clues as to the meaning of such nay-saying and must closely scrutinize her lines in the hope of discovering them.

It is fortunate, therefore, that from her seemingly random and grammatically incomplete utterings some phrases stand out, because their frequent repetition gives them the mesmerizing quality of refrains. Let us listen to them:

words were coming
her voice alone
just the mouth
whole body like gone

can't stop the stream
trying to make sense of it
must have cried as a baby . . .
perhaps not . . .
just the birth cry to get her going
God is love . . . she'll be purged
guilty or not guilty?
tiny little thing . . . out before its time . . . godforsaken hole . . . no love
crawl back in
begging it all to stop[5]

The refrains clearly speak of Mouth's aloneness, her desire to make sense of life, her suffering, her concern with guilt and divine punishment or pardon, her premature ejection as it were from the godforsaken hole, and her desire to crawl back into it and to make it all stop. They speak of life, death, suffering and punishment, and we are reminded of certain verbal exchanges between Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*, while we also seem to hear echoes of Beckett's trilogy of novels: *Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable.* Estragon and Vladimir are profoundly concerned with guilt and salvation and on one occasion want to hang themselves in order to end it all. At the beginning of the novel *Molloy*—actually the end of the titular hero's veritable calvary—the protagonist, having dragged his more and more decaying body through dark woods and muddy ditches, literally crawls into his mother's room that clearly resembles a womb or a tomb. Malone in *Malone Dies*, telling himself stories as he is waiting for death, says of himself that he is "being given birth to into death." The Unnamable of the novel by that title—himself as nameless as the world around him—questions his own identity and laments "I say I, knowing it's not I" and, not unlike Mouth, decides to use the third person pronoun when speaking of himself: "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, if I think of it."[6]

But Mouth's references to guilt and salvation associated with those of birth and death not only remind us of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, they also conjure up the biblical story of the Fall, which is the beginning of man's suffering and which coincides with his gaining of consciousness and individuation. The Bible tells us that man was created by God in His image and, like Him, was immortal. Yet God set limits to that likeness: neither the knowledge of good and evil, nor the knowledge of self was granted Adam and Eve. When the serpent tempted Eve, the serpent promised to remove these restrictions, saying *"et eritis sicut dei,"* you will be like the gods. Adam's and Eve's guilt initially springs from their desire to acquire divine consciousness and knowledge and with them the ability to differentiate, hitherto reserved for God. The arrogant desire on the part of man to be like the gods meets with severe punishment not only in the biblical story of the Fall but also in innumerable legends and myths of cultures outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. Nowhere and at no time will the gods condone man's transgression of the limits they have set to his powers of understanding and thereby his governance of the world. We have but to recall the cruel punishment meted out even to the half-god Prometheus for having given fire to man—that source

of power previously provided only through divine whim by means of the rays of the sun or in the form of lightning. We may think of the fate of those who tried to build the tower of Babel that was to raise them to the level of the gods; or of the lot of Ulysses, the admirable and intrepid Greek hero and seafarer, whom Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, relegated to the deepest recesses of Hell because he had dared to sail beyond the Straits of Gibraltar, transgressing, in his zest for exploration and adventure, what was permitted to man.

But if in the biblical story of the Fall, man's arrogance vis-à-vis God, his thirst for forbidden knowledge is at the center of his disgrace, the story also implies that, without this desire and without the subsequent knowledge, Adam and Eve would have never been truly human: the process of their individuation would have never taken place. We are told that Adam's and Eve's "eyes are opened" as soon as they have eaten of the forbidden fruit. They at once gain consciousness of themselves and of the world around them. For the first time they are now ashamed of their nakedness and, above all, conscious of their having sinned. Their newly acquired ability to differentiate between good and evil provides them at once with a sense of guilt. And while their new consciousness and the process of their individuation have made them superior to the rest of creation, these qualities have also set them apart and torn them away forever from the world harmony of which they had hitherto been a part. This alone was the equivalent of their losing Paradise—even if no specific judgment had been pronounced. Because of his individuation and consciousness, guilt and suffering had henceforth to be man's lot. The avenging angel driving Adam and Eve from Paradise only confirms what has already come about.

Now it is interesting that Adam's first act upon gaining individuation is his attempt to deny the process and the fact. When God calls him, he at first hides out, trying to blot out his very existence, if at all possible. He secondly rejects the assumption of any guilt by asserting that it was Eve who had offered him the fruit—which is but another way of saying "not I, I am not guilty—I do not really exist." Eve in her turn accuses the serpent of having beguiled her, assuming the same attitude of "not I, I am not guilty." The "not I" of the Fall—though implicit rather than explicit—resembles the "not I" P.D. James hopes the readers of her crime stories to assert. It reveals an attitude not unlike that of the "outsiders" viewing the beheading of Saint John the Baptist on Caravaggio's canvas and wishing to keep their distance from the horror they dare not fully face—though they cannot escape it.

However, the "not I" of the Fall is also an attempt to make undone what no longer can be made undone: the loss of Paradise is irreparable. The "not I" expresses the vain desire to regain that lost Paradise through a willingness to surrender the privilege of individuation and knowledge. In *Not I*, Mouth's longing to crawl back might be seen as a similar desire to annul individuation because of its concomitant suffering: a reversal of the process of birth and a regression to the undifferentiated world harmony that preceded it. Obviously, Mouth's drama is that she cannot crawl back. Yet I believe that the meaning of the play is more complex; that it represents in artistic form the epitome of the author's credo as an artist—echoing and continuing to some extent Nietzschean deliberations on the artist's self and his art—; but that it also—and in yet another sense—mouthes Beckett's credo as a man.

Notions that man's lot is inseparable from suffering and that it would have been better for him to have never been born (for the very fact that he is a conscious being) are expressed in the myths of many civilizations. Struck by their predominance in Greek thought, Nietzsche cites in *The Birth of Tragedy* an old legend propounding this notion in what the philosopher calls its "popular wisdom." The legend has it "that King Midas hunted a long time in the woods for the wise Silenus, companion of Dionysos, without being able to catch him. When he had finally caught him, the king asked him what he considered man's greatest good. The daemon remained sullen and uncommunicative until finally, forced by the king, he broke into a shrill laugh and spoke: 'Ephemeral wretch, begotten by accident and toil, why do you force me to tell you what it would be your greatest boon not to hear? What would be best for you is quite beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best is to die soon.' "[8]

But Nietzsche used this legend of Silenus merely as a point of departure as he developed his deliberations concerning the birth of Greek tragedy and, most specifically, the relationship of man's individuation to artistic creation and enjoyment. Greek civilization, in Nietzsche's view, associated the *principium individuationis*, the principle of individuation, with the god Apollo. But while appreciating on the whole the rationality and harmony of Apollonian art, it felt periodically the need to break the bonds of such rationality and individuation. The occasions were the festivals in honor of Dionysos, the god of the vine and of tragedy. During such festivals, it was as if nature herself "were bemoaning the fact of her fragmentation, her decomposition into separate individuals."[9] According to the myth—and in keeping with the rhythms of nature—Dionysos had to die each year at harvest time and his torn body returned to the earth to make possible in due time resurrection and new life of the vine. With his death individuation was annulled as it were, because his death represented the annulment of nature's fragmentation, a return to Wholeness, to the great All. This is how Ernst Cassirer refers to the myth in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*:

> Like all great vegetation cults, that of Dionysus [*sic*] feels the I only as a violent rending away from the primal source of life, and what it strives for is a return to that source, the "ecstasy" by which the soul bursts the fetters of the body and of individuality, to become united once more with universal life.[10]

But quite in keeping with the manifold ways in which myths can be interpreted, Nietzsche considered Dionysos not only to be the god of tragedy but believed him also to be its original hero of whom all subsequent ones represented but variations on a theme. He concluded, therefore, that the protagonist's death at the end of each tragedy carried within it the same metaphysical solace, namely that of a reunion with the All. To Nietzsche, moreover, Dionysos also represented the creative artist. His death was symbolic of the poet, the writer, who could create great art only when abandoning his ego, when touching upon the ground of being, in Nietzsche's words, when "the mystical jubilation of Dionysos . . . breaks the spell of individuation and opens a path *to the maternal womb of being*."[11] (I have

italicized *the maternal womb of being* because the image of a return to the womb, the *mother* or *mothers*, recurs frequently in literature.) Nietzsche believed great art to be "a triumph over subjectivity, deliverance from the self, the silencing of every personal will and desire."[12] Even the lyrical poet's *I*, the philosopher maintained, had to be "un-selved"[13] and had to speak "out of the depth of being."[14] Indeed, Nietzsche believed that "to the extent that the subject is an artist he is already delivered from individual will and has become a medium."[15]

I have shown elsewhere in some detail how strikingly Beckett's work reflects similar notions of the death of individuation as a prelude to truly artistic creation—often using formulations that literally recall Nietzsche (or Schopenhauer, on whom Nietzsche often relies).[16] It is quite immaterial, of course, whether Beckett was consciously or unconsciously inspired by these thinkers or whether a confluence of ideas is at play here. The facts speak for themsleves and are compelling enough to throw some light upon the enigmas of *Not I*.

Quite early in Beckett's artistic career, the titular hero of his novel *Watt* sets out in quest of Mr. Knott (or Naught) who dwells at the center of his house and, indeed, the universe—all his senses closed to the world. He is, as it were, that undifferentiated All that, once touched upon, seems to annul all the logical categories and differentiations Watt had hitherto lived by: Watt's experience at Mr. Knott's house destroys the world of individuation and rationality that had been reflected in the language handed down to him. With his loss of belief in that rationality and that language, the very foundation of his former world, has been shaken. Nevertheless, Watt becomes not yet a truly Beckettian author-hero. He remains a teller of tales, a sayer—whereas each of the protagonists of Beckett's later trilogy is a writer, an author, consciously concerned with his art. Molloy, the first of these three protagonists arrives in his mother's room (remember the Nietzschean image of the All), transformed as it were, in the course of a long, painful and debilitating trek through dark woods and mysterious experiences, from an Apollonian rational into a Dionysian irrational being. In his mother's room his only reason for existence is writing. For that purpose he has been rescued, by anonymous powers, from a ditch into which he had fallen—a totally helpless cripple. Were one to describe him at the time of his arrival in his mother's room, one would do well to borrow Beckett's own words written about the writer-protagonist of another author. The author is Proust, the writer-protagonist is Marcel, and the moment is that of Marcel's epiphany as a novelist. "He is almost exempt from the impurity of will," Beckett wrote about Proust's Marcel. "He deplores his lack of will until he understands that will, being utilitarian, a servant of intelligence and habit, is not a condition of the artistic experience. When the subject is exempt from will the object is exempt from causality (Time and Space taken together). And this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental aperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, the Thing itself."[17] (Beckett's concept and wording are here almost literally those of Schopenhauer as quoted by Nietzsche.) Molloy's almost vegetative physical and mental states are particularly noteworthy if we realize (and we are led to do so on the basis of his numerous, though vague and ambivalent, allusions) that in

the past and long before he set out to find his "mother" (we must remember, of course, that he found only her room resembling a womb or tomb), he had led a totally different existence. The novel's intricate structure, in fact, makes us believe that, in an earlier existence, he had been Moran, who is presented to us as the author-hero of the novel's second part and who, having been mysteriously commissioned one day to do so, had set out in quest of Molloy. Moran had been what we might call in Nietzschean terms a true representative of Apollonian individuation. Before setting out on his Molloy mission, Moran's life had been arranged by the clock and along patterns of behavior accepted by society. He had been meticulous, a slave of habit. His had been a world as respectable as it was comprehensible and describable. When he was called upon to search for Molloy, his quarry seemed to him his very opposite. With his acceptance of the Molloy mission, however, his world begins to be invaded by a Dionysian irrationality that slowly undermines his clarity of differentiation and starts to eat away at the principle of individuation. Yet he also comes to realize with a sense of profound shock that Molloy has always been a part of him and that he has always *known* him: "Molloy, or Mollose, was not a stranger" to him, although no one had previously spoken to Moran of Molloy. He felt at the same time that he had *invented* him.[18] Moran's attempt to envision fully his mission to search for Molloy resembles, indeed, an artist's letting go of rationality and surface values and his descent instead to the undifferentiated All:

> "It is lying down," he writes in his report at the end of his journey, "in the warmth, in the gloom, that I best pierce the outer turmoil's veil, discern my quarry, sense what course to follow, find peace in another's ludicrous distress. Far from the world, its clamours, frenzies, bitterness and dingy light, I pass judgment on it and on those, like me, who are plunged in it beyond recall, and on him who has need of me to be delivered, who cannot deliver myself. All is dark, but with that simple darkness that follows like a balm upon the great dismemberings. From their places masses move, stark as laws. Masses of what? One does not ask. There somewhere man is too, vast conglomerate of all of nature's kingdoms, as lonely and as bound. And in that block the prey is lodged and thinks himself a being apart . . . I arrive, he comes away. His life has been nothing but a waiting for this, to see himself preferred, to fancy himself damned, blessed, to fancy himself everyman, above all others."[19]

Whenever Molloy came to "visit" Moran (their roles—as in the case of each writer and his subject—were obviously interchangeable so that it is never clear who seeks whom), he behaved in a wild and uncontrollable manner: "He hastened incessantly."[20] Yet Molloy's presence had the strange effect that Moran, too, felt himself filled with panting: "nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain . . . just the opposite of myself."[21] Indeed, at the end of his quest, though never having completed his mission, Moran seems to have become identical with Molloy when he set out to go to his mother. Is this sheer irony? Was Moran's "mission" to have precisely that effect? Was Molloy but a later stage of the Apollonian Moran on his way to become a Dionysian artist and ultimately to touch upon the ground

of being when he arrived in his mother's room? The novel supports such thinking without ever being explicit about it. And yet Beckett seems to have foreshadowed this Moranian change into Molloy when, in his essay on Proust, he described the road of Marcel, that of the novelist-protagonist in *Remembrance of Things Past*, to true authorship:

> The old ego dies hard. Such as it was, a minister of dullness, it was also an agent of security. When it ceases to perform that second function, when it is opposed by a phenomenon that it cannot reduce to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept, when, in a word, it betrays its trust as a screen to spare its victim the spectacle of reality, it disappears . . . with wailing and gnashing of teeth. The mortal microcosm cannot forgive the relative immortality of the macrocosm.[22]

It would seem then as if the dolorous metamorphosis of Moran into Molloy and Molloy's later painful groping for the ground of being, his crawling back into his mother's room or womb or tomb (for both death and rebirth seem to be implied here), is but a Beckettian Künstler-roman in Nietzschean terms: the undoing of the process of individuation, the dying of an Apollonian ego and the birth of a Dionysian artist. It is quite in keeping that Molloy even speaks of his loss of a sense of identity, his being "wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate."[23] If the Moran-Molloy trek is seen as one continuous development, it represents the artist's moving away from intelligence and fragmentation in an effort to arrive at and rediscover the pristine unity of the All—a notion Beckett also developed in his Dialogues with Duthuit, as we shall see later. And it is not surprising that the Moran-Molloy artist's physical changes and altered intellectual sensitivities are reflected in his use of language and the relationship of that language to "reality." Molloy admits that "when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names."[24]

The making of the Dionysian artist is further pursued in the second novel of Beckett's trilogy, *Malone Dies*. The bed wherein Malone spends his days and nights seems to be in a room closely resembling that in which Molloy arrived. Unlike Apollonian, individualist man, Malone is certain of nothing, not even of his body. He describes himself as speechless and shapeless and might well consider himself dead, were he not under the impression that he is dying (a sensation he describes as being given birth to into death) because he has in his possession pencils (one of them French) and exercise books in which to write. "This exercise book is my life," he acknowledges, and it is in the stillness of his room broken only by the noise of his little finger gliding before his pencil across the paper that he knows what he has to do.[25] He writes of himself, but he does so as if he were another. (Again the first person pronouns have been replaced by a third person.) But he also realizes that, as he writes, as he begins again to try "to live, cause to live, be another, in myself, in another," he does so "no longer to succeed but rather in order to fail."[26] For nothing is certain, all is sheer possibility, as "the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness"[27]—that is, as he copes with the undifferentiated All. Such failure was precisely what Beckett considered the aim the modern artist had to strive for. In his three well known Dialogues with Duthuit he stressed the fact that

the modern artist must abandon "art, craft, and good housekeeping, living," and come to realize that "to be an artist is to fail."

The protagonists of the stories he tells himself while "dying" (or while in the process of becoming a yet more Dionysian artist) are consequently more and more nameless as they become less and less individualized. There is Sapo—most likely *homo sapiens*; Macmann, Irish for "son of man"; Moll from Latin *mulier*, woman; but there is also Lemuel, a variant of Samuel, clearly meant to challenge and taunt the reader with the possibility that there is, among this odd array of protagonists, Samuel Beckett himself, the author of them all. But it is in the third novel of the trilogy, *The Unnamable*, that the most radical break is made by Beckett with the Apollonian world of the *principium individuationis* and that the reader is led into the very heart of Dionysian formlessness. It is quite appropriate that the novel's protagonist asks at its very beginning "Where now? Who now? When now?" The shapeless tale's protagonists (if the term can be applied any longer with any justification) are, besides the Unnamable, Mahood (mankind) and Worm. "I say I," asserts the Unnamable, "unbelieving," and he continues to mumble "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me."[28] I have quoted him earlier as resolving never to say *I* again, yet, after that resolve even he must wonder "what then is the subject? Mahood? No, not yet. Worm? Even less. Bah, any old pronoun will do, provided one sees through it."[29] Since the Unnamable's concerns are strictly those of the Dionysian writer, and things and people can no longer be differentiated, he must create his own reality, invent his own actors. As the Unnamable says "not I," he invokes, nevertheless, the fictional characters of Beckett's earlier novels—especially those of the trilogy—, usurping them as if they had been his own: all the Murphys, the Molloys, the Malones, who each used the pronoun *I*. The inspiration seems Nietzschean, the irony Beckettian when the Unnamable defends the impersonal use of the first person made by these earlier author-heroes: "He feels me in him, then he says I, as if I were he, or in another, let us be just, then he says Murphy, or Molloy, I forget, as if I were Malone . . . it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me."[30] It is he, the Unnamable claims, who invented Mahood,

> him and so many others, and the places where they passed, the places where they stayed in order to speak, since I had to speak, without speaking of me . . . I invented my memories, . . . not one is of me. It is they asked me to speak of them, they wanted to know what they were, how they lived, that suited me, I thought that would suit me, since I had nothing to say and had to say something, I thought I was free to say any old thing, so long as I didn't go silent.[31]

While silence is what he would like to attain, he must go on. For the paradox inherent in the artist's arrival at such Dionysian "death" is that the death would be meaningless if it were not also a beginning. Art is not meant to stop. It is simply to be "of a new order," as Beckett had asserted in his Dialogue with Duthuit concerning three modern painters. There he maintained—not in novelistic or theatrical terms, but rather on a theoretical level—that the modern painter had to detach himself from the concepts of art prevalent with

only minor deflections since the Italian Renaissance. It was not enough for modern artists to realize that "Italian painters . . . surveyed the world with the eyes of building contractors, a mere means like any other." What was crucial was rather that Italian painters and those who followed their tradition "never stirred from the field of the possible, however much they may have enlarged it."[32] What Beckett found fault with in their conception of art—even that of such modern painters as Tal Coat, Matisse, or Masson—was their common assumption "that the domain of the maker is the domain of the feasible. The much to express, the little to express, the ability to express much, the ability to express little, merge into the common anxiety to express as much as possible, or as truly as possible, or as finely as possible, to the best of one's ability."[33] Hence to Beckett the history of painting appears to have been, regrettably, nothing but "the history of its attempts to escape from [its] sense of failure."[34] What Beckett equally rejects is the emphasis art historians have placed on the relationship of representer to representee—their attempts altogether to establish causal relationships, "as though the irrationality of pi were an offense against the deity, not to mention his creature." What Beckett envisions instead—and here he gives his unstinted admiration to the painter Bram Van Velde—is an aritst's total submission "to the incoercible absence of relation, in the absence of terms or . . . in the presence of unavailable terms."[35] He believes Van Velde to be one of the few—perhaps the only—modern painters to realize "that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living."[36] Beckett's own acknowledgement of the paradox inherent in these Dionysian disquisitions seems to be an appropriate assessment of his own artistic attempts in *The Unnamable* as well as in *Not I*: "I know that all that is required now . . . is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he make an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation."[37]

Of all Beckett's author-protagonists, the Unnamable clearly represents the height of that Dionysian spirit that Beckett himself so greatly admired in the artist Bram Van Velde and that he has seemingly tried to emulate: a moving away from individuation and an annullation of any relationship between representer and representee in art. In many ways, Mouth of *Not I* seems to be the Unnamable's equivalent—an analogy that has been observed by a number of critics.[38] Even more than the Unnamable, Mouth is deprived of her bodily existence. Even less than he is she shown in any relationship to the field of the possible. "Her body like gone," she is physically no more than a mouth that enunciates words: only her "words are coming." Like the Unnamable, who must go on, she "can't stop the stream," although "her voice is alone." Yet while her existence and the form of her utterances resemble that of the Dionysian author-protagonist, the Unnamable, her own concerns are not predominantly those of the artist. Her questions concerning guilt and suffering as well as her desire to crawl back seem more closely related to the myth of Silenus and the biblical story of the Fall and thereby go beyond or stop short of man's salvation through art that was envisioned by Nietzsche. While she does not say *I*, while she has rejected the principle of individuation

as completely as did the Unnamable, her drama has widened to that of everyman. It is almost as if she were Mahood (mankind) whom the Unnamable could not yet decide to use as one of his protagonist stand-ins, so that it is not surprising that her suffering is akin to that recognized by modern psychologists and psychoanalysts as inherent in human existence as such.

Psychoanalysts such as Jung think of man's appearance in the universe—heretofore the realm of plants and animals—as catastrophic and believe that his very intelligence and consciousness are a source of suffering not only for himself but also for all that surrounds him. Such thinking is, of course, in total harmony with myths and the Bible, when it asserts that suffering and separation are the inevitable by-products of human consciousness, because this consciousness ruptured and fragmented the primal oneness and world harmony of which man originally had been a part. Erich Neumann speaks of "man's original fusion with the world, with its landscape, its fauna [that] has its best known anthropological expression in totemism."[39] Man's gaining of consciousness set him apart from the great All and turned him into an individual aware of his otherness, thus splitting the universe into a subject/object dichotomy that differentiates between I and thou, people and people, things and things. Psychoanalysts have observed, moreover, patterns of rupture, separation and alienation at every stage of an individual's process of maturing: birth, the individual's first assertion of independence vis-à-vis his mother, his family, and finally vis-à-vis society. As he attempts to define the various phases of ego-feeling in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud maintains that "originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it."[40]

In a similar vein, though glancing backward rather than forward, Neumann thinks of man's birth as a loss of paradise. Writing of the infant, he states:

> [His] world is experienced as all-embracing . . . The world shelters and nourishes him, while he scarcely wills and acts at all. Doing nothing, lying inert in the unconscious, merely being there in the inexhaustible twilit world, all needs effortlessly supplied by the great nourisher—such is that early beatific state . . . The state of being contained in the whole, without responsibility or effort, with no doubts and no divisions . . . is paradisal and can never again be realized in its pristine happy-go-luckiness in adult life.[41]

And again we find that poets have foreshadowed such notions long before psychoanalysis was established as a discipline. For this is what Lionel Trilling, one of the finest Wordsworth critics, comments upon that poet's "Ode: Intimations of Mortality" and "The Prelude":

> The Ode makes heavenly pre-existence the source. The *Prelude* finds the source in maternal affection. But the psychologists tell us that notions of heavenly pre-existence figure commonly as representations

> of physical prenatality—the womb is the environment which is perfectly adapted to its inmate and compared to it all other conditions of life may well seem like "exile" to the (very literal) "outcast."[42]

Trilling also mentions in that respect James Joyce's near perfect evocation of prenatal bliss: "Before born babe bliss had. Within womb won he worship. Whatever in that one case done commodiously done was. (*Ulysses*)"[43]

But are we justified in assuming that Mouth's sense of exile and her wish to crawl back into the "godforsaken hole" (which might possibly be spelled w-h-o-l-e) is the equivalent of poetic longing for a lost prenatal paradise? I believe that Beckett's emphasis is slanted differently and that it is the play's title "Not I" that is of crucial significance here. For—though psychologists and psychoanalysts seem to have given little or no heed to this fact—it would seem that the child's first reference to himself or herself as *I*, its use of the first-person pronoun instead of calling himself or herself by the name others have conferred upon him or her, must represent a giant step in a child's process of individuation and the development of his ego. In contrast, a conscious avoidance of the first person pronoun (indirectly saying "not I"), must be considered an annulment of that ego. Mouth's not saying *I* resembles not only the lyrical poet's un-selving, but rather everyman's un-selving and deflation of the ego. It is in this sense that *The Unnamable* and *Not I* are not identical. *The Unnamable*'s protagonist may well be considered the surrogate of Beckett the writer; Mouth is, beyond that, his surrogate as a human being. The Unnamable arrives at Beckett's own theories about art and writing while putting them to work. In *Not I*, these theories are equally put into practice, but it is not Mouth who propagates them. Her desire to crawl back represents rather her willingness to surrender that ego-consciousness that, in Beckett's view, has been not only the doom of post-Renaissance artists but of modern man in general. It is this sense of individuation that Beckett himself would deny himself as he withholds it from his characters as well as his actors. It is Beckett himself who says: "Not I."

New York City

Notes

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3. 216.
4. S.E. Gontarski, "Beckett's Voice Crying in the Wilderness, from 'Kilcool' to *Not I*", *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, (vol. 74) 45, 28.
5. Beckett, *Not I* 216-23.
6. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, trans. Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove P, 1958) 165, 94.
7. Genesis *3*: 5.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956) 29.
9. Nietzsche 27.
10. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol 2, trans. Ralph Manheim, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970) 197.
11. Nietzsche 97.
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16. Edith Kern, *Existential Thought and Fictional Technique: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beckett* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970) 167-240.
17. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove P, 1957) 69.
18. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, trans. Patrick Bowles and Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove P, 1955) 152.
19. 151.
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25. Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*, trans. Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove P, 1956) 114.
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27. 19, 21.
28. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, trans. Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove P, 1958) 3.
29. 77.
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31. 152-53.
32. "Three Dialogues by Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit", *Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1965) 17.
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37. 21.
38. Gontarski 27.
39. Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1954) 268.
40. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961) 16.
41. Neumann 15.
42. Lionel Trilling, "The Immortality Ode", *Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M.H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960) 137.
43. 142, n. 7.