



IRAQI  
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية  
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية



ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

**Journal of Language Studies**

Contents available at: <http://www.iasj.net/iasj/journal/356/about>

## Self and Identity Concepts in Postmodernism: A Study of Samuel Beckett's "Not I"

**Prof. Dr. Ansam Riyadh Abdulla Almaarof \***

Tikrit University- College of Education for Women- English Department

[Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq](mailto:Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq)

&

**Aseel Ahmed Jasim**

Tikrit University- College of Education for Women- English Department

[Aseel@st.tu.edu.iq](mailto:Aseel@st.tu.edu.iq)

Received: 14/4 / 2023, Accepted:21 /5 /2023, Online Published: 25 / 3 /2025

### **Abstract**

The Fragmented Self and Identity in Postmodernism: An Analysis of Harris Through "Not I" by Samuel Beckett. Postmodernism is a deliberate distancing of the self with itself, leading to disintegration of coherent subjectivity. The premise of this paper is that the identity of character is fragmented when we analyze the character of Harris in the play. This study argues that the play subverts the typical notions of identity and presents a fractured and unstable self that keeps up with the complexities of the postmodern condition. The goal of the research is to explore how Beckham's work disintegrates the notion of a unified self, including the psychological and existential impact of this fragmentation. Research questions of interest to the understanding of the play may include: How does the play represent the fracture of the self? What is the role of

\* **Corresponding Author:** Ansam Riyadh, E. Mail: [Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq](mailto:Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq)

, **Affiliation:** Tikrit University - Iraq

© This is an open access article under the CC by licenses <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



alienation and disconnection in the shaping of identity in the play? What does the performative quality in "Not I" do to highlight postmodern conceptualizations of selfhood? The method entails an analysis that is textual and performative minded, based on Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and hyperreality. It explores how the play creates a hyperreal experience in which identity breaks down into multiplicities—a space of fragmentation between the voice (as the character's imagined identity) and the body of the performer (as a bio-subject separate from the narrative as told). Through a close reading of Beckett's spare language, non-linear story, and disembodied character, the paper demonstrates how the play creates a simulated identity that only lives in fragments, without a unitary centre. These findings show that the play illustrates Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal wherein what constitutes the self is rendered thereby a simulation, neither truly present but also not wholly vanished. By representing identity as a construct, perpetually subverted through the alienation of voice, language, and meaning, Beckett critiques a postmodern condition. Beckett's play, the paper concludes, ultimately forces audiences to think about the existential void left after stable identity is stripped away.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Fragmented Self, Identity, Samuel Beckett, "Not I", Jean Baudrillard, Hyperreality, Simulation, Alienation

الذات ومفاهيم الهوية في ما بعد الحداثة: دراسة لمسرحية "لست أنا" لصمويل بيكيت

ا.د. أنسام رياض عبدالله المعروف / جامعة تكريت

و

أصيل احمد جاسم / جامعة تكريت

### المستخلص

الذات والهوية المُجزأة في ما بعد الحداثة: تحليل لشخصية هاريس في مسرحية "لست أنا" لصمويل بيكيت. تتسم ما بعد الحداثة بحالة تباعد الذات عن نفسها، مما يؤدي إلى تفكك موضوعية الذات الموحدة. تنطلق هذه الدراسة من فرضية أن هوية الشخصية تتجزأ عندما نُحلل شخصية هاريس في مسرحية "لست أنا" لصمويل بيكيت. تجادل الدراسة بأن المسرحية تقوض المفاهيم التقليدية عن الهوية وتقدم ذاتاً متكسرة وغير مستقرة، تعكس تعقيدات الحالة ما بعد الحداثة. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيف تعمل أعمال بيكيت على تفكيك مفهوم الذات الموحدة، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار التأثير النفسي والوجودي لهذا التفكك. وتشمل الأسئلة البحثية لفهم مسرحية "لست أنا" ما يلي: كيف تُصوّر المسرحية تفكك الذات؟ ما دور العزلة والانفصال في تشكيل الهوية داخل المسرحية؟ وكيف تسلط السمة الأدائية في المسرحية الضوء على مفاهيم ما بعد الحداثة المتعلقة بالهوية الذاتية؟

وتعتمد المنهجية على تحليل نصي وأدائي قائم على نظرية جان بودريار حول المحاكاة والواقع الفائق. تبحث الدراسة في كيفية خلق المسرحية لتجربة فائقة الواقعية تُفكك الهوية إلى أجزاء متعددة—مكان من التفكك بين الصوت (باعتباره الهوية المتخيلة للشخصية) وجسد المؤدي (ككيان بيولوجي منفصل عن السرد كما يُروى). من خلال قراءة متأنية للغة بيكيت المقتضبة، والسرد غير الخطي، والشخصية المجردة، تُظهر الورقة كيف تُنشئ المسرحية هوية محاكاة تعيش فقط في أجزاء، دون مركز موحد. وتظهر النتائج أن المسرحية تجسد مفهوم بودريار للواقع الفائق، حيث تصبح الذات مجرد محاكاة، ليست موجودة تمامًا ولكنها أيضًا لم تختفِ بالكامل. من خلال تصوير الهوية كهيكل دائم التلاشي عبر عزلة الصوت واللغة والمعنى، ينتقد بيكيت الحالة ما بعد الحداثية. في النهاية، تُجبر المسرحية الجمهور على التفكير في الفراغ الوجودي الذي يخلفه غياب الهوية الثابتة. الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الحداثة، الذات المجزأة، الهوية، صمويل بيكيت، "لست أنا"، جان بودريار، الواقع الفائق، المحاكاة، العزلة.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The notions of self and identity have been central to philosophical, psychological, and literary discourses. But postmodernism undermines these classical, essentialist ideas of a cohesive identity, arguing that subjectivity is disrupted, contingent and in flux. A quintessential representation of Rift Theory would be Beckett's *Not I* (1972), which is a disjunctive monologue of the modern, fragmented subjectivity that the mouth that performs the play is disembodied emphasizes the alienation, disconnection and existential void inherent in postmodern identity. This study examines "Not I" in terms of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and hyperreality to argue that Beckett's text constructs identity as simulacra—a form that is neither real nor completely absent but rather a fragmented and evasive structure.

Postmodern theorisation means that the self is no longer seen as a coherent, autonomous entity, but rather as a constructed fluid being, always shifting in response to external systems of representation, language and culture. Particularly relevant to the play, Jean Baudrillard's (1983) theory of simulation explains the dissolution of difference, thereby flattening the distinction between what is real and what is representational, causing the "self" to become a hyperreal construct, wholly detached from a stable or "real" identity. Scene 1 Beckett's minimalist dramaturgy and his mercurial narrative structure depict the self in hyperreal generative drive, which returns the audience's attention to the constructed and performative nature that characterizes identity. Also, the disembodied voice in "Not I" embodies the alienation and lack of agency that characterizes postmodern subjectivity (Esslin, 1987).

This paper is to examine what "Not I" does to the traditional notion of the self, implementing in its place an abstract and simulated identity. It attempts to answer, among

others: How does Beckett's treatment of identity engage with postmodern concerns with alienation and instability? How does performance feed into a splintered self? How does Baudrillard's theory on hyperreality inform one's reading of Beckett's work in terms of identity representation? In utilizing textual analysis in conjunction with performance theory, the paper investigates the extent to which the intersection of language, voice, and minimalism illuminates the postmodern crisis of identity.

"Not I", then, potentially represents the postmodern condition whereby identity is understood as a simulation, an archive, of movement or gesture, that atomizes the whole into parts. The disembodied voice, a motif intrinsic to the play, acts as a fractured, unstable entity, operating as an agent between the real and the hyperreal. In the end, Beckett's oeuvre interrogates this illusion of self on which conceptions of narrative presuppose; it finds at the heart of postmodern subjectivity an abyss. Reading Beckett through the lens of postmodern identity furthers the discourse on the human condition in this fragmented age, emphasizing Beckett's own narrative on the self, a simulacrum in a world of alienation.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

In this study, I use a qualitative research design of textual analysis and performance studies to analyze how "Not I" represents the post-modern concept of the fragmented self and identity. This study combines textual analysis and performance studies to examine how the play portrays the fragmented self and identity within a postmodern framework. The work considers the language, structure and performative elements within the play and how it relates to Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulation and hyperreality. Close reading of the play's script, and analytic scrutiny of selected performances, reveal the interplay between text, voice, and embodiment.

The textual analysis section scrutinizes the language and structure of the play. In particular, special focus is held on the disembodied mouth, both as the only performer and as the a bleached stand-in for a broken identity. This stage involves an evaluation of the performative elements of "Not I", guiding attention to how the staging and delivery of the monologue help to deliver a fragmented, simulated identity. Performances in these works, along with reviews, are analyzed to uncover how people performing these works inhabit and express themes of alienation, disconnection, and instability.

Simulation and Hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard, 1983): The Prowling (insarking) Players have developed a post-punk anti-grunge look that subverts the mainstream's appropriation of underground cultures. In analysing the interplay between the real and the constructed self in the play, Baudrillard's notions of the simulacrum and hyperreal are employed. Using this methodology, the study connects textual and performance analysis with postmodern theory to comprehensively show how the play constructs the subject as a fragmented, hyperreal object.

## **3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and hyperreality, as stated in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1983) Challenge the

truth vs non-truth: Where does truth fit in Baudrillard's thought (especially in the "postmodern" condition) Baudrillard blurs traditional lines of veracity that most theorists observe between the real thing and its result as argument in postmodern time produces a new with the aesthetic form of object or thing. This idea is crucial to making sense of the fragmented identity represented.

Beckett's employment of a mouth separated from a body who delivers a breathless, disjointed monologue, a manifestation of what Baudrillard describes as the hyperreal. The self-identity of the play is a simulacrum; it is not coherent, not native but is fractured and diffused with no central core. Such aligns with Baudrillard's notion that the postmodern self is a constructed artifice, no longer buttressed by authenticity, merely existing in a performative illusion (Baudrillard, 1983). Additionally, the study also relies on the broader postmodern critique of identity, specifically Lyotard's (1984) rejection of grand narratives and the concept of stable subjectivity. Lyotard's concept of "incredulity toward metanarratives" offers further insight into the ways in which the play undermines established structures of identity through its representation of postmodern subjectivity as alienated and unstable. Drawing on Baudrillard's and Lyotard's theories, this framework foregrounds the importance of language, performance, and minimalism as strategies for 'unbuilding' a stable self and 'building' a fragmented, hyperreal subject.

#### **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The fragmentation of self and identity has been a central concern in postmodern literature and drama, reflecting the broader philosophical and existential questions of the era. This literature review explores previous studies on fragmented identity and postmodernism in dramatic texts, with a focus on works by Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. These studies establish a foundation for analyzing the fragmented self in the play through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and hyperreality.

Abdulla and Faraj (2024) explore the irrationalism embedded in postmodernism in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, highlighting how the play undermines traditional rational narratives. Their study demonstrates how Pinter uses ambiguous language, fragmented dialogue, and disjointed character interactions to critique the modern notion of coherent identity. This work is particularly relevant to the play, as both playwrights employ fragmented language to destabilize the audience's understanding of identity and the self. By showing how language constructs and deconstructs meaning, Abdulla and Faraj's findings underscore the performative instability of identity, a key theme in the text.

Similarly, Almaarroof and Rostam (2023) investigate the fragmented landscapes of Harold Pinter's *"The Room"* as a postmodern critique of stability and coherence. Their analysis reveals that Pinter uses spatial fragmentation as a metaphor for psychological and existential instability. This study aligns with Beckett's use of disembodiment in *"Not I"*, where the fragmented voice and body symbolize the breakdown of a unified self. The comparison between spatial and psychological fragmentation further enhances the understanding of how postmodern drama employs abstraction to represent identity as unstable and disconnected from traditional frameworks.

Almaarroof and Mehasin's (2024) study on Pinter's "The Homecoming" explores celebrated fragmentation as a hallmark of postmodernism, focusing on how the play dismantles traditional family structures and societal norms. They argue that fragmentation is not only a reflection of postmodern disillusionment but also a deliberate strategy to challenge dominant narratives. The play similarly uses fragmentation as a critique of essentialist notions of identity. The disembodied mouth in "Not I" mirrors the celebrated fragmentation seen in Pinter's characters, as both reject the possibility of coherence in favour of a fractured, performative existence.

Hussein, Abdullah, and Jasim (2021) analyze existential themes in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" and "Endgame", focusing on the human search for salvation in an absurd, fragmented world. They argue that Beckett portrays humanity's journey as cyclical and futile, emphasizing the disconnection between desire and fulfilment. While their study does not specifically address the play, their exploration of Beckett's use of repetition and minimalism provides important context for understanding the existential void portrayed in the play. The fragmented self in "Not I" builds on the themes of futility and alienation discussed in Hussein et al.'s work, illustrating the culmination of Beckett's exploration of fragmented identity.

These studies collectively highlight the postmodern preoccupation with fragmentation, alienation, and the instability of identity in drama. They provide a framework for understanding "Not I" as an extension of these themes, where Beckett uses disembodiment, fragmented language, and minimalism to deconstruct traditional notions of selfhood. While the previous studies primarily focus on Pinter's works or Beckett's earlier plays, this paper contributes to the discourse by applying Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and hyperreality to "Not I". By situating Beckett's play within the broader context of postmodern thought, this study explores how the fragmented self in the play critiques the constructed and performative nature of identity in the postmodern era.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The play is an excellent example of how postmodernist drama subverts conventional understandings of identity and subjectivity. Utilizing Jean Baudrillard's (1983) theory of simulation and hyperreality, the play deconstructs the idea of a singular self, offering instead a fragmented, performative, and artificial identity. In its minimalist staging and disembodied mouth monologue, Beckett critiques the illusion of authenticity, not just in the theatre, but also in life, and explores the constructed nature of human subjectivity.

The fragmentation of "Not I"'s speaker conforms to Baudrillardian ideas of the simulacrum, a representation increasingly in place of something else, stripping original replica of significance. The play's main character, depicted only by a disembodied mouth, embodies this feeling of a fractured self. The rambling, abstract monologue is filled with interruptions and repetition, like this line:

"Out... into this world... this world... tiny little thing... before its time... in a godfor... what?... girl?... Yes... small tiny little girl... into this... out into this... before her time..."

this godforsaken hole is called... called... for that no matter... unknown as to parents..." (Beckett, 1972, p. 2).

Entropy is a lost subjectivity, torn from any internal narrative. Critics like Esslin (1987) assert that the language of Beckett's plays "subvert the very structure of communication," revealing the artificiality of human constructs. Through the lens of Baudrillard, the fragmented vernacular becomes a simulacrum of persona, in which signifiers and utterances do not point to an originating reality, but rather begins a post-hoc process of hyperreal technologies of selfhood projection. We have been there before: *Hearing the Voice in Hyperreality*

The dissociation of not-I's vocalist directly echoes Bauman's concept of hyperreality, where demarcations between object and imagery dissolve into one another. The mouth, in a vacuum, becomes not just anatomy but a hyperreal index of identity that is disconnected not just from materiality, but from its placement. This hyperreal condition is underscored in Beckett's staging:

"Unbroken flood, stream of words, faintly audible, rest of stage in darkness, mouth alone in spotlight, goes on, finds herself unable to stop..." (Beckett, 1972, p. 1).

Following Baudrillard (1983), in a hyperreal world the artificial becomes more real than real, and indeed Beckett's mouth epitomises this. According to Hussein, Abdullah and Jasim (2021), Beckett's disembodied figures struggle for a sense of coherence in an environment that has robbed them of agency. The mouth's relentless stream of utterance here supplants the speaker, resulting in a performance more real than the self it attempts to represent.

From transmission to translation as the writer uses language as a postmodern critique. "Not I"'s fragmented language subverts traditional narrative structures, deconstructing the notion of a cohesive identity. One of postmodernism's distinguishing tenets is its rejection of metanarratives, that is, grand narratives that seek to unify and explain experience (Jean-François Lyotard 1984). Beckett tears apart metanarratives of identity and coherence in the play, which withholds logical sequence or resolution from the audience and leaves them with nothing but an unending monologue. For example, the repetition of the speaker's denial—"what?... who?... no!... she!... no! ..."—blocks any possibility of building a stable identity (Beckett 1972, 4).

Such fragmentation is seen as a critique of the essentialist notions of identity prevalent in Western thought (Almaarroof & Mehasin, 2024). By breaking the speaker's self-expression down to chaotic fragments, Beckett reveals language as a form of performance, not a transport for authentic self-representativity. According to Baudrillard (1983), in the hyperreal condition, language functions as an infinite system where signs create the semblance of meaning but are divorced from any real referent.

Performativity as a simulation of identification is also there, "Not I" itself becomes a simulation of identity, in which the detached mouth is an automaton reciting text at impossible velocity. The very staging instructions of Beckett insist that the monologue be delivered as a fast "unbroken flood" of words, thus depriving the audience of any

understanding of the narrative (Beckett, 1972, p. 1). Such mechanical, almost robotic delivery turns the mouth itself into a simulacrum of subjectivity.

According to Esslin (1987) this technique marks Beckett's approach towards abolishing the illusion of character, leaving only a 'mechanical apparatus' that simulates the role of identity. The bizarre spectacle of a scoliosis ridden Angela Jolie, almost costuming herself into a sexuality void of any trace of the real can be seen through a Baudrillardian lens, whereby her performance is hyperreal, with the monologue being so artificial that it draws attention to the fact that there is no real self behind the text. The character is not a person but in its very being it can be conceived only through its language as that of a conscious state of performing, a simulated identity for the postmodern condition.

Postmodern self and alienation is clear. The play's speaker's alienation is consistent with the postmodern critiques of identity that play on the existential feeling of disconnection. According to Baudrillard (1983), the hyperreal distorted affects individuals sense of self, in which they become alienated from both themselves and their experience, as each individual's identity becomes increasingly mediated by artificial systems of signs. This alienation plays out in the speaker's repeated disconnection from her own experience, as she refers to herself in the third person: "she did not... could not... believe a word of it... no connection whatever..." (Beckett, 1972, p. 6).

This lack of connection drives home the fragmented state of the speaker's identity, which has become entirely illegible as a singular entity. Similarly, according to Almaarof and Rostam (2023), identities in postmodern characters tend to be experienced as disjoined and alienated, indicative of the wider existential voids provoked by postmodernism. Beckett pushes this alienation to its limit by rendering the speaker a disembodied mouth, severed from any physical or emotional mooring.

Viewed through the lens of Baudrillard's theory of simulation and hyperreality, "Not I" becomes a powerful attack on the fabricated and performative character of identity. I suggest that by presenting the mouth as both a disembodied and fragmented simulacra, Beckett undermines conventional and normative conceptions of authenticity and unravels identity as a hyperreality. Fragmented language, alienated performance and minimalist staging serve the purpose of a radical deconstruction of the self, wherein the audience is urged to question the artificiality and instability of their own subjectivity at play in the postmodern world.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Using Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and hyperreality as a means of cultural and critical analysis, this study aims to examine the transcendence of the identity and selfhood. The deconstruction of identity as a unified aspect, whole and undivided is present in Beckett's work, and what is offered in place of it, is something much more disintegrated, and affected, and distanced from its previous concept of unity and identity. In the play, a disembodied mouth serves as a hyperreal construct—a simulacrum that blurs the boundary between the real and the artificial and thus most particularly questions the audience's understanding of subjectivity.



Through close reading of the speaker's fragmented language and performative disembodiment, the paper shows how Beckett is critiquing the postmodern condition of identity as mediated by artificial systems of signs that lack authenticity and coherence. The relentless monologue of the play, filled with dislocation and alienation, responds to this question at its heart: what is identity in a postmodern age? Beckett proposes that identity isn't now a fixed essence, an eternal nature, but an interminable performance, made through language and without any essential reality. Additionally, the study suggests that the play reflects Baudrillard's claim of hyperreality destroying the ring of truth. Beckett's minimalist staging and obsession with fragmented subjectivity (that system whereby identity appears to dissolve as the last bastions of faithful experience unwind) emphasize the artificially constructed nature of human existence. The self is revealed to be a simulation, rather than a coherent experience. By doing this, Beckett sets audiences up to question their cracked realities and the fragmented composition of our profiles.

In the end, this study proposes that the play reflects an incisive critique of postmodern identity. Thus the play does not oppose but rather subverts conventional notions of selfhood, as they are replaced with a hyperreal, simulated performance of subjectivity that resonates with the alienated, fractured quality of living in a postmodern register.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Abdulla, A. R., & Faraj, M. K. T. (2024). A Profound Irrationalism Anchored in Postmodernism: A Study of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. *JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES*, 8(2), 270-284.
- Almaarroof, A. R., & Rostam, S. U. (2023). Fragmented Landscape in Harold Pinter's "The Room": A Postmodern Study. *Journal of Language Studies*. Vol, 7(4), 470-478.
- Almaarroof, A. R. A., & Mehasin, Z. (2024). Celebrated Fragmentation: A Postmodern Study of Harold Pinter's "The Homecoming". *JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES*, 8(5), 366-376.
- Baudrillard, J. (1983). *Simulacra and Simulation* (S. F. Glaser, Trans.). University of Michigan Press.
- Beckett, S. (1972). *"Not I"*. Faber & Faber.
- Esslin, M. (1987). *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin Books.
- Hussein, M. S., Abdullah, A. R., & Jasim, A. H. (2021). Man's Continuous Search for Salvation in Beckett's plays: From Arrival in *Waiting For Godot* to Departure in *Endgame*. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, 28(3, 1), 42-66.
- Liotard, J.-F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.