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Exile Beyond Geography: Bilingualism, Self-Alienation, and the Poetics of Silence in Samuel Beckett

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Abstract

This article focuses on the experience of internal exile in Samuel Beckett's work, focusing on two fundamental axes: bilingualism and silence. Beckett's conscious switch from English to French after World War II is not an aesthetic or practical choice, but an act of linguistic self-exclusion, through which he repositions himself in the face of word and meaning. Drawing on Derrida's concept of the "monolingualism of the other" and Kristeva's definition of the foreigner, this study treats bilingualism not as an expressive enrichment, but as a sign of a deep division within the creative subject. Meanwhile, silence is not seen as an absence of speech, but as the most sincere form of expression, a way of giving voice to what cannot be said. Analyzing works such as *The Unnamable*, *Not I*, and *Krapp's Last Tape*, the article argues that Beckett does not write about exile, but from a permanent state of exile, conditioned not by geographical space, but by separation from language, identity, and meaning. The article aims to bring a new approach to the literature of exile, considering it as a fundamentally linguistic and existential experience, beyond the usual framework of national identity or cultural affiliation.

Keywords: linguistic exile; bilingualism; silence in literature; Samuel Beckett; self-alienation

1. Introduction

The literature of exile does not simply represent the physical departure from the homeland. As Isayev (2021) notes, it often stems from a permanent experience of temporality, where exile does not end with displacement, but continues to be felt as a spiritual and existential state. In this experience, the feeling of being a stranger penetrates identity, language, and cultural belonging. Recent studies also highlight how exile narratives actively reshape cultural and political discourses around identity and belonging (Guevara 2024). Exile is an experience of separation from oneself and from the system of signs that once gave meaning to the world. Within this landscape, language, the fundamental element for the construction of identity and communication, is no longer experienced as a refuge, but as a boundary. As Arnaldi (2022) illustrates through the concept of "therapeutic foreign language", the experience of being a stranger in language becomes an essential aspect of the experience of exile. What once offered belonging and security now becomes a space of tension and exclusion.

The writer in exile often finds himself in a position between two worlds: that which he has left behind and the one which he has not yet fully accepted. In this intermediary, language is no longer simply a means of communication, but a field charged with memory, loss, and self-alienation. This is especially true for Samuel Beckett[1], an author who, while not experiencing exile in the political sense, embodies a deeper and more silent form of it: linguistic exile.

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In this article, the term "linguistic exile[2]" does not simply refer to the shift in the language of writing from English to French, but to an existential and aesthetic state of detachment of the subject from language as a meaningful and representative abode. In Beckett's work, this detachment is not only biographical but translates into a stylistic strategy in which language loses its informative and referential function and becomes an internal terrain of tension, where speech makes itself impossible. Thus, "linguistic exile" in Beckett implies a deep awareness of the imperfection of language, a desire to go beyond it, and a writing practice that aims to expose the impossibility of communicating identity or experience fully. As Pascale Casanova has pointed out, this is a deliberate "aesthetic self-deprivation" to free the writing voice from idiomatic conventions and the mother tongue (Casanova 2006, p. 326).

This state of linguistic exile is closely linked to a form of self-alienation. Unlike being separated from the mother tongue, "self-alienation" means that the subject feels divided from itself—the language it uses no longer fully expresses who they are, but feels foreign, damaged, or empty. In Beckett's writing, this appears through broken voices that cannot affirm a stable self. As Kristeva points out, "the subject in language is always already estranged from itself, speaking in a voice not fully its own" (Kristeva 1991, p. 134).

After World War II, Beckett chose to write in French, not to win new readers, but to avoid the ease and automatism offered by his native language, English. In a letter to Nicholas Gessner in 1957, he describes this choice as an attempt to write "without effect, without rhetoric, 'without style'" (Casanova 2006, p. 76). French was not for him a pragmatic choice, but an act of constraint: a way of stripping the word of its ornamentation, bringing it closer to silence, and freeing it from the stylistic expectations of the mother tongue.

This article builds on recent developments in Beckettian studies that emphasize the author's central role in interrogating the unstable relationship between language and subjectivity. As Loran Gami (2022) observes, Beckett's works enact a "radical annihilation of the self", wherein the voice that speaks is one "it cannot claim as its own", revealing the ontological fragility at the heart of modern literature (p. 2).

This kind of exile does not only serve a bare aesthetic, but is also an ethical attitude towards language and writing. Beckett does not aim to master reality through words; on the contrary, he questions its very power to represent the world or the subject. In doing so, he constructs a new relationship with the text: one stripped of authority, open to uncertainty and fragmentation.

At the heart of this relationship there lie two fundamental elements: bilingualism and silence. Bilingualism, for Beckett, is not a sign of expressive versatility, but the site of an inner fracture, where the act of writing no longer affirms belonging, but exposes distance. It is not a dialogue between two languages, but a negotiation with the failure of both. What he constructs is not a bridge, but a space between, where meaning becomes unstable and voice unsettled. Silence, on the other hand, is not a passive absence, but an active mode of expression. It marks the limit of speech, a space where Beckett does not speak *about* the unsayable, but *from* it. Rather than using language to fill the void, he uses silence to shape it—to let what cannot be said resonate more fully than what can.

In this respect, Beckett is closely linked to Derrida's concept of the "monolingualism of the other". Similarly, Beckett is in an existential state of being without a place, neither in his language of origin, nor in a new belonging. He lives and writes in a field of tension where no language is sufficient, and every attempt to speak is met with a silent wall of emptiness.

Although Derrida's concept of the "monolingualism of the other" was developed within a specific historical and political context, namely, French colonialism in Algeria, this study does not aim to equate these experiences. In the case of Beckett, the reference serves

to illuminate an existential condition of estrangement from language, not as the result of external oppression, but as an inner state of uncertainty regarding the act of speaking. In this sense, Derrida's phrase "I only have one language; it is not mine" (Derrida 1998, p. 2) is not invoked as a political statement, but as a way to shed light on a deeper experience: the impossibility of inhabiting any language as fully one's own.

These experiences of separation and self-alienation, embodied in bilingualism and silence, are not for Beckett simply stylistic devices, but essential ways of being in the world. This article aims to examine precisely these two pillars, bilingualism and silence, as forms of representation of internal exile in the work of Samuel Beckett. By analyzing works such as *L'Innommable*, *Not I*, *Endgame*, and *The Unnamable*, as well as placing them in dialogue with thinkers such as Pascale Casanova, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Homi Bhabha, we will argue that Beckett does not write about exile, but from exile. Through this intermediate position, neither in the language of origin nor in a new belonging, Beckett constructs a poetics of separation, emptiness, and silence, which remains among the most powerful representations of modern exile literature?

To examine this approach, this study builds its methodology on a combination of discursive analysis and hermeneutic interpretation of the literary text, in conjunction with the deconstructive approach developed by Jacques Derrida and the cultural analyses of alienation according to Julia Kristeva and Homi Bhabha. Selected works by Samuel Beckett are examined not only at the level of content, but also in the construction of voice, rhythm and silence as structural elements of the experience of exile. The research method relies on a comparative reading of different linguistic versions of Beckett's texts, as well as a critical reflection on the way bilingualism and silence become tools to articulate a profound crisis of the subject and language. This approach aims to highlight how, in Beckett, exile is not a thematic content, but an ontological state embodied in the very structure of writing.

It is worth noting that, although the works of theorists such as Derrida, Casanova, Kristeva, and Bhabha date back several decades, their ideas continue to be part of the contemporary debate on the literature of exile and on the poetics of bilingual writing. Recent studies on Beckett and on the experience of the foreigner in language and text continue to build on these approaches (Louar 2019; Loran Gami 2022; Engelberts 2021), demonstrating their enduring relevance in the current theoretical framework.

This article builds on the theoretical approaches of Casanova, Derrida, Kristeva, and Bhabha, putting them in dialogue with Beckett's concrete literary text. Unlike existing studies, which have usually treated bilingualism, silence, and self-alienation as separate aspects of Beckett's poetics, this study aims to examine them as deeply intertwined dimensions that construct a poetics of internal exile.

This article aims to show that in Samuel Beckett's work, bilingualism, self-alienation and silence are closely related and cannot be understood separately. The use of two languages is not a means of enrichment, but a way of showing that the author no longer feels any language as his own. This experience of distance from language is accompanied by a deep sense of separation from himself, which appears in the text through an uncertain voice and fragmented narratives. Silence, on the other hand, is not a lack of words, but a way of expressing what cannot be said. These three dimensions will be analyzed in this study as part of a poetics of internal exile, through careful readings of the text and reliance on philosophical and stylistic approaches.

2. Literature Review

Literary discourse on exile, particularly in relation to foreignness in language and identity, has undergone significant development in recent decades, shaped by philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic perspectives. Within this framework, the work of Samuel Beckett

holds a distinct place—not because it thematizes exile in an overt or external manner, but because it inscribes it into the very structure of writing. For Beckett, exile is not a journey from one place to another, but a radical dislocation from the self, from language, and from the possibility of articulating a coherent subjectivity.

One of the most influential readings in this regard is offered by Casanova (2006), who positions Beckett at the margins of the global literary system. She interprets his shift from English to French as an act of aesthetic self-deprivation and refusal of stylistic ease. Rather than embracing French for expressive range, Beckett adopts it to strip language of its idiomatic familiarity—to write, as Casanova puts it, "beyond" English by silencing it from within (Casanova 2006, p. 76).

This displacement resonates with Jacques Derrida's concept of the *monolingualism of the other*, articulated in the assertion: "I only have one language; it is not mine" (Derrida 1998, p. 2). Though grounded in the context of French colonialism in Algeria, Derrida's reflection finds a powerful parallel in Beckett's linguistic estrangement as an Irish Protestant writing in English—a language historically associated with domination. In both cases, the ostensibly native language becomes a space of alienation, not belonging.

Although Derrida's concept of *monolingualism of the other* was originally articulated in the context of French colonialism in Algeria, it finds a profound echo in Beckett's position as an Irish writer for whom English functioned as a foreign language internalized through estrangement. In both cases, the so-called inherited language serves not only as a vehicle of communication but also as an instrument of domination. For Derrida, French is the language imposed upon the Algerian body and psyche; for Beckett, English bears the lingering shadow of British colonial rule over a historically subjugated land, despite being his mother tongue. Beckett's decision to write in French should not be understood merely as an aesthetic provocation, but as a deliberate act of distancing from a language that signified not belonging but estrangement. In this light, Derrida's assertion, "I only have one language; it is not mine", extends beyond a singular colonial framework and becomes emblematic of a liminal condition in which language ceases to offer refuge and instead becomes an alien imprint upon identity.

Kristeva (1991) notion of the foreigner "who lives within us" provides another key lens through which to view Beckett's poetics. According to Kristeva, foreignness is not merely an external condition, but an internal structure of language and subjectivity (Kristeva 1991, p. 13). In Beckett's texts, the speaking voice no longer belongs to a unified self but emerges from a fractured consciousness, unable to claim ownership of its own words or sustain narrative coherence.

Similarly, Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 4) argues that identity takes shape in "third spaces" of hybridity, where belonging is always incomplete, negotiated, and precarious. This concept illuminates Beckett's position as a writer who does not speak from within a national or linguistic center, but from the thresholds of meaning, where language, identity, and representation falter.

Yet, beyond these foundational theorists, recent Beckett scholarship has reconceptualized his relationship to language, embodiment, and voice through close readings of his bilingual practice and formal minimalism. Engelberts (2021) contends that Beckett's bilingual works resist conventional translation and should instead be understood as hybrid compositions that undermine monolingual authority. Self-translation, in this view, is not about clarity or equivalence, but about maintaining a space of tension in which no language can stabilize meaning or selfhood.

In the same spirit, Loran Gami (2022) reads Beckettian silence as the site of ontological fracture: language collapses into emptiness, the speaking subject dissolves, and writing

becomes testimony to the failure of expression. This silence is not spontaneous absence but a structurally embedded mode of refusal—a refusal to speak on language's terms.

Amanda Dennis (2021), focusing on Beckett's theater, argues that language in his plays operates not only as discourse but as a terrain of embodied experience. In *Not I*, for example, the voice is violently severed from the body, and its relentless rhythm destabilizes subjectivity rather than affirming it. Silence here is not mere pause, but the force that reveals the limits of speech.

Louar (2019) similarly suggests that Beckett's bilingualism is not additive but subtractive—a strategy to dismantle stylistic continuity and disrupt literary convention. For her, Beckett's writing in two languages serves not to enrich expression but to expose the inadequacy of all language. In the same vein, Almeida and Veras (2017) argue that Beckett's translation and self-translation practices act as poetic mechanisms to unveil the slippage between word and meaning, resisting the assumption that language can ever fully convey experience.

Derval Tubridy (2018), in her analysis of *The Unnamable*, conceptualizes Beckett's silence as an "ethics of the unspoken"—a form of critique where language negates its own authority. In her view, Beckett does not portray the failure of the subject through silence; rather, silence becomes the form in which the subject ceases to exist in recognizable linguistic terms.

From a performative perspective, studies by Ulrika Maude (2015) and Jonathan Bignell (2022) highlight how Beckett's use of recorded voice, darkness, bodily fragmentation, and disrupted temporality foregrounds the physical experience of linguistic estrangement. The separation from the voice and the self is enacted not only narratively but somatically, turning Beckett's theater into a space of sensory exile.

Taken together, these readings offer strong insights into bilingualism (Louar 2019; Engelberts 2021), silence (Loran Gami 2022; Amanda Dennis 2021; Derval Tubridy 2018), and self-alienation (Kristeva 1991; Homi Bhabha 1994) as central dimensions of Beckett's writing. What remains underexplored, however, is a framework that considers these elements not in isolation, but as interwoven expressions of a singular existential condition—what may be called "internal exile." In this state, the subject is not displaced from a nation or culture, but from language itself as a medium of coherence and belonging.

This study seeks to address that critical gap by treating bilingualism, self-alienation, and silence as three structurally linked sides of Beckett's poetics. They do not simply accompany one another—they form a unified logic of estrangement. At a time when fragmentation of language and identity has become a hallmark of contemporary literature, Beckett offers a unique paradigm: writing not as self-expression, but as testimony to the irreducible fracture at the heart of being.

3. Linguistic Exile as an Aesthetic and Ethical Position

For Beckett, writing in another language is not a stylistic or technical decision, but a way of distancing himself from the fluency and comfort of his mother tongue. By choosing French, he aims to escape the automatisms of expression and confront the very boundaries of language. This chapter explores how bilingualism becomes a form of voluntary detachment from linguistic certainty and a means of exposing the deep uncertainty embedded in the act of writing. In this sense, what this article calls *existential experience* refers to the writer's confrontation with the failure of language to ground identity or provide expressive coherence, a confrontation that marks Beckett's entire literary practice.

Samuel Beckett's choice to write in French after the Second World War cannot be understood as a technical, stylistic, or commercial decision. Rather, it marks a radical shift in his relationship with language and the act of writing. French, for Beckett, was not simply

a new means of expression, but a form of creative self-denial: a way of questioning the easily fluid and acquired approach of English, his native language. This was a conscious choice to write at a distance, in restraint, and in hindsight, a state that forced the author to fulfill himself with expressive prudence, to abandon rhetoric, and to confront the emptiness of language.

The meaning of this choice becomes clearer when we place Beckett in the cultural and linguistic context of twentieth-century Ireland. As an Irish Protestant from Dublin, Beckett had a complicated relationship with English, a language that itself carried the remnants of an imposed colonial identity. While other Irish authors, such as James Joyce, sublimated this tension through stylistic overload and fragmented language structure, an approach that, as Uyurkulak (2022) notes, constructs a multilayered and complex space of writing, Beckett, by contrast, chose a path of radical reduction. Rather than creating an elaborate style or experimenting with constructed complexity, he stripped the language of all ornamentation (Walker 2019).

In a letter to Nicholas Gessner in 1957, Beckett describes his decision to write in French as a deliberate refusal of literary ornamentation and expressive fluency (Casanova 2006, p. 76). The desire for stripping is not an ordinary aesthetic act, but an ethical stance towards language. By abandoning the stylistic mastery and certainty of expression that English offered, Beckett embraced a way of writing that demanded not perfection but limitation. He wrote not to articulate experience in its fullness, but to expose its absence.

This choice constitutes a conscious act of creative limitation, a way of building the text not on the richness of language but on sensitivity to its limitations. Instead of a style loaded with linguistic trimming, Beckett constructs a way of writing that avoids any kind of excessive rhetoric and approaches silence. This "anti-style", a term used by McMullan (2010) to describe Beckett's bare writing, is as shaped as any other style, but with the objective of not masking the emptiness with rhetorical embellishment. In this way, the Beckettian text does not seek to build a world, but to witness the void where the world is impossible.

Beckett is not the only author to have experienced linguistic exile as a creative act. Writers like Vladimir Nabokov, who wrote in Russian and later in English, or Eva Hoffman, who describes the loss of belonging through linguistic displacement in her work *Lost in Translation*, also show forms of this interlingual tension. But the difference lies in the way Beckett embraces this separation not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a state to be experienced. While other authors often seek a reintegration into the new language, Beckett chooses to remain in the gap between languages, in a territory where meaning is always uncertain and language always suspicious.

Other exiled writers, such as Agota Kristof, Joseph Brodsky, and Milan Kundera, have also experienced the linguistic divide as a creative experience, although their strategies differ fundamentally from Beckett's. Agota Kristof, a Hungarian who wrote in French after exile in Switzerland, describes the experience of language shift as a deep existential wound: "La langue ennemie, la langue qui ment" ("The enemy language, the language that lies") (Kristof 2004). For Joseph Brodsky, writing in English was an attempt to survive aesthetically and to preserve poetic identity in a new linguistic environment, while Kundera (2007) builds stylistic and structural bridges between French and Czech, aiming for a reintegration into the new language.

Faced with these attempts to build a "new home" in a foreign language, Beckett chooses to stand in the void, to write from a space where no language is reliable, and every identity is temporary.

In this approach, Beckett's work contains a profound ethical dimension: he does not seek to impose a meaning through language, but to listen to its limits, to live in what cannot

be said. As Jacques Derrida describes in *Monolingualism of the Other*, the experience of writing in a language that is "not ours" represents a profound state of separation. Derrida asserts: "I only have one language; it is not mine." (Derrida 1998, p. 2). This sentence sounds profoundly Beckettian: for the author, language, whether familiar or foreign, is no longer a space of possession, but a field of tension where separation is internal and enduring. This conceptualization of the linguistic stranger still remains essential in contemporary literary and translation studies (Louar 2019; Loran Gami 2022), and continues to influence recent analyses of Beckett's bilingual writing (Engelberts 2021).

Julia Kristeva's concept of the foreigner is also in line with this. In her work *Strangers to Ourselves,* she writes, "The foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder." (Kristeva 1991, p. 13). In this context, Beckett is not simply an author who describes the foreigner; he writes from the position of being a foreigner himself, a foreigner in language, in style, in belonging. French for him is not a second language to complement the first, but a way of living separation as a formative experience.

Therefore, linguistic exile in Beckett's work should not be treated as an isolated episode of his biography or as a formal strategy. It represents an essential dimension of his poetics: an attempt to stand at the edges of language, to bear witness to what cannot be said. By rejecting the certainties of speech, Beckett constructs an ethics of absence, a way of standing in the presence of emptiness without filling it with rhetoric. This is, in essence, a literature that does not claim to own the world, but to bear witness to man's permanent separation from it. This resistance to rhetorical certainty is, in this article's view, an *ethical stance*, a form of fidelity to the limits of expression, where silence becomes more truthful than fluency.

Even the works that Beckett wrote in English after 1947, such as *Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, do not mark a return to the mother tongue as a safe haven. On the contrary, they continue to reflect the same estrangement from language, visible in the fractured speech, the absence of a stable self, and the collapse of coherent narrative. These texts show that bilingualism in Beckett is not simply a matter of linguistic choice, but the expression of a permanent state of separation between speech and self.

4. Bilingualism and Self-Alienation

Bilingualism in Samuel Beckett's work is not a random biographical fact or a technical writing device. It constitutes a deliberate act of separation and a way of being that displaces the author from any full linguistic affiliation. Writing in another language and then rewriting the text in the mother tongue does not amplify the author's voice, but rather shatters it. This is a continuous process of self-alienation, in which Beckett strips language of the automatism, familiarity, and stylistic ease that English offered.

For Beckett, the transition from one language to another does not represent an attempt to build bridges between cultures or to find a richer form of expression. On the contrary, he uses this shift as a way to deepen the separation from the self and to draw attention to the uncertainty inherent in every act of expression. Rather than expanding linguistic possibilities, bilingualism in Beckett serves to dismantle the illusion of linguistic mastery. This chapter examines how the experience of writing in more than one language becomes an experience of self-alienation, where the subject no longer feels secure in either what he says or the language through which he says it.

This intermediate position is constructed not as a privilege of mastering two codes, but as a state of existential uncertainty. In this context, *self-alienation* describes the condition of a fragmented *subject*, one that no longer perceives unity in voice or belonging in language. Beckett does not write to build bridges between two languages, but to stand in the gap between them. At this point, bilingualism is not a means of enrichment, but evidence

of the crisis of the subject. Similarly, Almeida and Veras (2017) emphasize that Beckett's process of translation and self-translation provided him with an opportunity to continually reshape his texts, to search for more precise expression, and above all, to engage with the inherent instability of meaning. As they note, Beckett's bilingual writing transforms the process of translation and the use of two languages into a poetic practice that constantly highlights the tension between language and experience (p. 103). This practice simultaneously reveals the gaps between words and the sense that no one language is sufficient to fully express meaning.

Based on Engelberts discussion on the structural nature of Beckett's bilingual texts, it can be said that this situation between languages creates a third linguistic space where none of them guarantees identity stability and where the tension between language and meaning becomes apparent (Engelberts 2021, pp. 157–74).

For Beckett, rewriting is not reflection but displacement; not repetition but another version of emptiness. In this way, bilingualism appears as a conscious strategy to accept the impossibility of fully representing experience in a single language. As Beckett himself put it: "The expression of the fact that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express" (Beckett 1983, p. 139), a perspective that permeates his entire bilingual practice.

This act of writing in a foreign language and then rewriting in English creates a displaced authorial subject. Beckett does not attempt to construct a voice that bridges two cultures, but a voice that stands outside any security of identity. He operates in a field of tension where the word does not reinforce the author's authority, but undermines it from within. This is a kind of writing that, instead of constructing *a linguistic self*, shows the process of its dissolution.

At this point, Jacques Derrida's concept of translation as "the experience of the foreigner within one's own language" takes on central importance. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida writes: "Translation is not a passage from one language to another, but an experience of the foreign within one's own language." (Derrida 1998, p. 60)

For Beckett, this "stranger" is not an external alienation, but an inseparable component of the act of writing. Writing is no longer an act of mastering the world through language, but an experience of living in separation. Bilingualism in this case becomes a way of witnessing the crisis of the writer, who knows himself not through the mastery of a language, but through the experience of its loss.

One of the most significant examples of this process is the structure of *The Unnamable* and *L'Innommable*. In both versions, the narrator attempts to articulate himself through a vocabulary that fails. Instead of unification between languages, we have a deepening of the experience of separation. Each version, French and English, contains semantic micro-displacements that cannot be translated precisely because they represent different positions of loss in language.

One of the most significant examples of the separation between languages and the self in Beckett's work is the closing sentence of L'Innommable: "Il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer." In the English version translated by Beckett himself, it becomes: "You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on." At first glance, the two versions seem similar, but they fundamentally differ in rhythm, tone, and the relationship they establish with the speaker. The French begins with an impersonal form (il faut), which expresses an obligation without a clear addressee, while the English immediately establishes a silent interaction through the imperative you must. In this way, the English gives the phrase a more direct, emotionally charged tone, like a voice speaking to itself from a painful distance.

The change deepens in rhythm and intonation. In French, the phrase flows smoothly and leaves room for uncertainty. In English, the construction is faster and escalates towards

a decisive closure: *I'll go on* sounds like a strong, almost heroic affirmation, but it comes after a denial of oneself: I can't go on. This makes the conclusion more contradictory, tenser. Beckett, in this act of self-translation, does not seek equality between the two languages, but confrontation. Translation does not cover the gap, but reveals it: it shows that experience cannot be contained within a single form. By contrasting two voices in the same sentence, he testifies to the crisis of meaning and to the inability of language to fulfill itself. This is an act of writing that places the subject in front of his deepest division.

It is precisely these shifts that make Beckett permanently bilingual, not as a translator, but as a witness to the loss of a stable meaning in both languages. As Uhlmann (2014) argues, silence in Beckett's work does not simply represent an absence, but can be read as a philosophical image that marks the limit of thinking, where language and thought collide with emptiness.

This approach to bilingualism echoes strongly with the concept of the "third space" proposed by Homi Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha writes: "The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; moments of panic as much as pleasure." (Homi Bhabha 1994, p. 4)

In Beckett's case, this third space is not an area of negotiation between languages, but a place where the very meaning of linguistic belonging collapses. Writing becomes an experience of the border, not a passage. Rather than building bridges, Beckett's writing exposes the fractures between words, between self and speech, and between language and experience.

In *The Unnamable*, the narrator declares: "I shall not say I again, ever again; I shall never say I again." (Beckett 2009, p. 299). This evidence of withdrawal from the use of the personal pronoun is not only rhetorical, but a painful act of separation from the idea of the subject. The very word "I", which usually serves as the center of the narrative, is here rejected as untrue, as a syntactic whim. It is a way of expressing that language, instead of reflecting itself, betrays it.

In *Not I*, the voice of the character "Mouth" flows unstoppably, like an avalanche of fragmented thoughts that never manage to build a stable identity: "...out... into this world... this world... tiny little thing... before its time... in a godforsaken hole..." (Beckett 1978). This disintegration of linguistic structure and the inability to formulate a clear narrative embodies an exile from oneself and from the act of speaking itself. As Connor (2014) argues, through the concept of material imagination, Beckett shifts attention from direct literary representation to the material aspects of language: sound, rhythm, and the breakdown of narrative structure.

In *Not I*, Beckett takes the experience of separation to an extreme of linguistic disorder. The character "Mouth" speaks without interruption, in a breathless, disjointed rhythm, with no punctuation and no regular syntax. The sentence ceases to function as a unit of meaning and becomes a cascading stream of words, where each utterance flows into the next without stable content. Language no longer serves the act of narration but becomes an inner compulsion—not to tell, but to force out what cannot be said. This manner of speaking does not belong to a unified subject, but to a voice fractured by the very experience it attempts to narrate.

In *Not I*, the linguistic flow of the Mouth is suddenly interrupted by violent pauses, as in the passage: "...what?... who?... no!... she!" (Beckett 1978, p. 221). This burst of interruption is not a syntactic error, but a conscious strategy that shifts the narrative from content to the acute experience of the inability to speak. The voice that interrupts itself, that resists identification (she!), manifests not only a crisis of reference, but also a form of exile from itself.

In this work, silence is not presented as an absence, but as a limit threatened by words. As Neupane (2023, p. 5) writes, "Without silence and pause, Beckett's plays are like a fish out of water". The silences in *Not I* are not simple gaps, but pauses filled with tension. They are the moments where the failing voice stops to breathe and to cope with the narrative that overwhelms it. In this sense, Beckett uses silence not as the end of speech, but as the place where the collapse of the voice occurs. He constructs a discursive structure where the very impossibility of stopping makes silence more present and colder than the absence of voice.

In this sense, it can be said that Beckett is not simply a bilingual author, but an author who remains always a stranger to language. He does not write to express himself in a second idiom, but to experience the loss of himself by and through language. Bilingualism for him is a form of ontological emptiness, a way of bringing out what language cannot encompass. This condition reflects what we may call *ontological emptiness*, not the absence of content, but a void born of language's inability to stabilize meaning or subjectivity. With this term, the article refers to a state where the subject no longer finds being or self-mediated by language, because language no longer offers either identity stability or meaningful flow. The "ontological void" is not simply a void of content, but an effect produced by the limited and fragmented functioning of language itself. It is the void that remains when the subject's consciousness tries to articulate itself, but the voice that emerges is foreign to it. This is what Beckett unpacks in his work: the impossibility of representing being through speech. As Casanova observes, Beckett chose to write in French not to communicate more effectively, but to strip language of its fluency and expressive ease—to push writing toward a point where it no longer relied on stylistic mastery, but on exposure to its own limits (Casanova 2006, p. 76).

Rather than constructing another self through French, Beckett attempts to be more precisely silent. He seeks not the precise sound, but the precise emptiness. Through this structured silence, he dismantles the authority of the word and reconstructs the text as evidence of being always on the margins.

In line to this assumption, bilingualism no longer functions as a lexical or communicative category, but as an existential structure. Beckett writes from a position of being external to language, and this externality is not a comfortable position, but a permanent separation. Writing becomes a way of standing in this separation, not to overcome it, but to witness it. As Ulrika Maude (2015) analyzes, in Beckett's plays the body and the technology of sound interact to construct a poetry of fragmentation and mediation, where the presence of being emerges shaken and interrupted by the limits of perception and technology (Ulrika Maude 2015, pp. 191–92). This dynamic is particularly evident in *Not I*, where the Mouth, detached from the body, delivers a frantic monologue against a backdrop of darkness and silence: "whole body like gone. . .just the mouth. . .lips, cheeks, jaws. . ." (Beckett 1978, p. 220). Similarly, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the recorded voice recalls: "Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indulgence. . ." (p. 222), emphasizing the fragmentation of the self and the disconnect between Krapp's aging body and his former voice.

Another key moment in *Krapp's Last Tape* that reinforces the fragmentation of the subject is when Krapp, listening to a previous recording, hears: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that." (Beckett 1958, p. 221). This self-commentary on a previous version of himself does not simply express regret, but indicates the disjunction between the "present self" and the "past self", mediated through technology and sound. There is no continuity of the self; there are recorded voices that return as strangers, as evidence of an experience that no longer represents the subject himself.

By perpetuating self-alienation through the process of rewriting, Beckett turns the act of translation into a bare form of experience. He does not attempt to translate meaning, but

to repeat the gap, to preserve the rupture. In this way, writing becomes an attempt to say what cannot be said in either one or two languages, but only in the tension between them.

5. Silence as an Expression of Absence and Exile

Although silence is one of the most enduring themes in Samuel Beckett's work, it does not appear everywhere in the same way, nor does it play the same aesthetic, psychological, or dramatic function. Rather than treating it as a single, general category—simply framed as "structure"—this study proposes to analyze the way silence varies according to genre and context. In *Not I*, silence is embodied and scenic: it is constructed through light, rhythm, and the absence of physical presence, turning the theater into a space of tension between pause and explosion. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, silence is a temporal division that marks the failure of memory to recreate identity—a gap between past and present selves. In *The Unnamable*, however, silence is no longer a pause but a state: it permeates consciousness permanently, like an inner voice that seeks to articulate itself but remains incomplete.

In the play *Not I*, silence is not presented as an ordinary absence of speech, but takes on a sensitive form through lighting, rhythm, and the displacement of the body from the stage. All attention is focused on a mouth that speaks with unstoppable momentum, while the body is not visible at all. This separation between voice and body creates a sense of profound disconnection, while the silence that surrounds it is not a pause of rest, but a tense solidification—a disruption of personal identity.

This form of silence transforms the stage into a space where words are always on the verge of exhaustion and where the voice becomes a sign of a desire to speak that finds no peace. According to Amanda M. Dennis, in Beckett's work, language is not a transparent vehicle of self-expression but a terrain that both constitutes and confines subjectivity. "Language itself becomes a navigable terrain, an 'environment' that spawns selves and worlds" (Amanda Dennis 2021, p. 7). In *Not I*, this fractured terrain is mirrored by the silence of the Auditor—a figure who does not speak but intensifies the spatial and emotional dislocation of the speaking subject. His silent presence does not simply witness but frames the monologue as an act of isolation shaped by the tension between the desire to speak and the embodied difficulty of articulation. Thirthankar Chakraborty has noted that *Not I* expresses powerfully the experience of separation from language as an act of internal expulsion. "The voice detached from the body undermines the very possibility of self-presence, in which the body becomes a trace or a shadow of a lost origin" (Chakraborty 2023, p. 175). In this sense, the silence surrounding the disembodied voice in *Not I* does not simply represent an absence, but rather reveals the speaker's identity crisis. It separates experience from expression, creating a separation that cannot be captured by the articulated word.

According to Emilie Morin, *Krapp's Last Tape* "examines how the passing of time creates a sense of discontinuity between different temporal selves and dramatizes the unbridgeable gap that separates the past from the present" (Morin 2017, p. 61). From this perspective, the silence in this piece is not simply an absence of speech, but a sign of the failure to maintain a continuous self in time. The piece is built on the contrast between the recorded voice of the past and the silence of the present, as Krapp—an elderly and lonely man—listens to the accounts of his former self and confronts the void that time has left behind. This confrontation does not express an attempt to reconnect with the past, but the inability to meaningfully retrieve it. Silence appears here as a "third language", standing between the voice of the past and Krapp's lack of response. This silence is not a break between two words, but a form of suspension, where the subject fails to define itself either through memory or through the present. Long pauses, accompanied by repetitive actions and small physical movements, create a tension stronger than any words. Instead

of seeing a process of remembering or illuminating the past, we witness the disintegration of identity through the inability to maintain a connection with oneself. Krapp is no longer the one speaking on the recording, but neither is he completely alien to it. He stands in an intermediate space, where silence serves as an indicator of the separation between versions of himself that no longer match. In one of the most poignant moments, Krapp stops, slowly repeats the word "spool. . . spool. . ." and falls into a long silence. This is not a moment of reflection, but an empty space where words no longer manage to represent anything. As Amanda Dennis explains, "Beckett's art shows not the failure of language as such, but the breakdown of the subject who is attempting to speak" (Amanda Dennis 2021, p. 5). In this way, *Krapp's Last Tape* uses silence as a structural form to expose the failure of memory, the separation between present and past selves, and the emptiness left behind by the passage of time. Silence is not the end of the narrative, but the very narrative of the impossibility of constructing it.

Unlike silence as absence or as dramatic rhythm in theatrical texts, in *The Unnamable*, it takes the form of an ontological state. This work perhaps represents the culmination of the examination of the homeless voice, separated from identity and stripped of any communicative function. It is not about complete silence, but about a continuous discourse that approaches the point of self-annihilation. The subject in The Unnamable is a voice without a body, without a name, without a place. He faces the impossibility of being, of speaking and of being represented in language: "Where I am, I don't know, I'll never know. . . I'm in words, made of words, others' words. . ." (Beckett 1958, p. 414). The speaking voice does not seek to communicate, but to survive in a space where meaning cannot take place.

In this case, silence emerges from the accumulation of fragmented voices that fail to cohere into a conscious identity. Every attempt to speak is undone by the overlap of language, leaving the subject in a continual drift toward placelessness. Speech no longer constructs narrative, but testifies to its failure as a means of representation. This is what Adorno calls "an attempt to grasp the incomprehensible"—a language that reveals its own emptiness, becoming its own critique of form (Adorno 2005, p. 241). In this spiral narrative, silence is not merely the end of speech, but a form of absence that infiltrates every attempt to articulate. The voice becomes foreign, a dissonant mixture of words that no longer belong to a unified subject: "I am all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their setting. . ." (Beckett 1958, p. 386). As Derval Tubridy (2018) observes, following *The Unnamable*, Beckett reflects that there is "nobody left to utter and . . . nothing left to utter about" and that he is "twist[ing] and turning, but to no purpose"—a condition that captures the residue of voice, exhausted yet compelled to continue (Derval Tubridy 2018, pp. 108–47). This spectral language marks the existential condition of the text: a life enclosed in utterance without origin or conclusion. In this sense, *The Unnamable* does not employ silence as a rhetorical technique, but rather formulates an ethics of silence—one that dismantles the premises of narrative, subjectivity, and meaning. Silence is internalized: it is the voice made alien to itself, tracing the contours of an indeterminate existence that no statement can resolve.

Endgame presents one of Beckett's darkest approaches to silence as a dramatic, philosophical, and ethical component. In this play, silence is no longer constructed as a temporary pause or as a tension between words, but as an all-encompassing reality of the collapse of communication and interaction. The characters Clov and Hamm find themselves in an empty, isolated, horizonless environment, where words are tired, worn out, and where dialogues collide more with the walls of the unconscious than with the consciousness of the other. Clov's words, "There's no more nature. You exaggerate. In the vicinity. But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (Beckett 1957,

p. 4), sound like an ironic repetition of former human phrases, disconnected from any actual content. This worn-out language, in fact, implies a deeper silence: the silence that lies behind every cliché, behind every meaningless statement.

In this context, as Adorno (2005) emphasizes, the very dramatic structure of the work is built on the impossibility of constructing meaning: "Beckett's plays present meaning only through its impossibility. They say what cannot be said precisely by persisting in speaking" (Adorno 2005, p. 125). The silence in Endgame, then, is not simply an absence of voice, but the product of an overflow of meaningless voices, an environment where words have become empty, and where nothing remains to be said, but one continues to speak anyway.

Unlike *Not I* where silence is embodied and rhythmic, and *The Unnamable* where silence is a persistent state of mind, in *Endgame* it is a historical and existential situation: a post-apocalyptic world where words are relics of a lost time. Marwa Sami Hussein (2011) describes *Endgame* as presenting a post-apocalyptic environment in which communication has collapsed, and language is exhausted: a world inhabited by silence that is not absence but the residue of what once was meaningful. Silence here is ethical: it no longer seeks meaning but signals its end, the echo of deprecated speech.

In this sense, silence in Beckett's work constitutes a profound way of expressing what language cannot contain: emptiness, separation, loneliness and inner exile. It is not an absence, but a structure through which absence itself becomes visible. As Kristeva (1991, p. 19) emphasizes, silence does not hide meaning, but speaks with its own language, questioning the supposed transparency of expression. Closely linked to the author's bilingualism, silence in Beckett is not simply a consequence of the failure of language, but the most precise way to show that human experience is always beyond expression. Between English and French, he creates a "third territory" where no language is sufficient and where silence becomes more precise than words.

In this poetics of silence, Beckett constructs a text that does not aim to describe the world, but to show the limits of description. He does not construct a narrative to be understood, but a space where the unspoken takes shape. Silence thus becomes the only language left to the fragmented subject—a form through which exile from self, from language, and from belonging becomes more clearly visible. What is not said becomes the essence of what remains to be said. Silence, in this way, is not a void waiting to be filled, but a presence that excludes any filling.

The analysis of Beckett's literary and dramatic works raises the fundamental question of whether different literary forms, such as prose and drama, experience linguistic alienation and self-alienation in the same way. Unlike the introspective and abstract narrative of *The Unnamable*, plays such as *Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape* directly confront the concreteness of the stage space and the actor's body, embodying a voice that in Beckett is usually infinite, unstable, and without a defined identity. As Jonathan Bignell (2022) notes, elements such as sound, gesture, lighting, breaks, and spatial setting are not merely background to the performance, but reveal the very inner dimension of human experience. In this sense, silence is no longer a linguistic structure in the text, but becomes a concrete event, an experience in time, that shifts attention from what is said to how silence is felt and lived on stage. This requires an approach that combines literary analysis with performance theory, to understand how Beckett's language translates into body, rhythm, and space.

6. Conclusions

Samuel Beckett's literature represents one of the most profound and sustained attempts to conceive of exile not as narrative content, but as a structure of thought, an ethical position, and an act of writing. In his works, the voice itself appears fragile and fragmented, caught in a process of dissolution; it does not aim to express a unified self, but to reveal the cracks

between times, between self and memory (Ulrika Maude 2015; Uhlmann 2014). Beckett does not narrate the story of expulsion from a place, a regime, or a nation. He writes from a more internal and unstable position: he remains ever a stranger in language, in body, and in himself. For him, exile is not a peripheral experience but an essential condition of existence and literary creativity.

This position does not allow the author either to create a consistent narrative voice, or to construct worlds that languages express coherently. On the contrary, it undermines the very foundations on which literary representation is built. The decision to write in French, a language that was neither native nor fully acquired, is the first act that leads Beckett towards this self-displacement. In this act, he does not seek another place of identity, but creates an intermediate position, where no language is completely home and no voice is completely alone.

The rewriting of his works from French into English, a process that for many authors would aim at dissemination or stylistic improvement, becomes for Beckett a way to relive the uncertainty of meaning and to speak from a void, not from a center. As discussed throughout this study, Beckett's use of two languages does not represent an enrichment of expression, but rather highlights a profound division between voice and meaning. He does not use different languages to add clarity or stylistic variety, but to show that no language can offer a lasting sense of belonging. Meanwhile, silence emerges not as a lack of words, but as a charged space where the crisis of expression becomes apparent. These two elements—the distance from language and the refusal to speak fluently—are not simply stylistic devices, but constitute the very foundation of the poetics of internal exile that characterizes Beckett's work.

In this way, linguistic exile, bilingualism, and silence are intertwined as three forms of an existential experience that grants Beckett's literature its power to endure beyond time, beyond nation, and beyond any rigid stylistic categorization. What he represents is not a singular voice, but a space of separation, a permanent structure of dissonance, a poetics of existence at the margins.

In our time, where experiences of displacement, bilingualism, exile, and identity fragmentation are shared by many authors and readers alike, Beckett's poetics acquires a new dimension. He does not offer solutions, nor does he seek to recover a lost identity. Instead, he offers a way of inhabiting division, of dwelling at the threshold, of remaining silent without silencing the word.

At a time when many contemporary writers, such as Yoko Tawada, Ilya Kaminsky or Tess Nguyen, operate across linguistic and cultural divides, Beckett's approach remains irreplaceable in the way it seeks neither adaptation nor healing, but inhabitation within the rupture.

He does not use language as a means of reconstructing a new world, but as testimony to irreparable fragmentation. This makes his poetics a radical form of exile literature, not from one place to another, but from oneself towards a permanent self-othering.

This approach is profoundly important for contemporary literature, especially in the context of writers working in a second language, in translation, or on the borders between languages. Rather than offering us a successful model of bilingualism as an enrichment, Beckett reminds us that division, emptiness, and absence can become the very core of a powerful creative act. As Pascale Casanova writes, As Casanova writes, Beckett sought "to write in the absence of language, to communicate beyond language" (Casanova 2006, p. 76), and in this effort, he offers a model of the writer who does not aim to represent the world, but to bear witness to its unreadability.

Beckett constructs a poetics of exile that does not seek return, resolution, or reconciliation. He does not seek to compensate for the rupture with a stable authorial voice; rather,

he unravels himself on the margins of writing. Silence and bilingualism are not stylistic devices but forms of being, ways of accepting emptiness as a condition, of writing from a place where the word is no longer a refuge, but a way of listening to the silence that hovers above all meaning.

Ultimately, Beckett's work invites us to think of exile not as an individual fate but as a fundamental human condition, a state of being on the threshold, where the word is no longer a tool of certainty, but evidence of its own crisis. It is precisely in this marginal space that his literature finds its power to be both universal and undeniable. Beckett's examination of bilingualism, silence, and self-alienation does not simply describe a state of exile, but a radical annihilation of the self, an existential denudation, where language itself becomes both the instrument and the witness of this dissolution. This study aims to provide a new approach to Beckett's work, connecting the dimensions of bilingualism, silence and self-alienation as essential elements of a poetics of internal exile. This analysis aims to broaden the perspective on how Beckett subverts narrative and stylistic structures to demonstrate the limits of linguistic expression and human experience. Future research in this area can be deepened through further analyses of the practice of translation and self-translation in his corpus, as well as through exploration of how Beckett's poetics of silence interacts with other forms of the experience of exile and foreignness in contemporary literature.

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Notes

1 Throughout this article, references to Beckett's works follow the published English versions, except where otherwise indicated. The occasional quotation from the French original is included where linguistic nuances are directly relevant to the argument.

2 The concept of *linguistic exile*, as used here, draws on existing Beckettian scholarship but is developed specifically to emphasize the ontological and stylistic dimensions of Beckett's bilingual practice and silence. It does not presuppose political exile in the conventional sense.

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