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READING BECKETT, LACAN AND THE VOICE

*Ventriloquism of the Literary Object*

**Voices in Beckett and Lacan: The Unstoppable Murmur**

**I**n *The Analyst's Ear and the Critic's Eye*, Benjamin and Thomas Ogden give a vital agency to voice as a hook between psychoanalysis and literature:

[...] one of the ways that a piece of literary criticism is psychoanalytic derives from its particular way of hearing and writing about literary voice. *This way of hearing and writing has its origins, we believe, in how practicing psychoanalysts are attuned to the patient's voice, and their own, in a way that is unique to the practice of psychoanalysis.* (8; emphasis in the original)

In *Beckett, Lacan and the Voice* (2016), Llewellyn Brown has done precisely what the two Ogdens describe as a “particular way of hearing and writing about literary voice” by reading the Beckettian voice through Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan, unlike Freud, extensively theorizes the voice as an object, adding it (along with the gaze) to the Freudian repertoire of the oral and the anal objects. Lacanian voice is thus a conceptual category, apart from what it does in the analytic process where two speech-acts intercut one another. In the clinic, the analysand speaks (and *writes* through speech) with his voice and the analyst intervenes by cutting into the logic of his speech with his own voice. Psychoanalysis is thus a practice in hearing from both ends. The analyst gives a hearing to the analysand (this hearing is as important as interpretation) and the analysand hears both the analyst's voice and increasingly, his own, while speaking. The first chapter of Bruce Fink's *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique* (2007) is devoted to listening. He prescribes a hearing with “free floating attention” that can defer understanding in its penchant for presupposition and pay attention to not only what is said (*dit*) but the act of saying (*dire*) itself (11). If there is an invocatory dimension to psychoanalysis as a practice of speaking, the voice has a more significant role in Lacan's thinking as an object-cause of desire and a phenomenon that comes from the field of the Other.

For Lacan, “language is not vocalization” (274) and we cannot reduce voice to language. The voice as Real does not reside in what is said (*dit*) but marks the saying (*dire*) that *ex-sists qua* the said in the (f)act of speech and hence the famous formula of ‘L’étourdit’: “That one might be saying remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard (*Qu’on dise reste oublié derrière ce qui se dit dans ce qui s’entend*)” (32; 33). In the twentieth chapter of his tenth seminar, *Anxiety*, Lacan dwells on the anatomy of the acoustic apparatus to show how the voice resonates in the void of the ear which is a complex of tubular resonators. The voice is differentiated from speech in this ability to resonate in the void which for Lacan represents the void of the Other or the barred Other — “the void of its lack of guarantee” (276). Lacan reflects: “The voice responds to what is said, but it cannot answer for it. In other words, for it to respond, we must incorporate the voice as the otherness of what is said” (275). According to Lacan, the voice is not “assimilated” but only “incorporated” (277) and this incorporation must acknowledge voice’s alterity as an object when the subject identifies with it. The voice resists the Symbolic and by responding to the *said* with the *saying*, as it resonates in the Other’s void, it *incarnates* the Real as an immanent and inexpressible beyond of language. As Brown reflects, “the voice comes to the fore when, in human experience, language fails to signify” (36).

Fink holds that psychoanalysis works against the narcissism of listening as “our usual way of listening overlooks or rejects the Otherness of the Other” (2). In Beckettian terms, usual listening is little more than what *Worstward Ho* (1983) calls “leas-tening”. Psychoanalytic listening, on the other hand, is about acknowledging the unconscious as the discourse of the Other where saying (*dire*) resonates with an invocatory dimension as it circulates between the subject and the linguistic field of the Other. To return to Llewellyn Brown’s book here is to address the question how Samuel Beckett’s multi-medial literature listens to the Other’s voice as well as the voice as Other. Beckett is an apt writer to study literary invocation because Beckettian writing, as *How It Is* (1961) underlines, is an inscription of the voice. It acknowledges a problematic distance from the subject through the regime of quotation: “I say it as I hear it” (3).

In *Beckett, Lacan and the Voice*, Brown has written the most definitive book so far on Beckett and Lacan in both Beckett Studies and Lacanian literary criticism. I do not say this simply because there is not a wealth of existing critical material in this network of relations. I say this because Brown has convincingly taken Lacan out of his poststructuralist stereotype as a thinker of the “linguistic turn” by concentrating on the radical final phase of his teaching where the Symbolic unconscious is redefined from the Real, i.e. the impossible *qua* symbolization. As the Lacan of *Seminars XX* and *XXI* says, language is nothing but “knowledge’s hare-brained lucubration (*élucubration*) about language [*lalangue*]” (139) and there is no other definition of the signifier than what makes a hole in the Real (15.4.1975, 157). For later-Lacan, “language does not exist” except for the *multiple material supports* of *lalangue* (a neologistic *letter* combining “la” with “langue” and thus equivocating

at the *invocatory* level with “the tongue”) (*Seminar XXV*, 15.11.1977).<sup>1</sup> This shift in the late-teachings from the semantic solidity of language to the invocatory and corporeal material of *lalangue* is homologous with the shift from pleasure to *jouissance* as the Real affect of tormenting enjoyment. It is this later-Lacan of the Real, who shines through Brown’s book and Beckett’s works give a challenging drift to these complex thoughts, not as a field of application but as an analogous zone of rethinking and subversion: “In Beckett’s work, the subject consistently encounters the symbolic as grafted onto a real: it regularly entails a dimension that is unbearable and untameable” (Brown, 102).

*Beckett, Lacan and the Voice* is the inaugural monograph in *ibidem*’s series, *Samuel Beckett in Company*. Paul Stewart, the series-editor, writes in the preface that it intends to examine interdisciplinary relational possibilities around Beckett’s work, putting his *oeuvre* in new theoretical and historical contexts. As he points out, relation or rather the lack of it, is a key term in Beckett’s own thinking, as evidenced in his famous *Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (1949) as well as the early correspondence with Duthuit on an aesthetic of non-relation. Jean-Michel Rabaté, who has also written the foreword to Brown’s book, has reflected elsewhere: “Beckett leads us to a paradoxical ethics of non-relation [...] paradoxical because the relation with the Other is founded on a non-relation” (142). As we shall see, this complex non-relation between the subject and the Other is key to Brown’s Lacanian reading insofar as the Lacanian Real is founded on sexual non-relation which punches a hole into linguistic meaning.

Before getting into Brown’s argument, let me make a detour through perhaps the earliest evocation of the literary voice in Beckett’s first published novel *Murphy* (1938). Brown focuses on the novel’s ending as an exorcism of the Imaginary when Murphy cannot imagine his dearest ones, moments before his death. But he does not dwell on the voice’s generative moment as it emerges in relation to the *present absence* of the Other in the psychotic Mr Endon and his unseeing eyes. This moment is crucial for encoding the voice as an *inscription of self-hearing* which works in tandem with an Other who is *both there and yet does not exist*, not to mention the gaze, interacting with the voice. At the end of a thorough inspection of Mr Endon’s eyes in which Murphy’s gaze captures the details of the Other’s eyes like a magnifier, he finally sees himself reflected in Endon’s eyes as a “horribly reduced, obscured and distorted” image (149). When he sees himself “stigmatised in those eyes that did not see him”, this empty gaze returns from the field of the Other as the Other’s unseeing eye mirrors the subject’s image back to him. This scopic dimension is immediately supplemented with the voice: “Murphy heard words demanding so strongly to be spoken that he spoke them, right into Mr. Endon’s face” (149-150).

I would argue that this moment depicts the Beckettian voice as an act of self-hearing where the subject is alienated into an Other through the voice which creates a breach between what he hears and successively inscribes through his speech. But this is not an autistic act of self-hearing as the voice emerges in the logic of interpellation where Murphy is making an effort to connect with Endon who is an

*absent presence* in the scopic field. His eyes do not acknowledge Murphy's presence but only reflect his image back to him. The letter thus arrives at its destination as the message comes back to the speaker in an inverted form, from the field of the Other. The alterity of the voice is couched in this Real contradiction that the *Other is there and yet does not exist*. Beckett highlights this invocatory alterity by using quotation marks for the voice which Murphy hears, being spoken to him and then speaks in turn to the non-responsive Other:

“the last at last seen of him  
himself unseen by him  
and of himself”

A rest.

“The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy.”

A rest.

“The relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon could not have been better summed up than by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself.”

(150)

Not only does the voice concern the gaze and its absence here but it also comes up with a strange coda of relationality, founded on non-relation. In our critical recounting of Brown's argument, we will return to this non-relational relationality.

### **Brown's Reading of Invocation: Does the Other Exist?**

If Beckett's work is replete with the contingency of the Other's promised arrival, in the famous *Godot* (1953) or the late radio-play *Ghost Trio* (1975) where the Other does not arrive, there are also moments of haunting where the Other is conjured, e.g. ... *but the clouds...* (1976), not to mention the cases where the Other arrives, as in the “visit” in *Malone Dies* (1956), the writing operation in *How It Is* and so on. The Beckettian paradox of *non-relational relation* does not consist only in the non-existence of the Other; it is also about the Other's *persistence* in non-existence. This marks an antinomy, drawing on the impossibility of the Real. In *Fizzles* (1976), Beckett juxtaposes the possibility of encountering the Other with the absolute impossibility of such an encounter and the resultant interminability of solitude. In the second fizzle, Horn comes, always at night and reads out a set of notes about the protagonist to him (a prefiguration of the 1980 play *Ohio Impromptu*). These visits relieve the solitude of the protagonist, confined to a closed space. He has not seen his specular image in years and for the last five or six years no one else has seen him. The first-person narrator wards off the possibility that these brief nocturnal sessions with Horn are hallucinatory: “It is in outer space, not to be confused with the other, that

such images develop” (230). In the end, these visits enable him to get up on his feet and move about in the room.

As opposed to this enabling presence of the Other, ‘Fizzle 5’ establishes a stark logic of non-relation as it describes a closed geometrical space without the slightest possibility of encountering the Other, though there is company. The “arena” is “room for millions” in both stasis and motion and yet the track that follows the ditch, on a higher level does not allow any encounter. The last two lines, describing this track, resonate with non-relation: “Just wide enough for one. On it no two ever meet” (237). Though Brown is sensitive to this antinomy of the Other’s presence *and* non-existence, on occasions he seems to read the non-existence of the Other as absence. Perhaps the problematic could have been pursued through later-Lacan’s Borromean logic where a relation of two can only be posited from the third and hence non-relation founds relation. Brown acknowledges throughout that the *singularity* of the subject is a result of his *internally excluded* division from voice as *object a*, which also founds his non-relation with the Other. But in the absence of the Borromean logic, what does not crystalize is that the Lacanian non-existence of the Other is not so much the absence of the Other as it is the Real impossibility of establishing a relation with the Other. As we have it in Beckett’s *Quad*, the geometrical space and corporeal movement as inscription are organised in such a way that in spite of coming perilously close to one another, the four walkers can never touch the Other. For each, *even when the Other is there, the Other does not exist*. We can say the same about *Play*.

*Beckett, Lacan and the Voice* is divided into four long chapters, apart from a substantial introduction and a brief conclusion. Brown sets up the theoretical framework in the introductory chapter by emphasizing the voice in Beckett’s canon and establishing it as a complex field of study, before narrowing down his approach to the Lacanian voice. Tracing the voice from its function in grammar as well as its various literary evocations from Bakhtin’s “polyphony” to Blanchot’s voice of the neuter, Brown shows great skill in relating all this back to Beckett at every possible juncture, which keeps the reader focused. He suggests that Lacan’s resistance to making language into a “complete and totalising system” keeps the space open for “invention”. This is where literature functions as an invocation to the “insurmountable hole” of language (15). Brown also works his way through Beckett Studies, using the readings of Steven Connor and Shane Weller on issues like Beckett’s complex relation to language and figuration of alterity. Brown rightly points out the limited poststructuralist use of Lacan in Beckett Studies but what is somewhat missing in this account is an excursus through Derridean voice, to stake out the claims in a sharper way. Though the book includes passing references to Derrida, especially the Derrida-Lacan divide on “trace” and “letter”, what is lacking is an account of Derrida’s critique of the voice in what he calls “phonologism” (69; 80; 90)<sup>2</sup> and how it is different from Lacanian voice. A brief discussion of Derrida’s *Voice and Phenomenon* (1967) where he deconstructs Husserl’s privileging of voice over writing could have been helpful here. What Derrida calls the “body” or “corpse” of

the word, in its “inert sonority”, which is then animated by the voice’s signification (70), could have been contrasted with the Lacanian synchronization of voice with *lalangue* as a *detritus* of language or what Jacques-Alain Miller calls “the word prior to its grammatical and lexico-graphic systematization” (Miller, 38).

Brown’s understanding of the Lacanian voice as a “deficiency of meaning” (23) opens it towards the Real. It finds a homology in his definition of the voice as “one form of *jouissance*, by means of which the subject gives his existence consistency” as he faces the unnameable of language (30). *Jouissance* is a key term in Brown’s argument. He sees it as a positive solidification of the subject in later-Lacan. *Jouissance* of the Real pushes language into its a-signifying corporeality (*lalangue*). For Brown, the Beckettian horizon of subjective singularity is this *lalangue*, marked by the voice as it breaks with linguistic sense. He mobilizes later-Lacan, for whom “the signifier founds the Real as its own exterior” (45) and the voice is a vehicle for the signifier’s grafting on the *ex-sisting* Real. If drive is an echo of *saying* on the body, as Brown extracts from the first session of *Seminar XXIII*, the voice becomes the privileged drive-object here. In the same session, Lacan underlines the unstopability of the ear as an orifice to ground the insistence of the voice (I, 10). There is a tension here in Brown’s argument between the voice as Real (51) and the imperative vociferation of the superego (39; 55), which would be inclined towards the Symbolic.<sup>3</sup> If the voice, seen as torture in *The Unnamable* (1953) and *How It Is* is held within the function of the superego, it problematizes invocatory identification, where the voice eventually marks the absolute singularity of the subject. These different incarnations of the voice could have been shown in *How It Is* where it moves from the transcendental Other (an ear above in the zone of light) to an immanent Other, “extimate” to the subject who finally takes responsibility for it though it can only be “incorporated” and not “assimilated”, as the persisting machinery of quotations suggests at the end.

Though the argument has this tension between the Symbolic and Real aspects of the voice, it is productive because it allows us to ask the question whether there is a Real dimension of the Other insofar as *he is there and yet does not exist*. It is impossible to follow this thread in this review essay but I will nevertheless mark Lacan’s brief discussion of the Real Other in the Borromean knot in *Seminar XXII*: “if there is a real Other, it is nowhere else than in the knot itself and that is why there is no Other of the Other” (18.3.1975). As I have said above, the Borromean knot structurally inscribes relation only through non-relation and the third which keeps the One and the Other together can never produce a couple in the strict sense as the relation remains mediated and non-relational. In the same passage from *Seminar XXII*, Lacan also formulates that to identify with the Real of the Real Other is to obtain the *name-of-the-father*. As Brown goes at length to show how this patronymic fails in Beckett and the signifying chain cannot be quilted, he could have qualified this Real dimension of the Other to consolidate the Real voice. It would have also initiated a fascinating inquiry into the Real of the superego function.<sup>4</sup>



Chapter I, 'The Voice and Its Structure' begins by charting the trajectory from the *name-of-the-father's* linguistic buffering of the "unbearable nature of the voice" by creating a quilting point through to the failure of this paternal metaphor in Beckett, which exposes the intolerable rustle of the dead voice. Though Brown's reading hinges on this absence of the paternal *point de capiton* which foregrounds the menacing voice, to his credit, he avoids the diagnostic reductionism of a psychotic characterization of Beckettian subjectivity. He evokes the Real in the "not all" (*pas-tout*) and uses this logic to open up the "unlimited" dimension in Beckett's texts. The "not-all" of the Real is coterminous with the absence of the Other to quilt the discourse of the subject and this lack makes it unending, as in *The Unnamable*. Brown reads Beckett's recurrent stress on the "unborn" aspect of the subject as a deprivation of "any symbolic link to an Other (75) or again: "the Beckettian Other is fundamentally absent, one who does not exist, according to the structure that Lacan expresses in the axiom: '[...] there is no Other of the Other'" (96). This leads Brown to declare that the Beckettian subject "is completely alone, without any Other" (98). The non-relation between the subject and his great Others (the absent patronymic and the "impassive mother") establishes the argument and the Real status of the voice is underscored in this lack of relation (101). The problem with this reading of "absolute solitude" in Beckett is that it does not sufficiently emphasize the other side of solitude as a coexistent company. As Brown rightly observes, when Lacan theorizes the barred or lacking Other, the lack in the Other stems from the fact that "there is no Other of the Other". But Lacan does not say, *there is no Other* (as he says about the sexual relation). He says, *the Other does not exist*. As indicated above, I would read the Lacanian axiom as the antinomy of marking a Real Other: *there is an Other who does not exist for the subject*.

This logic finds culmination in Lacan's final work where he introduces the Borromean knot as a *writing* of the three orders: Real-Symbolic-Imaginary. The efficacy of this knot, in its minimally triadic form, is different from the regular chain in which the first ring links the second and the second links the third. The Borromean knot as a Real inscription is founded on *non-relation* insofar as all three rings are *singular*, i.e. there is no one-to-one relation. This singularity is irreducible to solitude. Moreover, they are knotted in a *singular* way insofar as cutting any one releases the other two and there is no differentiating among the three, except colouring. Each one can be the third that knots the other two in this *equivalent* structure. Lacan shows in *Seminars XXII* and *XXIII* that there are three *modes* in the knot: the Imaginary as *consistence*, the Real as *ex-sistence* and the Symbolic as *hole* (18.2.1975; 16.12.1975). The Real is founded on the non-relation with the Other as there is no dyadic relation without the mediation of the third but the knot also has an Imaginary consistence as the third inscribes a non-relational relation. A reading of Beckett through this Borromean logic would have inscribed the Real antinomy of solitude and company, where both are unverifiable. This is how Lacan reads the Real logic of contradiction in *Seminar XXI* (19.2.1974).<sup>5</sup> Brown's reading of subjective singularity as solitude (331; 333) means that the interpretation cannot accommo-

date textual traces like the return of the Roman Capitals as a sign of company in the voice's final declaration of solitude in *How It Is* or the complication of the final word "Alone" in *Company*, which is undecidably located between second and third-person passages as a one-word, one-sentence paragraph. If we ignore the punctuation, "Alone" becomes the final word of a sentence, written in the second-person: "And you as you always were." (42) This indicates how the voice remains a trace of company in solitude.

Lacanian solitude is not opposed to the multiple of company. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan insists that the formula "There is such a thing as One" must be read as "there's one all alone" (67) and this is the "swarming" solitude of any number of Ones who are non-related to the Others, as clarified by the brackets in Lacan's little schema:  $S_1(S_1(S_1 \rightarrow S_2))$  (143). If the lack of guarantee in the Other is a truth that emerges in Beckett, the Beckettian non-relation does not mean that the Other is absent. In *How It Is*, the crawlers' gift of forgetting ensures that every inscription on the body, as an index of the encounter, marks it as the first. Every encounter with the Other is *unary* ["each time the first" (118)] and in spite of an endless series of encounters, it cannot found a relation insofar as the One never becomes the Two of addition. We do not have a 1-2-3 but only a 1-1-1. And yet at the end, when the narrator denies the presence of crawlers in the mud as "all balls" (127), his speech is still invaded by the Roman Capitals, inscribed on his body by his Bom. As he declares his solitude at the level of the signifier's content (*said*), its *invocatory* body (*saying*) suggests an irreducible antinomy by marking the presence of the Other as Real. It is not that Brown is entirely oblivious to this antinomy. He is aware that in *How It Is*, there is an "effort to produce the presence of an Other who, fundamentally, proves to be absent and who, as a result, may exist — at least for the duration of the performance — as *divided*, as a subject" (155) or again: "Beckett's aesthetics of indeterminacy [...] according to which the nonexistence of the Other is posited simultaneously with the idea of his existence" (315). But as he does not engage with later-Lacan's Borromean logic or the Real dimension of the Other, the argument weighs little too heavily on singularity as solitude and non-existence as absence.

In the second chapter 'Disjunction of Pronouns', Brown approaches the voice through the split between the subject of enunciation and the subject of reference as he explores the Beckettian narrator's refusal to use the first-person-pronoun. While this approach is not unique and poststructuralist Beckett critics like Carla Locatelli and Daniel Katz have broached the topic,<sup>6</sup> Brown's reading of *Not I* breaks new ground by connecting the shifting pronouns with the material dimension of language and corporeal drives. He reflects that "the invasion by the voice is inseparable from this evacuation of the unified body" (125) in the blabbering lips, projected from the unfathomable dark in Beckett's play. The voice marks "the impact of the signifier on the body" as an effect of *jouissance*. Billie Whitelaw's experiences as the actress playing Mouth compliment this convincingly new interpretation of tormenting *jouissance* in Beckett. The reading of *Company* in this chapter highlights the important paradox that the voice of torture is also a form of company and the



production of the “I” has the function of silencing the voice, which the text resists (143). The ritual of Othering the self through discourse in *A Piece of Monologue* develops the argument about addressing the Other who does not exist. The third chapter explores “topological forms” of the voice by focusing on the two operations of *continuity* and *interruption* in the Beckettian text. The body becomes crucial in this argument as Brown shows the Beckettian subject’s response to the torture of the voice through acts of “physical inscription” such as May’s pacing in *Footfalls*. The reading of *Eh Joe* reiterates the connection between voice and *jouissance* by showing how Joe enjoys the process of self-flagellation through the voice of the superego. The argument is pinned on *jouissance* as an emissary of death-drive and inter-penetrates the “image” and the “voice”, not only at the level of the televisual medium but also on the plane of scopic drive.

The Lacanian understanding of interruption as a feature of the signifier that both causes and limits *jouissance* speaks to Beckett’s emphasis on the halting knock in *Ohio Impromptu* or the disturbing chime in *Footfalls*. Instead of applying one onto another, Brown creates a dialogue between the two where the Beckettian text speaks back to Lacan: “interruptions thus situate the subject outside the possible: at a point where signifiers border on the irreconcilable” (200). The moving body producing a writing through motility in Beckett, is for Brown, an “attempt to become one’s own other” (224) in plays like *Rockaby* and *Footfalls* as the subject *invents* responses to the non-existence of the Other. Brown focalizes the Beckettian attention towards *making an image* as a way of “lodging himself in relation to his other” (226) because “the imaginary register can designate the place it has abandoned” and “offers a barrier to the *real*” (227). The intricately detailed reading of the radio-play *Rough for Radio II* is remarkable for locating the image in the absence of the visual frame. The “reading voice”, positing the non-existent Other by becoming one’s own other is a high-point in Brown’s reading. Though there is no undervaluing that corporeal inscription and imaginary crystallization are Beckettian subject’s ways of coping with the Real voice of torment; as Brown does not evoke the Real Other, the argument risks falling back on the Imaginary other. We are thus left wondering whether the Beckettian subject becoming his own other is a *small other* (the Lacanian specular image in the mirror) or a *big Other*.

If the self-othering produces the image as the empty locus of the other, it may take away from the cutting edge of the Real in later-Lacan and end up suggesting that Beckett eventually screens the Real with the Imaginary. This makes him look like a less radical author *qua* the Real than what he is. One could show how Beckett approaches the Real as mathematical impasses of formalisation and texts like *Worstward Ho* are driven by a *jouissance* of worsening which takes the Symbolic to the breaking-point of the Real where the three pins and one pinhole fix the “bounds of boundless void” (103) as minimal notches of Lacanian material writing.<sup>7</sup> This problem reflects back on the absence of the Borromean structure in Brown’s argument. Had he engaged with the Borromean inscription of the three registers, it could have been shown (as Lacan does in *Seminar XXII* and *XXIII*) how *all three rings of the knot*

*participate* in the Imaginary as consistence, the Real as existence and the Symbolic as hole. It would have spliced the Symbolic big Other with the Imaginary small other (not to mention the Real Other). This way, the throwback to the Imaginary would not have toned down Beckett's radical engagement with the Real, which makes him such an important writer from the later-Lacanian perspective.

The fourth and final chapter, also the longest, raises the question of technology to show the alterity of the voice *qua* language. The tape-recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape* is one such technological filter of the recorded voice. If we follow Brown's reading of the play, death is the name of the Other that awaits Krapp in the future and he "rejects life" by "accepting to be a vehicle for the voice of the Other" (252). If this is another way the Beckettian subject shows the *jouissance* of death-drive, the question returns whether we should see the Other of death as Real, Symbolic or Imaginary. The argument that the radio voice has more otherness because it is shorn of a corresponding image (260) drives home what Brown calls the "abolition of the imaginary" (257) or again: "the voice destroys the imaginary envelope" (265). But this point creates friction with the aforementioned "protective" function of the image. A qualification about these two different purchases on the image would have been helpful. Brown is illuminating on the function of the "sound editor" as "a way of dealing with the failure to become a subject" (281), which gives primacy to voice as a technological object. He counters the critique that thinkers like Lacan reduce technology to subjectivity by showing throughout this chapter how voice emerges as the Real object of technology. Brown furnishes elaborate readings of neglected plays like *Cascando*, *Rough for Radio I* and *Words and Music*. These are important additions to Beckett Studies. Due to the intricate textual nature of these brilliant readings, it is not possible to go into their details and we can only follow, as we have, the contours of the broad argument. The book deserves a careful reading for these interpretations alone and it would be interesting to see how the readings in the final chapter interact with Ulrika Maude's readings of technology and the body in Beckett, which surprisingly does not get a more substantial working through.<sup>8</sup>

Brown arrives at "voice as writing" (315) from the transcription of music in *Rough for Radio I* and *Cascando* and pursues the thread by going back to the trilogy of novels: *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. He traces this writing at the level of the "unary trait" and the readings continue to invest in the Real voice as the *unlimited* of not-all (*pas-tout*) in Beckett. However, *not-all* as the *limit* of the Symbolic remains underdeveloped. Brown shows how the Beckettian subject tackles the unlimited Real of the voice by containing it through the "limited whole" of the "discursive structure" (377). The argument about containment as a phallic fixing (380-82) again risks de-radicalizing the Real. A Borromean acknowledgment of *equivalence* of the three registers would have counterbalanced the risk. The 'conclusion' provides some necessary rounding off about the voice, being heard where nomination "fails to exhaustively express the subject's being" (385) and the effect of technology, being "to radically deny or exclude the subject, thus extending the impact of the voice" (388). The function of the sound-editor as a *reader* of the voice is a key clarification:

“the sound director testifies to the impossibility of achieving a true mediation between the register of meaning, and the voice devoid of meaning. Only the work of creation can deal with this breach on a material level” (389).

To conclude, *Beckett, Lacan and the Voice*, notwithstanding the theoretical tensions symptomatic of a truly rigorous reading, offers the first convincing Lacanian interpretation of Beckett. The handling of Beckett’s bilingual *oeuvre* with the combination of the best of both French and English readings of Lacan and Beckett gives it an impressive sweep. It is also a landmark study for extending the Lacanian category of the voice into the literary domain. The voice forces the question of subject in literature with the alterity of the ventriloquised literary object. In reading this thoroughly researched and lucidly composed book, the reader will feel both pleasure and *jouissance* but the latter is checked in great economy. In the spirit of Brown’s Lacanian equivocation between “enjoy (*jouis*)” and “I hear (*j’ouis*)”, let us enjoy what we have here and what this here makes us hear.

#### Notes

1. In this passage from *Seminar XXV*, Lacan connects his formula that there is no meta-language with the non-existence of language and the presence of *lalangue* as a bare being of language or shall we say, the body of language. The fact that there is no metalanguage connects to the formulation that there is no Other of the Other and therefore the Other does not exist or is barred. We will see how this formulation about the Other’s non-existence is the kernel of Brown’s Lacanian reading of Beckett.
2. Brown hints at this difference between Derridean and Lacanian voice only once through Dolar (171) but does not develop this thread.
3. On 24<sup>th</sup> November 1975, in conversation with the Yale University students, Lacan states this most explicitly: “Freud’s *Id* is the real. The symbolic, from which the superego arises, has to do with the hole.”
4. Brown mentions Mladen Dolar’s point that the superego can be seen as the Other of the Other (336). This claim may have an interesting dialogue with the Borromean triadic structure where the third as the Real (the Other of the Other) knots the One with the Other.
5. Lacan reflects: “what constitutes the Real, is that through logic, something happens, which demonstrates, not that *p* and *non-p* are both false, but that neither one nor the other can in any way be logically verified” (19.2.1974).
6. See Carla Locatelli’s book *Unwording the World: Samuel Beckett’s Prose Works after the Nobel Prize* and Daniel Katz’s book *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the prose of Samuel Beckett*.
7. I pursue some of these threads of Lacanian writing in my article “Lacan and Beckett: Acts of Writing between Literature and Psychoanalysis.” in the forthcoming 2017 SBTA issue of *Samuel Beckett and Extensions of the Mind*.
8. See Ulrika Maude’s book *Beckett, Technology and the Body*. For example, Maude’s discussion of skin as the conjunction of the inside and the outside of the body could be related to Lacan’s Möbian logic.

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