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Speaking Subjects: Beckett’s Not I, Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses, and Coetzee’s Foe

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Speaking Subjects: Beckett’s *Not I*, Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, and Coetzee’s *Foe*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

SPEAKING SUBJECTS: BECKETT’S NOT I, RUSHDIE’S THE SATANIC VERSES, AND COETZEE’S Foe

By Jake F. Khoury, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Major Directors: Drs. Katherine Nash & Winnie Chan,
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In repositioning Beckett’s Not I in relation to Rushdie and Coetzee, I show that The Satanic Verses and Foe suggest approaches to language similar to Beckett’s play, insofar as each text interrogates the ability of the speaking subject to maintain control of his or her voice, finding that the speaking subject’s voice is constantly infused with the voices of others. Additionally, I demonstrate Beckett’s relevance to the postcolonial environment and delineate convergences and divergences in how Rushdie and Coetzee formulate the voices, bodies, and identities of marginalized and postcolonial speaking subjects.
“Am I another? A stranger to myself? Sprung from myself?”

-Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

**Introduction**

Recently, Beckett scholarship has seen an upsurge in postcolonial interpretations of his works.\(^1\) Though such reevaluations of Beckett’s political engagements are valuable, I do not approach Beckett’s *Not I* in this manner. Rather, I reposition this short play within postcolonial contexts to illuminate postcolonial speaking subjects. By placing Samuel Beckett’s *Not I* in conversation with Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, and J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, I delineate convergences between these two distinctive novels by prominent postcolonial authors and Beckett’s play, which focuses on the voice of a marginalized speaking subject.

At first glance, *The Satanic Verses* and *Foe* appear to make an unlikely pairing. *The Satanic Verses* is considered to be a defining text within Rushdie’s oeuvre, while *Foe* is considered to be a minor work within Coetzee’s corpus. Rushdie’s text is stylistically an exercise in maximalism, and, in this regard, could not be more different from Coetzee’s minimalistic novel. These two authors have distinct political concerns, with Rushdie often focusing on the postcolonial issues of India while Coetzee keeps a keen eye on the politics of South Africa. Rushdie celebrates the hybridity of the postcolonial subject while Coetzee consistently focuses on the marginal spaces where such subjects reside. Yet, for all of these

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\(^1\) Patrick Bixby’s *Samuel Beckett and the Postcolonial Novel*, Craig Owen’s “Exorbitant Apparatus,” and *Beckett and Ireland* are all examples of this trend.
contrasts, each text appears to be in sustained dialogue with Beckett’s ideas about the speaking subject’s relation to dominant language that he offers in *Not I*. In repositioning Beckett in relation to Rushdie and Coetzee, I show that *The Satanic Verses* and *Foe* suggest approaches to language similar to Beckett’s, insofar as each text interrogates the ability of the speaking subject to maintain control of his or her voice, finding that the speaking subject’s voice is constantly infused with the voices of others. Additionally, I demonstrate Beckett’s relevance to the postcolonial environment and illustrate the convergences and divergences in how Rushdie and Coetzee formulate the voice, body, and identity of the marginalized speaking subject. My examination of this matter helps me answer a number of questions: What are the differences in how Coetzee and Rushdie reconfigure Beckett’s assertions about the speaking subject, and what role, if any, does the body play in identity formation in each of these texts? Is self-authorship a possibility for the speaking subject? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how does the indeterminacy of the speaking subject’s voice, body, and identity work to thwart hegemonic cultural definitions?

Coetzee and Rushdie are almost universally considered postcolonial authors and each uses Beckett’s *Not I* as an intertext to develop his own formulations of the marginalized speaking subject. Edward Said describes their authorial practices as:

> the work of intellectuals from the colonial or peripheral regions who wrote in an ‘imperial language,’ who felt themselves organically related to the mass resistance to empire, and who set themselves the revisionist, critical task of dealing frontally with the metropolitan culture, using the techniques, discourses, and weapons of scholarship and criticism once reserved exclusively for the European. (243)

Said’s description of the work of postcolonial intellectuals, who write from the margins of Empire speaks to my assertions regarding Rushdie’s and Coetzee’s utilization of Beckett’s views of the speaking subject. Specifically, these two authors recontextualize Beckett’s representation
of the speaking subject in their respective postcolonial literary projects, showing that his formulation, in part, reflects the context of the marginalized and postcolonial speaking subject.

In *Not I*, Beckett’s representation of the speaking subject centers on her attempts to use her voice to reposition herself in the context of the dominant language. The attempted repositioning of the speaking subject is quite significant to Coetzee’s and Rushdie’s respective texts insofar as the postcolonial speaking subject is constantly subjected to the relocation wrought by the dominant language and culture. Thus, in the following, I assert that both Rushdie and Coetzee uphold Beckett’s position that the voices of speaking subjects are overcome and dislocated within language, but I also claim that both authors reformulate Beckett’s arguments by asserting the primacy of the body within this transformative experience. In so doing, I posit that Rushdie locates in the voice and body of the speaking subject a site subject to vacillating cultural definitions, and that, in Coetzee, the body both succumbs to and resists cultural markers.

Ultimately, my primary claim is that although the voice of postcolonial speaking subjects is always disrupted, the semantic overload wrought by these disruptions generates indeterminacy that elides classifications, and that the reemergence and resistance of the body, especially in Coetzee, is another form of indefinable indeterminacy. Thereby, the indeterminacy of the voice, body, and identity of the speaking subject eludes and resists classification, working to destabilize essentialist renderings of identity.

Structurally, my non-chronological arrangement highlights the fact that Coetzee’s claims about the body of the speaking subject (that the body both succumbs to and resists cultural markers, making it indeterminate) draw out latent features of speaking subjects’ voices within Beckett’s and Rushdie’s texts. In other words, the end of my Coetzee section is cumulative, a moment when the latent power of withholding in Rushdie’s and Beckett’s speaking subjects
comes into view. I speak to the ramifications of the speaking subject’s power of withholding in my conclusion. Moreover, I address moments where both Coetzee and Rushdie use the performative aspect of *Not I* to hybridize genre. Specifically, their intertextual use of the play reverberates in their respective novels via the literal performative activities of their characters. Throughout this work, I utilize Martin Heidegger’s description of language as the house of being, Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, and Giorgio Agamben’s conception of whatever being, to parse Coetzee’s, Rushdie’s, and Beckett’s articulations of the speaking subject. These theorists prove helpful in illuminating my claims about the speaking subject’s position within these texts. Additionally, I utilize Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as Jacques Derrida, at different moments to elucidate my assertions.

To contextualize my claims, I will briefly outline each of my sections.

Beckett’s *Not I* explores the identity of Mouth, whose uncontrollable verbal ejaculations construct her identity. This play appears to argue that the speaking subject (Mouth) has no control over her speech, and that other voices disrupt her own. Thereby, she is not capable of authoring her own identity, making her a conglomeration of a multiplicity of authors. Mouth’s multiplicity makes her voice and identity indeterminate insofar as one never knows who is speaking her. Beckett presents Mouth as a disembodied speaking subject, and, thus, the body plays no role in forming her identity, making language the ultimate force in her attempt at self-authorship. Moreover, Mouth is surrounded by a multiplicity of sounds, the sounds of external voices, the movements of her mind, and a constant “buzzing” that further impedes her acts of self-creation and overload her own articulations with semantic indeterminacy.

Rushdie, in *The Satanic Verses*, makes a brief allusion to Beckett’s play that reverberates throughout the text. Chamcha and Gibreel, the novel’s “conjoined opposites” and “phases of a
whole being,” are in a constant struggle to maintain their own voices. But, unlike Beckett, Rushdie makes plain that the speaking subject’s body is a point of emphasis, that the body is a site that not only bears the struggle of differing cultural forces but also is shaped by speaker’s speech acts. For Chamcha, cultural voices disrupt his voice, making him unable to maintain verbal control in his quests for self-authorship, and because he cannot maintain verbal control, his identity is infused with otherness. The disruption of Chamcha’s voice and identity causes his body to vacillate between cultural definitions. For Gibreel, his body is initially destabilized. Constantly projected upon, his body breaks down, and shortly thereafter he experiences a thorough disruption of his voice and identity. The otherness that manifests in both of their voices overloads them semantically, and their speech acts become indeterminate articulations that are silent in meaning.

Similarly, Coetzee’s *Foe* shows that Susan Barton’s tongue is girded and disrupted by external social forces while Friday’s indeterminate speaking status makes him a silent force. Susan’s inability to maintain her speaking voice imbues her voice with indeterminacy, while Friday’s voice is simply indeterminate, making both Friday’s and Susan’s voices indecipherable. But, Coetzee, unlike Beckett and Rushdie, places far more emphasis on the body, presenting the bodies of Susan and Friday as translingual signs that resist signification. In so doing, Coetzee ties identity to the body, which becomes an unnamable space that simultaneously reflects and repels external cultural markers. In this manner, the speaking subjects’ identities become spaces that simultaneously succumb to external cultural markers yet resist these static determinations.
Whose Voice?

“The language we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master* on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.”

James Joyce, *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*

The focus of Beckett’s *Not I* is the verbal articulations of its protagonist Mouth. The play presents Mouth as a disembodied speaking subject. The stage is shrouded in darkness with one light illuminating the lips of Mouth, the remainder of her body wholly imperceptible. Clearly, the focal point of Beckett’s play is Mouth’s utterances. Her speech acts inform our understanding of her identity and, at one moment, she exclaims, “so intent one is … on what one is saying … the whole being …. hanging on its words” (219). Mouth’s identity hinges on language, on her recitation of the word. Mouth’s statement makes clear that every utterance of a speaker touches the “being” of its utterer. Each articulation by a speaker alters the “being” (the mind and body) of the speaking subject, and, thus, Mouth’s identity emerges from the movement of her lips.

Clearly, for Beckett language is the constitutive force of reality, and Heideggerian formulations of language and being illuminate Beckett’s claim about language and the self. In “The Nature of Language,” Heidegger stresses that the closest we come into contact with language is when we speak, that language is an event that “befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us” (57). Heidegger’s verbs (befalls, strikes, comes over,
overwhelm, and transform) indicate the speaking subject encounters a happening that causes him or her to experience a loss of agency. In other words, the event of speaking causes the subject to be subsumed, overtaken, and metamorphosed by the external force of language that inflicts a happening upon the subject. This is precisely what Mouth states. The being of the speaking subject hangs on each articulated word and overcomes Mouth each time she speaks. Moreover, because Mouth posits that a speaker’s being is “hanging” on each spoken word, we see that, like Heidegger, Beckett believes that language “touches… innermost nexus of our [human] existence” (Heidegger 57). This “nexus” is the space where the subject’s identity and language interacts, the moment in space and time where a being is articulated by the language s/he speaks. Mouth’s refrain evidences that language. Elsewhere in Beckett’s oeuvre, the narrator of *The Unnamable* affirms that language composes identities and bodies: “made of words, others’ words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words” (74). Everything, every entity in and of the world is composed of language, and like the narrator of *The Unnamable*, Mouth has a constitution of language—she is defined, articulated, constructed, and understood only in language. Importantly, the narrator of the *Unnamable* states that it is “other’s words” that compose reality. Likewise, Mouth’s uttered words are often unrecognizable to her, showing that her speech interacts with her reality, simultaneously splitting, composing, and defining her through words. Mouth’s speech is not inherent to her. Mouth’s voice partakes of internal and external reality – a constant interaction between internal world and external reality.

In this regard, she is an intersubjective speaking subject, an amalgamation of voices whose identity relies upon her speech acts. Mouth’s hybrid voice, her intersubjectivity, and the ways the constitutive force of language define her are, in part, conveyed via a “vehement refusal
to relinquish third person” (14). The failure of the pronoun “I,” its inadequate representation of the fissured and fragmented subject, is the reason why Mouth refuses the “I.” Her refusal is conveyed via her refrain “what? … who? … no! …. she!” (216, 218, 221, 222, 223). This refrain indicates that the only possible way to enumerate the self is in language, specifically, in third-person speech, yet the interrogative nature and uncertainty that emerges from her refrain reflects the inadequacy of all pronouns. As Beckett’s narrator in the Unnamable states, “it’s the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me” (62). Her refrain reflects the inadequacy of pronouns by moving from general questions to more specific answers. It begins with a “what?” that asks what thing is doing the speaking. The response to this question gives only a partial answer and presents another query: the “who?” The “who” limits the type of object speaking to the human subject, positing a singular or plural number of speakers, yet another question emerges insofar as we wonder whether a singular or a multiplicity of speaking subject(s) is talking. The answer to this question is then a negation, a “no” that attempts to negate Mouth’s “I,” but fails to do so. The “no” (the “I”) remains and a blank space emerges where remnants of an articulated and defined singular speaking subject intertwine with the “she” Mouth offers in lieu of the singular pronoun. And it is the “she,” the use of third-person speech as self-referential, which opens up a space for an intersubjective speaking subject. Her refrain makes clear that Mouth rests between the “I” and the “she.” In essence, Mouth is a singular speaking subject that exudes plurality with each word she speaks, and, in so doing, she is estranged from herself.

Each time Mouth utters her refrain, Auditor enacts the only movement in the play. The movement “consists in simple sideways raising of arms from sides and their falling, back, in a gesture of helpless compassion,” and Auditor’s movement lessens until it is “barely perceptible”
the third time it is spoken (215). The lessening of Auditor’s movement each time the refrain is spoken indicates helpless acquiescence to the third-person mode of self-reference. Auditor’s recognition reinforces the fact that Mouth’s refrain demonstrates that third-person speech is the best available mode of self-reference because of the split nature of the subject’s voice. Mouth’s use of third-person speech illustrates that the “subject no longer corresponds to closed and coherent forms of meaning” (Morin 63). The “I” closes off the possibility of a plurality of meaning, singularizing the speaking subject, but the use of the third person, the “she” opens up the possibility of multivalent meanings of the subject and a multiplicity of subjects within one. Mouth’s use of non-self referential language to speak of herself demonstrates the close contact between language and the speaking subject, and indicates that she cannot be articulated by this singular pronoun. Her acceptance of the “she” enacts her plurality, and as Sarah Gendron posits “like most of Beckett’s characters,” Mouth is “split apart on the inside and often unrecognizable even to itself” (51). Mouth’s use of the “she” places her between the “I” and “she, self and other. In this regard, Mouth comes to resemble what Deleuze calls the virtual object. Virtual objects “are the embodiment of self-estrangement: of being other within itself” (qtd in Gendron, 51). Mouth’s use of the pronoun “she” reflects her estrangement from herself. The “she” distances her from her “I,” making her an amalgamation of self and other. In essence, Mouth is a third space that combines self-referential speech with non-self referential speech.

In this regard, her words become semantically overloaded because her use of the self-referential “she” exudes the indeterminacy created by the conjoining of self and other within her. For instance, her speech indicates she is “an Irish woman of about seventy years of age, who recalls a life of premature birth, mechanical survival” (Bair 622). As Bair point out, Mouth’s speech acts give an account of her, but how many other “Irish” women might have had similar
experiences? In other words, her use of third-person speech makes plain that Mouth’s experience as an “Irish woman” is generic, which makes Mouth’s articulations semantically overloaded insofar as they might reflect conditions of others that are external to her, making it indeterminate who she really is. Thereby, Mouth’s agency is problematized because non-referents of herself become part of her articulation of self. We also see Mouth recognize that her voice (and her agency) is disrupted by other voices that further evidences her indeterminate status.

The disruption of Mouth’s voice is explicitly seen after the second time she repeats her refrain: “realized … words were coming … imagine! … words were coming … a voice she did not recognize … at first … so long since it had sounded …. then finally had to admit … could be none other … than her own … certain vowel sounds … she had never heard” (218). Importantly, words have agency, spewing forth on their own account, and these words are articulated in a voice unrecognizable to her but accepted as her own. In essence, language overcomes Mouth, evidenced by the fact that she does not recognize the sound of her own voice and that she had not even “heard” certain sounds that she makes. Mouth is estranged from the language she speaks, and her voice and words illustrate the foreignness of both to her in that she does not recognize the sounds she is articulating and realizes that these are the sounds of her voice. Mouth’s verbal explosions show that her voice is, in part, a composition of alterity.

Mouth’s lack of verbal control and the otherness inherent to this lack is consistent throughout the play: “now this stream…steady stream…not catching the half of it…not the quarter…no idea…what she was saying…till she began trying to delude herself…it was not hers at all…not her voice at all” (218). Again, Mouth’s “stream” of words spews forth from her, words that are both hers and others. Her “stream” is incomprehensible to her, making clear that
voices of the dominant language speak within and through her, and showing that Mouth has an utter lack of verbal control. Mouth’s claim that it is not her voice with which she speaks is simply delusional. Mouth’s words are her own and others; they are incomprehensible to her, and although she does not recognize her own voice, she must accept it as her own. With this, Beckett makes clear that Mouth’s otherness is within her.

In “The Exhausted,” Deleuze claims that Beckettian “voices” “refer to ‘Others,’ and these “‘Others’ in turn carry with them possible worlds, worlds created by the stories that the voices convey” (7). Deleuze’s analysis of Beckettian voices illustrates that Mouth has internalized voices of others, and her verbal acts are simultaneously not her own, yet her own. Mouth’s verbal projections are polyphonic in that they are composed of other voices, other voices that have come about by internalizing “stories” that have been created by others even further removed from Mouth, and which become a part of Mouth’s own voice. In this way, Mouth’s voice highlights her fractured agency, and reflects her use of the pronoun “she” because it includes others in her self-identification. Mouth’s uncontrollable verbal explosions make clear that a plethora of voices rupture her speech acts, making her lingual ejaculations not quite hers, and showing that she is clearly an intersubjective speaking subject.

The singularity of Mouth’s agency is thoroughly disrupted by the speech acts she performs and her non-self referential self-identification. Clearly, Mouth’s agency is intersubjective, which points to the Bakhtinian idea that language and consciousness meet in the material sign (the word), and thus, we realize that the language shapes her consciousness and identity. More to the point, Mouth’s identity hinges on her speech and is reflective of contemporary speech act theory.
Judith Butler’s concept of performativity stems from J.L. Austin’s description of speech acts. For Austin, there are two different types: constatives and performatives. A constative is a descriptive statement while a performative is a part of the act that is taking place. In essence, the performative utterance means that speech acts have an effect upon reality and produce something. The most commonplace illustration of the performative utterance is the wedding example, where uttering “I do” (in the proper context) transforms the speaker into husband or wife. The distinction between these two types of utterances has been seriously interrogated by a host of theorists, the most prominent of which are Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. Derrida’s critique of Austin’s distinction between constatives and performatives hinges on iteration. Derrida finds that performative utterances have consequence because they are recognized as “reproducing social and linguistic conventions” and, because of this fact, they work to reinforce or function citationally, referring back to said social and linguistic conventions and relying on these conventions to maintain their force (Secomb 148). Derrida finds that performative speech acts are moments of reiteration that affirm the sociolinguistic status quo. Butler pushes Derrida’s critique further by discussing how constative statements affect gendered identity. Statements such as “It’s a boy” and “It’s a girl” at the moment of birth function, as Linnell Secomb’s description of Butler’s theory finds, to “prescribe, define, and construct the infant’s gender identity” (149). Like Derrida, Butler finds that what it means to be a girl or a boy (gendered identity) is inextricable from socio-linguistic status quos. The statements “It’s a boy” and “It’s a girl” reiterate social norms of gender, affirming their validity, and commencing the process of masculinizing and feminizing the infant that, in the end, shapes his/her somatic performativity. In this regard, speech acts come into contact with, shaping and sculpting, the visceral movements that the speaking subject enacts. Butler’s argument is that gender identity is
“a doing or a performative enactment rather than expression of an inner essence or being” (Davies 149). In essence, Butler suggests that a body does not have a “pregiven identity” that emerges from it, and, thus, “subjectivity arises through the performativity of that body” (149).

Performativity is reflected by Mouth because her voice, her words, her performative speech acts simultaneously enact and negate her identity. Mouth’s plural voices perform her identity, but because her performative speech acts are composed of other voices, her identity is always composed of other cultural identities. Her performative speech acts enact who she is, but do so in a collaborative sense – an iterative self authoring performed by others within. Mouth’s speech act(s) makes explicit that she is authored by a plurality of speakers; others’ voices dictate the composition that she is. In this way, Mouth is clearly a split subject who cannot fully take verbal control of herself. Moreover, because her speech acts are so semantically overloaded, her body disappears because it cannot exhibit the plethora of significations that are articulated by her voice. The signifying force of language is too great and overcomes her body, shrouding it in darkness, reflecting the indeterminacy of her speech acts.

Within Mouth’s hybrid voice and identity, there is constant play between the words of others and words of her own. The play’s focus on Mouth’s articulations of speech makes clear that her identity hinges on the voice with which she speaks, and because Mouth constantly vacillates between acceptance of her voice and disavowal of her voice, the defining feature of her voice and identity is indeterminacy. Moreover, Mouth’s indeterminacy is heightened because she is a disembodied mouth, allowing her no physical ground in reality besides the appearance of her mouth and tongue. And because Mouth’s indeterminacy is primarily conveyed through her speech acts, it is important to ascertain the incomprehensibility of her verbal activities.
The play commences with disorienting, indeterminable articulations. Ten seconds prior to the beginning of the play the audience hears the “unintelligible” sound of “Mouth’s voice” from “behind the curtain” (215). Importantly, Beckett’s stage directions state that it is “Mouth’s voice” that is to accompany the beginning of the play. However, it is an unnamed “Voice [that] continues behind curtain unintelligible, 10 seconds” that mark the play’s conclusion (223). Beckett’s move from a specific identification to an “unintelligible” unnamed “Voice” is important for two reasons. First, this movement demonstrates that Mouth’s experiences a loss of control over her speech through the course of the play because we start with a named speaker (Mouth) and conclude with an unnamed “Voice.” Thereby, we see that Mouth’s speech acts are overtaken by voices internalized by her but which have external origins. Secondly, prior to beginning and after the end of the play, the voice(s) is “unintelligible.” The unintelligibility of the voice(s) that precedes and follows the conclusion of the play places emphasis on the impossibility of fully comprehending the voices that are heard, and, thereby, reflect the state of Mouth’s speech acts enacted during the play that are marked by indeterminacy and uncertainty. The unintelligibility, indeterminacy, and uncertainty of Mouth’s agency, her voice, and speech acts make clear that the sounds of Mouth’s voice heard before and during the play and the unnamed voice perceived after the play are forms of silenced meaning.

Clearly, Mouth’s speech acts are audible articulations, but because her voice is infused with the voices of others, it is semantically overloaded. Her words are burdened by the meanings of others’ words and, thereby, the meaning of these signifiers is indeterminate. The indeterminacy of Mouth’s speech acts should be understood as forms of silenced meaning insofar as her vocal acts exude ambiguity. Her speech acts constitute a penumbral space that vacillates between possible meanings but never fully articulates any of them. Therefore, her
voice constantly offers garbled articulations; it is a voice that articulates an audible silence. Mouth’s articulations exhibit muted meanings and are the only type of speech acts that Mouth offers.

They are comparable to the “buzzing” Mouth refers to throughout the play (216, 217, 218, 219, 221, 222). This “buzzing” occurs “in the ears,” but then “the buzzing? ... yes… all the time the buzzing… so called… in the ears… though of course actually… not in the ears at all… in the skull… dull roar in the skull” (216, 217). First, Mouth is plagued by the buzzing” all the time. Second, Mouth initially locates the “buzzing” within the “ears,” and, in so doing, imbues it with connotations of audibility insofar as “ears” are associated with our apprehension of sound and the “buzzing” occurs within them. However, she later undermines this locale by positing that the “buzzing” occurs in the “skull.” Thus, it appears that the “buzzing” Mouth speaks of is the movements of her consciousness, and, seemingly, Mouth’s relocation of the “buzzing” would lessen the emphasis on audibility that is associated with it. Yet, because it is described by her as “buzzing,” as a “dull roar,” she imbues it with audible qualities. However, Mouth makes plain that this “buzzing” neither is simply the movements of her consciousness nor composed of her speech acts. The “buzzing” Mouth describes, rather, is something different: “it can’t go on… all this … all that … steady stream … straining to hear … make something of it … and her own thoughts … make something of them … all - ...what? ... the buzzing… so called … all that together” (219). Here, Mouth is simultaneously experiencing her “steady stream” (her speech acts), her “own thoughts,” as well as the “buzzing.” Thus, the “buzzing” Mouth describes is a distinctive phenomenon that occurs in her “skull” but is neither her speech acts nor the movements of her consciousness. Mouth’s experience of these three different phenomena should be understood as three distinct sounds insofar as Mouth (as previously shown) hears her own
voice, because the buzzing has an aural dimension, and, finally, because she imbues her thoughts with an auditory component (insofar as she strains to hear them).

The “buzzing” Mouth describes is similar to how narrator of the *Unnamable* describes himself: “I am the thing that divides the world in two […] thin as foil, I’m neither one side nor the other, I’m the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness […] I’m the tympanum” (383). Like this unnamed narrator, Mouth rests in between the vocalization of the world and the sounds of her own thoughts reverberating through her head. And like the unnamed narrator, Mouth rests in between self and other. Mouth is *Not I*’s “tympanum” or eardrum, which vibrates when sound waves make contact with it. Throughout the play, Mouth is surrounded by the sounds of voices of the world and the inner movements of her consciousness that cause her to vibrate. Thus, because she is always experiencing the vibrations of aural events, she constantly refers to “buzzing.” She hears her locale in between all these sounds, and fluctuates in accordance with them. As we have seen, Mouth remains within an in-between state throughout the play, her voice fluctuating between her own and others, her consciousness intersubjective (between and among others’ consciousness, showing that she is indeed that “sliver” in-between that constantly vibrates or buzzes because of their constant encroachments upon her.

In “Tympan,” Jacques Derrida describes the “tympanum” as the “ultimate representative of *différance*” (Gendron 62). For Derrida, it denotes “on one hand the ear drum and on the other a term associated with the printing press,” and, in this way, it “symbolizes all that is between speech and writing, inside and outside, origins and copies” (Gendron 62). In other words, the “tympanum” is that which eludes representation, inhabiting an in-between space that holds together difference, differing from each and deferring whether it can be included in either.
Mouth is both the “she” and “I,” showing that she eludes representation in language (the pronouns failing to represent). She is estranged from herself, yet strangely herself. She is a reproduction of the voices of others, but also speaks with her own voice. Mouth is the “sliver” in-between; she is the “tympanum.” The in-between of the “tympanum” is the hybrid locale that Mouth inhabits, and, wedged between her thought movements and the vocal world, she constantly feels the reverberations of each, and is shaped by her experience of them. These reverberations touch her and her vibrations occur in response to her inside (thought movements) and outside (voiced speech). Her identity is shaped by experience as such she constantly elides determinacy.

Moreover, Mouth’s inability to author herself is apparent in Not I: “it can’t go on… all this … all that … steady stream … straining to hear … make something of it … and her own thoughts … make something of them … all - …what? … the buzzing… so called … all that together.”) This moment suggests Mouth’s desire to author herself, but shows her incapability of doing so. She cannot understand or does not “catch the half of it…not the quarter” of her “steady stream,” and has “no idea…what she was saying” while she speaks, and her lack of comprehension of her vocal acts show that her attempt at authorship is largely a failure insofar as her words have their own agency and are incoherent utterances. At the same time, Mouth is unable to “make something of” her “thoughts” because her speech acts are not of her own making. She appears unable to translate her thoughts into a coherent self-narrative nor to generate bodily movements.2 Mouth’s disembodiment, the fact that her “whole body [is] like gone,” disallows her body from partaking in her acts of self-authorship. (219). Although she is

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2 Beckett’s play displays features of a novel insofar as the production is contingent upon Mouth’s pseudo third-person narration, which blurs generic distinctions insofar as Not I relies more on narrative than dramatic performance.
able to enact the successful movements of her “mouth … lips … cheeks … jaws […] tongue?,” they only move because she speaks, and, as we have seen, her speaking comes about on its own account and is not a product of her agency. In this way, Mouth does not quite successfully “make something of” her thoughts and speech acts because the narrative of herself she presents to the audience and to herself is not understandable, and because she cannot give an account of herself with her body. Mouth authors only uncertainty, and, based on her description of her experience, she inhabits solely an indeterminate space.

Beckett’s play hinges on aural factors (Mouth’s experience of inner sounds and her speech acts), but it ultimately exudes the silent meanings of Mouth’s experiences as the “tympanum,” her authorship of an uncertain narrative based on articulations simultaneously her own and not her own, and her uncertain identity that is produced from her experience and narrative. S.E. Gontarski posits in “Reinventing Beckett” that theatre, as “Beckett spent much of his career demonstrating, is … an aural art form” (439). Not I holds to Gontarski’s assertion insofar as it delves into the indeterminate meaning of white noise, the indeterminate articulated sounds that Mouth experiences and creates.

Beckett’s Not I demonstrates that the reverberations of spoken language shape Mouth and destabilizes her agency. Moreover, Mouth’s uncontrollable and indeterminate speech acts constantly defer the full construction of her identity, showing that it constantly vacillates with each word she speaks. Mouth has no control over these speech acts, and other voices disrupt her own, making her incapable of authoring her own identity. Mouth is the “tympanum” that rests in between the sounds of a plurality of other voices and her own voice, a space that rests between and touches self and other. Moreover, Mouth’s speech acts, identity, and incapability of deciphering who she is, all point to the heavy indeterminacy that the play exudes. Beckett
renders this audible indeterminacy as a form of silent meaning, an experience of white noise.

Finally, Beckett presents Mouth as a disembodied speaking subject, and, thereby, the body plays no role in forming her identity, making language the ultimate force in her attempt at self authorship.
Across Bodies and Voices

“Quests for my own word are in fact quests for a word that is not my own, a word that is more than myself; this is a striving to depart from one’s own words, with which nothing essential can be said. I myself can only be a character and not the primary author.”

Bakhtin, *Notes Made*

In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie depicts the vocal movements and the fluctuations of each protagonists’ identity. Like Beckett, Rushdie makes clear that Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s speech acts have distinct bearing on each of their identities, and, at the same time, shows that both of their voices are disrupted by the voices of others. However, unlike Beckett, Rushdie places more emphasis on the interaction of his protagonists’ bodies and speech acts, showing that spoken language has somatic implications and that bodies reflect the movements of speech.

Informing this reading of Rushdie is the brief allusion he makes to Beckett’s play. Rushdie’s brief yet telling allusion to Beckett’s *Not I* intertwines the main themes of his text. This allusion occurs when Gibreel is convalescing at Allie Cone’s apartment after the schizophrenic episode that is a result of the plurality of voices that emerge in his dreams when he is his “angel self.” Gibreel, seemingly in a state of mental lucidity, declares

‘The craziness is in here and it drives me wild to think it could get out at any minute, right now, and he would be in charge again.’ He had begun to characterize his ‘possessed,’ ‘angel’ self as another person: in the Beckettian formula, *Not I. He*. His very own Mr. Hyde. (350).

The “Beckettian formula” the narrator refers to concerns language’s relation to the self, self-estrangement, the inability to maintain one’s own voice, the impossibility of authoring
oneself, and also speaks to the “Question of the mutability of the essence of the self” (285). The “Beckettian formula” strikes to the heart of the novel in that it is situated between Ovidian and Lucretian forms of transformation that it makes interchangeable with selfhood. Seemingly, Chamcha and Gibreel must choose from the two. The choice between the Ovidian and Lucretian formulations for Chamcha is as follows: “Either I accept Lucretius and conclude that some demonic and irreversible mutation is taking place in my inmost depths, or I go with Ovid and concede that that everything now emerging is no more than a manifestation of what was already there” (285-6). For Chamcha, “this is pretty cold comfort,” and the “Beckettian formula” offers a third option for both him and Gibreel (286). The “Beckettian formula” compartmentalizes the self, negating the “I” and asserting one part of the self as another (the “he”). In other words, the negation occurs within the singular being and is retained, and, thereby a multiplicity emerges within this singular being, fragmenting and fissuring the self. Like the Lucretian mode, the “Beckettian formula” contains a negation, a sloughing off of old selves, but, at the same time, the formula makes clear that a metamorphic plurality (an otherness) remains within a singular self, speaking to the multiple and metamorphic account that Ovid offers. Thus, the Beckettian formula melds the distinctive versions of self that Lucretius and Ovid offer, and provides a clearer account of both Gibreel’s and Chamcha’s experiences of language and the self. The “Beckettian formula” is illustrated by the pronouns that profoundly shape the Gibreel’s condition.

Gibreel’s description of the “Beckettian formula” shows that the “he,” his angel self, is within Gibreel. Gibreel makes plain that “The craziness [his angel self] is in here [within Gibreel],” and just like “Mr. Hyde” who could manifest and overtake Dr. Jekyll, so can Gibreel’s “he.” Gibreel’s “craziness,” “his angel self,” is other than himself, another within him that could
manifest at any time. Gibreel’s multiple and metamorphic self couches multiplicity within singularity. And Gibreel’s use of pronouns marks clear and distinct lines between the “I” and “he,” in order to clearly distinguish between himself and his angel self. In this light, the “I” suffers a metaphorical death, a negation, an attempted negation of the angel self, and replaces the “I” with a pronoun that signifies a different entity but which retains the “I” within. Rushdie makes plain Gibreel’s sharp negation of the “I” and affirmation of the “he” by emphasizing their distinctiveness via italics. Each “he” that refers to Gibreel’s angel self is italicized in order to differentiate between the two, visually marking the difference between Gibreel and his angel self. But the clear lines that Gibreel draws between himself and his angel self in language do not hold: “the serial dreams were still there- he would still speak, at night, verses in Arabic, a language he did not know” (351). Thereby, the other, the he, his angelic self, still manifests within him, causing him to speak a language that he does not know, indeed, voicing himself as other. Gibreel’s “he” functions in a self-referential manner because, in his view, the other is a part of himself, a part that could and does manifest at any time. Thereby, non-self referential language becomes self-referential, the mutation of referents occurs and distinctions of language between self and other are collapsed. In this way, both pronouns and Gibreel are transformed. Thus, at once, Gibreel is both “I” and “he” which reflects the unnamed narrator’s position in the Unnamable: “Bah-any old pronoun will do” because of the flaw of pronouns: “it’s the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me” (343). Gibreel’s vacillation between pronouns shows that there is no pronoun that combines a self and non-self referent, which is what he needs to describe himself. In this way, Gibreel’s use of pronouns speaks to Deleuze’s concept of the “virtual object” in that it “is the embodiment of self-estrangement; of being other within itself,” which parallels Mouth’s condition of self in Not I (51).
Gibreel’s vacillations between self and non-self referents demonstrate that he is ruptured. There is a split within Gibreel, and this split makes Gibreel’s distinction between pronouns merely *prima facie*. The narrator affirms such a view, stating “his splitting of his sense of himself into two entities, one of which he sought heroically to suppress, but which he also, by characterizing it as other than himself, preserved, nourished, and secretly made strong” (351). This observation affirms the fragmenting of Gibreel, but it also shows that language does not allow Gibreel to make clear separations. By using the pronoun “he,” Gibreel unintentionally strengthens and affirms the presence of the other within his “I,” and voices of others emerge as voices of himself. Gibreel is a hybridized subject, an amalgamation of self and other, simultaneously himself and not himself.

The Beckettian formula opens up a space between self and other that coalesces well with what Homi Bhabha refers to as the “interstice” (224). Bhabha refers to this space as the position of the migrant, a position that creates an “ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity” (224). Bhabha’s assertions concerning what occurs in this space reflect the circumstances of the “Beckettian formula.” Beckett’s formula creates conditions “where boundaries exist in nothing but transformation,” and the “self is intrinsically multiple and metamorphic” (Clingman 124). Transforming boundaries, ambivalent splitting, and hybridity are rampant throughout Rushdie’s novel. Yet, it is the voice—the “verses in Arabic”—that Gibreel speaks that trigger his transformations and reflect his multiplicity. Gibreel’s space parallels the conditions of Mouth’s locale in Beckett’s *Not I*, and, as we shall see, both Gibreel and Chamcha inhabit a hybrid spaces where voice(s) enacts their identities—identities that emerge from a variety of speakers.

In the energetic beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie explicitly shows the similar trajectory of Chamcha Saladin and Gibrel Farishta by combining their names: they become
“Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha” (5). Their union is explicitly conveyed by merging their names through language, and it is language that expresses their unity of undulating tension. It is language, more specifically, the speech acts of Chamcha and Gibreel that hold together and create the tense combinations that make up their respective identities. The narrator affirms Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s tense union: “For are they not conjoined opposites, these two” (441). Hugo Rios assesses their relation: “Saladin and Gibreel are also one character, the migrant … they are faces of the hybrid … they are roles, phases of a whole being” (52). Rios’ assertion points to the fact that the two, with their differences, form a composite picture of the migrant and the migrant’s hybridity. Dutheil extends Rios’ statement, pointing out that “he [Rushdie] focuses on the divided identity of the migrant and his or her way of dealing with this condition” (85). Dutheil’s statement crystallizes the action of the novel: how do migrants deal with their conditions, their hybrid selves and ever-changing split identities?

Rushdie’s treatment of Gibreel and Chamcha demonstrates his use and alteration of Beckett’s depiction of Mouth. Chamcha’s voice is penetrated and overcome by a plethora of cultural voices that, in turn, has somatic implications for his body. Through Gibreel, Rushdie demonstrates the breaking down of the migrant body, which leads to the othering of his voice. Thereby, Rushdie amends Beckett’s “formula” by including the body within this hybrid space. Moreover, because Gibreel and Chamcha are “phases of a being,” Rushdie’s novel asserts that a dual penetration of migrants’ voice and body occurs. The question that Rushdie’s novel appears to ask is: how do migrants construct themselves in language, given that they inhabit an in-between space (between self and other) where cultural voices constantly shape, impede, and disrupt their own speech acts, identity, and body? Gibreel and Chamcha cannot maintain their own voices, identity, and bodies, and it is through voice that each of them attempts to author
their identities. Their identities reflect their utter lack of verbal control, and their voices are constantly ruptured by the voices of others. I shall now trace how Chamcha’s voice is disrupted which leads to the breakdown of his body.

After leaving Bombay to move to London for private school because of a strained relation with his father, Chamcha, assimilates into English culture. The narrator remarks on Chamcha’s trip: “How far did they fly? Five and a half thousand as the crow. Or from Indianness to Englishness, an immeasurable distance. Or, not very far at all, because they rose from one great city, fell to another” (41). Although there is a great distance between the two great cities of Bombay and London, this distance of measurable miles is dwarfed by the “immeasurable” cultural difference. Moreover, the narrator hints at the passing of Chamcha’s Indian identity insofar as he describes their travel as the flight of a “crow,” a familiar literary trope signaling doom or death.

After his schooling is complete, Chamcha attempts to disown his Indian identity, by taking on a variety of English accents: “he had shaped himself a voice to go with the face, a voice whose languid, almost lazy vowels contrasted disconcertingly with the sawn -off abruptness of the consonants” (33). Here we see that Chamcha carefully crafted his English voice, and he considered his English voice to be “his own” (33). In remaking his voice, Chamcha’s hope is to be homogeneous; his wish is to have an English voice, but, as the passage indicates, within his English voice there is difference insofar as the “lazy vowels” contrast with the abrupt “consonants.” Moreover, Chamcha crafts his voice to match his face so that it will reflect his body, but, as we shall see, his voice effaces his body. Butler’s concept of performativity appears important here insofar as Chamcha’s English identity is brought forth and
conveyed by his speech acts, and, because no “pregiven identity” of Chamcha is realized. Chamcha’s profession, which depends on his voice, allows him entry into English society.

While in England, Chamcha becomes a voice actor or “the man of a thousand voices and a voice” (60). Chamcha’s job as a voice actor has dual functions. In one regard, his profession works to hybridize genre insofar as it makes prominently displays performative qualities in Rushdie’s novel, referring back to why Not I is an important intertext to note. At the same time, as a voice actor, Chamcha successfully integrates into English society. He provides innumerable voices for many English products. The multiplicity of his voices is, in part, simply reflections of his occupation in England. In this sense, his voices are extensions of the English economic system, commodities and manifestations of the network of Western capitalistic power. They are wares not of his own creation, and are brought into being, crafted by him in order to fit whatever product they represent. Thereby, they are simultaneously his and not his own. Chamcha’s voices are his performative speech acts, but because they come into existence (are paid for) only for the product they represent, they are commodities of the English economic system. At the same time, as representations of the English culture industry, they support, advertise, and reiterate the values and norms of the culture industry.

Embedded in the narrator’s description of Chamcha (“the man of a thousand voices and a voice”) I find a dual allusion to literary and pop culture. The pop culture allusion is to Mel Blanc, dubbed “the man of a thousand voices” because he was the famous voice actor for Warner Brother’s cartoons. He performed the voices of the animated characters of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, and a host of others. The allusion to Blanc makes clear the performative nature of Chamcha’s voice, and also demonstrates that his voice is derived from the Western culture industry. The literary allusion is to The Arabian Nights, a series of a thousand and one stories
that prolongs the life of Scheherazade. Perhaps the most famous example of a frame story in world literature, *The Arabian Nights* is a compilation of Arabic, Indian, Turkish, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian stories within a Persian frame. In making this allusion, Rushdie is showing that within the Indian cultural frame of Chamcha’s voice, there is heterogeneity and difference. This is not to say that Chamcha has an original, authentic voice that he speaks with, but rather that within his singular voice there exist numerous, distinct voices. In other words, the singular voice always houses a multiplicity of inflections.

The malleability and different frames of Chamcha’s voice allow him to participate within the English economic and culture industry, but, as he does this, his body is effaced. When Chamcha returns to Bombay, Zeeny points this out to him: “They pay you to imitate them, as long as they don’t have to look at you. Your voice becomes famous but they hide your face” (61). Essentially, she claims that Chamcha’s voice is merely imitative and that in mimicking English voices, Chamcha’s body is hidden from sight. In “Of Mimicry and Man” Homi Bhabha points out that the “effect of mimicry is camouflage... [that] It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled” (125). Bhabha’s assertion about mimicry holds true for Chamcha insofar as he becomes “mottled” by imitating a plethora of different English voices. However, Bhabha also finds that in imitating, the migrant becomes “a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (126). Bhabha asserts that the imitative migrant is a copy that maintains a certain disparity from the original. In Chamcha’s case, his disparity is his body that is effaced via his profession which is why Zeeny posits that “they [English culture industry] hide your face.” Yet, Bhabha maintains that this disparity of the imitative migrant is a subversive threat inherent to mimicry that endangers the culture being imitated.
Although Bhabha’s formulation holds true for Chamcha, his notion of mimicry is problematic because Chamcha’s body (the subversive part of him within English society) is effaced by the dominant culture of England. Rushdie’s narrator affirms Zeeny’s point that Chamcha’s body disappears by describing the effacement that both Chamcha and Mimi Mamoulian, a Jewish woman, Chamcha’s “female equivalent,” undergoes: “Saladin and Chamcha were legends of a sort, but crippled legends, dark stars. The gravitational field of their abilities drew work towards them, but they remained invisible, shedding bodies to put on voices” (61). Chamcha’s and Mimi’s voices are distributed throughout English society, but their bodies are never seen. In this regard, the subversive part of Chamcha simply disappears, showing that Bhabha’s assertions regarding the resistant space of mimicry do not hold for Chamcha. Instead of subverting, Chamcha’s body dissapersas and he becomes disembodied, and so too does his resistance to English society and culture. Kelly Hewson clarifies this notion by asserting that Chamcha “becomes merely a voice to everyone” (83). Hewson’s comment coupled with Zeenat and the narrator’s, demonstrates the prominence of voice to Chamcha’s English identity, and he is a voice, a product of his speech acts, speech acts which are product of the English economic system. He is always heard but never seen, and, in this light, Chamcha’s participation within the English economic and culture industry works to disembody him and squash the site of his potential resistance (his body). The “dark” tone of his Indian skin and Indian features are effaced and his identity in England hinges on his performances of English voices. He is simply a multiplicity of voices that promote and propel a diverse array of products and English social norms, and his speech acts overcome his body.

Chamcha’s success as a voice actor yields him entry and enables him to assimilate his voice into English society if and only if his body is effaced. Gaurav Majumdar points out that
Chamcha becomes a “figure of coherence gained through multiplicity, through its comfort with its own differences and variety” (38). Majumdar’s statement is revealing insofar as Chamcha’s voices allow him to cohere with the norms of English society via imitation. In addition, Majumdar’s statement affirms the varied multiplicity within Chamcha’s singular voice that the allusion to *The Arabian Nights* offers. Yet the supposed “coherence” of Chamcha that Majumdar speaks of cannot be glimpsed, because the supposed “coherence” of Chamcha’s English voice and identity is ruptured when he returns to India.

When he returns to Bombay to play the role of the Indian doctor in Shaw’s *The Millionairess*, “he tailored his voice to the requirements of the part, but those long-suppressed locutions, those discarded vowels and consonants, began to leak out of his mouth out of the theatre as well. His voice was betraying him; and he also discovered his component parts to be capable of other treasons, too” (49). Chamcha verbal slippages occur while he is on stage performing. His voice ruptures, and the “discarded vowels and consonants” of his Indian voice permeate his English voice, spilling out and rupturing his meticulously crafted English voice. As we have seen, it is Chamcha’s voice that is the preeminent feature of his English identity, and here we see that he cannot maintain the sounds and “locutions” of his voice. Additionally, this passage reinforces the prominence of his voice to his identity in that the other “parts” capable of treason are merely “components.” Here, Chamcha’s “component parts” that betray him should be read as his body. Chamcha can be seen by the Indian theatregoers. When he is seen, his effaced body that is brought about by his English voice, begins to resurface and can be glimpsed. Thus, while his Indian voice emerges, so too does his Indian body.

Moreover, Chamcha’s English voice is further ruptured on his flight back from India: “and Saladin, emerging from the dream, found his speech unaccountably metamorphosed into
the Bombay lilt he had so diligently (and so long ago!) unmade … ‘So, okay, bibi, give one whiskysoda only’ (34). Chamcha’s carefully constructed English voice that so methodically unmade his Indian voice is overwhelmed. His Indian voice “unaccountably” emerges, spewing forth, and disrupting what he thought to be “his own” true English voice and identity. The reemergence of his “Bombay lilt” causes Chamcha to feel other than himself: “I’m not myself, he thought as a faint fluttering feeling began in the vicinity of his heart.” (34-5). Chamcha’s feelings of being other than “himself” show the close connection between his speech acts and identity. The simple utterance of “So, okay, bibi, give one whiskysoda only” disrupts his understanding of his whole identity. Chamcha experiences self-estrangement that indicates that another is being expressed through his speech acts, hinting at the plurality of cultural others that exist within him. Moreover, Chamcha considers his voice to consist of “transmogrified vowels and vocab,” which suggests his feelings of self-estrangement in that transmogrification implies an unexpected, strange change. Additionally, transmogrification hints at the grotesque, which shows just how much Chamcha feels that these “transmogrified vowels and vocab” are different from him. At the same time, it demonstrates the vast difference that emerges from a singular voice. Chamcha is jolted, surprised by the reemergence of his Indian voice, and its manifestation shows that he simply cannot maintain control over his voice, that he cannot effectively author himself, and that his identity is inextricable from his uncontrollable speech acts.

From this examination of Chamcha’s voices, we see that his performative speech acts articulate and undermine his identity. His English and Indian voices are products of his singular voice, suggesting that heterogenous cultural voices lurk within each of his speech acts that undermine his verbal control. Moreover, his inability to maintain verbal control demonstrates that he is a hybridized speaking subject who performs hybrid speech acts that destabilize his
sense of self. In this regard, Chamcha’s attempt at authoring his identity becomes an impossibility. Instead, Chamcha has multiple cultural authors who author his identity. These authors exist outside of him and within him, and he becomes a site where different voices interact, mutating and fissuring his identity. Moreover, the voices and speech acts that Chamcha performs carry somatic ramifications insofar as his body is effaced when speaking with his English voice and betrays him while his speech acts slip and rupture on the Indian stage. Thus, Chamcha’s body undulates in concert with his speech acts.

But, Rushdie’s text also indicates that external voices of the dominate language shape the body of migrants as well. Language is the force that establishes the identity of the characters of Rushdie’s novel. Plummeting through the atmosphere of “Proper London,” after the splitting apart of the Bostan, both Chamcha and Gibreel undergo physical mutation (2). And, as Rushdie’s narrator informs us, “What did they expect? Falling like that out of the sky: did they imagine there would be no side effects? Higher Powers had taken an interest” (137). The splitting apart of the Bostan that occurs in English airspace, and Chamcha and Gibreel’s subsequent fall into England, show that once they arrive in English territory, they begin their metamorphosis. However, each of them changes in different ways, with Chamcha metamorphosing into the Goatman, two “bumps” appearing on his “temples” upon walking away after his fall, while Gibreel transforms into the archangel, a “distinctly, golden glow” appearing around the “edges” of his “head” (137). As Rushdie’s narrator puts it, “One man’s breath was sweetened” and the other’s “soured” (137). Rushdie’s narrator claims that he is the “Higher Power” responsible for their change, but he also states that it is a “mystery” how these changes occurred. Perhaps the “mystery” the narrator refers to is his own medium: language. Language is the raw material of the narrator’s story, and, thereby, is the force that constructs the characters’
respective stories and enacts their transformations. At the same time, the narrator’s
dramatization of his medium and his own activities in the novel further exemplifies the
performative qualities that the novel exudes. Rushdie’s narrator is not static. He is active force
and is a large part of the drama that unfolds in the novel. In this regard, Beckett’s play is a
crucial intertext to note because Not I dramatizes the performance of speech acts, and Rushdie’s
novel picks up on the dramatic element of performing speech acts via his use of an intrusive and
self-reflective narrator.

The constructive force of language is the subject of conversation that the Manticore has
with Chamcha in the medical facility of the Detention Centre. The Manticore represents the
freakish qualities of migrancy. That is, the Manticore reflects the interpenetration between the
East and the West highlight the result of the conjoining these disparate realms within language.
His conversation highlights the descriptive power that a dominant language has on the bodies of
the migrants:

The other [Manticore] seemed to be suggesting that these mutations were the
responsibilities of – of whom? […] ‘I don’t see,’ he[Chamcha] ventured, ‘who
can be blamed …’ […] ‘The point is,’ it [the Manticore] said fiercely, some of us
aren’t going to stand for it. We’re going to bust out of here before they turn us
into anything worse. Every night I feel a different piece of me beginning to
change […] ‘But how do they do it,’ Chamcha wanted to know. ‘They describe
us,’ the other whispered solemnly. ‘That’s all. They have the power of
description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.’ (174)

The “they” the Manticore refers to are the guards, and it is their “power of description” that
causes the transformations of the migrants. Indeed, as Rios finds, the hospital scene is pivotal
because it shows that the transformations of the migrants occur as a “result of contact between a
foreigner and the powerful renaming machine of Empire” (55). Although Rios is certainly
correct in his estimation that the Detention facility is a manifestation of English empire, what he
fails to see is that Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s transformations occur as soon as they touch English
soil. The Facility, a node in the network of English hegemonic power, is imbued with a more prevalent descriptive force than other sections of English society, is only a point within a larger descriptive force that is diffuse throughout English society. “Description” is a rhetorical mode of language that generates images of things, people, or occurrences, and, the descriptions of the guards are depicting the migrants in certain fashions and altering their physical forms. But, again, the descriptive force of language exists in all corners of society, and this is why even after Chamcha escapes, he continues transforming. By noting the perpetual changes he endures, the Manticore indicates that migrants are subject to these incessant mutations. In other words, the changes wrought by language are continuous and unstoppable. And, as the Manticore informs Chamcha, the hybridized and mutated migrants, in a hopeless effort to stifle these changes brought about by language, are plotting an escape.

The hybridizing force of the “power of description” that transforms the migrants is readily seen when Chamcha escapes with these other creatures: “Chamcha glimpsed beings he could never have imagined, men and women who were also partially plants, or giant insects, or even, on occasion, built partly of brick or stone; there were men with rhinoceros horns instead of noses and women with necks as long as any giraffes” (176). The great variety of hybrid creatures that Chamcha sees are constructions of language, and the migrants, including Chamcha, succumb to this force. But, more notably, they become hybrid creatures, and though they are altered (and will continue to be altered), they are not one thing or the other. Rather, they are unbelievable compositions that hold together distinct forms. In other words, the migrants are partial “plants,” creatures that are part “brick,” part “stone,” “men with rhinoceros horn instead of noses,” and “women” with giraffe-like “necks.” As Rios argues, the hybrid, “consciously or unconsciously, starts absorbing characteristics from the surrounding cultures, growing to such an
extent that no single culture can contain the cross-cultural references that inhabit this being” (55). In this instance, the migrants or hybrids are aware that they are undergoing cross-cultural changes, but Rios’ verb “absorbing” is a bit problematic. While it is true that, just like sponges, the migrants absorb English cultural traits, the use of the word “absorbing” takes away the forced absorption that English society enacts. Indeed, the migrants are placed in the Detention Facility, and thoroughly subjugated to the language of their imperial hosts. Although Chamcha is a British citizen, his cultural heritage induces English authorities to place him in the facility and subject him to their descriptions of his culture. Rios’ verb choice implies a passive process of mutation, but mutation in the novel is painful and difficult, the reason why the Manticore and the other migrants plot their escape. Moreover, Chamcha’s own process of mutation devastates him, and, in the words of Majumdar, “he is defined as a ‘satanic’ satyr by the gaze of the English state-apparatuses” (39). Chamcha finds himself undergoing a brutal process of hybridization, and the “power of description” that the English state enacts upon him and other migrants is a hybridizing force that painfully shapes and redefines the somatic appearance of the migrants. Chamcha’s goatish appearance demonstrates how the English regard the migrant: a monstrosity. The migrant is the product of the Manichaean opposition, and is where the postcolonial subject resides. But, Gibreel is the actual evil agent, and, therefore, the “gaze” that defines Chamcha inaccurately depicts his qualities. Moreover, the byproduct of English description, to Chamcha’s mortification, is that his goatish form becomes the emblem for anti-racism, showing that Empire’s definition and descriptions undo their intended categorizations and functions. But this hybridization of the migrant body does not occur only in England. As we shall see, Gibreel’s body undergoes transformation due to projections that are put upon him in India, and these projections lead to the fissuring of his voice.
Much like Chamcha, Gibreel is an also an actor, but he is a film actor. Again, threaded throughout Rushdie’s novel is performance. Gibreel’s occupation hearkens back to Not I, illustrating the performative quality of Rushdie’s novel which works to infuse a dramatic element to this genre. And Gibreel enjoys a highly successful career, since he has been, “for fifteen years, the biggest star in the history of the Indian movies” (11). Unlike Chamcha, Gibreel establishes his career in India. The narrator makes clear that his fame as an actor is inextricable from the characters he portrays: “For over a decade and a half he had represented, to hundreds of millions of believers in that country in which, to this day, the human population outnumbered the divine by less than three to one, the most acceptable, and instantly recognizable, face of the supreme” (17). Gibreel’s face and fame are tied to his performances of a host of different deities. Gibreel’s acting career causes his body to become a singular representation of a plethora of deities that cross cultural and religious boundaries. This is evidenced by the narrator’s hyperbolic description of the human to god ratio. The diverse population of India, a country known for its religious and cultural diversity, accepts Gibreel’s body as a fitting representation of its enormous variety of religious figures and cultures. The narrator emphasizes the plurality that Gibreel’s body portrays: “Gibreel had spent the greater part of his unique career incarnating, with absolute conviction, the countless deities of the subcontinent” (16). “The countless deities of the subcontinent” that Gibreel depict shows he crosses religious and cultural boundaries within India. Gibreel does not only perform these roles; he “incarnate[es]” the various religious figures. The use of “incarnating” indicates that Gibreel does more than merely act or perform a role; rather, he gives bodily form to these various cultural and religious figures. From Gibreel’s portrayals, we see that his body is a site of multiplicity insofar as it has the capability of embodying these divergent religious figures and deities.
Moreover, Gibreel’s cultural and religious plurality is compounded by the fact that his personal faith is Islam. Gibreel, a man of Islamic faith, is accepted by “hundreds of millions” of people as a representation and embodiment of their own culture and religion. The fact that he, a singular individual, becomes a representation to such a broad spectrum of religions and cultures exhibits, simultaneously, the heterogeneity of India and of Gibreel’s body. In this regard, Gibreel becomes a hybrid bodily composition that reflects a plurality of cultural and religious voices. Rekha Merchant, Gibreel’s married lover who ends her life, affirms Gibreel’s plurality by accusing him of “being a creature of surfaces, like a movie screen” (27). Like a “movie screen,” Gibreel’s body endures the projections of the diverse Indian populace, and has no form of its own. Gibreel’s body is contingent on the perceptions, or rather the religious and cultural beliefs, of the person viewing him; it has everything to do with his migrant status. Gibreel was born in “British Poona” and then moves to the “bitch-city [Bombay], his first migration” (18). He is a migrant who has moved through layers of culture and classes: born to an Islamic family in British Poona, who moves to Bombay and after working as a courier becomes a famous actor. Gibreel’s migrant status enhances his plurality and shows that his body, at best, is unclear. In part, the uncertainty of his body stems from his own varied cultural background, but it becomes even more uncertain because he is a migrant and an actor. No outward sign of Gibreel’s own religious and cultural background is apparent, and the lack of its presence shows that his own body is indeterminate.

Gibreel’s body is further destabilized after his illness. Inexplicably, while filming a movie in “Kanya Kumari,” Gibreel collapses and is rushed to the hospital (28). His illness is a medical mystery and during it, he hemorrhages, and “was quite simply bleeding to death inside his skin” (28). Gibreel’s hemorrhaging is internal, and this fact makes clear that his body is
rupturing from within. Gibreel’s body prior to his illness was merely a surface of various projections, but here an internal breakdown of his blood vessels almost causes his death. The treatment that Gibreel receives from his medical staff involves “seven days” of blood “transfusions, and every clotting agent known to medical science” (28-9). The Latin root “trans” means across, beyond, or on the opposite side. Fusion is the combination of two distinct things. Thus, the word “transfusion” denotes the crossing of and combining of two distinct things, and, thereby, Gibreel’s treatment is an infusion of distinct properties that cross into his physical body. In this regard, metaphorically and literally, Gibreel’s physical body comes to reflect a unity of difference that indicates that Gibreel is ruptured not only on the surface by projections, but also beneath by “transfusions.” Moreover, Gibreel is so destabilized internally that no “clotting agent known to medical science” can steady his fissuring and crossings. None of the treatments that the doctors perform on Gibreel work, and they give “him up for lost,” but just as suddenly and inexplicably that his illness came about, he recovers (29). But Gibreel’s illness irrevocably alters him.

After a brief period of convalescence, it becomes clear that “he had changed, and to a startling degree because he had lost his faith” (29). Clearly, Gibreel’s illness brings about a distinct transformation in him, and his illness should be seen as moment of metamorphosis and mutation, a breakdown of the body that leads to an alteration of his faith. Gibreel’s loss of faith in Allah is the transformation that occurs because of his illness. Indeed, as Rushdie’s narrator points out, “every minute of consciousness” during Gibreel’s illness is spent calling on “Allah,” but Gibreel’s voice is never heard, and Allah never shows him a “sign” of acknowledgement (30). Finally, when Gibreel is angered by Allah’s lack of response, he begins to feel emptiness
and isolation and realizes that he is “talking to thin air, that there was nobody there at all” (30). And upon this “day of metamorphosis the illness changed and his recovery began” (30).

Gibreel’s “calling” and “talking” to Allah goes unheard, and his inaudibility shows that he has no voice of his own. Prior to his illness, the emphasis is solely on his body, and Rushdie draws no attention to the status of his voice. His voice is an absence because his faith in Islam makes his voice appear to be stable and monologic. Gibreel’s speech acts were apparently iterations of the monologic praisings of God. The monologic nature of Gibreel’s voice is seen through his “calling” and “talking” to Allah while he is ill: “O God most beneficent most merciful” (30). These descriptors of Allah are common adjectives applied to the deity within Islam. Gibreel’s words show that his voice is derivative of Islam, and, in this regard, he does not speak with his own voice or words. Rushdie’s narrator makes this point clear by describing his “calling” and “talking” to Allah as “unspoken words” (30). In essence, Gibreel’s iterative voice appears to be simply a monologic manifestation of his religious and cultural beliefs. His words are not his own. During his illness, he becomes aware that he is just a medium through which the words of Islam are conveyed. Gibreel’s illness makes him conscious that he is a dialogic speaking subject, and that the monologic nature of his voice is illusory. After Gibreel recovers and disentangles himself from Islam, he begins a quest to establish a voice of his own and author his identity through it.

Gibreel vacillates between the projected religious and cultural identities of India that are, in part, a result of his career as an actor. Yet, Gibreel’s movement across different identities is also a product of his uncertain selfhood. As previously discussed, Rushdie’s allusion to Beckett’s Not I establishes Gibreel’s use of pronouns as an attempt to stabilize his voice and identity, and, as we have seen, shows the fissured nature of Gibreel’s identity and voice. The
narrator affirms Gibreel’s ruptured sense of self by stating he had a “splitting sense of himself” (351). Gibreel’s splitting is a product of his religious crisis; that is, it comes about after he disavows his faith in Islam. And it is after his loss of faith that he discerns the fragmenting multiplicity of voices that exists within his own.

Gibreel’s movements in the remainder of the novel center on this issue, namely how will Gibreel deal with the multiplicity of voices that reside within his voice and that constantly reshape his identity? The rupturing of Gibreel’s voice occurs most prominently in his dreams. Gibreel is unable to clearly separate his dreams from reality. His doctors declare that his lack of separation between these realms is a form of schizophrenia, but, in truth, Gibreel’s dreams actually reveal the true nature of his self. When Gibreel encounters the “Supreme Being,” who looks like a “myopic scrivener” and shares other physical attributes with Salman Rushdie, God states, “We sent Revelation to fill your dreams: in which not only Our nature, but yours also, was clarified. But you fought against it, struggling against the very sleep in which We were awakening you” (329). Gibreel’s interpretation of God’s statements is that his true self is his angel self, but therein is his problem. God’s statements reveal that Gibreel’s dreams are revelatory, and the revelation they offer is the dialogic nature of the voice of God and Gibreel’s own voice. Gibreel’s dreams should be seen as revealing the multiplicity of reality and the self, the fact that he is a composite of fiction (dream) and performative reality. Rushdie’s novel works to conjoin binary oppositions of good and evil, self and other, east and west, and, in so doing, shows that each side of a dichotomy always contains traces of the other. Thus, Rushdie’s novel embraces multiplicity and hybridity. But Gibreel struggles against such “Revelations.” And, Gibreel’s primary difficulty with his dreams is that they exhibit the plurality of voices contained within his own.
Gibreel’s dreams are hybrid manifestations, a merging of waking and dream life. Parallels emerge between Gibreel’s waking and dream life, and this point is made plain by the narrator’s description of Gibreel in the Mount Cone section: “Gibreel is no longer a mere spectator but the central player, the star. With his old weakness for taking too many roles: yes, yes, he’s not just playing the archangel but also him, the business man, the Messenger, Mahound” (111). Just as in his acting career where he played a plethora of different deities, in his dreams, Gibreel plays the roles of the “archangel” and Mahound. In playing the role of Mahound, Gibreel also plays the multiple aspects of his character, “the businessman, the Messenger.” Simply put, Gibreel’s dreams display the movements of his real life. Moreover, his hybrid dreams that combine his reality and dreams are moments of “listening” and speaking (112). Gibreel simultaneously listens to voices of others, but these voices overtake him and cause him to speak. And Gibreel “feels a confusion, whom am I” (112 italics in original). This is an important point because the instability of Gibreel’s voice is what causes him to question who he is. The destabilization or plurality of Gibreel’s voice causes him to question which who is speaking him occurs throughout his dreams.

Gibreel’s ruptured voice is most prominent during the recitation of the Satanic Verses. They are quoted immediately after Gibreel invokes the “Beckettian formula,” showing that this formula speaks to the heart of the novel. After Gibreel describes Beckett’s “formula,” the narrator informs us that he “would still speak at night, verses in Arabic, a language he did not know: tilk al-gharaniq al’ula wa inna shafa’ ata-hunna la-turtaja … which turned out to mean … These are the exalted females whose intercession is to be desired” (351). During Gibreel’s dreams, his voice is overtaken by a language he cannot speak. Gibreel’s dreams are voiced enactments of language, and, in this case, a voiced language that Gibreel did not know how to
speak. The fact that Gibreel speaks in Arabic during his dreams injects foreignness, an otherness into him. In addition, Gibreel’s Arabic voice is a repetition of Mahound’s recitation of the Satanic Verses that occurs earlier in the novel: “their [Lat, Uzza, & Manat] intercession is desired” (117). This repetition does two things. On one hand, it shows that Gibreel’s voice is contaminated by the voice of another. On the other, its reference to the Satanic Verses points towards the monumental struggle for voice and word that occurs during the recitation and renunciation of them. The recitation and renunciation are dialogic moments of speech where the voices and identities of different characters become inextricable.

During the recitation, the bodily experience and voices of Gibreel and Mahound are inextricable from each other. As Mahound sleeps, he “clutches at his centre […] and now the miracle starts in his my our guts” (114). The bodily experience of Gibreel and Mahound are concurrent. Possession of the same bodily “guts” by “his my our” indicates that this is an experience they share, but, interestingly, it is not only Gibreel and Mahound’s experience. The “my our” conflates the narrator with both Gibreel and Mahound. It is the narrator speaking, so the physical events he attributes to Gibreel and Mahound are also his experience. Moreover, Gibreel feels “that strength that force, here it is at my own jaw working it, opening shutting” (114). As we have seen, Mahound “clutches at his centre” feeling the strength of a “force,” and here we see that Gibreel and the narrator both experience this force as it moves to their/“my jaw.” The “my” is simultaneously Gibreel, Mahound, and the narrator, and, thereby, all three experience the force that happens to the “jaw.” This “force” is directed toward speech. The contested body part here is the “jaw,” the “opening [and] shutting” of which produces speech. Thus, this moment is at the threshold of speech, and, the infiltration of the body in the sequence is directed at the body parts that produces speech. Because this infiltration happens to all three
bodies, dialogic speech acts are born: “The voice comes. Not my voice. I’d never know such words. I’m no classy speaker never was never will be but this isn’t my voice it’s a Voice” (114). Here, the description that the plurality of speakers (Gibreel, Mahound, the narrator) offers concerns whose voice is speaking. The “voice” does not belong to any of them; it is a “Voice” of plurality, their conjoined voice. Obviously, Rushdie plays with the idea of a monologic “Voice” of God by capitalizing “Voice,” “butbutbut: God isn’t in this picture” (114). The “butbutbut” indicates the number of speakers in the sequence: Gibreel, Mahound, and the narrator. Yet, importantly, God is not in this scene, and the implication is that there is no original or singular “Voice” that speaks. Moreover, Rushdie’s use of the word “picture” denotes a movie that references and crosses into Gibreel’s real life. This point is further evidenced by the repeated comparison of Gibreel’s dream to a movie. In likening Gibreel’s dream to his reality, the narrator shows that within reality multiplicities of voices reverberate through and within a singular voice, and, that this multiplicity hybridizes the identity of the speaker. This becomes even clearer by investigating the renunciation of the Satanic Verses.

After reciting the Satanic Verses that promote Al-Lat, Uzza, and Manat as desired intercessors to Allah, Mahound faints. Upon waking, Mahound has a conversation with his virago of a wife, Hind, regarding the Satanic Verses, and she informs him that she disagrees with the verses. According to Hind, the Satanic Verses would do away with binary oppositions by making a monotheistic religion polytheistic. For her, the binary opposition between the triumvirate of female deities and Allah is to be desired. Mahound, swayed by Hind’s words and by the idea that the Grandee (Abu Simbel) might betray his pledge, heads back to Mount Cone to exert influence upon the Archangel (Gibreel).
At Mount Cone, Gibreel, having just fallen “down the rabbit-hole” encounters Mahound, and an epic bodily struggle for voice commences (124). And the “businessman […] goes to work […] on my whole body” (124). Unlike their previous encounter, here, the struggle encompasses the entirety of the “body,” when previously, the bodily struggle was at the level of the “jaws.” The intense struggle for the entirety of the body is made clear in the text: “Gibreel and the Prophet wrestling, both naked, rolling over and over, […] Mahound wrestles the Archangel throwing him from side to side and let me tell you he’s getting in everywhere, his tongue inside my ear, his fists around my balls ” (125). Notice the physicality of the scene. “Wrestling” is mentioned twice, they are “naked,” “rolling over” one another; Mahound throws the Archangel from “side to side,” grabs Gibreel’s sexual organs, and penetrates Gibreel’s body “everywhere.” This intense struggle shows the tumult and penetration the migrant body experiences. Gibreel’s body is being controlled and dominated, but the control and domination is a product of self and other because Gibreel is simultaneously Mahound and the Archangel. Moreover, Mahound penetrates Gibreel’s ear with his tongue, and, thereby, another’s human organ of articulation that generates a voice enters Gibreel’s ear. Mahound’s penetration of Gibreel’s ears shows his desire to place his voice within Gibreel, and also the breaking down of the body of the migrant leads to the injections of different cultural voices. In essence, the voice that pours forth from Gibreel is a result of the tumult his body experiences.

The bodily struggle between Mahound and Gibreel, a struggle that could have lasted “for hours or weeks,” is for all intents and purposes won by Mahound. Gibreel is physically dominated throughout the fight by the prophet, his body penetrated and thrown about by him. But, Mahound “throws the fight,” and, essentially forces Gibreel to pin him: “Mahound was pinned down beneath the Angel, it’s what he wanted, it was his will filling me up and giving me
the strength to hold him down because archangels can’t lose such fights” (125). Gibreel’s pinning of Mahound is brought about by Mahound, whose strength penetrates Gibreel and gives him the power to “hold him down.” This manifestation of power by Gibreel is not internally derived. Rather, it is internal and external, the external strength of Gibreel as Mahound filling Gibreel up and giving him power. The end product of Gibreel’s pinning of Mahound is that “the moment I [Gibreel] got on top … he did his old trick, forcing my mouth open and the voice, the VOICE, pour out of me once again, made it pour all over him, like sick” (125). The intense physical contest culminates at the moment when Gibreel speaks. But these are not Gibreel’s words. This is Gibreel’s internalization of a “VOICE” that has no origin, and it is ejected from him like vomit. Importantly, Gibreel’s voice becomes a substance or bodily product in this sequence. As we shall see, this parallels the unnamed narrator’s description of Friday’s voice in Coetzee’s Foe. At the same time, this is a thoroughly dialogic moment because Gibreel is a multiplicity of speakers. Like the previous encounter in Mount Cone, the “I” conflates the narrator and Gibreel. Moreover, Gibreel is also playing the role of Mahound. The fissuring of self and identity is even more rampant throughout the second sequence because Rushdie pluralizes the different phases of Mahound’s being by calling him the “businessman,” then the “Prophet,” and then “Mahound.” Again, Gibreel plays the part of Mahound so he becomes each phase of him. Moreover, Gibreel is conflated with the narrator, and he is simultaneously playing the role of Archangel. To add to this rupturing, the narrator of the story is Shaitan. So, at once, Gibreel is himself, the Archangel, Shaitan, Mahound, the businessman, and the Prophet. Thus, the rampant fissuring of Gibreel’s identity is seen, and, thereby, making each voice that stems forth from his dialogic. And just like the previous encounter on Mount Cone, “God isn’t in this picture.” Mahound’s presence within Gibreel has a central function-to be disseminated through
his voice. And therein lies the issue; “the voice, the VOICE” that pours forth from Gibreel is supposed to be Allah, but it is an admixture of all the different voices of these identities that he is playing and passing through. It is a plurality of voices spoken with a single voice. And, Shaitan (the narrator) makes plain the plurality of this voice after the encounter:

Gibreel, hovering-watching from his highest camera angle, knows one small detail, just one tiny thing that’s a bit of a problem here, namely that *it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me*. From my mouth, both the statement and the repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all know how my mouth got worked. (126)

Who takes credit for the voice? The “me” is both Gibreel and Shaitan (the narrator). Within the “statement and repudiation” the plural “me” does the speaking. The voice that is projected from this “mouth” contains the tense relation of opposites. Moreover, the “mouth” that does the speaking gets “worked,” meaning that even the “me” that speaks “the whole thing” is not the agent speaking the words.

As we have seen, Gibreel’s body is a site of struggle, and the breaking down of his body leads to the fissuring of his voice. Gibreel’s voice, like his body, is imposed upon, tossed about, and sways with the movements of others. In that regard, his voice is a locus where multiple voices converge within a singular voice. Gibreel’s voice articulates speech acts that contain plurality and enact his fissured identity. Yet Gibreel has no control over the various voices that converge within his, and, thus, Gibreel cannot take verbal control of himself. Therefore, Gibreel’s identity is composed by various cultural authors.

The voices of both Gibreel and Chamcha are undermined throughout *The Satanic Verses*. Gibreel and Chamcha, the “conjoined opposites” that reflect the “faces” of the “migrant” show the twin movements of disruption of the body and voice that a singular migrant endures. Both movements reflect that migrants cannot speak with their own voices, and Gibreel and Chamcha
shows the opposite disruptions that a migrant encounters with each moment. For Chamcha, it is his disrupted voice that leads to the effacement and alteration of his body. With Gibreel, it is his body of surfaces that breaks down and leads to the disrupting or hindering of his voice. In other words, what Rushdie does is utilize and expand the “Beckettian formula.” Disruption of voices is his primary concern, but, in expanding the “Beckettian formula,” he shows that self-estrangement is both visceral and verbal. In one case, self-estrangement moves across the body of the speaking subject and disrupts the voice, and in the other, self-estrangement is made manifest in the voice of the speaking subject and estranges the body.

Finally, the rupturing and destabilization of Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s voices show that they are sites of indeterminacy. Because neither of them can maintain control of their respective voices or bodies, they become figures that exude hybridity, which vacillates across and between binary oppositions. They are dialogic voices and bodies that never can fully articulate what they are, always deferring their own meaning. The pluralities within their singular voices generate speech acts that are semantically overloaded, and they become forms of white noise, streams of sounds that are so incomprehensible that they become a form of silence.
Resistance

“We must believe in the body, but as in the germ of life, the seed which splits open the paving-stones, which has been preserved and lives on in the holy shroud of the mummy’s bandages, and which bears witness to life, in this world as it is.”

Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*

J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* clearly shows the speaking subject’s inability to take verbal control of the self, but it also offers a space of resistance, namely, the body. Like Beckett and Rushdie, Coetzee finds the voice of the speaking subject to be infected with the voices of others. However, unlike Beckett and Rushdie, Coetzee indicates that the body of the speaking subject is a space of resistance that simultaneously is marked by cultural materials, yet withholds itself from these markers, and offers its own indeterminate signs.

In *Foe*, a reworking of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee makes references to constraints placed on the tongue of the speaking subject, particularly, Susan Barton’s tongue. Constricting and disruptive forces gird Susan’s tongue, speech acts, and agency. Due to these disruptions, Susan’s articulations have an indeterminable origin. From it, Susan’s indeterminate speech acts reflect indeterminacy and silence meaning. At the same time, Friday’s speaking status is uncertain as he may or may not be missing his tongue. And the sounds he produces have silent, indeterminate meanings. Thus, both Friday’s and Susan’s voices are conjoined forces of silent meanings, the uncertainty of which is tied to both their bodies. Their bodies become “their own signs,” and, the “signs” of their bodies exhibit two meanings. They are
capable of being marked by cultural remnants, but, at the same time, they remain distinct sites. Thus, the body becomes a sign that is both determinable and indeterminate.

To begin, I will show the constraining forces that gird Susan’s tongue, and how this makes her unable to craft her own identity. The initial constraint on Susan’s tongue occurs when Susan is stranded on the desert isle with Cruso and Friday. She discusses Friday’s inability to speak with Cruso, and he explains to her that “’He [Friday] has no tongue,’” […] ‘That is why he does not speak. They cut out his tongue’” (23). (In the novel, there is doubt as to whether Friday’s tongue has actually been removed. Below, I plan to interrogate Friday’s speaking status, but, for the moment, I will suspend this analysis and accept Susan’s belief in Cruso’s claim.) After learning of the absence of Friday’s tongue, Susan experiences an uncontrollable emotive response that is not entirely her own: “I began to look on him – I could not help myself – with the horror we reserve for the mutilated. It was no comfort that his mutilation was a secret, closed behind his lips … Indeed, it was the very secretness of his loss that caused me to shrink from him” (24). Susan is unable to control her response to Friday’s condition. Without being able to stop herself, she stares at Friday in “horror.” Friday’s condition impinges upon Susan’s agency insofar as she cannot control her emotional state. At the same time, her physical agency is disrupted insofar as she cannot help but look upon him and because she shrinks from him. Coetzee’s use of “shrink” is suggestive as it carries the connotation of physical diminution, and suggests a decrease in her agency. This decrease in her agency is evidenced by her emotions having a collective component insofar as it is the “horror we reserve” for beings who have terrible afflictions that she experiences. In other words, the reduction of Susan’s agency is clearly seen because the “horror” has a collective origin, expressed via the pronoun “we.” The other word of interest is “mutilation.” “Mutilation” refers to Friday’s supposedly missing speech.
organ, yet the word is etymologically suggestive and points to the word “mute.” *Matus* is the Latin masculine past participle for silence and dumbness while *mutilare* is the Latin word for cut off. The Latin root of “mute” and “mutilation” is “mut,” a verb that means change. There is an etymological thread that emerges when studying these three texts. Mouth is “mute” throughout much of her life, Rushdie’s novel deals with the “mutability” of the essence of the speaking subject, and Coetzee’s works concerns “mute” and “mutilated” speaking subjects. Susan applies “mutilation” to Friday’s condition, but it is fitting for Susan insofar as, when she learns of Friday’s condition and is around him, she changes and becomes silent. Additionally, it captures the change in her agency.

Susan also experiences a corporeal reaction to Friday’s severed organ. Friday’s condition makes Susan cognizant of the “lively…movements of the tongue in my own mouth,” but, although her tongue is “lively,” she “could not speak while he [Friday] was about …I caught myself flinching while he was near, or holding my breath” (24). Her emotional tumult is accompanied by a physical reaction that girds her speaking. As previously seen, Susan “shrinks” from Friday, but now she flinches and holds her breath. These more substantive physical responses suggest she loses bodily agency. Her greatest loss is her inability to speak when he is about. Essentially, his presence mutes her. Her muteness takes on continued significance as she later recognizes that the silence of her story is inextricable from Friday’s, and that it cannot be adequately told without articulating his silence. Susan’s and Friday’s story are interrelated and inextricable from one another.

Moreover, Susan explicitly states that Friday disrupts her individual agency: “I was ashamed to behave thus, but for a time was not mistress of my own actions,” clearly showing that her physical reactions to Friday’s condition are beyond her control (24). It is as if both her
body and psyche are overcome by Friday’s speaking status, and his affliction stymies her capacity to speak. And as we shall see, Friday’s silent condition envelops Susan and they inhabit similar muted space. This constriction halts her words, while other voices permeate them, and, thereby, when they are disseminated, their meaning is languid, uncertain, and impotent.

Susan’s tongue is arrested, and her words are shaped by cultural voices. This relationship can be gleaned from Susan’s and Cruso’s numerous verbal conflicts over representations of labor and material goods, Susan’s exploration of the island, and her crafting of a pair of “sandals” that she feels “saved” Cruso “labour.” (24-25). During this argument, which occurs the day after Susan learns of Friday’s condition, Cruso hurls the “skins” Susan used to craft her sandals over the fence. After considering that Cruso has had “years of unquestioned and solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman,” she decides to make a “vow to keep a tighter rein on my [her] tongue” (25). Prima facie, Susan appears to have complete control over her tongue. She decides to rein in her tongue, but Susan’s decision, in actuality, is due to English social norms. These remain upon and within Susan when she wonders onto Cruso’s island as she is still clad in her “petticoat” that is “baking dry upon” her (5). The “petticoat” ties her to English culture, and is baked dry upon her. The petticoat, a remnant of English fashion norms, still adheres tightly to her. Coupled with the collective “we” that is horrified by Friday’s supposedly “mutilated” condition, the petticoat can be seen as a physical manifestation of English society that adheres to her and informs her decisions and feelings.

Judith Butler’s theory of performativity is especially useful here. Butler’s argument is that gender identity reiterates social norms of what it means to be a girl or boy. Butler suggests “subjectivity arises through the performativity of that body” (Secomb 149). For Butler, pronouncements of gender trigger and shape the somatic performativity of a body. The
important point to glean here is that the social process of feminizing has somatic implications. For this reason, Susan’s petticoat that stills adheres to her body is important. Her petticoat is an enactment of her English gendered identity, and, in this way, the norms of eighteenth-century English gender identity and behavior still cling to her, shaping not only what she wears but also informing her interactions with Cruso. Cruso’s masculinity must not be challenged according to English gender relations in the eighteenth-century, and she adheres to her feminine role. Susan has internalized gender norms that compel her to restrict the movements of her tongue, rend apart her agency, and adhere to her body in the form of the petticoat. Even stranded in Cruso’s deserted kingdom, she fulfills the mores of her socio-historical moment, and this fulfillment disrupts the movements of her tongue. Gender roles mark many of Susan’s decisions and activities when she is rescued and returns back to England.

After Susan is rescued by the crew of the Hobart, the captain of the ship suggests to her that she tell her story. Upon settling down in Clock Lane in England, Susan writes her story and sends the “limping affair” to Daniel Foe, noted author of confessionalists (47). (Though I am concerned with speaking, it is worth noting that Susan’s written “limping affair” suggests a textualized body and parallels the instabilities of the voice, identity, and body of the speaking subject). In attempting to engage Foe to aid her in writing her story, two salient points of Susan’s experience in England emerge: that in her journeys to get to Foe, she unwittingly becomes an English signifier, evidencing language’s pervasive effect on her identity and

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3 Coetzee’s decision to employ a female protagonist, as other critics have noted, places Foe in conversation with Moll Flanders and Roxana. These novels suggest Defoe’s interest in eighteenth-century gender relations insofar as they both depict female protagonists and narrators who transgress gender norms. Coetzee’s introduction of Susan into Robinson Crusoe complicates Defoe’s idea that women can simply transgress norms freely; positing instead that these norms are so ingrained that some unconscious adherence, such as wearing a petticoat, always remains.
showing another constraint on her tongue. Her tongue is further girded by Foe’s comments about the structure of her story. These points suggest the disruption of her voice, and dissolution of her identity and agency.

Susan and Friday reside at Foe’s house when bailiffs take possession of it, she writes letters to him while she is there, and, then, with Friday in tow, she tracks Foe down. During their search for Foe, Susan and Friday suffer extreme privation. Economically, Susan and Friday are destitute, and they both maintain inferior societal positions (Susan as a woman and Friday as a former slave). They pass through Berkshire, Marlborough, and Bristol, and are subject to conversation and harassment. For instance, Susan is harassed by “two drunken soldiers,” who chase after her, presumably, to rape her (101). After this incident, she begins to try to “pass for a man” (101). Susan’s attempt to disguise her sex is clearly an attempt to prevent future attempted assaults, but, as we shall see, her performance can be regarded as her attempt to throw off the constraints of her gender. After she dons her disguise, Susan and Friday trudge on and find an “alehouse” (101). Upon entering, Susan and Friday immediately become the objects of attention. Susan, dressed as a man and wearing “breeches” and Friday, “a black man” cause “all speech [to] die” either because of who they are or due to their “bedraggled” condition (101-102). Susan’s and Friday’s presence in the alehouse silences the patrons, and shows that their silence is a pervasive force that is externalized. Susan and Friday go to the most remote corner of the bar and sit down, but the “innkeeper” states, “This is a clean house, we do not serve strollers or gipsies” (102). The innkeeper then refuses to serve both of them because Friday is not wearing shoes. However, the innkeeper pluralizes each of the epithets (“strollers and gipsies”), assigning these nouns to both Friday and Susan. For the innkeeper, both Susan and Friday are “strollers or gipsies.” Thereby, we are left to wonder whether it is simply Friday’s lack of shoes that causes
the innkeeper to refuse them both. In essence, we wonder whether Susan’s association with an unshod person causes her to be labeled as a gipsy or stroller, or if it might have something to do with her own state of cross-dress that makes the innkeeper pluralize his labels. Susan’s improper enactment of her gender role may cause the innkeeper to refuse to serve them. Susan and Friday then make their way out of the bar.

The question of whether Susan and Friday are “gipsies” surfaces again as they make their way to Bristol so that she can try to untether herself from Friday (by this time, she had begun to believe that their incessant togetherness was “burdensome” to both of them) by trying to place him on a ship bound for Africa (109). Along the way, Susan and Friday endure hardships and an “old man,” who inquires about Friday’s status, asking Susan if she was Friday’s “mistress” (107). Although Susan is still dressed as a man, clearly, the old man recognizes Susan’s actual sex because he poses this question. In response, Susan recounts what she knows of Friday’s speaking status, and the “old man” then inquires about what her and Friday’s social status: “’Are you gipsies, you and he?’” (108). Momentarily, Susan is unable to answer the older man’s question: “For a moment I was lost for words,” but she manages to respond by articulating that Friday was a slave that will soon be returned to Africa (108). The “old man” then defines what “gipsies” are: “‘Aye,’ he said, ‘but we call them gipsies when they roam about with their dirty faces, men and women all higgledy-piggledy together, looking for mischief’” (108). Unkempt, homeless, confused, and disordered, Susan and Friday fulfill his definition of gipsies. Nevertheless, Susan is surprised by this designation. She is rendered speechless and was “shaken” by this encounter (108). Susan’s and Friday’s encounter with the old man forces her to consider their social status: “Twice Friday and I have been called gipsies. What is a gipsy? What is a highwayman? Words seem to have new meanings here in the west country. Am I
become a gipsy unknown to myself?” (108-9). Susan points out that a single word within a culture may overcome her own understanding of herself and her identity. Geographic locale creates difference between the meanings of words, and, unknowingly, Susan and Friday have become gipsies according to English usage of the word.

Prior to these encounters, she simply considers Friday to be a mute slave and herself a former female castaway who intends to tell her own story. Her prior conception bears no traces of their socio-economic circumstances, but these two encounters force her to reevaluate her and Friday’s condition. Thereby, we see that words have a constructive and constrictive impact on their individual identity, and, accordingly, both of their English identities are inextricable from the meaning of this word. Susan and Friday are reshaped and reformed by linguistic forces of a major language that undermine and reconstruct her conceptions of both of their identities. As Deleuze and Guattari assert, this is a moment where the “major language” implies the “deterritorialization of the mouth, tongue, and teeth” of the speaking subject (19). The major language invades the somatic organs of a speaking subject. The implication of this invasion is that when the subject speaks, there is a moment where dual deterritorialization occurs. The speaking subject’s (a minority speaker’s) speech organs are overtaken by the major language, and, concurrently, the speaking subject deterritorializes the major language. Thus, within this space we see major (the langue of the society) and minor (the parole of the speaker) languages vying for dominance. And, as it pertains to Susan and Friday, we clearly see that English langue is dominating Susasn’s parole. Susan’s conception of the word “gipsy” is overcome, and, for this reason, she comes to the realization that she and Friday fulfill its definition. The English langue girds her tongue because she can no longer use the word in the manner in which she knows it. However, because Susan poses a question, (“Am I become a gipsy unknown to myself?”), she
deterritorializes the major language by challenging whether “langue” is indeed reflective of her and Friday’s condition. Moreover, her “parole,” though overcome, manages to deterritorialize “langue” insofar as it destabilizes its meaning via this interrogative speech act. Moreover, her agency is disrupted because she succumbs to langue and is no longer speaking with her own voice.

The girding of Susan’s tongue also occurs in her interactions with Foe. In enlisting his aid to help articulate her story, Susan hopes to tell her history, specifically, her experience on Cruso’s island. But Foe disagrees with Susan about what constitutes her story. According to Foe, her story, properly told, is larger in scope. He believes that Susan’s “loss” and “reunion” with her daughter is her true story, and that her experience on Cruso’s island is simply a “novelty” (117). Foe believes her story to be concerned with her experience in Bahia, and that her island adventure is only a small part. Susan is stunned by Foe’s contention, “All the joy I [Susan] had felt in finding my way to Foe fled me. I sat heavy-limbed” (117). After Foe makes his claims regarding her story, Susan says nothing and listens as he explains his ideas. In this regard, Susan is physically and verbally impotent in the face of Foe’s argument. Her experience with Foe parallels her encounter with the “old man” who claims that she and Friday are “gipsies” and renders her speechless and “shaken.” In both instances, Susan falls slack when she encounters an English man who makes claims about her social status and story. Susan’s silence and physical immobility denotes her inability to alter the accounts that they provide of her and Friday. Further, she appears to not be able to affect any meaningful lingual impact on her status, which brings back the question of who is speaking for whom in Coetzee’s novel. In other words, Susan’s attempts at articulation are thwarted as demonstrated by the pervasive force that works
to subvert the lingual capabilities of her own tongue, and by her inability to be the “father” of her “own story” (123).

Susan’s inability to control the parameters of her own story is made clear in Foe’s house when she is introduced to Amy and others:

But now all my life grows to be a story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you? (133).

Susan realizes that her story and her life intermingle, and her story usurps her life. But she is unsure of who is authoring the story. These stories are spoken into being, and others are doing the talking. This is why Susan posits that the girl (Amy) is speaking words that Foe has made up for her, and, at this moment, she realizes her speech is not her own, making her story and identity not of her own construction. Someone is “speaking her” into being, but she has no idea as to who is doing the talking. Because others speak for her, Susan is marked by doubt and uncertainty. She declares that she is composed of doubt, and doubt suggests indeterminacy and uncertainty. Thereby, her speech acts and identity reflect indeterminacy, and she realizes that she cannot be the “father” of her “own story.” Her meaning silenced and bloated with “doubt,” Susan begins to realize that these forces are the constitutive feature of herself and her story.

Much like doubt, silence is a space of uncertainty, and she feels that if her “story seems stupid, that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday’s tongue” (117). The implication of Susan’s statement here is twofold: 1) that “silence” is a “lack,” an indeterminate space that emits doubt and 2) that her story is inextricable from Friday’s narrative. Although Susan posits here that the impetus of her story’s “silence” rests with Friday, as we have seen, Susan recognizes her own silence because
she cannot speak her own story. Because Friday’s and her story are interconnected, silence, doubt, and indeterminacy are features they both share. She asserts that her “true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday” (118). However, the novel demonstrates that there is no “art” that will give rise to Friday’s voice, and it remains unintelligible.

Friday is the most enigmatic character in Coetzee’s novel. His incessant silence shrouds him in mystery and places him at the heart of the novel insofar as both Foe and Susan believe that her story cannot be told unless Friday’s is articulated. But many critics oversimplify Friday’s condition by taking for granted that Friday is not a speaking subject. A host of postcolonial critics including Marni Gauthier, Lindan Lin, and Sheila Roberts, all generate arguments that uphold Cruso’s account of Friday’s tongue, that it had been cut out by “Slave hunters in Africa” (23).4 These critical maneuvers are problematic, because if Friday is a speaking subject then he is infused with great power since, via his own agency, he chooses not to speak. Thereby, the interpretation of him and the novel would change drastically.

In her essay “Theory in the Margin: Coetzee’s Foe Reading Defoe’s ‘Crusoe/Roxana,’” Spivak contends that “Friday’s tongue has been cut off-by slavers,” but she injects an important caveat: “Derek Attridge provides the ‘real’ detail of Coetzee’s answer to this in an interview, a genre that is generated to bring undecidability under control” (13). Spivak makes a dual move. On one hand, she upholds Cruso’s account, but, on the other, she offers a heavily skeptical

4 For instance, in her essay “Post-colonialism or the House of Friday,” Roberts links “Friday’s tongueless mouth” to him being in “a perpetual state of the Lacanian Imaginary” (91). Gauthier, in her essay “The Intersection of the Postmodern and Postcolonial in Coetzee’s Foe,” claims that Friday’s lack of a tongue is “a metaphor realized. We are suddenly made aware of the fact that the Friday in Robinson Crusoe [...] is also voiceless” (55). Lindan Lin asserts “that the moment the slavers take Friday’s tongue to erase his personal history is also the moment they simultaneously obliterate their own history” (44). All of these examples show that many critics buy wholesale Cruso’s account of Friday’s tongue.
response to “real” answers that stem from genres that thwart indeterminacy. My point is that although Spivak is skeptical of paratextual evidence, she still upholds the “real” answer, and that in *Foe*, the status of Friday’s vocal condition (whether he has the capacity for speech or does not) is indeterminable. My argument here is Spivak’s reliance on “real” answers blunts the pervasive indeterminacy of the novel, and that the text *never divulges Friday’s speaking status*.

My argument is that Friday’s vocal condition is uncertain and I claim that the unknowability of Friday’s indeterminate speaking status is integral to novel. Friday’s agency, our uncertainty whether he can or cannot speak, mirrors Susan’s because she may not be the agent behind her speech acts that generate uncertainty. Moreover, Friday’s “voice” emits uncertain sounds similar to Susan’s indeterminable articulations. Thereby, their vocal status and silenced meanings are quite similar. More clearly, Susan’s speech acts generate silenced meanings, and Friday’s silence becomes like Susan’s speech, because it arises under similar unknowable circumstances as Susan’s. Thereby, Friday’s vocal status and speech acts parallel Susan’s, becoming a central concern of the novel: Are Friday and Susan speaking or nonspeaking subjects? And, textually, it appears that the answer to this question is indiscernible.

Friday’s status as a speaking or nonspeaking subject arises from Susan’s statements regarding the veracity of the stories that Cruso told her. The credibility of Cruso’s claims regarding Friday’s vocal status is undermined because of several claims that Susan makes: “the stories he [Cruso] told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile with one another, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy” (11-12). Susan points out that Cruso’s stories are irreconcilable and contradictory, and questions his ability to discern “truth” from “fancy.” Cruso’s varied stories and Susan’s questioning of his cognitive functioning makes his
statements unreliable. Moreover, Susan universalizes her doubt of Cruso’s stories: “in the end I did not know what was truth, what was lies, and what was mere rambling” (12). Susan’s inability to categorize Cruso’s statements as “truth,” “lies,” or “mere rambling” demonstrates that all the veracity or falsity of Cruso’s stories must be held in suspension. Discerning the truth status of Cruso’s statements is impossible, and when Cruso makes his claims about Friday’s speaking or nonspeaking status, they partake in this uncertainty.

When Cruso attempts to show Susan the interior of Friday’s mouth, she never empirically verifies Friday’s supposed disfiguration: “‘Look,’ said Cruso. I looked, but I saw nothing in the dark save the glint of teeth white as ivory. … he brought his face close to mine. ‘Do you see?’ he said. ‘It is too dark,’ said I” (22). In one attempt, Friday’s supposed stump of a tongue is shrouded by the pearly sheen of his teeth, and, in the other, it is simply too dark for her to tell. When Susan returns to England, she reinforces this uncertainty: “I guess merely, I have not looked into your mouth. When your master [Cruso] asked me to look, I would not” (85). Importantly, Susan articulates that any statements she makes regarding Friday’s tongue are simply guesses. She is unsure about his speaking status because she would not look into Friday’s mouth. Yet, this account of Cruso attempts to exhibit Friday’s supposed wound to her conflicts with her prior statements. More precisely, initially when Cruso tries to show her the interior of Friday’s mouth, she claims that it is too dark for her to see, but then, she claims that she would not look. This discrepancy in her story is important to note, and it appears that Susan’s statements about Friday’s speaking status are as unreliable as Cruso’s. Thus, Friday’s vocal status is indiscernible. At every turn, the novel thwarts clear apprehension of Friday’s speaking status. As interpreters, our best understanding of the novel ought to take into consideration the inconclusiveness of this issue. In other words, the strongest interpretive
position that we can take on the matter is that we are confounded by the novel in deciding whether or not Friday is or is not a speaking subject. And, once more, Friday’s vocal status parallels Susan’s insofar as she is uncertain if she can speak for herself.

Perhaps because it mirrors her own, Friday’s vocal status is troubling for Susan. Susan finds that “Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others” (121). Susan’s estimation of Friday is that his is a “helpless silence” that makes him subject to the desires of others (122). But Susan is being shortsighted. As described above, Susan’s tongue is girded by cultural languages and social mores even though she is a “speaking” subject. A few pages prior, she expresses uncertainty about who speaks for her, and the novel demonstrates that forces that gird her speech acts also disrupt her agency. Thus, her assertions about Friday’s “helpless silence” appear wrongheaded. But, perhaps, there is power in this uncertainty for both of them.

In the novel’s closing chapter, Friday’s silence is depicted as powerful: “His mouth opens. From inside comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption” (157). The unnamed narrator does not indicate the aural quality of Friday’s “stream,” and the question emerges as to whether Friday can be heard. The answer is uncertain, but it is certain that something similar to a voice emerges here. Friday’s indeterminate “stream” which may be audible or silent is a product of the force of his body because it “flows up through his body” (157). The fact that Friday’s “stream” “flows up through” his body shows it to be a bodily product. This bodily emission is a “soft and cold, dark and unending” “stream” that moves “out upon” the body of the narrator and “beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face” (157). The narrator’s adjectives “soft and cold” indicate that Friday’s “stream” has dual qualities. On one hand, it is supple and malleable, and, on the other, it is frigid and discomforting. Like
Susan’s voice, Friday’s stream exhibits qualities that would allow it to be shaped, but, at the same time, it exudes uncomfortable and silent meanings. Moreover, Friday’s bodily product is “dark and unending.” “Dark” suggests opaqueness and uncertainty, and “unending” makes clear that its indeterminability will not cease. Additionally, Friday’s “stream” strikes the “face” of the narrator, blotting out his “eyelids.” Friday’s bodily product comes into contact with the narrator’s eyes, blocking his perceptual organs of sight, blinding him, and resisting his gaze. In this light, the uncertainty of Friday’s voice is a resistant force that thwarts the perceptual organs that allow for clear identification. Moreover, the parallels between his voice and Susan’s suggest that they may both have power because of their indeterminate voices. Moreover, Friday’s “stream” is a response to a question that the narrator poses, showing that Friday will only offer indeterminate answers.

As Spivak observes,

it is Friday rather than Susan who is the unemphatic agent of withholding in the text. For every territorial space that is value-coded by colonialism and every command of metropolitan anticolonialism for the native to yield his “voice,” there is a space of withholding, marked by a secret that may not be a secret but cannot be unlocked. The “native,” […] is not only a victim, he or she is also an agent. (16)

The qualities of Friday’s voice and the fact that is undeterminable supports Spivak’s assertion that Friday withholds a secret. His voice does not yield, and resists societal demarcation, colonial values, and the whims of the anticolonial voices. Spivak regards Friday as a “guardian at the margin” that demarcates a space that cannot be penetrated by postcolonial theory and colonial values. To an extent, her assertion that Friday’s voice withholds more than Susan’s is correct, because Susan’s voice is overcome throughout the novel. But, as we have seen, Susan’s and Friday’s speaking status, voices, and speech acts parallel each other, and, in this regard, Spivak fails to consider the intricacies of what happens to Susan’s voice.
As Spivak observes, Friday’s silence is a form of resistance, but, she appears to gloss over the fact that in being overcome, Susan’s voice also offers indeterminacy and silent meanings. The indeterminacy of Susan’s voice can be discerned by the translational space that they both appear to inhabit: “But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday” (157). The “home of Friday” is a space beyond language, and throughout the novel, Friday’s abode is wherever Susan resides. In other words, Friday’s and Susan’s share a translational space. Moreover, in the final presentation of Susan’s and Friday’s bodies, they are not in the same physical locale (Susan is in a cabin and Friday under the transoms). However, they remain in close proximity and the water that Susan floats in is the same “still and dead” water that Friday is submerged within. Thus, Susan’s and Friday’s spaces share a common feature: the water that contains the broken down parts of words. Moreover, within this space, every syllabic movement of language is halted, burdened by external forces, and then diffused. This description of words in Friday’s “home” parallels Susan’s verbal movements insofar as her speech acts are “caught,” infused with externality, and then languidly dispersed into the space that surrounds her. Thereby, Susan’s vocal condition and speech acts inhabit a space of and exude indeterminacy that parallels Friday’s bodily voice, and both of their voices generate only muted meanings. Though Susan’s voice does yield, it is marked by silent meanings because of the instability of her agency and because her muddled voice cannot be extricated from others’ voices. Thereby, Spivak’s point that Friday is more resistant than Susan appears off-base, because she resides within the same space of Friday, and because her voice is a cultural amalgamation that exudes the indeterminacy of her agency and identity.
Perhaps most importantly, Spivak does not acknowledge the novel’s explicit suggestion that Friday’s voice is a bodily product. And because Susan’s and Friday’s bodies are both housed within a translingual space that offers only the signs that their bodies present, Spivak misses a major point: that the main resistant force that both Friday and Susan offer are their bodies.

For Coetzee, bodies are such that they always matter. In *Foe*, a distinction is drawn between voice and the body: “we may say the tongue belongs to the world of play, whereas the body belongs to the world of earnest” (85). The opposition between the tongue and the heart appears to be one of frivolity and seriousness. The tongue is deemed to be a tool “with which we jest and lie and seduce,” while the body is imbued with qualities of seriousness. And in different texts, Coetzee “speaks of ‘the body and its undeniable life’ […] even its ‘undeniable […] power,’” asserting that “Whatever else, the body is not ‘that which is not’” (qtd in May 392). Moreover, Brian May points out that the “ineluctability of the body is a substantial theme in *Waiting for the Barbarians*” (407). Coetzee’s statements about the body, the above passage from *Foe* that describes Susan’s and Friday’s translingual space, and May’s comments on *Waiting for the Barbarians* show that the body, for Coetzee, is not to be regarded lightly. Coetzee’s assertions about the body are in stark contrast to Beckett’s and Rushdie’s. Writing of Beckett’s late fictions as portraying “quite, literally disembodied” subjects, Coetzee concludes, “I am not there yet” (Beckett 23). Unlike Beckett, who presents an entirely disembodied subject and in contrast to Rushdie who makes more of the body than Beckett but still finds that it is subsumed by external articulations, Coetzee suggests the body remains, resists, and withholds. As we shall see, in *Foe*, Coetzee argues that although bodies are subject to the external material articulations, there is an “undeniable power” of the body that resists material cultural forces. This point is
conveyed by the transitory social markers of Friday’s and Susan’s bodies, and by the
descriptions of each of their bodies.

As previously shown, Susan’s body appears to be imposed upon. The petticoat that is
baked dry upon her when she arrives on the shows reflects that she is somewhat defined by
social markers of England. However, Susan’s petticoat does not remain a defining feature of her
body, and she shifts through various costumes. Coetzee presents her in a “shift” and dressed as a
man. Her wardrobe changes show various degrees of how her body is culturally defineable. At
the same time, the movements of her attire signify the passing iterations of her culture, and,
thereby, Susan’s body would appear to resist determinate cultural definitions.

Susan is presented four times as wearing a shift (137, 139, 153, 157). As a material
marker of English culture, a shift is an eighteenth-century article of clothing for women and men
that functioned as both underwear and as a nightgown. Similar to modern slips, Susan would
wear her shift under her petticoat: “Then I undressed to my shift and let down my hair and crept
under the bedclothes” (137). In this light, Susan’s shift creates physical distance between her
petticoat and her body. However, this cultural marker would appear to be a somewhat constant
presence on Susan’s body, but shifts were made of light material (usually linen) and fit loosely
on the body, making it a less constrictive cultural adornment. Moreover, the polysemy of the
word “shift” indicates her capability to move and transfer to different positions, and a shift
occurs when Susan and Foe engage in carnal activities: “I drew off my shift and straddled him
(which he did not seem easy with, in a woman)” (139). Here, Susan’s “shift” is easily and
quickly removed, and, upon its removal, Foe’s feelings change. When she takes it off, Foe
becomes uneasy with her naked body on top of him, but, when Foe initially embraced Susan, he
“gave such a sharp bite to my lip that I cried and drew away” (139). In this way, Susan shifts
the visceral power dynamics between them. Moreover, because both men and women used them, it is a sign that represents her ability to pass through different cultural markers and deviate from English cultural normativity.

Prior to her attempt to pass for a man, Susan wears “breeches” (99). Breeches were predominately worn by eighteenth-century gentlemen, and her wearing of them puts her at odds with the customary attire worn by women. In wearing breeches, she defies normative behavior. In this light, it appears that Susan maintains more agency over her body, and her ability to don male clothing shows how transitory these cultural markers are. Susan’s attempt to pass for a man occurs after “two drunken soldiers,” who presumably were going to sexually assault her. She decides to “pin my hair up under my hat and wear a coat at all times, hoping to pass for a man” (102). Now fully outfitted in masculine attire, Susan with her “breeches” on, her hair tucked beneath her “hat,” and her “coat” draped about her body, attempts to perform the role of a man. Susan’s donning of male attire and attempt to literally perform the role of a man indicates Coetzee’s interest in hybridizing genre, revealing a parallel between his and Rushdie’s text, and leading back to Coetzee’s dialogue with Beckett’s Not I. But, in this performative state, Susan crosses over the terrain of cultural markers, trading her “petticoat” for masculine attire. Although she is unsuccessful in her attempt insofar as both the “old man” and the “innkeeper” identify her as a female, her performance shows her ability to elude and defy normative eighteenth-century markers of femininity. Moreover, Susan suffers no more attempted physical attacks. One may say that she is not the primary agent in this act because she participates in this performance only in reaction to the implied threat of male domination, but her act demonstrates her certain capacity to select cultural markers and to thwart masculine threats to her body. Coupled with Foe’s uneasiness when Susan removes her shift, one gleans she is able to assert
bodily control and resist the efforts of males who try to dominate her body. Finally, Susan’s ability to move through these different markers shows that her body maintains distance from the material manifestations of a dominant culture. That is, cultural signs, the clothing that Susan moves through, are shed; at times, they even transgress societal standards.

Similarly, Friday’s body is distanced from and transgresses material cultural markers. While Susan and Friday reside in Foe’s foreclosed house, Friday discovers Foe’s “robes” in his “wardrobe,” and they “set him to dancing, which I [Susan] had never seen him do before” (92). Foe’s “robes” are “of a guild-master,” and Susan surmises that Foe was head of a “guild of writers” (92). A guild is an organization composed of craftsmen from a particular trade. Foe, a writer, is the “master” or head of his “guild of writers,” and, therefore, his “robes” would appear to be crafted to designate his authority and for him to preside over this particular community within English society. Foe’s “robes” can be seen as markers of both a cultural system and a particular community within this system. Guilds were a prominent component within the English industrial system, and, thereby, are inextricable from the functioning of the English social system. At the same time, the guild demarcates a particular community of craftspeople within English society, and because Foe is the “master” of this “guild,” Friday’s usage of them subverts their function. Inasmuch as Friday uses them for the purposes of dancing and not to lead an association, Friday undoes their intended function and connotation. In so doing, he destabilizes a cultural marker that represents a node within the larger functioning of the English social and industrial system, undermining the robes’ meaning for Foe’s writing guild.

Inexplicably, Friday’s finding of Foe’s “robes” “set him” to perform this action. Once more, Friday’s performance while in Foe’s robes speaks to Coetzee’s interest in hybridizing genre. In other words, Coetzee uses both Susan’s and Friday’s performative actions to imbue his
novel with play-like qualities, which speaks to why *Not I* is a particularly valuable intertext to Coetzee’s novel. At the same time, Susan’s use of the unidiomatic construction “set him” generates questions as to whether Friday has control over this action or not. Susan’s word choice appears to indicate that the “robes” trigger Friday’s performance, indicating that he is not the doer behind the deed. On the other hand, when Susan attempts to take the “robes” from Friday, he is prepared for her action and she finds “his hands already gripping the robe, which was spread over the bed” (92). Thus, it appears that Friday does have agency. Friday takes ownership of the “robes” that Foe leaves behind. In other words, the “robes” may be the cause of Friday’s dancing, but Friday’s refusal to relinquish the “robes” indicates that he now controls the “robes.” Moreover, Friday determines where and when the dancing is to take place: “In the mornings he dances in the windows, where the windows face east. If the sun is shining he does his dance in a patch of sunlight [...] In the afternoon he removes himself to the drawing-room, where the window faces west, and does his dancing there” (92). Susan’s description of where and when Friday dances shows that he always performs his dance in “sunlight.” And his shifting of locales in an effort to perform his dance in the sunlight indicates that he determines this bodily performance.

In part, because Friday always chooses to perform his dance in the “sunlight,” it would appear that his performance might be ritualistic. Perhaps Friday associates Foe’s “robes” with some remnant of his own cultural legacy where some similar costume was worn. Though the text does not clearly indicate that Friday’s dancing is a manifestation of his cultural past, it does appear to imply some ritualistic tendency. Moreover, Susan’s description of Friday’s “dancing” appears to indicate that this bodily activity moves him beyond the terrestrial realm: “In the grip of dancing he is not himself. He is beyond human reach. I call his name and am ignored, I pull
out a hand and am brushed aside” (92). In the throes of his dancing, Friday is transformed and unaffected by words and human touch. Friday’s act of performing this visceral activity subverts normal modes of human interaction. The fact that Friday does not acknowledge human touch indicates bodily resistance. Moreover, when Susan describes Friday’s dancing to Foe later in the novel, she indicates that the robes “stand out stiffly about him” and are “flying about him” (118, 119). Susan’s description indicates that as Friday performs the “robes” they are distanced from him. Susan’s use of the word “about” in both of these sentences indicates that the “robes” are somewhat near him but not on him. Additionally, standing indicates the stagnation of the cultural and communal purpose of the “robes.” On top of that, flying is indicative of flux, of passing through, and, in this regard, Friday’s movements destabilize the cultural function of the “robes.” Finally, Susan’s description suggests that “one might have supposed the purpose of his dancing was to show forth the nakedness underneath” (118). Susan’s statement indicates the Friday’s intent in “dancing” could be nothing more than to highlight what is underneath, namely his body. And, if Susan’s estimation is accurate, the focal point of Friday’s activity is not his clothed body, but his naked body. In this regard, it is Friday’s unadorned body that his dancing is meant to highlight.

Friday’s bare body appears to resist and undermine material cultural signifiers. Moreover, Susan’s movement through the different clothing that she dons shows a similar resistance and undermining, namely that her body is briefly articulated by these cultural markers, but, concurrently, eludes any determinate marks they might leave. To be clear, both Susan’s and Friday’s bodies resist determinate cultural signification. In order to highlight both Susan’s and Friday’s bodily determinacy and indeterminacy, it is necessary to explore the unnamed narrator’s description of each of their bodies.
In the final section of *Foe*, both Susan and Friday’s bodies are depicted twice, and each depiction shows a tension between determinacy and indeterminacy that shifts across their bodies. The second description of Susan occurs when the unnamed narrator descends into the water (presumably near the island), and enters a sunken ship. Finding Susan in the “black space” of a “cabin”, the narrator reports, “Susan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, […] float like stars against the low roof” (156-157). This description shows that Susan’s body has the potential to be acted upon (determined) yet resistant to action (indeterminate). Susan rests within an indeterminate, opaque space and is submerged in “water.” Her body is swollen and “fat.” Its location in space suggests uncertainty, and its robustness indicates that it is a domineering presence. At the same time, Susan’s appendages extend away from her “trunk” which, again, makes her body take up more space, but hinting at a state of sprawl, suggesting diffusion. However, her “limbs” are firm and unyielding as they project out from her “trunk,” and the use of the word “trunk” is suggestive, denoting that her “stiff” “limbs” are attached to a solid structure. Yet, she remains in her “shift.” Because of her body’s bloated condition, it would appear that this cultural marker fits more snugly against it. But, as I have shown, the polysemy of the word “shift” and the fact that it was worn by both men and women during the eighteenth century suggests maneuverability and indeterminacy. Susan’s hands are “puckered” from being immersed in water for so long, indicating that they are saturated and imbued with the moisture that surrounds her. A few sentences later, the narrator will reveal that parts of “words” are filled with water and diffused in it, and, thus, it would seem that Susan’s skin is being saturated with parts of language. Yet, these waters are “still and dead,” and the stillness of the water suggests that these “diffused” parts of words have no tangible effect on her
body. However, if the waters are enlivened, then her body may be subject to its currents. Finally, Susan’s bloated and wrinkled body floats like a “star against” the “roof” of the “cabin,” which forces the narrator to “crawl beneath” her (157). The narrator’s description of her body as a “star” suggests remoteness and timelessness, but, at the same time, Susan’s remote body impositions the narrator. The narrator is forced to “crawl beneath” her because of the scale of her body. Moreover, Susan’s remote body that impositions the narrator relates to May’s description of the “envisaged body” in *Waiting for the Barbarians*: “whether filming or bulging, [the body] tells us virtually nothing about itself beyond its … primacy and irreducibility” (411). Susan’s body is prominent yet remote, defined by her shift yet indefinable because of its solidity and, the narrator’s description of Susan shows that her body rests in between determinacy and indeterminacy. Susan’s body is in-between, it can be marked but irreducible and resistant.

Similarly, Friday’s body also exhibits these features. When the unnamed narrator of the final section glimpses Friday’s body, it is “under the transoms” and “half-buried in sand” (157). Friday’s body is in an in-between state, partially covered and partially exposed, suggesting that it is both removed and distance yet out in the open. Friday’s body position is tight and compact: “his knees are drawn up, his hands between his thighs” (157). His compact position indicates a resistant pose, but it could also be in the fetal position, suggesting that it is helpless. The narrator gets closer: “I tug his wooly hair, finger the chain about his throat. ‘Friday,’ I say kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, ‘What is this ship?’” (157). Friday’s hair is like “lambswool,” though soft and pliable to the touch, is retains or withholds insofar as lambswool is an effective insulator. The “chain” around Friday’s throat is a marker that was placed on him by Susan to show that he is a freed slave. It shows that Friday was subjugated, and that Friday is, in part, bound to his history. However, the “chain” is “about” Friday’s neck. It surrounds his neck,
but, at the same time, the word suggests that it is not on his “throat.” Moreover, in getting closer to Friday, the narrator kneels over him, but, this action requires the narrator to sink his “hands and knees” into the “ooze.” In doing so, the narrator sinks into a material that is an uncertain admixture. This material would seem to be mixture of “sand” and water, but, in calling it an “ooze,” the narrator indicates that the properties which compose it are of uncertain origin. Thereby, in moving closer to Friday, the narrator “sinks” into uncertainty. The narrator then poses a question to Friday: “What is this ship?”

When the narrator poses this question, he immediately states that there are no words within this space. That here, in Friday’s “home,” the components of words, “syllables” are “caught,” burdened by “water,” and simply “diffused.” There will be no answer to the narrator’s questions. Not even full words are made manifest within this space; the slivers of words are unhinged, burdened, and languidly spread out. This space is where “bodies are their own signs,” and Friday and Susan’s bodies are determinate yet indeterminate “signs” that offer resistance.

Immediately after his question, the narrator describes Friday’s movement and body: “He turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back” (157). Friday’s turning movements indicate circular motion that parallels the “dancing” Friday performs, “dancing” that moves Friday beyond the terrestrial realm. No longer compact, Friday is at full extension, and faces the narrator. Friday’s skin is taught against his bones, and his lips are in a receding state. The narrator then passes “a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in” (157). But the narrator’s “fingernail” does not manage to wedge between Friday’s “teeth.” The narrator does not access or penetrate the space of Friday’s “teeth,” and it is able to move only “across” them and look for a point of entry.
The narrator’s movement across Friday’s teeth suggests the transitory nature of the markers that touch his and Susan’s body, and also suggests that the body resists penetration and withholds.

The determinate indeterminacy of both Friday and Susan’s body shows that both of their bodies are marked by material signifiers that approximate their histories via Susan’s nightclothes and Friday’s chain, but both of their bodies appear to be indeterminate sites that offer clear “signs” of resistance insofar as the descriptions of their bodies ascribe hard and firm qualities to them. Their bodies appear to be comprised of dual qualities that can be taken to be yielding or firm and resistant. Friday’s and Susan’s bodies appear to be on a threshold that rests between states of indeterminacy and determinacy.

In this regard, both Friday and Susan appear to resemble Giorgio Agamben’s description of “whatever being” he offers in The Coming Community. Whatever being captures the vacillation of Susan and Friday’s body. In his rendering of “whatever being” Agamben finds that “whatever” is commonly misunderstood. Thus, he traces the word etymologically back to its Latin origin quodlibet, the “underlying word that conditions the meaning of all adjectives,” and he finds that in Latin usage the word means “being such that it always matters” (2).

Agamben asserts that because quodlibet underlies “all adjectives,” it represents a space that touches but does not fully participate in the quality that an “adjective” expresses. In this sense, the quodlibet is never actualized in the adjective it conditions. Instead, the quodlibet remains a distinct realm that manifests as a force that plays a role in conditioning qualities that adjectives express. Thus, the quodlibet is never is articulated as a specific quality, but is linked to the potential for any and all qualities to manifest. For Agamben, even the expressed quality is not static. The quality(ies) constantly vacillate and “individuation of a singular existence is not a
punctual fact, but a *linea generationis substantiae* that varies in every direction according to continual gradation of growth and remission” (19).

Clearly, Agamben’s description of *quodlibet* speaks to both Susan and Friday’s conditions insofar as both of their bodies are presented as firm and resistant to their expressed qualities, but also show the potential to manifest in a variety of manners in that they exhibit certain features that suggest malleability. Their bodies shape the adjectival expressions they exhibit, and they always underlie the expressed quality. Yet, they remain distinct and resist the adjectival (cultural) expression, etching out and withholding an indeterminate space.

Moreover, in that their bodies vacillate between determinate and indeterminate states, they reflect Agamben’s description of the threshold, which is *quodlibet*. The threshold “signifies a passage that cannot be completed, a distinction that can be neither maintained nor eliminated” (Norris 5). Whatever being is a threshold that is a borderline that never allows for something to be fully realized. The fact that the threshold cannot be maintained or eliminated means that a constant undulation occurs within the threshold because both determinacy and indeterminacy undulate within this space. Friday and Susan are thresholds. Incessantly and simultaneously, their bodies both pull back from and come into contact with the qualities being expressed. Further, because their bodies exhibit qualities of malleability, both of their bodies would appear to have potential to be expressed through a variety of qualities. Thereby, the body becomes a site of resistance that maintains distance from material manifestations of identity (cultural markers, clothing, and signs of history), yet, underlies and participates in the shaping of these qualities. Thereby, because their bodies are determinate yet indeterminate, they remain their own signs that resists and elide clear expression.
As Brian May points out, the body is tied to identity in Coetzee’s work: “the body—a foundation of identity in Coetzee that is decisively not ‘that which is not’” (398). The significance of May’s argument is that the body is foundational for identity in Coetzee. Moreover, May’s assertion, coupled with Coetzee’s description of the body (that it is always “not that which is not”), indicates that Friday’s and Susan’s bodies always underlie any expression of their identity. Moreover, Agamben’s description of whatever (being such that it always matters) parallels Coetzee’s statement about the irreducibility of bodies. Further, by relating Friday and Susan to Agamben’s description of whatever being, their bodies offer the force of indeterminate and determinate “signs” that always matter and that are “signs” which resist attributions of language and physical cultural markers. The withholding of their bodies and the translingual space they inhabit suggests that any essentialist renderings of their identity, be it an articulation of the dominant language or a physical cultural marker, will always be accompanied by a space of withholding that undermines the determinacy of the marker or articulation.

Moreover, as Agamben suggests of quodlibet, it is “line of sparkling alternation on which common nature and singularity, potentiality and act change roles and interpenetrate” (19). Because an “alternation” is a phenomenon of a morpheme or phoneme that exhibits variation in its phonological realization, we begin to see that quodlibet is tied to the sounds of language. Friday’s voice, a bodily product, exemplifies the indeterminate and determinate state of his body. Thereby, his voice matches his body, showing that his body is the ground of his identity, and that his voice enacts the indeterminacy of his body. The indeterminacy of his body then manifests as indeterminable “sounds” that have a fluctuating aural quality. In one case, it manifests as the “sounds of the island,” and, in the other, it produces a “humming” sound when he dances (92, 154). In this regard, Friday’s voice is tied to the sounds of language, but its phonological
realization is so indeterminate that it repels any essentialist conclusions about his identity. Its force blots the eyes of the unnamed narrator, and does not allow itself to be identified. These sounds are audible but their meaning is inaudible, unheard, and unregistered. His voice is a type of white noise that emits its own presence, yet withholds its meaning.
The Is Not

“Being-thus, being one’s own mode of being – we cannot grasp this as a thing. It is precisely the evacuation of any thingness”  

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*

Beckett’s *Not I* informs the arguments regarding the speaking subject that Coetzee’s *Foe* and Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* make. Beckett’s play articulates concerns about how the speaking subject is to articulate herself in language. Beckett presents the speaking subject as disembodied, and, thereby, it is the voice that enacts her identity. However, she cannot maintain verbal control, and, thus, becomes estranged from herself causing her to reside in-between self and other. Moreover, she is incapable of self-authorship, and her speech acts become semantically overloaded. Her attempt at self-authorship brings about indeterminacy and white noise, a noise imbued with silent meanings. Rushdie holds to Beckett’s position on the speaking subject, and plainly shows that neither Chamcha nor Gibreel can maintain verbal control over themselves, and that their attempts at self-authorship are stymied by various cultural voices. In holding with Beckett, he shows that Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s voices are overcome by a multiplicity which hybridizes and estranges them from themselves. In so doing, Rushdie inserts a new wrinkle into Beckett’s “formula.” He shows that the speaking subject (the migrant) is overcome in two ways at one moment. In amending Beckett, Rushdie shows that Gibreel’s body is infiltrated, penetrated, and that his voice is infected with a myriad of cultural voices. He also shows the opposite, namely that Chamcha’s voice is disrupted and overcome, thus, in turn,
shaping his body. Rushdie’s depiction of Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s struggle to maintain their voices demonstrates that the body and voice of the postcolonial subject ruptures at once. Finally, Chamcha and Gibreel’s inability to maintain their own voices cause their speech acts to be semantically overloaded and to produce silenced meaning. Coetzee’s novel examines Beckett’s argument regarding the speaking subject insofar as Susan’s voice is constantly girded by social mores, a condition that makes it impossible for her to author herself in language. Coetzee finds that voices are more easily overcome, but he amends both Beckett and disagrees with Rushdie insofar as he offers the body as a mode of resistance. Coetzee’s statements in *Foe* and elsewhere about the body show that he believes the body is a space that is “undeniable” and to a certain extent exudes “power.” The power of Friday’s and Susan’s bodies is that they are determinate yet indeterminate. They participate and shape any external expressions, but they maintain themselves as separate and distinct. Moreover, they are the “foundation” of identity for Coetzee, and, thus, each of their identities will always resist essentialist renderings.

Essentialist renderings of identity rely on classification and definition. As I have shown, Beckett, Rushdie, and Coetzee all present marginalized and postcolonial speaking subjects whose voices, bodies, and identities are linguistically or physically determined yet either become or remain indeterminate. The indeterminate voices of these characters produce inconclusive speech acts, speech acts which always passively withhold meaning insofar as no interpreter or culture can ever fully realize or exhaust the breadth of the speech acts’ connotations. The indeterminacy of these speech acts reflects Agamben’s description of pure potentiality. For Agamben, in its purest form, pure potentiality is the potentiality *not to do* or *not to be.*

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5 I am basing my description of Agamben’s idea of “pure potentiality” in the “Bartleby” section of *The Coming Community.* In this section, he describes the “*rasum tabulae,*” “the layer
potentiality \textit{not to be} is the power that all of the speech acts, voices, bodies, and identities of the characters I have discussed exhibit. This potentiality \textit{not to be} for these characters is contingent upon their indeterminacy. Indeterminacy can take different forms. Indeterminacy underlies determining classificatory maneuvers, allowing for partial expressions of qualities to arise. At the same time, indeterminacy retains a distinctiveness that seemingly undermines expressed qualities because the remainder always disallows the possibility of it ever being fully uttered or exhausted. At once, the “is” (the expressed quality) of indeterminacy is always accompanied by a “not” (the negation of that quality). The “is not” of indeterminacy undoes essentialist classifications and definitions, and makes it similar to what Deleuze calls a “foreign language in a dominant language” expressing the “impossibility of living under domination” (\textit{Cinema 2} 223). In highlighting the “impossibility” of “domination,” (the indefinability of the characters’ speech acts, voices, and, identities), the authors I have discussed illustrate that dominating classificatory acts are incessantly undone. In this regard, dominant languages and patriarchal discourses of Empire always subvert their own power in acts of definition and classification, and imbue the marginalized or postcolonial speaking subject with the passive power of the “is not.”

of wax covering the tablet that the stylus engravess” (36.7). It is the “passivity” of “layer of wax” that covers the “tablet” that is pure potentiality (36.7).
Works Cited


