THE UNNAMABLE TEXT:
A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF BECKETT'S
THE UNNAMABLE
By
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Traditional criticism of Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* has sought to establish a universal "truth" or unified consciousness behind the dispersive nature of the text, and consequently readings of the novel have been both reductive and inadequate. Because Beckett's text distorts and displaces traditional narrative tools, and the Western metaphysical tradition from which they arise, criticism concerned with the upheaval of tradition is more appropriate for reading *The Unnamable*. The thesis takes three different textual positions in the text -- the question of beginnings and endings in the text, the problematic of the subject (the proliferation of the "I" versus a concept of the unified consciousness), and the notion of propriety in the concept of the proper name -- and engages in textual play with the text. By using certain modified methods of what we might provisionally call "deconstruction," the readings open the metaphors in the text, and examine the nature of the distortion of tradition that Beckett achieves; the readings are productive rather than reductive. The thesis is more concerned with enacting the upheaval of *The Unnamable*, and is less concerned with describing the textual ruptures or arriving at any fixed meanings or conclusions, for that would be to remain strictly within the tradition that Beckett and the deconstructors attempt to dislodge.
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One is never so far removed from the centre as when one assumes to have recaptured the origin of the self in an empirical experience that is taken to be the cause.

Paul de Man
I

The Critics,
The Deconstructors,
The Unnamable
The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of three objects — things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be. The vehicle of expression is language — either current terms or, it may be, rare words or metaphors.

Aristotle

What does it all mean? What is the key to this strange world? The critic must attempt an answer.

A. Hartley

In his introduction to Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, Martin Esslin maintains that "a wide area still remains that is legitimately open for critical analysis" of Samuel Beckett's texts, and he classifies this "legitimate" area of analysis into three categories: the elucidation of allusions — literary, philosophical, geographical — in the text, the elucidation of structural principles, or the main design of the text, and the determination of the "quality and depth of [the writer's] experience" by the critic, who thus will "fulfill his proper function ... as exemplar for the reactions of a wider public." Most traditional criticism of Beckett's The Unnamable falls into these three categories, although there are some critics who, as Esslin would have it, do not fulfill their proper functions and engage in illegitimate criticism of Beckett. Rather than attempting a chronological survey of criticism of The Unnamable (as Edouard Morot-Sir does in "Cartesian Emblems"), we will maintain Esslin's three categories and trace the legitimate criticism, indicating the
substance (in Frye's sense of the word as sub-stance, standing under, understanding) of the criticism to the point where the traditional criticism's blindness to its own endeavour becomes apparent.

The first group of critics, like a variety of literary detectives, attempt to trace the "real" sources in Beckett's texts -- the "things as they were or are" of Aristotle. John Fletcher in *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* discovers that the restaurant, where one of the characters of *The Unnamable* (Mahood) sits with his head stuck in a jar, was really a "squalid eating-house near the Vaugirard abattoirs in southern Paris." Fletcher comments that "it is interesting to remark that the restaurant ... actually existed," and places the eating-house, called the Ali-Baba, on the rue de Dantzig, close to a windowless rotunda (the rotunda that Mahood later circles); the Ali-Baba was run by an old woman (the woman who takes care of Mahood while he lives in the jar). Fletcher concludes that "Beckett would have known it since he lived at one time in the rue des Favorites, not far away." Both Fletcher and Vivian Mercier take pains to record all the references to Ireland in the novel, and all the references to people whom Beckett was acquainted with while he lived in Ireland. Hugh Kenner, like Fletcher and Mercier, substantiates his interpretation of the "Cartesian Centaur" (the man on the bicycle) with evidence: "on leaving Beckett's apartment I became confused ... and blundered into a cul-de-sac which contained two ash cans and a bicycle." For these critics,
empirical facts of the "real" world provide the necessary support for their analyses; they would "transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality)" for the proof of their assertions.

While some critics would substantiate the "things" or "places" in *The Unnamable* with the things surrounding Beckett, the "real" person, others would substantiate the style of Beckett's writing with psychological proof. According to G.C. Barnard, Beckett had a genuine interest in schizophrenia, and had "at least two opportunities ... of observing something at first hand." Apparently Beckett visited the Bethlem Royal Hospital when he lived in London, because "he was already interested in psychotics;" and had a chance to observe Lucia Joyce, who was "diagnosed as a schizophrenic case." Since the speech and thoughts of schizophrenics are disordered and broken by the intrusion of irrelevant ideas, a faithful record of their thought would be equally broken and disordered: "examples of these disorders of thought occur throughout Beckett novels." And thus, *The Unnamable* is an example of the schizoid split of the ego into two selves: the inner, which withdraws from the real world, and the outer, which is a false self. The critic becomes the analyst and the text the patient, and the critic justifies his assertions with biographical and psychological "evidence" from the "real" world.

Clearly Fletcher, Mercier, Kenner and Barnard regard Beckett, to one degree or another, as a mimetic writer, who
uses an essentially transparent language to imitate "things as they were or are." Within the confines of Esslin's first category, however, there are other critical endeavours which seek to expose allusions of a philosophical nature. A large number of critics adopt a variety of philosophic systems to elucidate Beckett's writing. But at times the converse seems to occur: the critics use Beckett to illustrate a particular philosophic system. Fictive language is taken to be the language of philosophy, propositional language: there is a need for fiction to illustrate propositional truths.

Edouard Morot-Sir correctly observes that "criticism of Beckett in its philosophical aspects has tended to concentrate on Descartes and the Cartesians on the one hand, and on the other on the thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries more or less connected with Existentialism."¹⁵ Michael Robinson, a critic of the latter concentration, approaches *The Unnamable* through the philosophies of Sartre and Berkeley. The Beckettian Self is an approximation of Sartre's *pour-soi* which "organizes all that is (the *en-soi*)"¹⁶ and cannot conceive of itself without becoming the Other. The "I" or *pour-soi* wants to know itself and therefore creates a fiction (the character of Worm), thereby becoming Worm's Other, an object. The unnamable wants to become Worm in order to conceive his own self-hood: his attempt is a failure, as he is unable to become himself through his creation. Robinson uses Sartre's description of human relationships in an attempt to explain the novel and the character's search for his Self:
a futile gesture where the Other exists. From that, Robinson takes Berkeley's doctrine *esse est percipi* to illustrate the need for the unnamable to create others so that he might be seen, since once he has been seen by another, his Being is confirmed. The novel becomes "a monstrous projection of Berkeley's doctrine of perception and of Sartre's concept of the Other." As Morot-Sir states, Existential readings of Beckett are popular with the critics, who frequently ally Beckett with Sartre and Camus, Rilke and Dostoevsky.

Steven Rosen places Beckett in an entire tradition of pessimism which includes the Existentialists, but begins with Socrates and the Cynics. Rosen maintains that Beckett uses all the pessimistic clichés to write "a really entertaining complaint about life." The character of the unnamable is, according to Rosen, a sage-type in the mode of Socrates, mediated by humour and a certain buffoonery; but Rosen calls him a failed sage "who has lost some of his poise," his serenity (perhaps an "insane calm"), on his quest for apathy. Like the other pessimists, Beckett will admit no consolation for the misery of man, since consolation is no more than a cowardly or platitudinous gesture. Beckett enters the pessimistic tradition by declaring that "the artist must accept his art's futility;" in keeping with this assertion, Beckett, like his predecessors the "solitary, introspective pessimists from Heraclitus to Proust," upholds the pessimistic tradition by using "unrealistically simplified models of consciousness, ... rather arbitrary limitation[s] of mood, ... and deals with
something like hypochondria, ["humans are substantially sick"] a condition which seems to invite intolerance." Rosen claims that even within this pessimistic tradition, Beckett's views seem remarkably extreme. In his study, Rosen makes little distinction between the novels, although he believes that the first two novels of the trilogy are better examples of the pessimistic tradition that Beckett's other novels; The Unnamable does, however, illustrate how "as man withdraws from the world and approaches the self ... the self becomes successively emptier, even finally without distinct identity at all." By using Beckett as an illustration or an example, and placing him within a somewhat rigid tradition, Rosen performs a levelling task, reducing the difference between the writers in the tradition to affirm general truths about the tradition itself; Beckett's novels are placed in a position of secondarity to the tradition.

If any one philosopher or philosophy dominates Beckett criticism, it is surely Descartes and Cartesianism. Since the recovery of Beckett's early poem "Whoroscope," which is about Descartes and his eggs, and Beckett's first novel Murphy, with its sixth chapter on Murphy's mind, Beckett criticism has seized on the concept of Cartesian dualism as it is illustrated in Beckett's works. Edouard Morot-Sir in "Cartesian Emblems" traces more than fifteen years of study of Beckettian Cartesianism in Beckett criticism, before he continues with a variation of the tradition. Perhaps the most well known Cartesian study of Beckett is Hugh Kenner's
"The Cartesian Centaur," where Kenner associates Descartes' "perfect corporeal machine"—the body—with Beckett's man on a bicycle. Kenner traces the development of the man on the bicycle motif, and its relation to Descartes, through Beckett's novels to *The Unnamable*; in *The Unnamable* the centaur becomes dismembered; the end result of a gradual disintegration of the machine. According to Kenner, *The Unnamable* "carries the Cartesian process backwards beginning with a bodily *je suis* and ending with a bare *cogito*;" there is "no verifiable body." Kenner concludes by suggesting that Beckett's study of the relation between mind and body, and his subsequent anti-Cartesianism, indicates the failure of the seventeenth century ideal (the "fatal dream of being, knowing and moving like a god") in the twentieth century—what Morot-Sir would describe as "the contemporary doom of Cartesian expectations."

Ruby Cohn, like Kenner, outlines the influence of Descartes on Beckett's novels, but finds that the Occasionists, Geulincx and Malebranche, with their extension of Cartesian principles are more significant in their influence on Beckett. She examines the mind/body split in *The Unnamable*, and the character's search for selfhood which begins, like Descartes', in aporia or doubt; but she asserts that Beckett does not show particular interest in Cartesian idealism, and his heroes do not demonstrate the same ethical concerns as Descartes: "Beckett carefully disclaims for his hero any concern with the 'ethical yoyo' to which both Descartes and especially
Geulincx were drawn." Cohn would maintain, like Kenner, that *The Unnamable* is an example of the deterioration of Cartesian principles, that Beckett indicates the direction of Cartesian principles towards decay in "this late stage of human history." Morot-Sir identifies at least twenty-five different philosophies associated with Beckett criticism; included are Martin Esslin's Kierkegaardian reading, Robbe-Grillet's Heideggerian reading, Schultz's Hegelian reading and Frederick Hoffman's Cartesian-Berkeleyan reading. Rather than elaborating upon each of the philosophical systems either applied to Beckett or supposedly intrinsic to his work, it might be more interesting to note the significant interdependence of philosophy and literature. It seems that philosophy relies upon fiction to illustrate its particular propositions of general truths, and fiction upon philosophy for either ideas or commentary; and yet, the traditional critics presume a certain autonomy from the fiction they approach. Porter Abbott in *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett* writes, "unless we are to throw over our vocation, we must necessarily talk from a vantage point outside art." Inherent in this attitude is the belief that proper, literal language stands apart from fictive, figurative language, that the schism between the two allows "vantage points" either outside or inside. But what of Beckett the philosopher? or does his vantage point ever change from that of the artist? As we have seen, there are certainly critics who would claim Beckett as a philosopher;
but they do not approach the subsequent problem of their own positions as critics. However, perhaps we are moving outside the realms of the legitimate criticism by raising these questions; for the moment, let us remain within the bounds of the legitimate criticism and examine Esslin's second category: the elucidation of underlying structures or main design of the text.

Most of the traditional criticism of *The Unnamable* is concerned with the underlying structures of the text, and most of the critics identify the structure, to one degree or another, as an epic structure. Germaine Brée sees an entire epic pattern in *The Unnamable*: the voyage, quest or encounter, combat, separation and return; but the majority of other critics focus on the quest structure alone, along with the requisite questing hero: a character they identify as the unnamable. Regardless of the fact that there is an entire "gallery of moribunds" in the novel, going by the names of Malone, Mahood, Basil and Worm interchangeably, the critics conclude that there is a real consciousness present in the novel which exists apart from the fictions (the other names and stories), an "I", called the unnamable, who quests primarily for an identity, a self, an ego, a name, a truth, a being. There are a few variations on what the unnamable quests for: Robinson claims that the unnamable quests for a centre, a meaning, Josephine Jacobsen and William Mueller that the hero quests for oblivion (meaninglessness, silence), and Rosen that the hero quests for apathy, ignorance and
anxiety ("the inescapable condition of humanity"); all the critics acknowledge that there is actually a questing hero, although from the first page the "I" is questioned: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me."  

Allen Thihier writes that "the mere saying 'I' fosters the illusion that a self has been created, that a character is present, that a voice speaks." It seems necessary for traditional critics to identify a character, a hero, even if he has no name, no identity, and "no verifiable body;" many conclude that the character is therefore a universal figure (mankind in general). Jacobsen and Mueller call the Beckett protagonist the "Q" figure (from quidam: somebody, one unknown), Frye calls it the ego "stripped of all individuality ... seen merely as representative of all of its kind," Fletcher calls it "the naked voice of being who exists behind all of them [the other names]," and Cohn calls it "the image of ourselves." Cohn and Fletcher are more specific that the figure is the universal artist-human figure. It is a short step from an identification of the protagonist as mankind, to affirmations of general truths; the hero of the novel becomes all men questing for selves, identities and Being.

Some critics are careful to identify the quest in The Unnamable as a uniquely twentieth century one; Jacobsen and Mueller believe that with the absence of God (a centre, a meaning), mankind is faced with meaninglessness and emptiness and, out of necessity, must quest to discover his identity. Other critics see the problem as being as old as mankind:
man has always been compelled to quest for his identity, and that is the basis of all philosophy. The Cartesian critics see the quest as one for the *cogito* which can no longer be confirmed by a benevolent deity or the self thinking of itself; the Existential critics see the quest as man's attempt to transcend his facticity and achieve ideal Being. In every case, the quest for the self or Being or the *cogito* is a failure; *The Unnamable* is an example of man's "failure to acquire an identity," failure to be completely identified. Although the novel, according to the critics, affirms a universal truth about mankind, the supposed failure of the quest is, strangely enough, not attributed to their assertion that man can never achieve self-hood no matter how long he quests to do so; rather, the failure is attributed to language. Again the division between the logical, propositional (literal, transparent) language of philosophy, and the language of fiction is attested by the critics; they say that fictional language, in Beckett's case, cannot deliver the truth, although that truth is claimed as a universal philosophic truth. Since the character cannot achieve identity in the novel, they claim the fault is in language, because it actively prevents the character from realizing the goal of his quest. Here we see the paradoxical nature of the critics' endeavours; they affirm that Beckett reveals a philosophic truth about mankind, that mankind cannot achieve identity, but in fiction the failure of the achievement is the fault of fictional language -- the truth of Beckett's fiction is that there is no truth in fiction.
Traditional textual interpretation founds itself on this particular understanding of metaphor: a detour to truth. Not only individual metaphors or systems of metaphors, but fiction in general is seen as a detour to a truth that the critic can deliver through her interpretation.  
Gayatri Spivak

To suggest that meaning and language do not coincide, and to draw from that noncoincidence a particular strength, is merely to restate what literature has always revealed.  
Geoffrey Hartman

Most of the traditional Beckett critics agree that Beckett's The Unnamable is difficult and obscure, and frequently quote the passage "the discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities. Rhetoric;" (p.294) some of the critics go so far as to say that Beckett is deliberately obscure so as to resist interpretation: "it discourages interpretation, for this discouragement, in fact, is a large part of Beckett's meaning ... [his] works provoke such guesswork ... and provoke curiosity about [the meaning]."  
Rosen actually makes a case that despite all Beckett's attempts to suppress or eliminate meaning, meaning continues to emerge from the "buzzing, blooming confusion." As Nietzsche writes, our will to order arises from our need to make chaos intelligible through interpretation and subsequently appropriation; the will to create or arrive at a unified, fixed meaning in critical interpretations is a reductive process. Harold Bloom attests this: "The proper use of any critical paradigm
ought to lessen the dangers of reduction, yet clearly most paradigms are, in themselves, dangerously reductive."

Traditional Beckett criticism concerns itself with particular interpretative models; most of the criticism is a manner of hermeneutics, which would attempt to deliver the meaning or truth of Beckett's *The Unnamable*. Strangely enough, however, the critics never examine the données they employ or accept; they maintain a necessary blindness to their own projects.

Since most of the critics presume that Beckett is deliberately obscure, and that his texts resist easy understanding, such a position seems a good place to begin; Jacobsen and Mueller write "there is general agreement that Beckett readers need a key, some open-sesame as they stand at the threshold of his text." To revive Aristotle, writers employ the vehicle of language — the language of rare words and metaphors — in their art; if the work is obscure, it must be because of the figurative language. Clearly, this presupposition is working in Beckett criticism. And thus, the critics establish the dichotomy between Art and criticism; Art obscures and criticism clarifies. The implications of the word "obscure" are evident; obscurity is a covering over, a darkening, an unintelligibility (from the Latin "to shield" or "cover"). By employing such a word, the critics indicate the direction they will take for approaching Beckett.

As we observed earlier, the primary cause given for the failure of the quest is language; each one of the Beckett critics expresses this failure of language to express. John
Pilling observes that *The Unnamable* is an example of "the contemporary obsession with the inaccuracy of language as an instrument; it is designed to express, but almost actively refuses to do so ... language is a system doomed to failure." 46 The quest for self identity fails because "words form the barrier that prevents us from knowing who we are and what we are," 47 writes Robinson; "language is the fundamental deception ... an empty area of transit," 48 writes Dieter Wellershoff; "never, in fiction, have so many words been used as by Beckett to underline the inefficiency of language," 49 writes A.J. Leventhal; and Richard Coe observes that one of the most important themes of *The Unnamable* is "the failure of the self to penetrate the barrier of words." 50 Fictional language appears to express its own failure to express; the critics prove this with Beckett's own words in *Three Dialogues*: "this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new form of relation, and of an act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he [Van Velde] makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation." 51

"Expression" implies a direct link, a line between the signified (the thought) and the signifier, and Beckett asserts that expression, as such, is doomed to failure, that the occasion and the expression of it are not necessarily related, that the classical conception of the sign as the "sign of" something must be reexamined. Perhaps this is Hartman's implication when he writes that literature has always revealed the noncoincidence of meaning and language. But the critics
would maintain the disjunction between their interpretive acts of expression and the fictive text's impossibility to express. While the critics actively claim that fictional language is obscured by metaphors, they claim for themselves exemption -- "all language distorts; stylistic language distorts absolutely," writes Richard Coe. Implied in the hermeneutic gesture of Beckett critics is the belief that their language can reveal the "truth," the signified, even though the artist himself expresses the failure of the endeavour. Richard Coe claims that Beckett developed an antistyle which is "a vehicle of expression in which the concepts to be signified are neither coloured nor distorted by the words used to signify them;" and this antistyle will overcome the "chasms between language-as-such and the thoughts or concepts that language traditionally is expected to convey." Antistyle or simply the nature of fictive language? Coe does not examine his own expression, the expression of these supposed concepts or truths that Beckett expresses through the vehicle of language.

Let us examine the implicit claim of critical language which proposes that it is a more transparent and direct means of expression than the figurative language that it explores. The transparency of critical language is dependent on the non-presence of figures of expression in its own writing, for metaphor appears to be the essence of fictional language (that leads to its obscurity); metaphor is what the formalists would call the "making strange" or "making figures" that
gives the very quality of "literariness" to literary texts.

What is the key to this strange world? Our study does not claim to solve all the puzzles ... meaning has to be disentangled from a seemingly cryptic script.

Man cannot decipher his identity from the cosmic complexity of fictions and words.

We cannot avoid noticing that there are ... elements that at least appear to be keys.

Beckett readers need a key, some open-sesame as they stand at the threshold of his text.

The Unnamable ... is the product of a vision which uncovers "the model, the Idea, the thing in itself." Like secret watermarks hidden meanings appear.

We must look for the key [to meaning] elsewhere.

If we were to cultivate Nietzsche's will to ignorance for a moment, or maintain the critics' opposition to Art, and therefore read these passages literally, properly, non-metaphorically, we would presume that The Unnamable was a locked door, a crypt, a collection of hieroglyphics, a game or toy, a secret code, a mystical place, a burial spot, a coded document or a secret other world. But, The Unnamable is literally the title of a book, a book with two covers and a certain number of pages, written in a common language (English or French); is that the thing itself, the pure signified that the critics refer to, their meaning?

Transparent language is evidently not binarily opposite to figurative language; the critics use, knowingly or not, metaphoric language to describe their endeavours. Metaphorically, the text becomes a crypt, a puzzle, a locked entrance way etc., and the critic becomes the key holder, the game master or the Ali Baba who knows the secret code to enter a secret
place. If the reader of the critics must decipher, decode the critics' writing in the same way that the critics decipher or decode Beckett, then the reader must use the same critical tools; thus there must be another set of critics, and the layers always connect to other layers of readers. As Jacques Derrida writes, "the writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely." Given that the traditional critics do not escape metaphoric language, we will examine the predominant metaphors of interpretation a little further.

The passages selected from the critical texts are not randomly chosen, but should we distinguish between the randomness of selection and selection for design? Any selection, of course, removes passages from their contexts to be incorporated into another context, so that now the critics are open to interpretation of their interpretations. Interestingly, while the critics attempt to fix meanings, or discover truths in Beckett's text, their own meanings slip; the critics use metaphors to describe the truth arising from the metaphors in another text. The metaphors of keys, puzzles, ciphers, crypts, caves, and those arising from the words "obscurity" (from the Greek "to shield"), "elucidate" (from the Latin "light") and "cryptic" (from the Greek "to hide"), are all associated with the act of interpretation, but imply that the text is locked, coded, covered, hidden, secret, dark, that the critic brings keys, codes, tools, answers, light. In
traditional hermeneutics, revelation is a key concept, the bringing of light into the obscure world of the text.

While we understand the metaphors of interpretation on one level, if we examine the metaphors further still, we discover some rather interesting contradictions, instances where the metaphors can work in several different ways. When the critics use the metaphor of the "cipher" (the secret writing) for the text, in describing their practice of "deciphering" (the turning of the cipher into ordinary writing), they indicate that on the one hand there is a secret writing which conceals meaning, and on the other the ordinary writing which reveals meaning. And yet, in the very etymological root of "cipher" (from the Arabic cifr meaning "zero" or "empty" in the adjective form), lies the possibility of non-meaning. Traditionally, the cipher does not make sense, is unintelligible, is mystical; it reveals its own emptiness of meaning. Only the continued belief that there must be meaning leads the attempt to decipher; the possibility of "zero" of absence is always already threatening. The quest for meaning must ever accept the presence of non-meaning; error in deciphering will inevitably produce the zero.

The metaphor of the crypt and cryptic writing is another metaphor common to traditional criticism of The Unnamable. The cryptic writing or the secret, mystical writing is similar to the cipher in that it conceals truth and requires either higher intelligence or mystical knowledge to reveal itself; an Ali Baba and secret codes, open-sesames. Enclosing the
meaning is the crypt, for the open-sesame itself is not the meaning, and the crypt can at once conceal treasure or emptiness, death; the crypt conceals the dead, is the burial place. Derrida writes an incisive study of the metaphor of writing as "the dead letter," and traces how writing, since it testifies an absence of an author or speaker, has been associated with death throughout philosophy. The crypt metaphor indicates, like the cipher, a risk of non-meaning; the archetypal crypt in literature is Christ's tomb which is discovered empty, save for the linen clothes. The crypt conceals an absence, while tantalizing with the promise of treasure.

One of the most predominant metaphors of interpretation is that of the key and the locked text; this, of course, corresponds with the tool of deciphering the cipher or cryptic writing. The critics would solve the puzzles of The Unnamable with the discovery of the appropriate key. Significantly, however, the key which opens the path or passage to meaning, can also preclude opening, for the key also conceals, locks inside; it both locks and opens. The critics' key to the text must fit his or her reading of the text, to the suppression of what does not fit; it presents meaning while preventing the possibility of another meaning. In any attempt to unify, there is always part of the text which cannot be locked in, fully accounted for; a part which always escapes.

Perhaps the most interesting metaphors of traditional interpretation are those of darkness and light. Traditionally,
the poet is a visionary, one who is guided by a light that others may not necessarily see; artists, as it were, see the light, bring the light of truth to the darkness of the world, and thus they are awarded superior positions to those who have no such vision. They are hierarchically superior to the critic, who traditionally maintains a position of secondarity as one lacking in vision. The visionary text is considered to be shrouded in darkness, in obscurity, and necessitates "elucidation." We may well question how, in the task of elucidation, of revelation, the critic must bring the light to the text if he is merely in a position of secondarity. The critic, therefore, brings light to another light concealed, and thus takes the primary position of the visionary; the union of light and light creates a "pure presence," unadulterated light. Beckett would respond that "for us ... there is not such clarity ... where we have both dark and light we have also the inexplicable."^66

On one level, the metaphors of traditional textual interpretation of *The Unnamable* all point towards the interpretive (deciphering, decoding, unlocking, solving, lightening) acts of revelation (of the truth or meaning obscured in the text), but on another level the metaphors point towards emptiness, zero, death and locked entrances always locking out the very possibility of meaning, while holding the key to opening the passage to meaning. The text is (n)ever locked, (n)ever opened, (n)ever empty, (n)ever accessible to elucidation.
While traditional Beckett criticism would endeavour to fix meaning and truth in Beckett's text — the misery of the human condition, the truth of man's solitude in an indifferent universe, the endless and futile quest for the self or identity, man's loneliness and hopeless longing for rest — and to isolate itself or take a "vantage point" outside of Art (figurative language), the rhetoric of such criticism reveals the same metaphors functioning in what is supposedly propositional language; but even more importantly, the critics' greatest insight into the interpretive task, is the moment of their greatest blindness (to use Paul de Man's term). There is always a skidding (overspill, displacement, supplement; here we do not claim for ourselves any autonomy from metaphoric language) in any attempt to afix a meaning to the text; revelation always conceals, writing always "carries with it a certain absence or indeterminacy of meaning."^67 How else could we account for all the different "fixed" meanings that the unified interpretive readings of Beckett's text deliver, which "accumulate as a variorum of readings that cannot all be reconciled?"^68 Traditional criticism must, however, maintain its own blindness in order to continue; as Spivak writes, "in the long run a critic cannot himself present his own vulnerability. We come back simply to that question of attitude ... criticism does not reveal the 'truth' of literature, just as literature reveals no 'truth'."^69
Certain texts ... mark and organize a structure of resistance to the philosophical conceptuality that allegedly dominated or comprehended them, whether directly, or whether through categories derived from this philosophical fund, the categories of esthetics, rhetoric, or traditional criticism. For example the values of meaning or of content, of form or signifier, of metaphor/metonymy, of truth, of representation etc., at least in their classical form, can no longer account for certain very determined effects of these texts.

Jacques Derrida

To begin again, to start again from nowhere, from no one and from nothing and win to me again, to me here again, by fresh ways to be sure, or by the ancient ways, unrecognizable at each fresh faring.

Samuel Beckett

If we were to begin again, and go back to Esslin's observation about the wide area open to legitimate criticism, or rather the wide area legitimately open to criticism, we might indulge in some speculation about legitimacy. For now, let us take this assertion of Esslin's out of context (out of two contexts -- the text of Esslin's introduction, and the text at the beginning of this text) to examine the term "legitimacy" when applied to an area of literary criticism. "Legitimacy" (from the Latin legitimus: lawful, or lex: law) implies a legal, proper relationship between the father and the offspring; the offspring is legitimated by the strict hereditary bond between parent and child, the child who is
born from legal wedlock. How does this relate to the critic and the text? The critic becomes the legitimate descendent from the father or the text, and since there is descendence, there is also the accompanying primacy and secondarity; the text is the origin, and the criticism the issue (criticism is the issue). The laws prescribed, the laws which determine the bond of legitimacy, must be prescribed by something/one preceding the issue: the father; and thus, the father (text) originates the laws for himself and for his offspring (the critics). In a dialectical way, each must depend on the other to legitimate itself: the father-text is only such in so much as it has a son-critic.

As it is evident that criticism, or the criticism of interpretation, thinks itself necessary—why else would a critic assume the obligation of interpreting a text?—there must be a certain lack inherent in the text, something that needs interpretation; Spivak writes, "the so-called secondary material is not a simple adjunct to the so-called primary text. The latter inserts itself within the interstices of the former, filling holes that are always already there." Thus criticism founds itself on an absence in the text, and in a similar way engenders its own absence of meaning, truth, signified etc.; the father's lack is filled by the son. The critics' texts only belong to the fathers' texts only in so far as both belong to language—what Derrida would call the "General Text;" the laws that govern the two (attesting to legitimacy or otherwise) are the laws of language.
(figurative, propositional, fictional, transparent).

Traditional criticism of Beckett's text *The Unnamable* is only legitimate insofar as it conforms to a standard type, to the traditional edicts of interpretation which attempt to unify, enclose and fix meaning in a text, although that meaning is always already slipping. In this endeavour, they continue the tradition of logocentrism and the logical constructs of Western metaphysics; Derrida calls the history of Western metaphysics the metaphysics of presence (the presence of truth, meaning, being). Such is the yearning for unity in presence. We should acknowledge, of course, that what we have performed to this point has been a manner of unification in the traditional way. If we were to continue in the usual manner, we would place traditional criticism, unify it in intent and method, then promptly usher in the new form of criticism equally unified and complete and somehow superior to the antecedent criticism; we would perform a traditional gesture of dismissal of the forefathers and celebrate the new, in its very difference (and implied superiority) to the old. This gesture, however, is itself a unifying one, and thus is part and parcel of traditional criticism; it indicates only a difference in degree and not in kind. We cannot, therefore, dismiss traditional criticism out of hand, even if this form of criticism has difficulty in its project to unify the meaning of *The Unnamable* and arrive at a general truth which transcends the text.

If we were to attempt to define a new critical approach,
provisionally called deconstruction, it would be problematic, since the projects of the so-called deconstructors are disparate. There are, however, certain qualities that they have in common: they are concerned with the binary oppositions (and violent hierarchies) inherent in the Western metaphysical-logocentric tradition, with the non-coincidence of meaning and language, with commentary versus unifying interpretation, with the languages of philosophy and fiction, with the way that meaning always escapes (as does the text) into textuality and does not remain within the illusory confines of the "book" under the illusory authority of the proper author, with the Derridean concept of "writing" (phonetic, graphic, ideogrammic, hieroglyphic etc.), and with irreconcilable difference (and Derrida's "differance" which is neither a word nor a concept, but the condition of all differences). The deconstructors are not opposed to traditional criticism, for that would be to remain within the closure of Western metaphysics, the tradition from which traditional criticism arises, and they use traditional tools to explore disunity, what escapes every unifying gesture. In many ways, their projects are similar to the projects of literature: to subvert, overthrow and play within the laws of language, of writing. Geoffrey Hartman observes that the suggestion of finding strength in the disunity between meaning and language is "merely to restate what literature has always revealed," and Derrida observes that certain so-called literary texts have set up patterns of
resistance to Western metaphysics. Traditional criticism needs a supplement, just as the text does; deconstruction provides such a supplement to both texts.

Since the text is always supplemented, the supposed unity resulting from the illusion provided by the titled two covers, is only provisional; as Derrida writes, the proper name of the author or the text has no substantial value, and the indicative value we give them "is first to name the problem." Rather than attempting a description of The Unnamable, a discussion of what the text is about, which would be an exercise in delimiting the boundaries of the text, in encircling the text, and therefore acknowledging the sovereignty of the text (an acknowledgement of the text's illusory limits), we would do better to indicate some of the concerns in the text. This is not, however, to prove only a sameness (a reduction of the text into commonplace themes), or as Frye calls it a "likeness which leads to monotony," but more to indicate how all writing concerns itself with writing and language. In many ways, The Unnamable parallels deconstruction. Perhaps it would be better to say that The Unnamable demonstrates what literature has always known, and deconstruction demonstrates the gradual coming to self-knowledge of criticism.

Like deconstruction, Beckett's writing plays with the metaphysical opposition between propositional language, or the language of philosophy and criticism, and the so-called literary language of metaphor and fiction; Beckett trans-
gresses the supposed boundaries between the two by using philosophical "catch-words" and paradoxes in metaphorical constructions, just as Derrida transgresses the boundaries by using metaphorical constructions in philosophical issues. Both deconstruction and The Unnamable radically question the very boundaries themselves by continually altering their positions, their "vantage points" inside or outside of Art; the inside becomes the outside and vice versa. Beckett uses logical contradiction and paradoxes, never allowing an affirmation to remain unnegated, and questions how the text can proceed at all when "logically" such procedure should invalidate itself; he questions the very notion of arriving at truth through the aporia of philosophy: "What is more true than anything else? To swim is true, and to sink is true. One is not more true than the other." Like Beckett, deconstruction questions validity and the possibility of "truth." Derrida calls the affirmation of writing, with the risk of not arriving at a truth or meaning "Nietzschean affirmation" -- "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin." Beckett's writing is a celebration of disunity, and is thus problematic for criticism which strives for unification in an essentially hermeneutic gesture. Beckett says "What is the history of criticism but the history of men attempting to make sense of the manifold elements in art what will not allow themselves to be reduced to a single
philosophy or a single aesthetic theory?" 76

As Derrida writes, "certain texts ... mark and organize a resistance to the philosophical conceptuality that allegedly comprehended them;" The Unnamable is such a text, and its structure of resistance to traditional interpretation is a structure of resistance to traditional metaphysical conceptions of literature. The Unnamable constantly transgresses the supposed boundaries of fiction and philosophy, metaphor and literality, takes issue with the metaphysical desire for closure in beginnings and ending, allows no foothold for traditional criticism which would seek to establish plot, character setting, and questions the very proprietal act of naming, of holding a title over a text. The Unnamable does draw strength from the noncoincidence of language and meaning, and if the absence of meaning or the deferral of meaning questions the very possibility of proceeding in a text, The Unnamable would offer "I can't go on. I'll go on."

Rather than attempting another reductive reading of The Unnamable, we will provide a field of play and attempt a productive reading of the novel, a reading which will supplement other texts: both other texts of criticism and The Unnamable itself. A productive reading, which is attentive to the multiplicity and plurality of the text as it transgresses the provisional boundaries of tradition, will both augment and allow the play that any transgression promises. What The Unnamable already deconstructs in tradition, we will deconstruct even further, and produce what Derrida would call a "disseminative reading," which is attentive to the multitude of possible meanings that language allows.
Footnotes


4 Esslin, p.12.

5 Esslin, p.12.


7 Fletcher, p.184.

8 Fletcher, p.185.


12 Barnard, p.7.

13 Barnard, p.7.

14 Barnard, p.7.


17 Robinson, p.203.


19 Rosen, p.112.
20 Rosen, p.215.
21 Rosen, p.219.
22 Rosen, p.219.
23 Rosen, p.29.
24 Kenner, p.128.
25 Kenner, p.132.
26 Morot-Sir, p.34.
28 Cohn, p.296.
31 Robinson, p.30.
33 Rosen, p.27.
All subsequent references will be to this edition.
36 Jacobsen and Mueller, p.5.
38 Fletcher, p.179.
39 Cohn, p.5.
40 Fletcher, p.190.

43 Rosen, p.6,7.


45 Jacobsen and Mueller, p.60.


47 Robinson, p.23.


52 Coe, p.38.

53 Coe, p.40.

54 Coe, p.53.

55 Hartley, p.459.


57 Cohn, p.296.

58 Abbott, p.9.

59 Jacobsen and Mueller, p.60.

60 Jacobsen and Mueller, p.67.

61 Wellershoff, p.96.


63 Derrida, p.158.

64 See Derrida's chapter "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," pp.16-18 in *Of Grammatology*, and see *Dissemination*.

65 See J. Hillis Miller's "The Critic as Host," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, eds. Harold Bloom et al, for an examination of the continued metaphor of the critic as parasite.


67 Hartman, p.viii.

68 Hartman, p.viii.

69 Spivak, p.lxxv.


71 Spivak, p.lxxiv.


74 Driver, p.22.


76 Driver, p.22.
II

The Question of Beginning
The beginning is designated in order to indicate, clarify, or define a later time, place or action.1 Edward Said

Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that ... Perhaps that is how it began. What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple. The Unnamable

From the Bible we get "In the beginning was the word," from Ferdinand Saussure, in the beginning was the sound (phonē), from Jacques Derrida, in the beginning was "differance" (the condition of all beginnings), and from Samuel Beckett, Where now? Who now? When now? The Unnamable opens onto three questions, three interrogative pronouns, as the third of the projected trilogy of novels (Three Novels); such is the beginning project of the end, the projected end, promised by the title of Three Novels, the beginning of the promised end, the completion, the last. The (hi)story of the Western literary tradition, from the initiating moment (provisionally called Aristotle), has been one of beginnings, middles and endings; every origin (archē) moves towards its end (telos), and thus writing has been marked by a proliferation of archeologies and teleologies, linearly circular, as certain as the tock follows the tick. But what of the infinitesimal moment between the tock and the next tick, between the end and the beginning, between Malone Dies and The Unnamable?

The beginning of a text is difference, difference from/
to other texts; it is what designates, (de)sign(ates) the space between one text and another, initiating a process to be continued. As a sign, it points both back to previous texts and forward to the text in progress. Said distinguishes beginnings from origins in that origins are theological and divine, and beginnings are secular; origins centrally dominate what derives from them and beginnings encourage dispersion (are merely indicators). "The beginning is the first point (in time, space or action) of an accomplishment or process."²

The beginning is the initiation (initial moment) of the different, is the ceremony, the initiational ceremony of the new member, the new leg, the last leg as it were, of the trilogy. The novel moves towards a fulfillment of the promise of completion, the final beginning from all other beginnings; the trilogy promised, and the third comes as promised, to the last leg on its last legs. After Malone Dies we come to the promised end, the end to come; the end comes in (enters).

Enter the text — the stage (the third) is set (now?). Where does the text enter, on what stage, what board(er)s (in French bords, sides, borders)? Where are the board(er)s of the text? In Beckett's drama, the boards (the stage) always recede, become atopographical, placeless places, indefinite topoi. The black is only broken by a scream (Breath), intruded on by a mouth (Not I), by words; language breaks the bords.

"Here is my beginning" says Molloy (first stage); but where? (now) in The Unnamable (third stage)? Where (?) is
the demand for situation, for spatial definition, spatial borders of the stage (3); where is the beginning, where the text begins? The (now) blackened boards, blackening against the white of the margins (and the white space above/before the black). First white, then black; now white, now (b)lack -- Edward Said: "the beginning premise of all writing is loss." Now white, now (b)lack. (B)lack now, (b)lac(k)now. The question "Where now?" lacks knowledge of spatiality, questions situation ("My situation"?); it inspires the desire to know, indicates the lack of situation (?). The question thwarts the promise of fulfillment, promised in the first, in the title Three Novels, in the beginning of the third. The end surely enters, but where (now)? Itself a promise, the question effaces the initial promise by promising anew, promising an answer to where is "my situation" now? It promises a wait ("Perhaps that is how it [Godot] began?") but not a way (means) of entry, and suspends the weight of beginning. The beginning point, the "first point" is suspended, but urgently (now).

Can the stage (3) lack the necessary board(er)s and still retain the margins of beginning, the initiating point, the blackening of the page, or are the beginnings effaced by the question and the suspended promise? The promise is issued by whom (now)? Who will fulfill the promise (now) of beginning the text, of answering the question of situation? Narrative demands a narrator, a teller of the tale, one who will fulfill the promise of a beginning (but have we begun
now?), fill the lack between the two texts (2 and 3); narratives, novels, require one who k(now)s how to proceed. But again the second question is suspended (now) over the first, or after the first, tantalizingly shifting as we move, in our desire for reassurance, towards a graspable situation, an identifiable speaker (not a where? or who? now). Again the urgency of the question is repeated in the now(?); the temporality is suspended by the question mark which betrays the apparent linearity of the written line. The consecutivity of the questions, the words (?), (the black no(w)hite), linearly arranged suggest beginning points, but the temporal element of all narratives (which always have an internal chronology) which could confirm the initiating point of starting, of going forward, is effaced by the question and the promise.

In the beginning (when? now) is/was the (b)lack of writing irrupting from the margins (now?), the lack of origins, the initiating loss. The "now" repeated three times urgently, but questioning the constitution (the con: against, s(t)itu: place, "ation") of a beginning moment, of initial movement, is emphatic through repetition. Begin now! (?) Commencez! (Comment C'est, How It Is, in the beginning). It projects towards a novel as yet unwritten (according to the chronology of the Beckett œuvre), but written already in textuality; it also projects towards a beginning not as yet made, another beginning (?) -- when? (after two novels) now? The first word then (Where?) in the opening of the
novel cannot be the beginning; it has been effaced by the projection of another beginning to come (in, enter). The board(er)s become clear for another beginning which is not the first; but was there a first? Just a "confusion in the exordia." (p.302) Literally a con, a trick, which reneges on the promise of the title; we have been conned by a beginning that was not; but also a con (with) fusion (joining), which at once joins the third novel to the second, and effaces the distinguishing marks -- marks which should, according to Said, indicate, clarify or define.

Does the novel begin by begging to (k)now? (where, who, when), by begging the question (beg(g)in(g) the question, begin the quest(ion))? It stalls, postpones the beginning with questions (through begging or avoiding the issue), and creates "the infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay;" (p.349) it defers the issue of beginning by differing from itself (begging to differ), by projecting forward to an indefinite moment of beginning and promising the possibility of another point of departure. And yet, the three questions are unquestionably the first three in the novel, the first words; the questioning is itself denied; "unquestioning" follows the questions. The "un"questioning questions are undone, the promise dashed by the lack of the question mark, by the statement.

The (hi)story of narrative literature begins with the premise that all stories have beginnings from which proceeds the story towards its end; even the stories which begin
in media res begin nonetheless and find their chronological (in textual chronology) beginnings during the course of the story. The first words are the beginning, but the beginning is deferred in the infinitesimal lag between arrival and departure, (between 2 and 3); they contain a radical alterity which cannot be dissolved. The Unnamable does not begin at the beginning, nor in media res (since situation is always suspended by the mark of the question), just in media, the middle, the in between: "nothing can serve as a point of departure." (p. 306) The words proceed from an indefinite place, through an indefinite narrator, in an indefinite time (like the two screams in the dark in Breath); and yet they proceed with the project of beginning always already deferred, postponed. But this assurance of procedure is itself suspended, effaced by the questioning mark: "how proceed?"

The procedure is questioned, both the possibility of proceeding and the method of procedure; both senses spring from the etymological difference of cedere: both to yield and go forward. Proceeding entails the yielding, the giving way, and the movement away from the wreckage; language moves in The Unnamable through a process of continual effacement, each new question effacing the effaced preceding (pre-ceding; the one that has given way before) question in a system of palimpsestual (pal-incestual) relationships. Procedure contains the necessary failure of itself: it questions itself (proceed?); the system of palimpsests, however, is
not linear, nor can a method be (dis)covered through archaeological pursuits, since there is no initial imprint which is not itself always already effaced. "Procedure" is proceeding through endless erasure; such is the procedure of writing and the (hi)story of textuality: "the text is a process of demonstration ... is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse."  

The Unnamable proceeds (how?) against its own erasure, is constantly threatening to efface itself even as it proceeds. Such is an aporia, not pure and never simple. The procedure is doubtful, is doubting, but unlike Descartes' aporia finds no consolation in a transcendental (something/one which escapes textuality) signified. Playing upon the board(er)s between arrival and departure, the margins and the text, the text of The Unnamable is always at risk, the risk of its own effacement (through "un"questioning, "un"-ravelling), and the play proceeds nonetheless, even though "it hasn't begun, he's only preluding, clearing his throat, alone in his dressing-room, he'll appear any moment, he'll begin any moment." (p.381)

So far (both: this distance and to this point, indefinite) has the novel begun, or are we still waiting for it to begin? We have explored the provisional boundaries of the first few lines of The Unnamable, not to establish limits, which would be impossible, but to establish how the provisional opening of the novel is not the beginning, is merely a self-effacing project, projecting both outside towards other
texts (Malone Dies, Molloy, this text) and inside towards the "begins" within its own (we will later problemetize this concept of ownership) text. Any marginal limits are always effaced and expanding; the pre-liminaries are (n)ever finished: "I thought we had done with preliminaries. No, no, we have all been here forever." (p.293)

Unquestionably there are particular protocols of reading, protocols of beginnings, and The Unnamable is not blind to these. Yet the beginning markers are always questioned; "perhaps that is how it began?" Beckett writes that "perhaps" is a key word in his plays; "perhaps" is both "maybe" or "maybe not," questioning and suspending, continuing the project, the promise of the beginning to come (enter the text). Traditionally, protocols of beginning are easily identifiable, the signs indicate "this is the beginning;" this leads Edward Said to celebrate what proceeds from the beginning, the different elements of each story: "developing from them [beginnings] are orders of dispersion, of adjacency, and of complementarity ... [the beginning is] a multileveled coherence of dispersion." But Said would have it that beginnings are methods of unification which lead to dispersion; there is, however, always already dispersion in the beginning; "In the beginning was the pun. And so on." (Murphy, p.65)

As a novel that (n)ever begins, The Unnamable questions the very premises of narrative; traditionally all narratives have a story and a teller. Where Joyce in Finnegans Wake draws all narratives ever written into a unifying whole
encompassed by the beginning and the end, one which leads into the other in a circular pattern, Beckett places the whole issue of narrative in question by allowing the moments of beginning and ending to slip away, to efface themselves by questioning themselves. Kellogg and Scholes claim that Joyce celebrates the narrative form, while Beckett demonstrates its meaninglessness and hopelessness; Said claims that unlike Beckett's writing, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* "is a form of perpetual writing, always at a beginning." Joyce's writing demonstrates that narrative is unified, and Beckett's that unification is nostalgia, a dream of completion for Man yearning for stability and meaning. For Beckett, narrative is an endless risk taking, risking incompletion, risking lack and meaninglessness. Nothing is sure or safe, and to succumb to nostalgia is to admit palliation, to be duped:

The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones. To hunger, thirst, lust, every day afresh and every day in vain, after the old prog, the old booze, the old whores, that's the nearest we'll ever get to felicity. (*Watt*, p.43)

Now (?), what of a novel that (n)ever begins (is never "at" the beginning), that questions the ability to begin, that (n)ever ends, that ever "goes on," that ever promises, questions the promises and questions the questions? There are stories, but impossible stories ("this hell of stories") which equally never begin or end, which are forgotten in a faulty memory, which are not even a simulacrum of life (what Kellogg and Scholes deign to be the nature of narrative).
The stories of Mahood, Malone, Basil and Worm become incomplete vignettes, interrupted, disrupted and discontinued, although their completion is projected: "We must first, to begin with, go back to his beginnings and then, to go on with, follow him patiently through various stages ... let us go back as planned, afterwards we'll fall forward as projected. The reverse would be more like it." (p.352)

But the stories never go back or forward: "the mistake they make of course is to speak of him as if he really existed, in a specific place, whereas the whole thing is no more than a project for the moment." (p.371) The novel becomes projects for the moment, moments projected, never sequential; the projector throws the light forward, then shuts off: "Can it be that one day, off it goes on?" (p.291)

When Said writes about the "multilayered coherence of dispersion," we can only agree up to a point; the novel is indeed multi-layered and dispersive, but lacks the unifying element of coherence within the provisional boundaries of the novel.

If *The Unnamable* cannot be said to have "a" story (although it does contain multiple stories, fragmented and unconnected), and maintains that the projected moments are always provisional, then can we justifiably call it a novel, or even a narrative (a narrative "only beginning, though long since begun," p.366)? A narrative must have a structure of coherence; it must contain enough linearity throughout its dispersive elements to retain a unity. Even in modern texts, where the narrative is structured around an absence
(or an event which may or may not have occurred in the narrative) — the loss of virginity in *The Sound and the Fury*, the episode with H.C.E. in Phoenix Park in *Finnegans Wake*, the crime in *The Trial* — the narrative follows sequentially around the event. Narrative required a modicum of linearity, of sequentiality, that a moment comes from and moves towards another moment. *The Unnamable* recognizes the need, and subjects it to scrutiny:

All this business of a labour to accomplish, before I can end, of words to say, a truth to recover, in order to say it before I can end, of an imposed task, once known, long neglected, finally forgotten, to perform, I invented it all, in the hopes it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. (p.314)

The narrative does go on, without consolation, the discourse continues on its way — not on a metaphorical linear road between beginning and ending — without making headway. "Headway" implies a hierarchy, a gain, a goal achieved; although the narrative (?) is a gain, it is again and again going on, projecting, promising, catching itself promising and promising never to promise again.

We must look at the lies, all the lies, be all eyes, al(l)ies to the lies in order to analyze them, eye the annals (the "vast tracts of time" in *How It Is*) of lies, of chronology, and an(n)alyze the chronology of chronologies in narrative, the (hi)story of narratives ("it's a chronicle"), of beginnings and endings. For Beckett, the labour is not to remember (re-member, piece together again) the history
of narratives, rather the labour is to lose the memory, to refuse to be a member of tradition; the labour is the performance of what must ultimately be an alliance (all-eye-ance) to/with tradition. With eyes regarding the performance (per-form-ance) on stage three of the trilogy (on which stage of the annals?), we see the attention to the protocols of beginnings throughout the text, attention as per form (ance). The Unnamable recovers the task of originality, of difference, at once saving (recovering) and covering over its origins (origin-annals).

To call traditions of beginnings and endings lies, is not to successfully dispense with tradition; as Derrida points out, it is not so easy to step outside tradition. The Unnamable must eye the forms of tradition, as per form (ance), of beginnings and endings, and while de-forming (or attempting to deform, disfigure the figurations of beginnings and endings) accept a necessary alliance with other texts (more form-alized) texts). Beckett necessarily uses the form in order to step away, step out of the road. Formed therefore, is a formal alliance (alliance of forms), a marriage contract (con: with "tracts of time"), from which will issue difference (difference is the issue) after the labour: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hold, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps." (Godot, p.58)

Although originality (in difference) is born of the alliance between The Unnamable and other texts of a traditional
nature, there cannot be an originary text; the origins are always lost somewhere in the road, somewhere between births. If originality is traditionally a form of priority and precedence, then what precedes the text must be the original; and yet, texts are always born of other texts: in the beginning was the plural (the word and God, the pun, the forbears: "these notions of forbears ... where do they come to me from?" p.294). Since all texts are part of textuality, and of continuing unfolding textuality, all writing is a losing and gaining ground, but not a making headway, for that would celebrate primacy. The Unnamable is a step (stage) in textuality, a stride of/in a tradition which is never static, born of (borne by) a greater text always already recovering itself, erasing itself with questions. The quest(ion) of the long run, the race of striding away, of going on (and on-going), is that of The Unnamable; the question of beginnings always erases itself in another beginning as it races from beginning to beginning, (t)races over the paths of textuality, goes over the (t)races of other writing, and is born of the (t)race of other writing, in a formal alliance with what has walked before on the road "between," what has pre-ambled: "I hope this preamble will soon come to an end." (p.302)

The preamble never "ends" because there is always the obligation to begin again, "to start again from nowhere, from no one and from nothing and win to me again, to me here again, by fresh ways to be sure, or by the ancient ways, unrecognizable at each fresh faring." (p.302) The text turns back on itself,
back to its beginnings (?), its fresh faring of "Where now? Who now? When now?" and, in a sense, provides the promised answer to the questions; the textual forbears are always unrecognizable, always the traces of the ancient ways, the annals of lies, the allies. The Unnamable bears the traces (unrecognizable) of textuality, and is conversely borne by them; The Unnamable bears the traces of its difficult birth in its performance of the labour, performance on the board(er)s between texts in the third stage (or "each step along the way"). As the text is accomplished, The Unnamable must become an accomplice to all texts, and the reader of the novel an accomplice to all that lies (the lies) in textuality, an accomplice to the play between the novel and other texts: "the infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay," (p.349) although "the essential is never to arrive anywhere." (p.338)

We have preambled with the text as accomplices to its lies, accomplices who are implicated in the lies; we have proceeded from the three interrogative pronouns which opened the text and the spirit of interrogation, the urgent interrogation demanding where? who? when? Interrogations always demand the truth, demand the disclosure, uncovering and discovering of the truth; that is their business ("all this business"). They demand the truth appear (the appearance of truth), summon the truth to appear with a summons, and make a summation of the evidence. Had the spirit of the interrogation given way (conceded) to the truth, then the
sum would have been the beginning, would have been the end of the beginning, ending it before it began; but the spirit of interrogation does give way, give a way, give away (to) the beginning, causes it to be lost. The questions re-cover themselves as the beginning covers over itself; and yet there is the quest(ion) of/for truth, a truth to recover (to find again, lose again), a truth to say before the novel can end. All this business of truth though is all lies, lies to be recovered; and the truth is neglected and forgotten, erased by the memory. It cannot be revived, recovered by interrogation; the summons is neglected, ignored. The interrogation of the three questions, and the subsequent questioning of the questions insures that the text leads but never arrives, only arrives at the beginning again, which is never "a" beginning, only a beginning again:

And now I feel it's about to begin. (p.248)  
Things are only beginning, though long since begun.(p.366)  
It's only beginning, it hasn't begun. (p.381)  
It's only beginning. (p.398)  
Today is the first day, it begins. (p.400)  
If only I could give up, before beginning, before beginning again. (p.409)

and a beginning promise again (to begin).

The Unnamable's promises within promises effacing themselves project the beginning of the text, but they also project its ending, it(s) ending forward (toward) the ending, which is always already the beginning again: "The end begins, you go silent, it's the end, short-lived, you begin again." (p.394) The play between the beginning and the ending is confusion, a (con)fusion which does not allow either term
of the heterogeny to be lost; the end and beginning are always invoked as if they might "mean" something, as they do in traditional narratives. As an ending itself, an ending of the trilogy, The Unnamable plays with ending while effacing, (pr)ef(f)acing the ending and confusing, turning over, the two terms: "it's the end that is the worst, no, it's the beginning that is the worst, then the middle, then the end, in the end it's the end that is the worst." (p.395) And the end becomes the first in a series of endings which begin to subsume all the beginnings and endings throughout the trilogy, subsume in a confusion (joining but jumbling). The novel begins to play with the other novels: "It's night ... I'm looking for my mother to kill her ... it's raining." (Molloy) "I was hoping for something better, ... to see nothing ... now in shadow now in light ... shut up looking out of a window. (Malone Dies)." (p.391,2) As The Unnamable proceeds towards its own ending (which is another beginning), it posits the other moments of beginnings and endings, but only posits them as lies, as illusive (elusive); it posits its own end in the same way: "I'm going to stop, that is I'm going to look as if I had." (p.393) And the novel makes another promise, and again questions the promise.

The Unnamable moves back and forth over the trilogy, picking up the strands and threads of the other novels, weaving them into its own text(ile); as the novel proceeds, it also picks up the threads of its own text(ile), thereby causing the novel to fold over itself -- what Derrida would
call "invagination." Summoning forth its own interrogation and reworking the text, the novel becomes the culprit, guilty of interrogating itself: "the words fail, the breath fails, no it's something else, it's an indictment, a dying voice accusing ... a culprit is indispensable;" (p.411) the text accuses itself of failing to begin, of beginning failure, of beginning to fail (to end). The dying voice of the accuser (accusing where, when, who), however, is revived in the end, crosses over the borders of its death to come back in the end: "in the end it comes to that, to the survival of that alone, then the words come back, someone says I, unbelieving." (p.402) The promise of ending (the promising ending), and the promise of beginning (the beginning promise), move towards an abyss structure, a _mise en abîme_, move pro-mise (_en abîme_), moving back and forth over the textual fabric of the novel.

The end promises to recognize itself, to cognize itself again -- "in the end I'll recognize it, the story ... the end, the beginning, the beginning again" (p.413) -- by beckoning to the beginning to begin again so that it can be recognized as such, almost in the Proustian "involuntary memory" which presents the past as it never was present, represents a present that never was. Effacing (or facing) its own provisional origins, _The Unnamable_ can only recognize that there never were any real beginnings, and the beginnings are only provisional opening which come back to haunt the provisional endings, as if in a remembered dream: "perhaps
it's a dream, all a dream ... dream, dream again ... never wake." (p.414) The Unnamable dreams its beginnings and endings, dreaming of the dream of origins and teleologies; like all dreams, the dreams are fragmented, fragmenting the points of departure and arrival, and never arriving at the departure point: "I've journeyed without knowing it." (p.413) The "long sonata of the dead" plays the dream, the dream sonata perhaps of another play, another play of effaced beginnings and endings ("sleep without dreaming ... child of this world of illusion ... this world of endless change ... may the Lord of Heaven be merciful to you upon your journey"). The play in the textuality of The Unnamable always plays over the borders of the margins, and participates in the larger play of textuality.

If we, like the novel, go back over the beginnings of this text, which originated provisionally from the opening of the novel The Unnamable, we discover how, far from being a structure of unity from which issues dispersion, The Unnamable is dispersive from its opening; it spills over itself and effaces itself in its beginnings and beginning questions. Traditionally, narratives are teleological, moving towards an end to create a unified whole, moving through the middle, which can only be a middle because bounded by static moments of beginning and ending. The middle itself, the "between" part (between the acts of opening and closing), is entirely dependent upon the other two parts. In The Unnamable, though, the novel becomes the
"between," unbounded by beginnings and endings, spilling over or out of the openings, the holes (wholes). Instead of being a whole novel, in the Aristotelian sense, at any rate, the novel is always the flux between beginnings and endings which cannot hold the novel together (the centre cannot hold, the centre is not whole). The novel can never be unified (wholed) by a reading, because it is always on the thres(hold) of escaping out of the openings (holes) that it has created, escaping through "the space between here and the door ... what lies between us." (p.411)

Perhaps it's the door, perhaps I'm at the door ... I can depart, all this time I've journeyed without knowing it, it's I now at the door. (p.413)
Perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story. (p.414)

Perhaps the novel will end in opening on to the ending, open the ending, be open-ended (or an ended opening, an end opening), open on to the final (end) act (performance) in its last run (the long run). The threshold provides the edge (the border; the margins) that can be crossed over, opens the possibility of being on the brink (of ending or beginning); it is (n)either the end, (n)or the beginning of the story, an indeterminable moment on the brink, teetering first backwards then forwards. Swaying (playing) back and forth between the beginning and ending, the threshold is the ultimate difference dividing the "between." At the threshold, the door swings either inwards or outwards, allows departure out of the story or arrival to the beginning of the story; it is the infinitesimal lag, ("the thing that divides
the world in two, on the one side, the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as 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", p. 383), the "between."

At the threshold of the story, The Unnamable becomes the preamble, the confused exordium, the beginning; the novel allows the opening, the (o)pen(n)ing (penning) of another novel, of continued writing (penning the story). The novel becomes its own palimpsest, effacing itself entirely (wholely), offering itself to be rewritten (written over). The threshold is the curtain which divides the performances of the acts (of writing), the curtain in front of the board(er)s of the stage (of writing). At the threshold, the novel opens on to the final act, the final play (of the infinitude of play), the endgame -- "Me to play. Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing." (Endgame, p. 82)
The endgame can be either the end of play (end the play in a check-mate, end the play itself), or the beginning of an end that never comes (the pieces can avoid each other indefinitely in a stale-mate), an end that is suspended, that is left hanging on, (thres)holding on -- "I can't go on. I'll go on." (p. 414)

The final act of the performance (the "labour to perform," the laboured per-form-ance), effaces its own finality through the dual movement of the threshold (the endgame) which (dis) plays its heterogeny, its radical (with the dual roots of
literal and figurative meaning) alterity, and allows the going on (despite the cant of not being able). The end susp(ends) itself, goes on despite itself and spills over its own project. Like all the other projects (and promises and questions) in The Unnamable, the final project is left to efface itself before moving on (pre-ambling). "Can it be that one day, off it goes on;" and off goes the text (both in the sense of moving off towards something else, and turning off the text, turning the text back onto itself); or "that one day I simply stayed in." (p.291) The borders cannot contain the play of the thre(e)shold (the trilogy), of the going on; the play goes on (as it must go on), and loses itself (looses itself) in textuality where it (n)ever "has done with losing."

The Unnamable does not contain any "truths to be recovered;" it cannot even contain itself, hold itself inside its provisional marginal borders. The beginnings and endings as boundaries are always lost in the flux of the middle, the between, the threshold. Any reading of the novel must recognize that the traditional tools of narrative (beginnings, middles and endings) are not absent from the text, rather they are suspended by questions, by "perhapses" and by an effacing movement of the text, moving back and forth over itself, making itself at once preamble and end. The traditional signs of beginnings are present throughout the text -- in the beginning, I begin, I will begin again etc. -- but they are scattered through the text in such abundance that they
cease to have any "meaning" as beginning movements; all the
signs are emptied through overuse and questions to the point
that we can no longer identify the traditional aspects of
beginnings and endings with their appearance in The Unnamable.

The play (in all senses of the word) of The Unnamable,
always on the threshold of textuality while in textuality
(always on the threshold of an end or a beginning), does
not display the meaninglessness or hopelessness of narratives,
Kellogg and Scholes would have it, nor does it display
Joycean celebration of narrative form; it (dis)plays
traditional narrative forms by playing them against themselves.
There is never a static moment in The Unnamable, never a
unity, a reassuring certitude which is the end of play; only
play always risking non-meaning, risking losing itself while
it goes on, only "projects for the moment." Any reading
which recognizes that play in The Unnamable must engage in
the same (but not identical) play with the text. A reading
must take the same risks (of "unbelieving"), and play the
field (the threshold) between the text of the reading and
the text it is reading, play the tympanum, and allow the
play to go on.
Footnotes

2 Said, p.5.
3 Said, p.245.
5 Said, p.373.
7 Said, p.261.
III

Eyeing the Subject
Scene: A white stage
(Light on) One black
character
Actor stands composed,
delivers speech:
the written characters
composing
The Unnamable
the margins

Who speaks? -- subject "I": the actor
What does he speak about -- subject "I": about himself

Commencez:

I say I. Unbelieving.
I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me. (p.291)

The actor (the illusionist) seems to speak (gives the illusion of speaking), seems to be the speaking subject, but it is not as himself that he speaks; he speaks as an actor, acting the role of the speaking subject (assuming the role of the subject). He seems to speak about himself (about "it" -- the self objectified), but only as himself as actor, the subject of the speech. As a first person pronoun, which according to grammatical habit indicates an individual speaker, the "I" can only indicate the actor in his role of saying "I", not the actor as a "real" individual, a man (speaking subject "I"). The "I" can never refer to the actor when he leaves the stage, only to the "I" of the actor the spectator sees in the spectacle, the show (the illusion, lightened stage). The speaking subject never speaks about himself as speaking subject, nor is he the subject of the speech; all is illusion, only seems to be, as the "I" only seems to say himself and speak about himself. The "I"s, the indicators
(the semes) do no more than indicate one who can never be outside the realms of the discourse: a not "I" who is nonetheless speaking about who he is not.

The "I" which says "I" is unbelieving, does not believe that he (it) is "I"; the "I" shifts from the first person pronoun subject to an indefinite pronoun "it": "it is not I." And thus a pronoun (already a substitute for a proper noun) is substituted for another pronoun, indefinitely. What the "I" who speaks does not believe is the unity of the "I", the oneness of the "I", the individuality (that which cannot be divided, the indivisibility) of the "I", which the "I" always claims for itself; it claims the unity of the subject (the speaking subject and the words spoken about the subject; when "I" say "I", "I" mean "I", I refer to me, to myself, when I say I).

"It is not that their meaning escapes me, my own escapes me just as much." (p. 294) What escapes is the meaning of the "I"; what always already has escaped is the uniqueness of the "I", which, when spoken by the subject, cannot refer to (cannot mean) "I" as the individuated subject, the subject of the individual. The individual is always divided; the actor speaks and says "I", but cannot refer to anything but a subject that he is not; the subject becomes fragmented, even as it seems to be unified, seems to speak its own voice about itself. The sovereign unity of the "I" only hides (in the illusion, the light) what has already escaped, hides the dispersion, the fragmentation of itself. As Nietzsche points
out in *The Will to Power*, the subject is the result of interpretation, is a fiction of unification (part of the "grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed"\(^1\)), which may be a belief but has "nothing to do with truth."\(^2\) The "I" sayer in *The Unnamable*, however, is unbelieving while he says "I".

Although the sovereignty and the unity of the subject who speaks has been accepted and celebrated in the Western metaphysical tradition (as Nietzsche writes, "the subject: this is the term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality"\(^3\)), our belief in this unity has never extended to the speaking actor on the stage. Do we not know that the actor delivers his lines, that he is prompted by a script, that his speech is not his own words but rather the words of another -- some other authority which never appears on the stage? The actor as subject delivering a subject is delivered from the possibility of being the subject; even as he speaks, he is effaced, as he says "I", he is already not referring to himself, referring to that which he is not. While we accept the heterogeny (with what? a willing suspension of disbelief?) between that which the actor seems to be when delivering his lines and that which the actor actually is as not an actor, not the "I" of the speech, what is the connection, the link, the knot which ties the seams (between who seems to speak and who speaks) between "I speak" and "it is not I;" a seem (seam) between the "I" and the (k)not "I".
The seam (seem) discovers itself as an illusion, only what seems to sew together the "I" and the "not I", which knots the seams between the two in a kind of invisible mending, where does the "I" end and the (k)not "I" begin? Invisible mending which leaves no trace of where the difference occurs, where the knot is, where the knot is not, allows the distinction while constantly eluding the seam (the semantic topos) in the seem, the illusion. The seam (seme, sign of meaning) escapes by being invisible; but because the semantic trace of the (k)not is retained, the heterogeny continues between the words and the speaker, between the actor and the script, between the subject speaking and the speaking subject. As the seam (seem) signals its own disappearance (the disappearance of the unified subject), the unity of the "I" (the one, the sovereign "I") fragments: "is not this rather the place where one finishes vanishing?" (p.293) The definite subject vanishes into the indefinite; the "I" which should be the individual (the indivisible subject), vanishes into the invisible (the in-"di"-visible already retains the trace of its own "di"-visibility in the "di", and becomes invisible), the in(de)finite (the infinite "it" which cannot contain the individual, yet retains the trace of the I(t)). The "I" is distorted by the slash across which forms the "t", the slash which is a kind of deletion, a "not" this, a "not" "I".

As the oneness is shaken by its own disappearance, something comes to "in"habit the subject, something which
is not the subject enters the subject; a text, a script
goes into the subject: "it fills me, it clamours against my
walls, it is not mine, I can't stop it." (p.307) The "I"
is filled by the "I"t, that which the "I" is not: "What
puzzles me is the thought of being indebted for this infor-
mation to persons with whom I can never have been in contact.
Can it be innate knowledge ... innate knowledge of my mother,
for example, is that conceivable? Not for me. She was one
of their favorite subjects, of conversation." (p.297) The
text comes from a "they", another indefinite pronoun (indi-
viduals unknown), with whom the "I" has never had any contact;
the text is conceived elsewhere, issued by: a mother which
cannot have made contact with her issue -- her issue as
either the speaker "I" or the subject of the discourse; and
yet she in turn is a favorite "subject" of conversation.
Again the subject is fragmented: can the mother of the text
be the subject of her own conversation, or is the subject
of the mother already the subject of the "they"s conversation?
The mother does not conceive the text, at least not for "me".
Thus, what is puzzling is the thought of being indebted to
an authority which is itself fragmented: an authority which
is not unified, which is a "they" or a mother which engenders,
with is "both the teller and the told."

Who then has authorized the text, the script which the
speaker delivers? Surely not an author, a unified subject,
one "named" perhaps Samuel Beckett whose name appears on the
cover of the text Three Novels? The notion of the author
who executes a text has already been executed at length by
the likes of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault (unfortunately
we are forced to use these proper names as indicators --
for Derrida this is "naming" the problem of authority in
traditional metaphysics); for Nietzsche, the death of the
great authority has already been heralded by the madman with
the lantern (the light of illumination, of illusion). The
"one" who conceives the text, who gives birth to the text
is as disunified as the "one" who speaks the text: "What
matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's
speaking?" (Stories and Texts for Nothing, p.85) All that
the speaker can ever be indebted to is language, is writing,
is the script given to him -- "the sinecure handed down from
generation to generation." (p.315) No one author can ever
accept the credit of writing the text, can ever receive the
credits for writing the script, just as the actor can never
be credited with producing the words for the spectator; in
writing, or textuality, there is no author of a text, there
is only writing, writing itself over other writing:

I am round and hard ... all the rest I renounce,
including this ridiculous black which I thought
for a moment worthier than grey to enfold me.
What rubbish this stuff about light and dark ...
But do I roll, in the manner of a true ball? ...
What reams of discourse I could elicit from this
seemingly so legitimate preoccupation. But which
would not be credited to me. (p.306)

The "I" becomes metaphorically the ball, round and hard,
which rolls over, blackening the whiteness, eliciting reams
of discourse; the "I" becomes the instrument of writing,
writing itself as the subject of writing, but unable to take
credit for the writing. The "I" of writing can therefore not be credited with producing the discourse, just as the "I" of the actor can never be credited with referring to himself. Writing "de"scribes itself, as the "I" "de"-scribes (takes itself away from writing, becomes a "not I," a not(a) mark on the page) itself in its anonymity, its lack of credit. As the black of the text (the light and dark of the space and character) enfolds the "me" of writing and the written "I", it consumes the marks of an individuated "I" and "me" while eliciting the discourse of writing; it enfolds the credits of any individual authority and loses them. Like the "I" of the speaking subject, of the actor speaking, the "I" that elicits discourse is pre-occupied, is already filled with that which it is not. The "I" slips illicitly away from itself (renounces itself), just as writing slips illicitly away from the credited "I" (credited with authority over the text) through the speaking subject (another "I" which cannot be credited) and escapes into textuality (its meaning escapes); the unlawfulness of the illicit departure of authority in writing is what makes the pre-occupation only "seemingly so legitimate." Such is the puzzle of debtedness to a credited authority, an authority which is always lost as the text escapes, as writing enfolds the credits.

The subject is problematic in The Unnamable because the "I" is never the subject, always denies that it talks about itself, refers to itself; "strange task, which consists of speaking of oneself." (p.311) As the "I" is always
pre-occupied in/with itself, it denies its own primacy.
The first person singular pronoun "I" should indicate primacy,
as does the "one," the "alone" ("a": first letter, lone: one);
but what pre-occupies the "I" is the words of the others
(writing, language): "no words but the words of others."
(p. 314) The words of the "I" can never be his own, can
never be about him, only about an anonymous "I", an unpossessed
"me": his voice is always already inhabited by the voice of
writing:

It is his voice which has often, always, mingled
with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely ... 
his voice continued to testify for me, as though
woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I 
was, what I was ... he may come back again. Then
my voice, the voice, would say, That's an idea,
now I'll tell one of Mahood's stories ... to make
me think I was a free agent. But it would not be
my voice, not even in part. (p. 309)

The voice of the other (of "him," of "it" "bah, any old
pronoun will do", p. 343) always mingles with the voice of
the "I" and robs the "I" of his primacy, of his unity; the
subject can never be unified if it cannot claim sovereignty,
uniqueness of voice, individuated "I"ness. To be a free
agent would have to entail being apart from language, outside
of the field of writing, but the subject (?) "I" in The
Unnamable sees that there is no existence outside of the
field of writing, just as there is no existence inside the
field of writing -- at least existence in the sense of a
"being" in language. As Lacan writes, the subject must
recognize his own being-for-death in his own subversion into
the language of the other: "Can that be called a life which
vanishes when the subject is changed?" (p.353) There is always only the weaving of voices, the weaving of the textile, as the subject is always eluded in the mingled discourse of another (but not only "one" other).

According to Alan Thiher, the first person pronoun traditionally confers fictional being,\(^5\) acknowledges "a" persona, perhaps a narrator or teller of the tale; but the role of the teller is already inhabited by the trace of the weave of other voices. There are no free agents, free to speak uninhabited by another; there is no ownership of words or of voices, not even in part (in parts perhaps). The part of the speaking subject is parted even as he stands apart (alone), does not allow for the part of the self apart from the discourse. The subject's part parts itself from itself with the mingling voices which drown out its part, drown its part in a sea of words: "my voice ... so weak, so far, that it was like the sea, a far calm sea dying." (p.309) Does the "I" in *The Unnamable*, the lone actor speaking (not) himself, (not) about himself see his drowning, testify to his own drowning (another testifies, however) in the sea of words, lose sight of himself in the loss of unity, in the mingling sea, lose his "I"s? The "I" can only sight (cite) the other, can never take possession of the "I", even while he eyes it; language prevents the "I" from being "mine" -- the "I"dea is never "mine."

The subject is always already lost, drowned in a sea of voices:

Where is nature, where is man, where are you, what
are you seeking, who is seeking, seeking who you are, supreme aberration, where you are, what you're doing, what you've done to them, what they've done to you, prattling along, where are the others, who is talking, not I, where am I, where is the place where I have always been, where are the others, it's they are talking, talking to me, talking of me, I hear them, I'm mute; (p.385,6)

drowned in a sea of subjects ("you," "they," "others," "who," etc.) and objects ("you," "them," "others," "me," etc.). All pronouns in The Unnamable are interchangeable; the "I" switches to "one," to "you," to "he," to "it," back and forth questioning always the status of the subject, which vanishes when the subject is changed. There is no centralized subject: "I like to think I occupy the centre, but nothing is less certain;" (p.295) nor is there a subject which can contain the discourse. Once the subject begins to question itself as subject, the "I" questions its "I"ness, it is already lost as subject; the subject must objectify itself to ask about itself, become the "not I" to question the "I" and vice versa; and if all language is already the words of the other, then the subject can only be a "project for the moment," thrown forward towards its own drowning, lost even as it surfaces, even as it "seems" to appear on the page. The "I" is effaced by its own questions, effaced by the script and lost in textuality because never possessed; it is always interrupted by the "not," by its loss of primacy even as it is the "first" person "singular."

As a project for the moment, the "I" is alone, a loan for the moment: "I have to say, when I speak, Who speaks?" (p.390,1)

To ask the question "Who speaks?" is merely to hypothesize another subject, another subject to substitute for the "I";
but in *The Unnamable*, the subject shifts back and forth through all different pronouns and never establishes, makes static, a single speaking subject. Traditional criticism of *The Unnamable* must posit a central consciousness behind the "fictions," a central unified subject which commands the play of the subjects. But to posit a centralized consciousness is to affirm what *The Unnamable* cannot affirm at all; to posit a subject behind the effaced subject is to posit an individual (one that cannot be divided), an individual "cause" primary to the secondary "effects" of the shifting subjects. According to Nietzsche "the subject is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum."\(^6\) *The Unnamable* merely indicates that a subject, the subject, cannot be isolated, cannot be unified, that the subject cannot be centralized -- nothing is less certain. For Nietzsche, "the sphere of a subject constantly growing or decreasing, the centre of the system constantly shifting; in cases where it cannot organize the appropriate mass, it breaks into two parts."\(^7\) The subject parts from itself, examines itself, becomes an "I", but a "not I," speaking about "me," but a "not me." And thus, the question "Who speaks?" in *The Unnamable* is never allowed an answer; there is never a fixed position for the subject which always occupies a position other than itself.\(^8\)

*The Unnamable* heralds the loss of the unified subject, just as Derrida heralds the loss of the sovereign subject: "Henceforth, what is called the speaking subject is no longer
the person himself, or the person alone, who speaks. The speaking subject discovers his irreducible secondarity, his origin is always eluded; for the origin is already eluded on the basis of an organized field of speech in which the speaking subject vainly seeks a place that is always missing; 9 and Beckett writes,

Now at least I know where I am, as far as my origins go, I mean my origins considered as a subject of conversation, that's what counts. The moment one can say, Someone is on his way ... agreed, agreed, I who am on my way, words bellying out my sails, am also that unthinkable ancestor of whom nothing can be said. But perhaps I shall speak of him some day, and of the impenetrable age when I was he ... yes perhaps I shall speak of him, for an instant, like an echo that mocks. (p.352,3)

For Beckett, the origin becomes the subject of conversation (that's what counts); the subject "I" changes to "one," "someone" and "he" back and forth, seeking to find his origins in another subject, or find another subject who could describe the "I"s origins. But the ancestor is unthinkable, nothing can be said about him; the place of the subject's origins is always missing, is impenetrable through the words which, although bellying out the sails, cannot allow the subject to see. The organized field of speech becomes the sea or words, the air of words (with no substance) which pushes the craft along ("so there is an ocean then," p.314), but causes the subject to lose himself, elude himself on his way. Even if we push back towards an origin that can be spoken (the age when I was he.) for an instant, the origin is only an echo, the secondary sound which echoes what was never said, the representation of what was never a first, originary
present, a present always missing, always already an echo
mocking itself. The origin as subject of conversation, or
the originary subject which seeks in vain to find its origins
by asking who speaks, is always already on his way, never
still: "I am far ... far from my subject too, let's go back
to it, it's gone ... where was I, oh yes, my subject, no
longer there, or no longer the same." (p.391)

To go back to the subject, the subject of who speaks,
the subject of the conversation, the subject "I", subjected
to scrutiny, to subject the origins and the originary/ating
voice to view, is only to discover that the "where was I?"
is the originary question, that the subject is always missing,
always "no longer there, or no longer the same." The subject
is always vainly seeking -- "who is seeking, seeking who you
are, supreme aberration, where you are ... who is talking,
not I, where am I?" (p.385,6) -- but the identity of the
subject is never the same and never there. "Perhaps all they
have told me has reference to a single existence, the con-
fusion of identities being merely apparent and due to my
inaptitude to assume any." (p.330) As the speaking subject
cannot be a single existence, cannot be identical with himself,
is always not there or not the same, the subject simply
flickers, assuming any identity, taking on, casting off any
pronoun, any identifying mark of the speaking subject, be
it pronouns or proper names (Mahood, Basil, Malone, Worm,
etc.). There is no possibility of establishing or fixing
a speaking subject, an "I"dentity, a single unified existence;
the "I" never represents an "I"ndividual, nor the "you," or "he." Over the organized field of language, all possibility of establishing individuality is lost:

It has not yet been our good fortune to establish with any degree of accuracy what I am, where I am, whether I am words among words, or silence in the midst of silence ... what I am doing, how I manage, if it's I who speaks ... if it's I who seek, find, lose, find again, lose again, seek in vain, seek no more, if it's I what it is, and if it's not I, who it is, and what it is. (p.388,9

What is lost is the subject, the subject of accuracy and the accurate subject; even the seeker (the seeking subject, the speaking subject) has lost himself seeking in vain. The "I am" or "I am not I" are in words (but not in words alone, only in words with other words); to look inwards towards a centralized "I" is to find it missing between the Moment and the Speaking Subject. The silence which irrupts in the midst of silence does not conceal the unspoken, unspeaking subject as a unified consciousness thinking of itself as subject, but only speaking in the words of the other (the objectified other), because the "truth to recover," if, as Western metaphysics would have it, there is a truth (about the sovereign consciousness, the unified ego, thinking subject), is "all lies." To make headway, make our way towards the head -- with thinking brain, seeing eye, speaking mouth (or the perfect unity of consciousness speaking to itself, pure auto-affection) -- is a lie, lies lost. Silence itself is interrupted by the letter "I" which must exist outside itself; silence cannot hold itself apart from the "I" that is in its midst (the silence). Even the silence cannot retain its
unity, just as the words cannot retain their unity, their (uni) oneness, their "I"ness. All identity is lost in the vertiginous irruption of words (subjects) into silence and vice versa; all "I"ness is nought:

The words are everywhere, inside me, outside me ... I'm in words, made of words, others' words ... all words, the whole world is here with me ... I'm all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, whenever I find me, leave me, go towards me, come from me, nothing ever but me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray, I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet, and nothing else, yes, something else, that I'm something quite different, a quite different thing, a wordless thing in an empty place ... where nothing stirs, nothing speaks, and that I listen. (p.386)

The "I" is at once between words, surrounded by words, dispersing (dispensing) words, unifying words, only part of words which are particles of him, is the dust of words which can never be unified (settled), and is the listener who never speaks. Grammatically, "I" is a particle (and a fragment), both a word and letter, the smallest denominator (de-nominator: that which takes the name away, although a proper pronoun, that which takes the proper name away while replacing it, substituting for it) of a greater whole, and is also the whole itself (a word). "A" is another particle, and both "I" and "a" claim the distinction of being the smallest words, words which are merely one letter, barely words at all. "I" and "a" cite the space between the word and the letter, are either words or letters, or both; the "I" is both the letter in all these words, the particle of meaning, and a quite
different thing, a wordless thing (different from itself). As a particle, the dust of words, the letter "I" participates in the creation and destruction of Man -- Man made from the dust (of words) who returns to the dust (of words); man becomes words from dust to dust, from sky to ground or vice versa; not only becomes words (as the flesh made word), but has always already been inscribed in words. The particle of *The Unnamable* is another particle merging and falling away from/to textuality, as it participates in the (hi)story of Man's creation and demise, or the creation and demise of the "I am," the "I speak," the "I write." The "I" desires to be the origin of his own story, history, and continues to reposit itself throughout the novel; but nothing is less certain than the locus of the "I" or the voice of the "I". As Nietzsche writes, "We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, eg. the word 'I' ... these are perhaps the horizons of our knowledge."

At the horizons of our knowledge, between the ground and sky (or lack of ground and sky), we set up a word, an "I", as if it were certain, a contained point (word, letter or *stigmê*) and celebrate its unity, its ability to contain the world (our world; our words) in what we call the ego, the self, the individual. But at that point "between," our ignorance begins; we are ignorant of the origins of the "I" as it appears in language, as it fails to present itself as individual, as we listen to another say "I", being denied our ownership of the term; that "I" is not me, but the "I" of another. While the point seems clear, there is always
already the "not I" which must occupy the empty place -- Lacan writes that "empty speech" is the speech "where the subject seems to be talking in vain about someone who, even if he were his spitting image, can never become one."\(^{11}\) What appears to be "me" talking about "me" is only the image of "me," and "I'm something quite different;" language can only present a simulacrum of "me" or "I". "I" always lose myself, lose myself as subject from the moment "I" begin to speak. The simulacrum is all that appears; "I" only "seem" to be "me." "I" am only the actor delivering the lines which say "I", but are not referring to me, as "I" am something quite different as "I" only listen to myself speak, knowing that it is not "I", that "I" am silent (mute).

Even at the horizons of ignorance when the "I" desires to speak about himself, while recognizing the impossibility of achieving the accurate words to describe himself, the "I" is always making himself an object, even while designating himself as the subject of the discourse: "the subject who thinks he can accede to himself by designating himself in a statement, is no more than ... an object,"\(^{12}\) no more than a part of a total function that produces the statement. Thus the subject "I" who seeks to speak on the subject of himself, becomes an object of the discourse, the subject becomes its object. In attempting to discover who the "I" as subject is, the "I" attempts to look behind language or look beyond the "I" for what has caused the speech, the discourse; as Nietzsche writes, "Our 'understanding of an
event' has consisted in our inventing a subject which was made responsible."\(^{13}\) but the ensuing invention is only "a thing like all others: a simplification with the object of defining the force which posits, invents, thinks, as distinct from all individual positing, inventing, thinking as such. Thus a capacity as distinct from all that is individual."\(^{14}\) All that can ever speak is language speaking itself:\(^{15}\) "Can it be of me I'm speaking, is it possible, of course not ... in any case it's not a question of speaking of me, but of speaking." (p.392)

With the fracturing and dispersion of the subject into a multiplicity of possible subjects or objects, the subject necessarily loses all its traditional importance; all that maintains importance is writing, writing itself, as a process in textuality. The speaking subject can no more hold the centre or the concept of individuality; the terms necessarily lose all their traditional "meaning" and the "question of speaking me" is effaced, relegated to words, to "speaking."

That's all words ... all words there's nothing else ... they're going to abandon me ... you must say words, as long as there are any ... until they say me, perhaps they have said me already ... I don't know, I'll never know. (p.414)

Even if there were "a" subject, and "I" as a unified speaking subject, saying "I" authentically, as it were, the "I" would never recognize whether he had said himself or not; enslaved in language, because a part of language, the "I" (n)ever says himself unknowingly. The "perhaps" effaces all certainty, all reassuring certitude, all nostalgia for fixed origins
and the sovereign subject: "all words there's nothing else." As the words abandon "me," the loss is at once frightening and exhilarating: "the access to writing is the constitution of a free subject in the violent movement of its own effacement and its own bondage."\(^{16}\) And Dionysian freedom (from "me" as constituting subject) is violent abandon; not the abandonment of one left alone (of a lone "I" at the centre), but the abandonment of the one "I" with its cyclopian desire to suck all words into its mouth (the one, whose voice can claim them); "it's a poor trick that consists of ramming a set of words down your gullet." (p.324) The shaft always pierces his eye.

Whereas in The Unnamable, the "I" always effaces itself, always disfigures itself with the "not I;" in Not I the "I" is completely effaced from the text before it is even written, despite the presence of the solitary mouth delivering the story. The only pronoun is the third person which, the text tells us, the mouth "vehemently refuses to relinquish" even as the discourse stumbles periodically over "What? ... Who? ... No! ... She!" to the final "What? ... Who? ... No! ... She! ... SHE!" Although the mouth tells what "seems" to be a personal account, it never lapses into the "I" that might insure the illusion of a union between the teller and the tale, a union perhaps promised by the sole disembodied mouth; one which might have given "mouth-voice-words" the traditional unified effect of pure auto-affection. The only appearance of the "I" is in the form of "not I" in the title of the
play; the "I" can only be an absent presence in the text, a trace.

While the mouth is given prominence in *Not I*, even though it can never tell its "own" story as a first person narration, the mouth as "this venerable organ" is questioned in *The Unnamable*; in fact, the entire notion of voice is put into question. As Derrida has indicated, the primacy of the voice over the written word has long been part of the metaphysical tradition, beginning with the idea of the divine Logos and extending over the entire tradition, even to the point where "voice" has become one of the mainstay metaphors for narrative: "It's entirely a matter of voices, no other metaphor is appropriate." (p.325) But the metaphor of voice always presupposes one who speaks, a mouth which delivers the narrative, a consciousness thinking and delivering the narrative as it is thought (what Derrida calls the "s'entendre dire"). Once the notion of the subject as a unified whole (an "I") is problematized and put into play ("this flux of forms"), the metaphor of voice also becomes problematic.

Where in *Not I* Beckett dispenses with the head (where the sovereign subject would reside), in *The Unnamable* the head becomes an egg, an eye, a ball, a stomach, a mouth, then is discarded altogether; at the mouth stage of play, the voice is only the voice of another: a conjuror, an illusionist. "I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps, I don't remember, but it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist." (p.348)
The ventriloquist, who puts his voice inside the mouth or in the voice of another, never speaks his own voice; the voices are multiplied and become "a goodly company." (p.379)

But there is to be no marriage of voice and head, of thought and voice, of voice and "I" (not I (do)), only, in Derrida's word, a "dissemination," and in Beckett's, a urination or masturbation:

A nice mess we're in, the whole pack of us ...
I myself have been scandalously bungled ... I on whom all dangles, better still, about whom, much better, all turns, dizzily, yes yes, don't protest, all spins, it's a head, I'm in a head, what an illumination, sssst, pissed on out of hand. (p.372)

The wedding feast of the goodly company, with the "I" at the centre, is shattered (splattered) as are all notions of union in *The Unnamable*; the form of masturbation that the "I speak to myself" implies, is only a spinning outward of a kind of coital coil, a wet dream with no consummation:

"a sperm dying, of cold, in the sheets, feebly wagging its little tail ... born of a wet dream and dead before morning." (p.379,80) The head that becomes an egg will never have the consummation from the dying sperm on the sheet, just as the subject "I" will never have the union of himself and the written "I"; the head that thinks is lost, the mouth that speaks is lost and the "I" on the page is lost to textual play, feebly wagging its tail (tale) of itself, lost but not mourning.

As the subject (both the speaking subject and the subject of the subject) is put into a flux of play (or a play of flux) between the "I", "not I," "they," "he," "she" ("no sense
bickering about pronouns, and other parts of blather. The
subject doesn't matter," p. 360), or between the subject and
the object, there is no resolution, no dialectical union;
for the multitude of possible subjects (both speaking and
of conversation), and the absence of hierarchical arrangements
privileging one over the other, insures that nothing can be
aufgehoben. 17 There is no "cause" (which is Nietzsche's
conception of the interpreted subject) for the discourse;
the discourse continues without cause, as a series of effects;
but we should disregard the opposition, for such an opposition
is only "other parts of blather" in The Unnamable. As the
subject (?) "I" flickers throughout the textual flux, never
to be consummated, it is always dead before morning; or, as
Lacan writes, "between an extinction that is still glowing
and a birth that is retarded, 'I' can come into being and
disappear from what I say." 18 The "I" can only occupy that
"infinitesimal lag between arrival and departure," that
placeless place, timeless time, or, as Beckett calls it,
the "mess:" we have "to open our eyes and see the mess;" 19
or perhaps open the "I"s to the play of textuality and abandon
our "selves" to the mess of words.

The speaking subject can no longer contain the words
he speaks, nor can he find his place among the words; the
words do not belong to anything other than language, and
therefore cannot be contained or confined to a static locus.
No longer can the "I" establish anything even resembling
identity in language; the "I" can only seem to speak, forever
lost in textuality, effaced by his own dwelling place (which
has no locus or origins). To locate "a" subject in The Unnamable, or in all writing, is impossible, for the subject always escapes; how can we "designate a subject," writes Lacan, "when he does not even know that he is speaking?"\(^{20}\)

And thus, the actor who speaks, even knowing that he cannot speak of himself, cannot even enter onto the stage, although the stage as the textual field always beckons to the actor to go on. As a speaker, the actor cannot go on to deliver his script, yet as a figure in tetuality, the actor goes on and on in the weaving of textuality: "I can't go on, I'll go on." (p.414) The "I" as grammatical habit will continue, for we have no other tools: "there is no tool that does not belong to the metaphysical box;"\(^{21}\) but the "I" as sovereign subject can't go on after disruptions like The Unnamable. Forever lost, yet forever apparent, the "I" is always already at the threshold of the text, always already beginning a story that is "no longer there, or no longer the same."

The subject of the subject (both the speaking subject and the subject of the text) in The Unnamable has been the provisional subject of this text; but we can already see how the subject of the subject etc. becomes convoluted to the extent of being an abyssal structure. We must acknowledge the idea of the subject as a concern of Western metaphysics, but in The Unnamable we witness a violent rupture; as Derrida points out, all ruptures of hierarchies must be violent, because the hierarchies themselves are violent.\(^{22}\)
All we can do in a reading is play within the play of the rupture, and witness, while participating with abandon, the play that must result from the freeing of the sovereign subject in the play of textuality. With The Unnamable we can only participate in the problematic of the subject in writing, and no position is less secure than our positions as critics. From our shifting position inside the rupture of The Unnamable, always at the threshold, always risking our own effacement as reading subjects, and always risking the dispersion of the subject under investigation, we participate with abandon.
Footnotes


2 Nietzsche, p.269.

3 Nietzsche, p.269.


6 Nietzsche, p.269.

7 Nietzsche, p.270.

8 See Michel Foucault's discussion on the changing positions of the speaking subject in The Archeology of Knowledge, pp. 200-210.


10 Nietzsche, p.296.


13 Nietzsche, p.296.

14 Nietzsche, p.302.


17 See Hans-Joachim Schulz's This Hell of Stories (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), for his Hegelian reading of Beckett's novels, where he examines the various oppositions in flux before the aufhebung.


19 "Beckett by the Madeleine," an interview with Tom Driver


21 Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.xix.

IV

Unnaming the Text
There is no human being [although "language has created no forms to distinguish the real from the unreal"] so wretched as to have no name of his own, and yet the great majority of people ... are of supreme indifference to us. What is more, they look alike, or in all events the distinguishing marks are not conspicuous enough for the individuality of each to be upheld by words more meaningful than proper names.

Sir Alan Gardiner

We have the institution of proper names to talk in words about things which are not in themselves words and which need not be present when they are being talked about.

John Searle

What of the text The Unnamable (whose "title" we acknowledge by underlining, whose "right" of title or mark of ownership is enforced by the solid line beneath it), a text which appears "supremely indifferent" to the necessity of naming itself, of holding its "own" proper name, a text "so wretched" as to have no "real" name "of its own?" But the text is not in-different, for the title marks the difference between texts, is given an extra page and is honoured by full capital letters as it takes its place "before" the text, suspended over the text, claiming the text as its "own;" The Unnamable marks the difference between Molloy and Malone Dies, becomes the "distinguishing mark" distinguishing itself from all other texts by its title, its name. The Unnamable: the name, mark of distinction; it heralds a titled text, promises a proper text, and the white page
with blazoned capitals **THE UNNAMABLE** is thrown down before
the text's arrival, demonstrating its "ownership" in the
deed. The name insures that this is no anonymous text,
no text lacking in title, not a text "in name only," but
a named text, named for fame, so that we may conveniently
refer to the text with the metonymic contraction of its
"title."

While the named title is a distinguishing "appellation,"
the title's claim over the text, its deed of "ownership,"
its mark of "possession" is no different than the title
held over any text, in that most texts are marked by a title;
few texts are anonymous, few texts would forfeit the power
of naming and allow any title at all to appear before the
text. In other words, few texts are left to be invested
with a "common" name and mark their preference by a "proper"
name, a name which accedes to the propriety of textual naming;
for textual naming is proper. **The Unnamable** is in-different
to other texts by virtue of the fact that it has a name,
a title, that it has a proper title which can justifiably
claim a direct relationship with the text. If it were an
unnamed text, an anonymous text, it would be lacking the
consecrating name (the name of the father), would be nameless
and risk slipping into obscurity, into namelessness, or into
bastardy; it would have no name, and the titular power would
be relinquished.

Naming a text is appropriate and also an act of approp­
riation; Man's need to name and appropriate what is unfamiliar
into the familiar in a "making equal" is Nietzsche's "will to power." To name is to familiarize; Adam comes to know the beasts which come before him by conferring names upon them. And thus, Adam makes his claim to power in the act of naming: an act of mastery. Unnamed, the beast would be unknown and unknowable: as Wittgenstein claims, our words are our world. Could we know the text The Unnamable if it were unnamed? Only if we conferred a name on the text; and knowledge is appropriation. The Unnamable as the title suspended over the text appropriates the text into its possession as it holds the necessary title to the text, holds it in-differently over the text as it marks it as a proper text properly titled, in all propriety.

For all that the title of The Unnamable is correct and proper, is it at the same time deceptive, a name "in name only," only the "nominal" title? While the "presence" of a title over the text marks the privileging of a name over an anonymous text, the title itself is questionable in its "authority:" we question the propriety of naming a text The Unnamable. On the one hand, the text is indeed named, and on the other the text claims the impossibility of its "own" name -- claims the "a"-ppropriateness of its name. A name that is not a name, or is an unname, is perhaps not proper, although we may see that it is indeed, quite fitting. In the law (nomos) of propriety, the text has a name (nomen), but the text questions the law of the name (in the name of the law), questions the authority of the name even as it
confers a name.

The Unnamable as a title is a contradiction of the law of the named text, or the text with its proper (owned) name; it is an "antinomy" because it goes against the law. But The Unnamable is also an anti-nomen, for the text transgresses the law of the name, goes against naming and the principles of naming. To name is to give an individuating, distinguishing appellation, and to give a proper name (what is the grammatical term for all titles of books, characters, etc.), is to "satisfy the principle of identification." The Unnamable confers and removes the proper name, is an antinomy and an anomaly, because it does not conform to the law and does not conform to the name. As a "proper" name, which should by "rights" establish its "own" individuating distinction, The Unnamable dispossesses its "ownership" by the "un"naming: "un" as a prefix both marks a negation and a reversal; The Unnamable, therefore, reverses the conferring of the name and negates the name.

By the act of naming, The Unnamable titles itself and thus disallows another name to be conferred; yet by the act of naming with an "unname" the naming is suspended, is effaced even as it names itself. As a name, The Unnamable is barely a name; it indicates its "own" inability to assume (take upon itself, invest itself with) the responsibility that the "title" necessarily confers on it. The Unnamable diffuses the investment of power that the act of titling (of naming) always extends. The title indicates its applicability to
designate a particular text, since it is the "proper" name of the text, but only actually indicates its failure as a name. If, as Gardiner says, "the proprietary instinct is the seedground of proper names," then the proprietary notion is radically questioned in The Unnamable.

In grammatical terms, The Unnamable is a curious construction for a proper name; "unnamable" is technically an adjectival form which should modify a noun. But the lack of a subsequent noun reveals the adjective as able to stand alone, modifying a blank space; it allows an infinite number of substitutions to supplement the lack of a noun, the lack of a "proper" noun to be modified. The space allows the substitution of "common nouns to supplement the lack. For the moment (and all is "projects for the moment"), we conveniently substitute "text" in the blank, and discover that the text cannot be named even while it is named; or rather, the text cannot have a "proper" name for itself. If we speculate, however, on the space, the lack of the name, then we might admit that the lack of the name makes the name truly "proper," for it is possessed by persons unknown (and unnamable). Since, however, no names are actually "proper" (or, there are no absolute "owners" of names who can ever write them, because once they are written they are no longer "proper" -- "the energy of the graphein is the originary effacement of the proper name"), and all names are "common," because they belong in a system of classification (in grammar the "proper name"), the absence of a name that
"unnamable" could modify does not indicate some "owner" who transcends language.

In traditional metaphysical terms, the adjective "unnamable" is frequently found to modify something which indeed transcends language: a presence eternal, omnipotent, omniscient and transcendental, a God which cannot be named in the fallen language of Man. The Hebrews had the unpronounceable "Jahweh" for God whose name could not be spoken. And thus, the language of Man necessarily marks the fall from grace. Derrida devotes much of his attention to the metaphysical tradition of Man's desire for full presence, and how God is an example of one of the concepts of transcendence, which Man has created as an ideal of full presence, which denigrate writing. In this sense, "unnamable" attempts, but poorly, to indicate the grandeur and splendour, yet abstractness, of God. Yet "unnamable" also applies to that which cannot be identified, that which cannot be fixed with a name, that which is anonymous. Propriety is lost in textuality, as is identity; just as the "I" in The Unnamable is always shifting and lacking in identity, so the "proper" name is lacking in a direct referent in textuality.

In the "normal" form (proper state) of the proper name (and we should recognize Freud's assertion that normalcy is a convenient fiction), or as John Searle would say the "institution of the proper name," the name has a single signified; it forms a bond between the signifier and the signified, and necessarily limits the play of the signifier:
"every signified whose signifier can neither vary nor be translated into another signifier without loss of significance, suggests a proper-name effect."? In other words, the proper name indicates a unity, a completeness, an identity. Even if Molloy or Malone were never named as such in the texts, the names would substitute and be substituted for the pronoun "I" in the texts; in Molloy and Malone Dies, the unity of the proper noun and pronoun is assured, and the "title"s sovereignty over the text insured. The "I" in both texts, as Barthes writes, "becomes a name ... the best of names," even while it is never given "a" name; the "I" is a proper "I", not a shifting, uncertain, questionable unity, but "a magnetic field for the semes" which draws the signifieds to itself. In Malone Dies and Molloy, the "I" and the "name" satisfy our desire for propriety with the clean and fitting union of the sign and signified, satisfy our need for "semantic succour." (Watt, p.79)

The Unnamable not only lacks a satisfying title, but "appropriately" lacks an "I" which will remain stationary long enough to be named; the baptismal ceremony is marred by the shifting text which will not allow the mark (nota, not "á") of the name to unite with the "I". The scene of naming, the baptismal ceremony, is always deferred by the absence of the "one" to be baptized with its "own" "proper" name. If no being can be conferred (not even fictional being) in The Unnamable, then no name can be conferred, only deferred, awaiting the presence of the "goodly company," although
already in the presence of the company of a multitude of "I"s observing the ceremony; the "I"s observe the ceremony of naming, the naming of Basil, of Mahood, of Worm: "But it's time I gave this solitary a name, nothing doing without proper names. I therefore baptise him Worm. It was high time. Worm. I don't like it, but I haven't much choice." (p.337) Worm, Malone, Basil, Mahood, all the "puppets" are continually named and unnamed, named and "scattered to the winds," and the subject which always shifts, scatters itself, dispersing over the text; the subject as puppeteer or ventriloquist always shows his hands or lets himself (itself, myself) be seen before disappearing, before taking up another position on the stage.

Instead of being a unifying gesture, naming in The Unnamable becomes a dispersive gesture; naming allows forgetting, while remaining unnamed allows the tension of flux to continually posit and efface itself. The "I" in its overdetermination as possible "proper" subject retains prominence as it effaces itself and shifts from pronoun to pronoun: "there's no getting rid of them without naming them." to name is to forget in The Unnamable, and the object of naming is to dispense with what is named in an act of forgetting. Contrary to the proper use of proper names, as appellations which distinguish and identity (insure identity), the use of the "technically" proper name in The Unnamable allows the play between the names and the subjects, in the play of substitution and effacement, in the play of textuality
which always transgresses the bounds of propriety.

The proper name has always been privileged above the common name in a hierarchical structure of opposition, yet the proper name itself has always signalled the fall away from the thing itself. From Plato's Phaedrus onwards, we have a history of denigrating writing as part of the fallen, that which has fallen away from the ideal thing (the ousia). Since writing is described as a mnemē technē, it serves to allow us to forget the thing itself, it allows us to talk about something "which need not be present,"¹⁰ until we no longer remember the actual thing. And thus, what "originally" functions to aid in remembering, causes a forgetting until eventually the thing itself is forgotten, and only the words remain: "the same words recur and they are your memories." (p.395) In The Unnamable the proper name as "an institution" is retained even while it is substituted:

Worm, I nearly said Watt, Worm, what can I say of Worm ... what might not just as well be said of the other? Perhaps it's by trying to be Worm that I'll finally succeed in being Mahood ... then all I'll have to do is be Worm. Which no doubt I shall achieve by trying to be Jones. Then all I'll have to do is be Jones. (p.339)

The "I" takes on and casts off names and pronouns, indicating repeatedly the impropriety of the proper name as well as the impropriety of the "I" as an individuating name or pronoun. Each name, which should be an end to naming, merely allows a subject for the moment. The name does not "mean" anything, does not refer to anyone: not a character or a person; "name" and "mean" are anagrammatically linked,
just as *nomos* (Greek for "law") and *nomen* (Greek for "name") are almost homonymically linked. Mahood, Worm, Watt, Jones, Basil should mean something, since the proper name should belong to or be possessed by something, through the ratification of authority (the name of the law); the name must mean in order to be proper: "the words have to be ratified by the proper authority." (p. 369)

Names in *The Unnamable* are only "so-called" proper names, only nominally proper names, proper names in name only ("mere appellations ... reputations without correspondance in fact," according to the *O.E.D.*); and thus, the names become "a"nonymous, unnames, lose their power (their authority) to mean. While names de facto, they are not names de jure; the names do not correspond to the principles (the laws) of "meaning" and "naming;" their signification is arrested after the robbery of the name (by the ubiquitous "un"). The possible "subjects" in the text are unnamed, robbed of their names: the *nomen* becomes no-men, in that it cannot refer to any men (fictional or otherwise), and becomes no-"me"(n), in that it cannot refer to any "me" as individual first person. As proper names cannot be substituted for descriptions or characteristics, even though descriptions and characteristics can be related to proper names -- "proper names do not have definitions, nor can they be substituted for descriptive equivalents"¹¹-- and their primary function is to act as "pegs on which to hang descriptions,"¹² once their function as direct signifiers
is suspended, they become emptied of all signification, of all power to signify. Names which no longer "mean" or refer or signify are improper names, just as subjects which continually change and are substituted cannot be "the" subject. It is the tyranny of metaphysical language which continues to hold concepts of unity ("I"ness, subjectivity, propriety) in writing: "they will devise other means ... of getting me to admit, or pretend to admit, that I am he whose name they call me by, and no other." (p. 351)

For the "I" or "he" or "it" to admit to owning "their" own names is only an act of pretense, only a pretending to admit; the names are admitted into the play of the threshold, of the "between," of substitution. Onto the scene of naming, in the third stage of the trilogy, the textual field of The Unnamable, the names and pronouns are admitted and permitted, since they are not arrested by the laws of propriety: no name can be proper if there is no "one" to "own" it, and "subjects" cannot share "a" proper name without the name immediately becoming a taxonomic construct. Therefore, if a multitude of "subjects" (or conversely "objects") share a single, proper, name, they are only part of a common classification; the "proper" transgresses itself and is admitted into the "common." The individuality promised by the proper name is necessarily lost, is necessarily effaced by the common, just as the proper titled text loses its superior status in being unnamed, in being The Unnamable. Only pretending to submit (admit) to the superiority of the title (the proper title), the text transgresses the proper and moves towards the common
in textuality and writing, where propriety is pretense as it loses all of its distinctive characteristics and distinguishing marks. As Derrida writes, "from the moment that the proper name is erased from the system, there is writing."13

Because the entirely proper name is erased from the system, writing emerges; once there is no longer absolute "ownership" or "propriety," the position of the so-called proper name in language becomes problematic. If the proper name no longer "means," or no longer signifies the person or character (the thing itself, properly so-called), the direct relationship between the signifier and signified (which the proper name guarantees or insists upon) breaks down; the proper name effect which cannot bear substitution without losing its propriety or significance, signals the loss of the relation between the word and the thing itself; and to "pretend to admit" to "being" what is "named" is merely a nostalgic gesture. Saussure's positing of the "arbitrariness of the sign" is still yoked with the metaphysical nostalgia for presence because it insists on the "common" understanding of signs, even if the so-called thing itself is absent. Originary naming of things (beings) may be lost in memory, but the traces of the relationship (between sign and signified) are still maintained; in the beginning was the object, then in the beginning was the named object: "nothing doing without proper names." Traditionally the artist uses the tools of language to express what is known (in the common understanding of language), and yet the direct
relationship of expression becomes problematic when "the [artist's] occasion appears as an unstable term of relation," and subsequently the "dualist view of the creative process [is] unconvincing." (Three Dialogues, p.21) The source (and we use this term carefully) of writing is originary loss, and "the increasing anxiety of the relation itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity." (Three Dialogues, p.21)

Once the relation between the thing and the name proper to it becomes shadowy, invalid, once the thing loses its name, becomes unnamable, once expression becomes "the inability to express," becomes inexpressible (all the prefixes, instead of fixing before hand, act as unstabilizing agents which allow the play that the proper name itself denies), writing loses its stability and reassuring certitude.

I use them all, all the words they showed me, there were columns of them, oh the strange glow all of a sudden, they were on lists, with images opposite, I must have forgotten them, I must have mixed them up, these nameless images, these imageless names, these windows I should perhaps rather call doors, or at least by some other name, and this word man which is perhaps not the right one for the thing I see when I hear it, but an instant, an hour, and so on. (p.407)

The insidious "perhaps" enters to suspend and question the relation between sign and signifier, and gives the relation an absolute undecidability; "perhaps" robs the name of its "meaning," and allows no "semantic succour." All is mixed up, and the mixing disallows forgetting; names can be forgotten, or rather the relation between names and images, but imageless names and nameless images allow no peace, no
"wrapping up safe in words." (Watt, p.80) And yet the naming process continues; the need to name and affix a name in the face of the loss and absence of meaning continues; "now I'll have to find a name for this latest surrogate."
(p.392) But it is only naming for the purpose of forgetting, for the purpose of dispensing with both the name and the thing named: "And it's still the same old road I'm trudging, up yes and down no, towards one yet to be named, so that he may leave me in peace, be in peace, be no more, have never been. Name, no, nothing is namable, tell, no, nothing can be told, what then, I don't know, I shouldn't have begun."

Unnamed, the words are robbed of their names (their "time-honoured names"), robbed of their origins and stability; the "un" marks the space of a castration where the words cease to mean: the word "man" is "unmanned" (nomen), robbed of his "man"hood (the missing "n" in Mahood is found in the doubling of the "n" in "unnamable"). "I could have sworn they had gelt me. But perhaps I am getting mixed up with other scrotas." (p.333) The castration, or "mix-up." of the scrotas parallels the mix-up of the names and images; unmanned, unnamed, the text becomes the site of "unpower" (like Antonin Artaud's impouvoir), of unmeaning (of the powerlessness to mean);

At no moment do I know what I am talking about, nor of who, nor of where, nor how, nor why, but I could employ fifty wretches for this sinister operation and still be short of a fifty-first, to close the circuit,
that I know, without knowing what it means. (p.338)

Thus the circuit (direct current between sign and signifier, proper name and person or character, etc.), will never be closed, will always be held open for "the latest surrogate" waiting to be named and forgotten, awaiting the possible name or the possible meaning only to be forgotten, to be deferred by another surrogate and another substitution.

Always already awaiting completion, the circuit is (n)ever close, has its completion deferred, no matter how many "wretches" (Gardiner: "[there is no person] so wretched as to have no name of his own") are employed to complete the circuit: there will always be the element missing which inhibits closure. To know the closed structure of the circle is the arrest of play in a fixed meaning; but to have the circuit unclosed, unnamed, unmeaning is both to allow play and to be open to the anxiety of risk (the risk of unmeaning): "the increasing anxiety of the relation itself."

Of note ... was a picture, hanging on the wall, from a nail. A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point ... in the eastern background was a point, or dot ... [Watt] wondered what the artist had intended to represent ... a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and circle respectively ... or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre ... in boundless space, in endless time ... at the thought ... Watt's eyes filled with tears that he could not stem. (Watt, p.127)

Watt weeps at the thought of the centre or circle lost in boundless space and endless time, and Derrida writes that, "even today the notion of a structure lacking any centre represents the unthinkable itself;"¹⁴ but in The Unnamable,
thinking about the inevitability of the loss, without knowing what it means, is thinking the unthinkable, is affirming the abandonment of closure, with abandon. Nothing (no "one" thing) will fill the centre, only a multitude of substitutions, and nothing (no "one" thing) will complete the circuit, for there is always a gap that will allow another nameless wretch.

There is no first name, no proper name at the centre of *The Unnamable* (as the title promises); there is no first person who names, no "I name" (just as there is no affirmative "I" (n)"am"(e), or "I" (n)"am"("me"), or "I" name. If we push back to find the originary "unnamer," the one who steals the names before admitting them, in a *reductio ad absurdum*, we only discover:

And whose voice asking this? Who asks, whose voice asking this? And answers, Hissoever who devises it all ... For company. Who asks in the end, Who asks? And in the end answers as above? And adds long after to himself, Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. (*Company*, p.24)

There is only infinite regress (in boundless space and endless time), and no first (or last) authority who can answer for the asking. At best, there may only be the originary question, lacking the originary questioning solitary (or deviser); the deviser (creator, writer, author or authority) is always devised by "another still" which permits the flux rather than stabilizing a still centre. The solitary is always a company, for company: "the goodly company," the "puppets," the "creations," the "bran-dips," the players
who enact the scene of naming in *The Unnamable*, where no name is given any priority of signification, including the name Samuel Beckett (which appears beneath the "title" of the text).

Although the proper name (in grammatical terms) "Samuel Beckett" stands beneath the title of the text, both as "author" and "translator," the name in no way implies any superior "understanding" of the text, and the name should not be given any more privilege than any other name in the text. The name becomes part of the name series in *The Unnamable*, and must not mistakenly be considered "proper" to a man who "owns" the name and "authorizes" the text; the name "Samuel Beckett," like Mahood, Worm, etc., signals its lack of propriety, of transcendental signified, in the effacement of "the proper" enacted in the text. At the centre (the generating centre) of *The Unnamable* is not "one" Samuel Beckett, but just another deviser, devising it all for company, while devised himself through language and writing: "as if I were both the teller and the told." The stories are never his "own" stories.

He has no story, he hasn't been in story, it's not certain, he's in his own story, unimaginable, unthinkable, that doesn't matter, the attempt must be made, in the old stories incomprehensibly mine, to find his, it must be there somewhere. (p.413)
It's the murmurs, the murmurs are coming ... murmurs, distant cries ... and the silence ...
I'm still in it, I left myself behind in it. (p.414)

The author "owns" no story (no text) and his proper name forfeits its ownership in writing; inscribed on the
cover of the text is a name which participates in textuality, as the text does. Unspeakably, the author is in his "own" story, but "writably" the author's ownership is revoked, and he is in history (not as a linearized construct of chronological sequentiality, but as textual palimpsests); it is unthinkable that he "once" was an author, for writing and textuality do not distinguish temporal sequences, only adjacency and textual traces, do not retain the distinguishing marks (the proper names) as anything more than words participating in the text. Although the author's "name" is there somewhere, his "self" (identity, presence, proper name) is left behind only as a trace, a remarking which participates in the murmurs and distant cries; the name becomes improper, becomes "anonymous" cries and murmurs (where "I am the absentee again," p.413) in what Derrida might call (this term is also suspect as it is directly related to naming) the "General Text:" a text with no author and many traces of names lost in impropriety. "My story" (incomprehensibly mine) becomes a "mystery" in textuality; not a mystery to be revealed, not the mystery of origins to be recovered, but the mystery (my story) of the "my" (possessive) missing in the story, or missing in (his)story: "Where I make my escape, give myself up." (p.411)

We rarely make the mistake of attributing textual "ownership" to a named character, while we frequently make the mistake of attributing textual "ownership" to the author (in his own name). Because the text has no father (or mother)
who generates it (the text is generated in language, born in and of writing), like all texts it is illegitimate; it cannot be contained by legal certification (of copyright laws which protect ownership and promote the illusion of the proper author's possession of the text, by law), as the text "comes into the world unborn, abiding there unliving, with no hope of death." (p.346) Dispossessed and unnamed by writing, the text joins the improper play of textuality, escapes into "the anonymity of textuality,"15 where the sovereign self or the sovereign name is always lost even as it attempts to establish itself as a unity (one name). As Derrida writes (and we use the "name" knowing that the name is only part of the larger working of textuality, knowing that the name functions metonymically), "the proper name has never been, as a unique appellation reserved for the presence of a unique being, anything but the original myth of transparent legibility present under the obliteration; it is because the proper name was never possible except through its functioning within a classification and therefore within a system of differences."16

The text comes into the world unborn and abides there unliving, incomprehensible because it cannot "be" (comprehended), without certification (of baptism, of birth, of marriage) or certitude of authority; unborn, it is borne away from the legalities of the name (and the unique), because no longer bounded by the limitations of the proper (which would always attempt to contain it in the "bournes"
of the unique, moving towards the goals (bournes) of propriety). Ungenerated and undirected, the text abides: "it goes on by itself, it drags on by itself, from word to word, in a labouring swirl, you are in it somewhere, everywhere." (p.402) The Unnamable labours without being born, or labours unborn, unnamed: "someone says you, it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it's a kind of pronoun too, it isn't that either ... it's a question of going on, it goes on, hypotheses are like everything else ... that's right, impersonal, as if there were any need of help to go on with a thing that can't stop." (p.404)

Impersonal, unnamed, unborn and unbelieving, the text goes on by itself in "a fable of one fabling," in a fable of the "one," the unique, the proper, in a fable of the one who could never "be."

And there's nothing for it but to wait for an end to come, and at the end it will be the same, at the end at last all the same as before, as all that livelong time when there was nothing for it but to get to the end, or fly from it, or wait for it, trembling or not, resigned or not, the nuisance of doing over, and of being, same thing, for one who could never do, never be. (p.370)

Borne to the end of the text (borne away by textuality), born to see the ends of the proper, borne over the limits of propriety, we reach at last the end which is "all the same as before," the end which is only beginning to name itself (and efface its beginnings and names). The words carry us (bear us) to the on-going end of the text.
dispossessing itself, (un)naming itself *The Unnamable*.

And the end (n)ever comes.
Footnotes


2 Gardiner, p.47.


4 Searle, p.171.

5 Gardiner, p.57.


9 Barthes, p.67.

10 Searle, p.75.

11 Searle, p.106.

12 Searle, p.172.


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