

# Fiction as Therapy: Agency and authorship in Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*

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## Abstract

*The Unnamable* (1953) shows the breakdown of the Cartesian Cogito in a post-war soulless world in which its inhabitants suffer from disconnectedness. When the speaker's consciousness breaks down and is no longer able to attribute the projections of its own consciousness to the self, he becomes incapable of ascertaining his own agency, authority and existence; hence the dissolution of the Cartesian Cogito. The condition is further exacerbated when the speaker who hears unattributable, disembodied authoritative voices finds himself in a universe where there is no one else to ascertain one's existence. The sense of agency is therefore lost. Yet, the speaker, as in the fashion of AVATAR therapy for people with schizophrenia, attempts in writing, turning the voices into characters and stories and entering a dialogue with them to overcome his ontological insecurity in a universe that is generated out of his head and yet achieves an uncanny kind of independence. In other words, it is a therapeutic attempt to put the dismantled elements back into place in order to overcome the consequent ontological insecurity that this dissolution generates. This is done through a kind of quasi-corporeality that Steven Connor calls 'the vocalic body.' Nevertheless, as this paper argues, although being able to substantialise the voices, *The Unnamable* is still wavering between mediumship (being the medium of others' voices) and agency.

**Keywords:** Beckett; hearing voices; authorship; therapy; fiction

*It issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my wall. It is not mine. I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none: I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know. It's round that I must revolve, of that I must speak - with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me. (Or if there are others, to whom it might belong, they have never come near me.)* (Beckett 1953: 309)

Who is speaking? Whose voice is it that speaks through him/her? Does it exert an independent agency and is it a purely disembodied voice? What is certain is that the speaker is not able to locate the voice. It is an unattributed sourceless but intrusive voice. He is experiencing a voice's split condition, neither inside nor outside. He has no power and authority over it and feels forced/obliged to speak. The Unnamable's condition is similar to that of the Kleinian infant for whom there is the good voice and the bad voice. The good voice is the voice of the other becoming that of the self and the bad voice is the voice that belongs to the self but is recognised as the voice of the other, as Steven Connor suggests (2000). By inference, Connor extends this Kleinian infant condition to arrive at a more general conclusion that, '[i]dealized voices of all kinds derive their power, prestige, and capacity to give pleasure from this willingness to hear other voices as one's own' (Ibid: 32). Perhaps Connor is right when he says that the reason why we intend to sing along with a singer is to make it our own and consequently take pleasure in it (Ibid: 10): to turn it into a good voice, in other words. Whereas the good voice is the equivalent of pleasure, the bad voice is creepy, intrusive, 'racking,' 'assailing,' 'tearing,' to use the Unnamable's own words, annoying, unrelenting, unremitting and eerie. As this paper argues, the Unnamable's attempts (and possibly those of Beckett, by extension) in writing and speaking of authorial voice and hearing experiences in *The Unnamable* (Beckett, 1953) is to overcome his ontological insecurity in a universe that is generated out of his head and yet achieves a kind of independence and to dissipate the uncanny, the creepiness of the voice that is a consequence of unattributable, disembodied, and therefore, unlocatable features: an unlocatable voice is eerie, unsettling, threatening and authoritative, hence, creepy and uncanny. This paper also contends that the novel is an early manifestation of the death of the author debate that was soon to dominate literary theory and what later emerges as the poststructuralist critique of the humanist concept of the self and authorship: its contestation of clear authorial agency and intention reveals a dissolution of the humanist conceptualisation of authorship. In addition, it argues that the novel is also a therapeutic attempt to put the dismantled elements back into place in order to overcome the consequent ontological insecurity and a total annihilation of the self that this dissolution generates. This is done through

a kind of quasi-corporeality that Steven Connor calls ‘the vocalic body.’ Thus, this paper concludes that while the novel prefigures a deconstruction of the humanist concept of the self and authorship well before its later theorisations by Derrida, Barthes and Foucault, it is therapeutic. In other words, fiction helps the Unnamable (the author by implication) to turn a destructive force – an unlocatable voice that threatens to destroy the very integrity of the self – into a creative one and avoid a complete ontological annihilation that many haunted by voices, such as Virginia Woolf, have faced.

At some point in our lives, we all have experienced, one way or another, the natural phenomenon of hearing the voice. For instance, name hearing is a natural sensation that everyone might go through such as when they have the impression that their name is heard in public whereas the sound actually comes from an inhuman source such as the wind blowing through a passage. As Ralph Hoffman has it, ‘your occasional illusionary perception of your name spoken in a crowd occurs because this utterance is uniquely important. Our brains are primed to register such events; so on rare occasions the brain makes a mistake and reconstructs unrelated sounds (such as people talking indistinctly) into a false perception of the spoken name’ (Hoffman, 2019). Hearing our name, we turn our head and begin the excavation to find the source, as the voice implies the existence of a body that houses that source. Another example would be what G. Lynn Stephens and George Graham call ‘*delusions of reference*’ which occur in schizophrenic patients. As they explain, ‘the subject may have overheard another saying “Give cancer to the crippled bastard” but may mistakenly believe that the speech was directed at him’ (Stephens & Graham, 2000: 16). To be unable to locate the voice is to feel less in control and consequently to become anxious since a disembodied voice carries an uncanny effect (because it is one cannot locate its source) and is consequently experienced as more authoritative. Connor mentions historical accounts of ghostly (disembodied and eerie like a ghost) voices when for example the voices of dead children are heard from cellars, dungeons, vaults, or when Alexandre Vattemare made cadavers seem to speak in an act of ventriloquism in the nineteenth century. He speaks of the frenzy and dread that these voices would raise in people as they would ‘testify to the dread of premature burial that would bubble up at intervals during the 19th century’ (Stevens, 2000: 258). We normally tend to feel insecure at voices whose source and origin is not locatable. As Connor puts it, ‘[s]ound, and especially the sound of the human voice, is experienced as enigmatic or anxiously incomplete until its source can be identified, which is usually to say, visualized’ (Ibid: 20).

If it is the unlocability of the voice that creates the uncanny effect – that is, the ghostlike, threatening and authoritative effect – then that is all the more compounded if the voice is heard more frequently, even incessantly. The condition is further exacerbated if the voice hearer finds him or herself in a universe where there is no other who might ascertain one's existence; this becomes a powerful source of ontological insecurity. Such is the condition of the Unnamable. He is entirely alone: 'I alone am man and all the rest divine' (Beckett 1953: 302). *The Unnamable* shows the 'breakdown of the Cartesian *Cogito*, which Lacan also recognises' (Stewart, 1999: 108), reaching its climax in the existential crisis of the Unnamable himself. As the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* implies, when we doubt, we can be sure that we doubt. And if doubt is a form of thinking, according to Descartes, then we can be sure of the existence of the subject who does the thinking because there must be a subject that does the thinking. Accordingly, the existence of the thinking subject is undoubtable. It also implies that thinking is the representation of being. "I think" is equivalent to representation; "I am", naturally, to being' (Burke, 1998: 69). To use Descartes's own words:

*Then too there is no doubt that I exist, if he is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something. Thus, after everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement "I am, I exist" is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind. (quoted in Burke, 1998: 64)*

Therefore, this thinking being becomes a firm and undoubtable foundation on which to build the subject's knowledge of the world – because 'I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking' (Ibid: 18). Yet, the Unnamable is an example of a dissociation of *Cogito ergo sum* as the narrator cannot presume he is the subject of the act of thinking. As the Unnamable says from the very beginning, 'I seem to speak (it is not I) about me (it is not me)' (Beckett 1953: 293). The speaker doubts that he is the subject who does the thinking/speaking. When the speaker's consciousness breaks down and is no longer able to attribute to the self the projections of its own consciousness, he is therefore incapable of ascertaining his own agency, authority and existence; hence occurs the complete dissolution of the Cartesian *Cogito*.

But, what causes this experience to happen so often, more frequently than is generally considered 'normal'? Why does this disembodiment happen so that a source and a place has to be found for this disembodied voice? A convincing answer, as Stephens and Graham suggest, is that it happens when self-consciousness breaks.<sup>1</sup> To be self-conscious is to have self-awareness that the feelings and thoughts are your own, that you own

them, a process called introspection. However, if this self-awareness dissipates, you begin to doubt that your thoughts and feeling belong to you and come to assume that there are other agents who have entered your consciousness. Thought insertion and hearing voices are two forms of alienation or what Stephens and Graham call '*alienated self-consciousness*' (2000: 4). The thinker is still self-conscious as he or she is aware of the experiences, be they thoughts or voices, but assumes they are coming from an alien source. In other words, such experiences are attributed, by the subject, 'to another person rather than to the subject' (Ibid: 4). In thought insertion – which is very common among schizophrenic patients – they may be quite conscious that they are the subject where the thoughts happen – 'They regard them [the thoughts] as occurring within their ego boundaries' (Ibid: 126) – but believe that some other subject has put the thoughts in their mind. As Stephens and Graham explain:

*The subject regards the thoughts as alien not because she supposes that they occur outside her, but in spite of her awareness that they occur within her. Her distress arises not (as Freud or Sims would have it) from loss of ego boundaries and uncertainty about whether things are inside or outside the boundary, but from her sense that her ego boundary has been violated and that something alien has been placed within it. (Stephens & Graham, 2000: 127)*

Accordingly, voice hearers understand the subjectivity of the hallucinatory thoughts; however, they deny they are the author (producer or projector) of the thoughts and therefore infer that such thoughts must have come or been put in their mind from and by other subjects.

It could be inferred from Stephens and Graham that if subjectivity does not negate the thought insertion, there must be a split between subjectivity and agency both of which constitute the founding conditions of authorship. In other words, authorship is here understood as bound up with conditions of subjectivity and agency:

*We propose that the sense of agency and the sense of subjectivity represent distinct strands or components of self-consciousness, and that it is possible for these strands to unravel or break apart. More specifically, I may experience a thought as subjectively but not agentically my own. This possibility is realized in experiences of thought insertion and voices. Recognition of the distinction between the senses of subjectivity and agency helps to make the experiences intelligible. (Stephens & Graham, 2000: 153)*

Subjectivity is a self-awareness of one's consciousness and its process, of the subjectivity of thoughts and voices (that is, the awareness that they occur in the subject). Agency, on the other hand, is a sense of controlling one's own thoughts, feelings and emotions. It is '[m]y sense that *I think* a certain thought involves more than the sense that the thought occurs in me. It also consists in a sense that I am *author* of that thought, that I carry out the activity of thinking' (Stephens & Graham, 2000: 8-9; 2nd emphasis added).<sup>ii</sup> Consequently, authorship – to be the author of one's own thoughts, feelings, emotions, voices, etc. – might be defined with regard to a particular combination of subjectivity and agency. In the absence of any of the elements, authorship is lost.

In voice hearing experiences too, subjectivity might be kept in the sense that the subject recognises the existence of the voices in his consciousness but he is unable to attribute them; hence, deterioration of agency. Therefore, it could be said that our sense of self-consciousness works with regards to both that subjectivity and agency which also make up authorship. Nonetheless, a sense of alienation, which could be regarded as one level further away from authorship, occurs when the subject locates the voices (thoughts, emotions, etc.) in other agents: others are the authors of the voice. As Stephens and Graham suggest, 'in externality and alienation the sense of agency breaks apart from the sense of subjectivity. In alienation, in addition, the sense of agency places the agency in another' (Ibid: 155). In explaining why alienation occurs in the subject, for example in the case of voice hearing, Stephens and Graham propose that the subject confuses their own imaginary introspective inner voices with hearing another person's speech. He cannot tell their own introspection from 'a perceptual experience of someone else's speech' (Ibid: 33-4). In other words, introspection is confused with perception of external objects and events.

Strikingly similar to the agentless patient who hears voices is the condition of the Unnamable who holds onto a certain level of self-awareness of thoughts and voices but is not necessarily able to self-attribute them. As the Unnamable self-consciously puts it, the voice 'issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my wall. It is not mine' (Beckett 1953: 309). Rather he mislocates them but in a therapeutic act creates characters such as Mahood through the substantiation of the voices: 'I'll call him [the voice] Mahood instead . . . . It is his voice which has often, always, mingled with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely' (Ibid: 311). The inability to transmute and transform voices into fictional characters and telling stories could be life threatening while the ability to do so is therapeutic. Virginia Woolf, who was unable to write and living in isolation at the outbreak of the war, wrote in her 1941 suicide note: 'I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I

shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. . . You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read' (**Woolf, 1941**). Woolf's inability to communicate her memories any longer lead to a total dissolution of the self and finally to a total writing paralysis and therefore suicide. But a controlled liberation of verbal auditory hallucinations in the form of writing has a therapeutic function. It re-integrates a dissociative self, that would otherwise be subject to total ontological annihilation. This is the valuable insight into authorship that *The Unnamable* provides. The Unnamable represents Beckett's own alter ego and stands for the author-figure. Beckett underwent psychotherapy for two years (1934–35) with Wilfred Bion in London before moving to Paris where he wrote his most important novels. In *Outselves: Beckett, Bion and Beyond*, Luke Thurston (**2009**) argues that Beckett's art is a transformation of his own experience with Bion's therapeutic methods (**Ibid: 123**). Similarly, Ian S. Miller argues that Beckett translates 'his own therapeutic experience into art' (**Miller, 2013: xiv**). Therefore, fiction is the externalisation and slow transformation of inner voices into fully fledged characters. If the Unnamable is Beckett's double, then we can also conclude that here lies the novelist's ability in transmuting voices into the deflected ontology of the fictional world, with seemingly palpable characters who are externalisations of inner voices. Beckett explores the precarious line between the harnessing of voices that is the conversion of mediumship into authorial control and the creation of externalised characters and the breakdown of that process where the voices instead take over the agential and authorial role as vehicles of social and cultural prescriptiveness.

Moreover, the novel itself is exemplary of the critique of the Romantic humanist conception of authorship, before poststructuralists like Derrida and Barthes give shape to theories of the death of the author. Beckett masterfully shows that if the world is no longer the place where the subject might ascertain the structure of existence, he or she turns the attention inwards. The subject becomes hyper-reflexive and hyper-aware of their own introspection which is highly likely to result in the dissolution of the self and therefore of authority.<sup>iii</sup> Sass defines hyper-reflexive qualities as 'acute self-consciousness and self-reference, and . . . alienation from action and experience' (**Sass, 1992: 8**); hence, the hyper-reflexive person is alienated from their own thoughts, feelings, voices and consequently authorship<sup>iv</sup> The speaker, referred to as the Unnamable, has self-awareness that he is alone but is simultaneously overwhelmed by voices whose origin is not known although they occur in or to him. He keeps wondering where these voices and thoughts come from: 'These notions of forbears, of houses where lamps are lit at night, and other such: where do they come to me from? And all these questions I ask myself? It is not in a spirit of curiosity: I cannot be silent. About myself I need know nothing'

(**Beckett 1953: 296**). His wonder in the form of questions is not epistemological but ontological. If the speaker manages to find the answer, he will restore or find agency and authority or his ontology will stay under the threat of annihilation.

The voices that the Unnamable hears are disembodied and therefore perplexing. They express awe and are uncanny and therefore have authority as well as agency over the speaker. The feelings of perplexity and fear – '[s]o there is nothing to be afraid of. And yet I am afraid: afraid of what my words will do to me, to my refuge, yet again' (**Beckett 1953: 305**) – are due to the fact that the voices appear in the absence of external stimuli. As he wonders:

*But when, through what channels, did I communicate with these gentlemen? Did they intrude on me here? No, no one has ever intruded on me here. Elsewhere then. But I have never been elsewhere. But it can only have been from them I learnt what I know about men and the ways they have of putting up with it. It does not amount to much. I could have dispensed with it. I don't say it was all to no purpose. I'll make use of it, if I'm driven to it. It won't be the first time. What puzzles me is the thought of being indebted for this information to persons with whom I can never have been in contact. Can it be innate knowledge? Like that of good and evil? This seems improbable to me. Innate knowledge of my mother, for example, is that conceivable? Not for me. (**Beckett, 1953: 299-300**)*

The speaker, like the schizophrenic, thinks that thoughts and voices have been put into his mind as he has no innate knowledge; nor does he relate to thoughts and voices. Like the schizophrenic, his doubts, confusion, fear, stem from his failure to make a match between his own intentions and those of the thoughts/voices. Mladen Dolar says of the intentionality of the voice that '[t]he voice is something which points toward meaning, it is as if there is an arrow in it which raises the expectation of meaning, the voice is an opening toward meaning...with an inner intentionality' (**Dolar, 2006: 14**). Therefore, the problem arises when the voices and thoughts deny expression (representation) of the speaker's state of mind, intentions and feelings and underlying beliefs. As Stephens and Graham clarify, '[i]ndeed, perhaps on some occasions a person fails to find an intentional explanation for a given thought because there isn't one. Thoughts may occur in her that do not express, or do not express suitably, any of her underlying intentional states' (**Stephens & Graham, 2000: 170**).<sup>v</sup> The expressive or Romantic theory of art has it that words directly express thoughts and feelings coming from consciousness; the Romantic theory of authorship might be seen to be founded on such assumptions. In Beckett's work it manifestly undoes itself.



Contrary to the expressive theory, here the speaker is oscillating between mediumship (implying lack of authorship) on the one hand and agency on the other. He is pitched between having no control over the voices as well as being their slave, and an attempt to master them through materialising and entering a dialogue with them. As for the first, the voices are the speaker's master: 'I have never spoken enough to me, never listened enough to me, never replied enough to me, never had pity enough on me. I have spoken for my master, listened for the words of my master never spoken: 'Well done, my child, well done, my son, you may stop, you may go, you are free, you are acquitted, you are pardoned, never spoken' (Beckett 1953: 312). The Unnamable feels a medium through which the disembodied voices get uttered and heard:

*Ah if I could only find a voice of my own, in all this babble, it would be the end of their troubles, and of mine. That's why there are all these little silences, to try and make me break them. They think I can't bear silence, that some day, somehow, my horror of silence will force me to break it. That's why they are always leaving off, to try and drive me to extremities. But they dare not be silent for long, the whole fabrication might collapse. (Beckett, 1953: 351)*

This shows the speaker's attempt to gain agency, to find his own voice amongst all the voices which forces him to utter: 'Sometimes I say to myself, they say to me, Worm says to me, the subject matters little, that my purveyors are more than one' (Beckett, 1953: 353).

A disembodied voice is more authoritative; it generates obedience in the audience. As Connor explicates:

*And yet it is precisely because of this that we seem to have become much more able to mistrust our eyes than our ears. Thus, if a god or a tyrant wants to ensure unquestioning obedience, he had better make sure that he never discloses himself to the sight of his people, but manifests himself and his commands through the ear. Do we not call such a person a dictator? Ex auditu fides, as St Paul puts it in Romans 10:17 – from hearing comes belief. The very word obedience derives from the Latin audire. (Connor, 2000: 23)*

In a similar vein, Pythagoras had his instructions and religious ceremonies held behind a curtain for his pupils merely to hear so they could not see him. This created authority and compelled obedience for his students as the voice was disembodied. The disembodied voice whose origin is not locatable is more likely to be experienced as a kind of strange authority. Yet, unlike Pythagoras's students, for the Unnameable, the voices are not physical wave sounds; nor do they occur in his own subjectivity, nor

outside his consciousness. They are also happening incessantly without his volition. Thus they take on a ghostly character.

Now, in order to overcome these authoritative disembodied voices, to fix them and even disobey their commands (not worrying about the dire consequences such as punishment or death), one way is to materialise and substantialise them, to give them body by turning them into a fully-fledged character in the act of writing. At a certain point, the Unnamable starts to name a few of the voices: Mahood, Worm, Murphy, Molloy. In other words, characters are the embodiment of the dislocatable disembodied voices and thoughts:

*I'll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that, I'm queer. It was he told me stories about me, lived in my stead, issued forth from me, came back to me, entered back into me, heaped stories on my head. I don't know how it was done. I always liked not knowing, but Mahood said it wasn't right. He didn't know either, but it worried him. It is his voice which has often, always, mingled with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely. Until he left me for good, or refused to leave me any more, I don't know. Yes, I don't know if he's here now or far away, but I don't think I am far wrong in saying that he has ceased to plague me. (Beckett 1953: 311)*

I argue that the novel is representative of Beckett's later writing style (the 1950s). Shane Weller traces an aspect of Beckett's writing style, what he calls 'a language of derangement' (2008: 35), to his prose and comments, '[i]t is precisely such an irreparable fragmentation that Beckett will identify in his own prose works of the later 1940s, and for which he will employ the terms "disintegration" and "mess"' (Ibid: 40). But the novel is also suggestive of the writing process itself because turning voices into fictional characters and stories has a therapeutic function and repairing capabilities. As opposed to Weller's 'irreparable fragmentation,' which could potentially lead the person to committing suicide, madness and schizophrenia can be an intellectual, artistic and ontological breakthrough if it is turned into fiction because it helps prevent a total disintegration of the self.

Interestingly, substantialising verbal/auditory hallucinations is not only a source of character development by writers but also a therapeutic technique employed by Professor Julian Leff. In 2014, he initiated a research project to help schizophrenic patients transform their disembodied voices into characters that feel more embodied. His aim, and his colleagues', was '[t]o encourage them [the patients] to engage in a dialogue with the avatar' (Leff et al., 2013: 428). As Leff expounds, '[t]hese people are giving a face to an incredibly destructive force in their mind. Giving them control to create the avatar lets them control the situation and even make friends with it' (quoted in Brauser, 2014). Rather than

suppressing the voices, an act which is futile and ineffective, they engage in a dialogue in the course of a few weeks during which 'the avatar progressively changes from being persecutory to becoming appreciative and supportive' (Leff et al., 2013: 167). This is precisely what the Unnamable does in the novel by creating a fictional figure out of the voices.

In failing to recognise oneself as the author of one's own voices, the writer, similar to the schizophrenics, tends to get other agents involved, to look for other sources of production. This inclination to postulate the involvement of others is due to the person's tendency to locate unattributable thoughts, feelings and voices in order to overcome the creepiness of sourceless voices and thoughts, which might finally end in a complete dissociation of the self and loss of the sense of being. Often voices are condescending, destroying the person's self-esteem and confidence.<sup>vi</sup> Likewise, the Unnamable observes the voice as enumerating his shortcomings and failures:

*When he was away I tried to find myself again, to forget what he had said, about me, about my misfortunes, fatuous misfortunes, idiotic pains, in the light of my true situation, revolting word. But his voice continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was, what I was, so as to have done with saying, done with listening. And still today, as he would say, though he plagues me no more his voice is there, in mine, but less, less. And being no longer renewed it will disappear one day, I hope, from mine, completely. But in order for that to happen I must speak. Speak. (Beckett 1953: 311)*

Talking of the speaker's misfortunes and failures, making him feel idiotic, the voice is an impediment in his way towards self-realisation: 'who I was.' Yet, the materialisation of the voice through its transformation into a character and the authorial act of entering into a dialogue with it helps curb its pestering features – 'Ah if only this voice could stop!' (Beckett 1953: 58) – to overturn the master/slave relation of power, in the hope that one day it will totally disappear. As the speaker says, "I want all to be well with you, do you hear me?" That's what he keeps on dinning at me. To which I reply, in a respectful attitude: "I too, your Lordship". I say that to cheer him up, he sounds so unhappy. (I am good-hearted, on the surface.)' (Ibid: 16). However, to aim at the goal, the Unnamable has to 'speak,' that is, to write, to substantialise the disembodied voices. Perhaps the speaker is aware that all is his invention: 'I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end - gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway' (Ibid: 17). Therefore, it could be inferred that writers turn a

destructive force – that threatens to destroy the very integrity of the self – into a creative one through characterisation and fiction. Dialogue with hallucinatory voices transforms them into characters, as in the case of Avatar therapy, and creates a system of differentiation so that the self might ascertain its existence in opposition to, or with regards to, the other. As Milton Rickels says of the novel, '[o]ne may begin by defining the work [*The Unnamable*] as a recreation of the search for the self' (1962: 134).

Steven Connor argues that although voices are produced by bodies, they also give shape to bodies as we can hardly imagine a voice without a body. Thus, the voice has a kind of quasi-corporeality that he calls 'the vocalic body.' It is 'the idea – which can take the form of dream, fantasy, idea, theological doctrine, or hallucination – of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice' (Connor, 2000: 35). The idea of a body formed out of the autonomous voice occurs when the voice we hear is attributed to another being, not to ourselves. Therefore, 'a disembodied voice must be inhabited in a plausible body' (Ibid: 35).<sup>vii</sup> Thus, voices result in the production (materialisation) of bodies. Similarly, Elizabeth Barry suggests that the novel is a product of, and then reversal of, an anti-incarnation process. As she has it, '[t]his is a kind of anti-Incarnation, as Bruno Clément has pointed out, making flesh back into word – simply words on the page (Clément, 370)' (Barry, 2006: 149). Similar to the embodiment of God's word in Christ, she concludes that Beckett imagines 'the protagonist as God himself' in *The Unnamable* (Ibid: 151) and gives a few examples such as 'a few puppets' that the speaker has and can 'scatter' 'to the winds' (Beckett 1953: 1) to support her argument.

This anti-incarnation or materialisation of voices is achieved through writing, telling stories. Daniel Dennett in *Consciousness Explained* (1993) argues that story telling is an act of creation, protection and definition of our self in a similar vein to that of a spider as it spins webs and that '[o]ur fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others – and ourselves – about who we are' (Ibid: 418). Nevertheless, he explains that unlike the professional storyteller, '[o]ur tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source' (Ibid: 418). Therefore, hearing voices and turning them into stories is a capability.<sup>viii</sup>

Yet, turning voices into characters and stories and entering a dialogue with them risks experiencing the self as fundamentally split, so losing more and more the sense of agency and authority as the self-conscious subject becomes an object of its own scrutiny. The climax of the breakdown of consciousness and the consequent loss of agency is manifest in the following humorous passage:

*Who says "That proves my innocence"? He says it. Or they say it - yes, they who reason, they who believe. No, in the singular: he who lived, or saw some who had. He speaks of me, as if I were he, as if I were not he (both), and as if I were others (one after another). He is the afflicted. "I am far, do you hear me?" He says I'm far, as if I were he - no, as if I were not he: for he is not far, he is here. It's he who speaks. He says it's I, then he says it's not, I am far. Do you hear him? (Beckett 1953: 84)*

The ultimate confusion of a person who is seriously struggling to find his agency through desperately locating the referents of pronouns might look strangely comical. This results in a signifier with no identified signified. As a case in point, the two 'I's in 'He says it's I, then he says it's not, I am far' are not locatable. We cannot be sure to whom they refer. By the first 'I' is he [the voice] referring to himself or does he refer to the speaker, the Unnamable? Who is the 'I' of 'I am far'? Such effect is intensified due to the use of free indirect speech as the first 'I am far' is a direct quotation, where we understand the speaker is the voice talking to the Unnamable. However, immediately after the quotation, it is not clear who is speaking.

The Unnamable's losing a sense of agency is backed up by Elizabeth Barry's argument that Beckett uses middle voice sentences to suggest agentless subjects and to question agency. As she explains, '[t]he position of the middle voice, as the name suggests, between active and passive forms, allows it to function in the construction of what might be called agentless sentences' (Barry, 2008: 116). A middle voice sentence is one that is grammatically active but suggests the passive. A couple of examples are: it feels good; it sounds good. The agentless sentences suggest the agentlessness of the text itself. The novel ends with agentless voice(s) which supports Barthes' dictum that 'writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin' (Barthes, 2008: 146):

You must go on.  
I can't go on.  
I'll go on (Beckett 1953: 93).

It is not clear to whom or to what the pronouns refer. Are they disembodied voices in the Unnamable's head with which the Unnamable does not identify? Is the first or the second 'I' the embodied voice of the Unnamable? They have lost their referents. As Derrida observes, '[t]he

absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely' (Derrida, 2008: 91). Moving from agentless voices to a vocal embodiment of them and then again back to agentless voices suggests that although writing is therapeutic for a person who has voice hearing experiences and can prevent a total disintegration of the self, there is a constant need for re-location of alien voices. In this sense, writing might not be a final cure but an efficient treatment. The writing subject is pitched between some degrees of authorship and mediumship, being the medium of other voices. This paradoxical state is related to the ironic texture of Beckett's writing style – that it posits and disavows a proposition simultaneously. Beckett's writing anticipates poststructuralist theories. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Derrida never wrote on Beckett, because, as Derrida comments, 'he writes – in my language, in a language which is his up to a point, mine up to a point (for both of us it is a 'differently' foreign language) – texts which are both too close to me and too distant for me even to be able to 'respond' to them' (Derrida, 1992: 60).

Thus, the speaker hears self-produced but alien and intermittent voices. Because they do not echo the person's underlying intentional state as far as the person is aware, they are viewed as autonomous – '[p]erhaps there are others here, with me' (Beckett 1953: 57)– due to the person's self-consciousness breaking down: 'These voices are not mine, nor these thoughts, but the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me' (Ibid: 41). Therefore, the speaker feels the loss of an autonomous self-contained unified self and consequently tries to locate them, to find bodies for them. Yet, if the source is found, anxiety does not necessarily disappear as the problem of how others are able to put their thoughts/voices in him/her still remains an enigma. Writing, conceived thus, although an attempt to materialise the voice, agency and authority, is a cancellation of authority. On the one hand, it is an attempt to (re)locate the voice and give it body (substantialisation similar to Avatar therapy) but it is also a place where all origins are lost. Although being able to substantialise the voices, the Unnamable is still wavering between mediumship (being the medium of others' voices) and agency.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> In *When Self-Consciousness Breaks* (2000), Stephens and Graham's main argument is that "sometimes, when self-consciousness breaks down or becomes disturbed, it appears to the self-conscious person as if *other* selves or agents are involved in his or her stream of consciousness" (2).

<sup>ii</sup> Stephens and Graham give an example to elucidate the difference between subjectivity and agency. If I raise my own arm, the act of raising occurs in or to me (my arm), therefore I am the subject. Yet, I am not the perpetrator of the act. As they have it, "admitting that a thought occurs in my mind while insisting that somebody else thinks that thought is like insisting that somebody else raised my arm" (153). They continue, "[h]e is the agent who carries out the arm movement, even though the movement happened in or to my body" (154).

<sup>iii</sup> Shaun Gallagher calls this process of hyper-reflexivity "metarepresentation" which results in a false ascription of thoughts: "In metarepresentation the patient may start to ascribe the thought to some particular force or individual and report that it is inserted" (228).

<sup>iv</sup> As Sass clarifies, "[t]he term 'reflexive' refers to situations or processes whereby some being, especially an agent or self, takes itself or some aspect of itself as its own object of awareness" ("Schizophrenia, Self-Experience, and the So-Called 'Negative Symptoms'" 152). Therefore, self-reference is when one's self becomes an object of its own scrutiny.

<sup>v</sup> "Whatever one's view of Hoffman's detailed account, his assumption that a thought occurring in my mind might fail to impress me as expressive of my underlying beliefs and desires is quite plausible" (Stephens and Graham 171).

<sup>vi</sup> As Stephens and Graham explain: "Some patients find it difficult to make out what their voices are saying. Usually, though, they report the very words and even the manner (sneeringly, consolingly, threateningly, and so on) in which the voice conveys its message. Subjects typically also report that the voice addresses them directly or makes special reference to them. They regard the message as salient to their person or circumstances" (14).

<sup>vii</sup> "[P]henomenologically, the fact that an unassigned voice must always imply a body means that it will always partly supply it as well" (Connor *Dumbstruck* 36).

<sup>viii</sup> Marco Bernini calls this capability an "imaginary engine." As he puts it, "[i]f inner speech is the raw material for hallucinatory phenomena, it is also at the centre of our imaginary engine – supporting our simple need for, as the homonymous text by Beckett portrays, an intimate Company (1980) in the inaccessible dark of our subjectivity" ("Samuel Beckett's Articulation of Unceasing Inner Speech"). Likewise, Waugh refers to it as "visionary genius" and "a negative capability" examples of which are Hilary Mantel and Woolf: "For writers like Woolf and Mantel, afflicted in body and mind, haunted by voices, but gifted with kinds of visionary genius, the profession of novelist, the performance of a necessary negative capability, might be the only way of feeling that one is indeed a self" ("Hillary Mantel and Virginia Woolf on the Sounds in Writers' Minds").